

The Influence of Shelley's The Epipsy chidion on the Love poetry of Abdul – Rahman Shukri

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Abstract

Shelley enjoyed a considerable influence on the diction, imagery and themes of Arabic poetry . The Arab critics and poets Knew their Shelley through the publication of the Victorian thesis Which was the nucleus round which the Arabs built their image of him . The thesis is fully expressed by Stopford A. Brooks in the "Preface" to his Poems of Shelley , a selection published in 1880 . For Brook , Shelley's nature and work were "twofold" , that "he lived and thought in two worlds, one was the world of mankind and its hopes, the other was the world of his own heart ." 1 Brooke's distinction

is between what be called a politically and socially committed Shelley ,who was inspired by moral aims and wrote in the hope of a regeneration of the world ,and a non- committed shelley, who wrote without any ethical and absolutely apart from humanity .2

In fact, Palgrave's The Colden Treasury (1861), the anthology which introduced the Arab romantics to English Poetry ,is a mirror in which is reflected the victorian idea of lyrical poetry in general and of Shelley as a lyrical devotee in particular . for E.W. Edmunds, writing in 1911, the panorama of Shelley's theories, fancies, visions, speculations,fall headlong in melodies confusion through his poems, he adds "Turn to Palgrave's Golden Treasury and we see how high a place Shelley holds in lyric poetry . " 3

For the Arab romantics, Shelley's poetry expressed mystical purity and love . Reading Shelley's poetry; wrote the translator of Shelley's A Defence of Poetry ,

You feel that you have moved into a world beyond this earthly one – a world Which is all beauty As his "Skylark" does, so he ascends, like a cloud of fire, which his song descends on us from those heights . thus most of his poems have been translated by the Arab romantics from any other English poet except Shakespeare . 4

This new romantic poetry of Shelley affected the poetry of Al-Diwan group and later on Apollo group . They become aware that something happened to the Arabic poetry , that it has become romantically oriented .

For Abu Shadi , in what is perhaps the first article on Shelley in Arabic ,

Shelley was an idealist whose most sublime dream was the happiness of humanity and a first – class lyrical poet who occupied a sublime realm of his own, content with his lyrical genius Shelley lived in an ethereal world difficult for the mob to trace or to breathe its translucent air . This is also true for the personae which he created in his splendid poems . They are made of the substance of his imagination ,not of life . Yet his enchanting literary capabilities and his sincere high – minded idealism made it possible for Shelley's creations to enter in our hearts . 5

What made Shelley a great romantic poet in Abu Shadi's view, is his struggle to free himself from the Shackles of the ' earthly' or man's materialist nature and to participate in the ' eternal ' or the spiritual element of human life .

Thus, for the Arab romantics Shelley was a heavenly creature. Shelley's death at an early age , like those of al – Hamshari of Egypt, , al – Tijani of Sudan and al – Shabbi of Tunis , was seen as an inner metaphysical impulse towards a full realization of the eternal and the absolute . Love and beauty never fade into nothingness in Shelley's poetry or life . His need to see in reality what he idealized in his poetry especially in his famous poem the

Epipsychidion influenced the Arab romantic Abdul – Rahman Shukri .

Abdul – Rahman Shukri (1886-1958) , is perhaps one of the most fascinating and complex personalities in the history of modern Arabic poetry . He was influenced by his readings of the poetry of Shelley contained in The Palgrave's *The Golden Treasury* . He says “ I subsequently turned to reading books of poetry and literature , , so I became aware of the beauty of the world expressed in most of the English romantics , especially the poetry of Shelley . 6

Love and feeling are basic elements in his poetry and it is not surprising that the introduction to his third collection (1915) is entitled *Feeling and Poetry* . His interest was the romantic English poetry . He mentioned several examples of poems of his which were inspired by Shelley. The theme of the Shelley's *Epipsychidion* with distinct Shelleyan overtones is obvious in almost the majority of Shukri's poems . In fact , Shukri was influenced by Shelley's idealized love in the *Epipsychidion* . In the poem , Shelley was not infatuated by Emilia Viviani's enchanting beauty only , but by her intellectual beauty which "culminates in a fantasy of sailing off with her to a magic island ." 7 Like Shelley , Shukri was hoping to reveal a vision of an idealized love in his poetry through which he can be united with his beloved spiritually beyond any earthly existence .

The love – theme , the yearning for the ideal love and the beautiful, and the mystical passion encouraged by Shelley's supposed Platonism and agnostic symbolism was almost oriental . It exists in Arabic poetry and goes back to pre – Islamic poetry ' Udhri poetry' , but Shukri reinterpreted this tradition in terms of the Shelleyan vision of the ' ideal prototype ' . To explain the preponderance of love poetry in Shukri's works he wrote in the introduction to volume IV of his *Diwan* :

By love poetry I do not mean the poetry of lust or sexual passion, but that of spiritual love which rises above all description of the body except those which reveal the working of the soul . Love is the passion most intimately related to the soul, from it derive many passions or emotions such as hope, despair, bravery, love of glory, munificence or meanness . Because of this love has a great place in poetry It is not a condition that love poetry should involved loving any one individual alone , although this may be the case most likely to produce it . The love poetry I have in mind is caused by the passion which enables man to feel keenly Beauty in all its manifestations alike a beautiful face , or a body , a flower or a river , in the beauty of lighting in the clouds, the beauty of night and stars, morning and its breeze, or the beauty of the soul or character , an attribute or an event, or the beauts of the images created by the human mind . The love of one human being for another is only one aspect of this extensive passion which embraces all visible beruty in life . This poetic passion bestows its light upon everything even upon those loathsome dark aspects of life , giving them an artistic beauty like the painter the love poet draws upon the images of beauty in his mind ... perhaps Qais Ibn al-Mulawwah was singing not about the [real] Laila al-Amiriyya , but about the one who inhabited the inner world of his soul . 8

Shukri was mainly acquainted with the concept of the sout mate through an English translation of shelley's poem Epipschidion Hence , Shukri's love poetry is marked by its excessive idealization of the beloved . In "Smiles" the poet explains that her smile brightens up his soul and nearly unveils the unknown secrets of the invisible world . It enables him to hear myriad songs in his soul , and her glance breathes life in him as the sun causes the hidden seeds to germinate . the terms in which she is described suggest that she is more than a mere human being . He addresses her , saying :

*My soul is a sapling which you have planted ,
My soul is the lowly earth beneath your heights
You are the target of all creatures , no one lives but you
So have mercy upon me,my beloved . (Smiles, Lines 1-4)*

Clearly the object of love is almost divine here .

In his poem *The Poet and the Image of Perfection* , Shukri depicts the story of a young poet of uncorrupted feeling and a dventurous genius . He poet seeks deeper knowledge and beauty because he was unstisfied by the ordinary fountains of knowledge and the beauty of the external world .

*They tell of a man
Lord of Poetry and language ,
Disliked chains and restrications ,
Fallen in love with a girl of dreams ,
Whose beauty he made very well ,
There is no one like her in Beauty .(The Poet and The Image
of Perfection , Lines , 1-6)*

The direct source of Shukri's poetry is Shelley's *The Epipsychidion* The poet – protagonist , the imaginary woman (epipsychidion) and the pursuit of epipsychidion are the camponent elements of the two poems . Abdul – Hai thinks ,

As in the case of Shelley , The theme of Shukri's poem is self – alienation and the pursuit of a perfect image of the self which , in spite of its evasive nature , is the only means of attaining self – authenticity . It is not so much a pursuit of Ideal Beauty as an attempt of the mind to counter self- alienation by an image which the mind itself has evolved . 9

Shukri shows his endeavour to identify himself with the beatifel in thought , action or person . This stimulated the poet to go on a wisionary journey through a mountainous landscape and finally dies.

*- He wonder lonely follwing her
Loser whoever follows the dreams
He does his best to hold her
With hands so swift in his arms
He is still follwing her
Till he falls down of that mountains
God have mercy on a poet
Died of his long wishes .*

The them of " The Soul.Mate" is also follows the Platonic Psyche – epipsyche strategy . In an introductory note to the poem , Shukri explained its basic idea as follows :

You might see some person for the first time and yet imagine that you saw him and were acquainted with him in a life before this one . This makes you almost believe him who says that the soul is not created single , but with a soul – mate . 10

In the poem , the poet suggests that the meeting with the soul – mate is to take place , through death , beyond temporal existence . Thus , he quotes Shelley's lines of the Epipsychidion :

*Love's very pain is sweet ,
But its reward is in the word divine
Which, if not here , it builds beyond the grave
So shall ye live when I am there . (Epipsychidion, Lines 596-599)*

In " Love and Eternity " the poet's love is love of Beauty and not of an individual human being . But although he claims , " I am not one who love fair maidens , nor do my eyes shed tears when they desert me , there are moments when the passion seems to be for a human being" 10 . For instance , in the deeply moving , "A Lover Turns Away His Glance " ,the poet is agonizingly aware that the object of his desire is , for some mysterious reason which he dares not disclose , unattainable and that he therefore ought not to indulge in daydreams about him or her . There is a morbid fascination with death and the gruesome aspects of physical decay and dissolution in practically all his love poems , especially where beautiful women are mentioned .

In the powerful poem " Beauty and Death " the poet troubled and unable to sleep , sees in the dark of night a vision of his

recently dead beloved , but as he embraces her she once more dies in his arms , her beauty vanishes and her flesh disintegrates , leaving behind a skeleton smelling strongly of decay . In “ Women in life and in Death “ he sees the ugly and the dead behind the beautiful and living , expressing a somewhat diseased sensibility :

*They rose, swaying in their clothes in the dark nights ,
 After they had become food for worms
 They came in the dark , and struck the eyes of beholders with
 disease ,
 Echoing the shrieks of owls till the air grew sick ,
 Wearing their shrouds for modesty , lest their ugliness be seen .
 Alike in death and in life they hide defects that make their modesty
 a mockery (“ Women in Life and in Death” , 1-7)*

This nightmarish vision brings out the strong connection in the poet's mind between beauty and decay and his ambivalent attitude to wards women . In his prose work Kitab al- Thamarat , Shukri defines love as an animal whose upper half is a beautiful woman and whose lower part is a serpent . " 12

Almost every poem on love and beauty ends with thought on death . sometimes death is seen as a woman . In " Death " he prays to death to deliver him from a life which is a painful riddle and invokes death by the most appealing epithets and descriptions , calling it another that for long has been deaf to her son's entreaties He loves death as a man loves the face of his beloved and yearns to quench his passion by kissing its lips . And it is fairly often that the poet invokes death .

In " Ideas Beyond the Reach of Words " as the title suggests , Shukri deals with the mysterious aspects of the psyche which can not be logically discussed in words :

*Part of the soul they are and how can the soul be seen by
the physical eye ?
You know them only when your wakeful heart is fortunate
enough to feel them .
They are often attained by the one who keeps silent , for silence
yields much eloquence and is full of peace
The soul Speaks only to those who listen in humility (Ideas
Beyond the Reach of words , 1-6)*

*These unknown and " virgin " regions of the soul had a deep
fascination for Shukri , as they did for his romantic Shelley .
There are perhaps too many poems about the theme of idealized
love in Shukri's work that were written under the influence of the
Shelley .*

Notes

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- 3- Ibid . p .201 .
- 4- George Saintsbury , A Short History of English Literature
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- 6- Rupert Christianson , Romantic Affinities : Portraits from an
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- 7- H. Rilter , ed . , Kitab Mashariq Anwar al- Gulub wq
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99 – 100 .
- 9- Muhammad Abdul – Hai , " Tradition and English and
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unpublished D. Phil . thesis (Oxford , 1973) ,p . 265 .
- 10- Abdul-Rahman Shukri , Kitab al – Thamarat (Alexandria ,
1916) , p. 6 .
- 11- Badawi , p. 202.
- 12- Ibid, p. 567.