

Pessimism in Ebrahim Naji's Poetry

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Abstract

Pessimism may be one of the most evident features of Arabic contemporary poetry; specifically, when the poet belongs to the Romantic school since s/he has been living in an imaginary world far from reality. The fact is that the effects of pessimism in Arabic poetry have been observed since old times to the present, and Romantic poets have been impressed by changes in their personal and social conditions and then began complaining about the grief and pain of the time. Experiencing a painful life, Naji took a pessimistic view toward life. This paper attempts to focus on Ebrahim Naji's pessimism to see whether he is the same as older poets, or whether his pessimistic attitude is derived from Romantic values which have a deep relationship with the romantic trend impressed by the west and its literature.

Keywords: Romantic poetry, Ebrahim Naji, Pessimism

Introduction

Naji was born in Egypt in December 31st, 1898. His father was an engineer. He entered medical school in 1917-1923 and because of his proficiency in English and French, he did noticeably well.

Naji started his work as a physician in a railway company and then changed his job to a lawyer. When publishing his first collection, called "Behind the Clouds", he entered a new phase of his life (1934). Afterwards, he started writing prose and also did some translations. His second work, "Cairo Nights" in 1944, the third one "In the Night's Temple" in 1946 and his last posthumous collection "The Wounded Bird" was published in 1953.

Besides his collection, many works have been produced by him such as: 1: "How do you understand people?"

2: "The success of wise wanderer artist", humanistic and social stories

3: "The Letter of Life", 4: "Oh! Doctor, Be Understanding to me".

5: "Evil blossoms", a study on Charles *Baudelaire*, the French poet.

6: Translation of "crime and Punishment" by Dostoyovsky.

(see: Naji, life and The best poems, Salaman Moosa, p. 18).

Ebrahim Naji's Pessimism

As man came into this world, the will of achieving all his desires was born with him. Given that man possesses a special nature, it seems that he is not so much in favor of facing catastrophes and vicissitudes of life; Instead, he's always seeking peace and security, so he prefers to live far from difficulty and loss in this world.

When virtue is replaced by filth and joy is changing to grief, the man suffers and ascribes it to the world. Consequently, the world is responsible for the erosion of life and the separation of friends and families. Given the fact that Naji is a poet who manifests his emotions against life events and the point that the poet's life conditions are strongly related to his poetic experience while he expresses his joy and sadness in the right place, his perspective toward the world and its implications should be clear. We also have to bear in mind that the poet is a romantic who flies in an imaginary venue and represents a world different from the real one.

As I was studying the modern Arabic poetry and its modern movements, one of the Apollo members attracted my attention. He had been influenced by the romantic principles displayed in introspection, self- pain analysis,

virtue-seeking and reproach of the bitter realism. He was Ebrahim Naji, the contemporary poet living in 20th century who was so pessimist to all life events that just by turning the pages of his collection this pessimistic strand shows itself in every angle of his poem. Sometimes he's pessimistic toward the world and what is in it and sometimes toward love. When he ascribes all his difficulties to fate this pessimism reaches its peak. It seems that a romantic poet finds his happiness in the realm of love so his feeling of love covers the whole existence, nature and creatures and the poet is a part of this as well.

The poet feels a break between realism and an ideal world which has been his model of poetry, and that's why he feels sad and suffers and complains. This pain derives from this pessimism.

Ebrahim Naji lived in the 20th century at a time when Egypt was in uproar against the presence of England there as a power and Egyptians suffered from the tyrannical crisis. It was hard for a romantic poet like Naji to see the people suffering and not to sympathize:

"How is it possible not to cry for the poor since his biggest desire is to find a little bread."

This is how he feels sad by observing miserable aspects to life. Furthermore, the poet feels downhearted by unkind friends. He was not satisfied with his married life. Moreover, jealous friends turned his job as a manager down to a supervisor of health ministry. All in all, he was pressed by difficulty and that's why he developed a pessimistic attitude toward everything.

"I'm tired of people's conditions, since their work is similar to a poor man's need and a wretched man's struggles. I'm tired of people's conditions for there's no knot between them made for an aim or a work." (wounded bird, p.248)

The fatigue among people, caused by need, complaint for lack of affection and friendship is observed not only in Naji's but also in a number of other works by romantic poets. This is tangible to the extent that this feeling makes them leave the community and consequently seek refuge in nature. Khalil Matran, another poet, prefers solitude in desert rather than the life in the city. He's pessimistic towards man's world and impatient to live in corruption. Nature is his destination to live in peace and security (Saeed Mtossein Mansoor, p. 222).

Set off for the city and inviting me; and I'm on the solitude and insanity of my own love. Depart for a place full of gossip and torment where life is replete with temptation and speculation and where wickedness reaches the summit and majesty faces with disdain.

The benefits of this civilization aren't accorded by me since its excellence seems as an awkward pitfall. What caught me to be picked? vain ambitions or honest eyes?

Ebrahim Naji states that: "My story is such a bitter one that a day equals a night." (E. Naji behind the clouds, p 92).

It's natural for the poet to be packed by pessimism and to look at the world with an eye full of hatred and anguish because he's under the pressure of this cruel world:

"The world is hateful and fatigue ghosts are wandering around." (Cairo Nights, p. 133)

The world in Naji's poetry is in climax and so is considered as the source of every bad happening. This points becomes clear when we consider the fact that the poet does not seem to complain about the world just for his own his sadness and agony; rather he represents the world as an axis with pessimism revolving around it. He also sometimes imagines the world and the creation as a vain mirage: "came as the world was just the mirage and then started narration of love's words in desert. (behind the clouds, p.103). It's pointed by him that wandering thirsty lovers far from their yens have been betrayed by the mirage-like world:", a treacherous mirage-like desert with thirsty men roaming" (Cairo Nights, p. 161). As it's known this realm is similar to a bridge by which the man gets the bliss however it's a fire over which Naji passes with no hope for bliss:

"It's time for me to be deprived. O! my love, leave me alone since this heaven is not mine.

Alas as I get closer to the realm of bliss I have to pass a fire bridge." (behind the clouds ' p. 34)

So he's tired of the world and its mysteries having made him aimless in the life sea. He's searching guidance but is misled. All in all, he suffers.

"I'm baffled by the world's secrets, so what's my answer in silence of sands? searching for lead in its rays, I have no end except being misled (Ibid, p. 20).

Comparing life to an absurd theater with aimless events and stories, he talks about his unfulfilled desires: "It makes no difference what I know about the perplexity of night and the puzzle of day and what I don't.

The big theater peruses a long story but where's the end of the act?" (ibid ' p. 20)

Then while aware of the world's tricks and being pessimistic to its workings and the fact that the poet has never been swindled by it he addresses the world:

"I responded , Oh! my world! Who are you deceiving?

I am the one, tired of this trick.

I unveiled you, you took my happy years in response" (Ibid' p.22)

Living in the realm of despair in which grief has put out a tent, the poet is fed up by despair and predicament:

"What I felt as disaster you didn't and it's me who starts his day by night. My heart is so flattened that finding a window is impossible." (Cairo Nights, p. 170)

Naji is pressured by pain and grief. This pain has entered the depth of his veins, penetrated his fancy and emotion, captured his pen and changed his life to worry. He cries because of misery, ruin and fire to worry. He cries because of misery, ruin and the fire says: "what's my benefit in life caravan along with fire; ruin and terror slaughter, fire and flaw." (Ibid' p. 167)

Naji draws attention to the evils of life as well as his grieves that have taken all the joys in his life and are so appalling that made him see the world as a dark prison:

"Days scared me and nothing remains here to make me happy. The unlimited horizon now is bordered and this space looks like a prison" (Wounded Bird, p. 302- Cairo Nights, p.161). He compares his anger to a stormy sea, full of wares exactly as poverty is expressed as storms:

"The mad sea isn't willing to listen to neither the man who complains nor anyone else. The battle of life appears along with its foamy mad waves.

I've noticed the mediocrity wave and the continuous storm of death tidings.

It has put out his canopy, settled down like the covered wings around a bird and now, it's sleeping. Life is a grave with a manifold sense of happiness for a youth with a manifold sense of tiredness. "(Behind the clouds, p.31)

Pessimism reaches its climax in the mentioned lines.

As if it's narrow grave shadowed by despair and defeat, his world is nothing. Except the lies similar to the delicate webs of a spider and this is the most feeble one: "existence is a dark grave" shadowed by despair and silence. My eyes saw the love lies as the vain spider webs." (Cairo Nights, p. B7).

In some other of his poems, the world is mentioned scornfully and it's believed that it's a liar deceiving people:

"This life is a silly sneer and a vain thought.

Alas, It's a big liar by which people are swindled"

(Wounded Bird, p285) Also he writes:

"you are the man pressed by poverty and this world leaves nothing of you except a foe"

Every visible light ridicules the flame." (Najis' collection, p. 21)

Upset by predicaments, he imagines no rain in the world thunder. Despite the fact that Romantic literary images were innovative it was their concrete equivalent for their defeat, despair and disability in reaching realism. The image of man in their poetry is negatively distraught.

Escaping from realism flying in fancy sky, coming back to memories and going inside nature, "the great mother", are evident in Naji's poetry. (Ibid)

"It makes no difference what I know about the perplexity of day and the puzzle of night".

"The big theater pursues a long story, but where's the end of the act?"

"look at the different meanings of beauty, grown in the earth or sky."

Can you see something but a warning talking to a tall naught in this majesty?"

The image of beauty has grown in the earth or sky, while the poet's pessimism is so intensified that he claims it's a warning, possibly the most visible features of Romantic poetry are the sentimental nature and overview of all hardships concerning love and affection. Even pessimism in Romantic poetry, as in that of Naji, derives from

love and its defeat and it is the distinction point between pessimism in old poets, attitudes and Romantics who considered love as the reason for their sadness and failure.

As mentioned, the poet didn't enjoy his married life and so his relationship with the wife wasn't warm at all. Naji spent most of his nights in inns and clubs and this point caused their problems to be broken out. Also it's possible to say his pessimistic view toward life derived from his failure in his love to his neighbor. Since he got married, Naji left her with tears and passion:

"Alas, what the days have done for us! Does this ruin you?

and the dream that came to the mind is me, and how long we were in desperation ." (Ibid)

He also says:

It's my catastrophe age alarms are warning me, what have you prepared before my departure?

My age passed and you did no Just for me.

My first luggage is the same as the last one.

My lifetime is full of false wishes, and virtue has been my food.

My heart and blood is in your hand and is captive of you." (behind the clouds' p.34)

Comparing the love time to the childhood he describes life bitterness to get from current life and come back to love age reminding him of happiness and beloved:

"Everything's been bitter in my taste after awareness of the world. Alas who can take my whole life and give me world .Alas, who can take my whole life and give me back my childhood?" (Ibid ' p.34)

The poet is still suffering from The unhealed pain:

"Don't believe the pain has gone while it's still here.

Were deceived that the wound found the remedy. The gash is still hidden." (Ibid' p.44)

Sunset and night echo his misery along with unfulfilled wills similar to other romantics:

"I hope the cruel night won't be saved by Eod Since showed me all Vain dreams".(Cairo Night, p. 137)

He describes himself alone and distant in the coast:

"Darkness captured houses and seized all his tears.

As if I've been a castaway waiting for a ship which never returns."

He also cries for past love:

"O, My heart! Peace be upon the tall mansion of love which collapsed.

Drink me and Drink yourself of that ruins- Narrate me until the tear is floating.

And this hopelessness is cause by a passed love compared to a mansion collapsed. Then he drinks till his eyes are wet.

He knows The fate as The root of all his catastrophe and How he suffers is due to The fate.

"Neither I nor you rather the fate asked for our loss... For us to meet is so hard and the dark fate separated us.... I was likely to lose my faith to love If I didn't believe in you. "(Ibid, p. 210)

when love left our heart end for the fate, his wish will happen. we didn't pose a question:

Who fur and How come?

Even beauty of the world and its manifestation inform about naught:

Perceive the various meanings of beauty grown in the earth and sky.... Is anything visible in this majesty but a warning for ruin?

Fate:

"It's not our fault to be born with misery.

It's fate's, my mistress!

possibly well be gathered by destiny after hardship in visit."

"When a friend denies friendship well visit each other like strangers."

Be silent when everyone selects his way. Just say my fortune didn't agree"

He knows the destiny as the source of all difficulty, and his Pessimism reaches its peak when he believes he's been ridiculed by fate:

"It seems destiny made me fool, I cry but know not the tear.... Alas of my tears and my contempt. Its happenings didn't ask my honor and majesty.

(I bid, p. 53)

As if crying and separation made him dejected, and Came over his glory:

"while wandering in thought and abhorrence, I passed the night, complaining grieves.... I passed and didn't know where to go. I'll go wherever my feet decide."

He also adds:

"There's an eternal fever for the man remaining for ever."

"As if this world folk and their noise is a sort of rave."

And this interpretation of life and people compared to a fever and an idle talk is caused by his pessimism.

Conclusion

Considering the world as the source of evil and disaster, Naji puts it at the zenith of pessimism in his poetry. That's why it's perceived that the poet is not willing to mention his sadness and the world's tyranny but he considers the world as an axis around which all the difficulty and evil orbit.

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