

Ahmad Shawqi and Educational Poetic Stories on the Tongues of the Animals

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Abstract

Ahmad Shawqi, the most famous Egyptian poet, used the animal world to narrate children stories. He began using this genre as a student in France to express his moral, national, and social desires and to awaken his fellow countrymen's outrage against colonialism and its machinations. He narrated fifty-six tales, the first of which, entitled "Al-Deek Al-Hindi wa Al-Dajaj Al-Baladi" (The Indian Rooster and the Local Chicken), was published in the newspaper Al-Ahram in 1892. Shawqi's tales were often written in the form of odes, following the rajaz rhythm, and using variable rhymes. They are easy to read, short, often educational, and can be easily memorized. Shawqi used the Holy Quran, books of proverbs, and Arabic wise sayings as his primary influences. Indeed, Shawqi's tales are definitely Islamic in nature and tone.

Keywords: Ahmad Shawqi, children poetry, educational stories, Arabic literature & translated poem

Ahmad Shawqi (1868-1932) was one of the finest Arabic-language poets and dramatists to pioneer the modern Egyptian literary movement, most notable for introducing poetic epics to the Arabic literary tradition. Shawqi also produced distinctive poetry that was widely considered the most prominent of 20th-century Egypt.

Shawqi's work at the palace played a great role in facilitating ways to gain information, knowledge, and access to European arts, as the Khedive sent him to Europe to learn about both French and English literature. He translated some literary works, such as Lamartine's poem, "The Lake". Shawqi was also pleased by La Fontaine's poetry and fables. Thus, he was influenced by the French poets in their dealings with new subject matter and their ways of forming their poems. He also took advantage of what he learned in France in choosing new topics, bringing them out in an innovative and exquisite manner; he blended heritage with language, style, music, and imagination and presented them in a smooth Egyptian spirit, which fit emerging Arab tastes (Al-Sheikh, 2006).

Ahmad Shawqi (the Prince of Poets) did not leave any section of poetry without writing in it with the same excellence and quality, whether in the field of description, pride, wisdom, philosophy, congratulation, praise, or lament. Shawqi even wrote simplified children's poetry, which included themes of wisdom, love, and humanity (Abd Ul-Majeed, 1998, p. 111).

Ahmad Shawqi was, by virtue of his morals, a very tender personality, close to the pure essence of the world of childhood, a world of innocence, emotion and beauty; Shawqi loved childhood greatly.

Dr. Shawqi Daif said, "poetry and singing united in Shawqi, and everything in him prepared him for that, as he was an admirer of singing and singers on the one hand, while his poetry had a magical musical sweetness on the other hand ... There is no doubt that this had an effect on Shawqi's poetry, not in terms of authorship of the songs, but also in terms of selecting the words. Shawqi did not mean in his songs to amuse himself only and his singer, but also intended to please the mass audience and this aim, which Shawqi was unable to get rid of, made him descend from the high sky of his eloquent words, which he usually elected in his poems, into easy words that would go on every tongue." (Daif, 2010, pp. 167-168).

Shawqi's national interest circle widened to include children, as he felt they had a right to their own literature that would take them by their hands. He wrote for them more than fifty tales in simple, easy poetry, to make them love their language, nourish their imagination, and consolidate human values within them (Ismail, 2003).

Ahmad Shawki and the call for children's literature:

The poet Ahmad Shawqi said in the introduction to his poetry collection *Al-Shawqiyat*. "It occurred to my mind to write anecdotes in the same famous La Fontaine style, and in this collection there are some of them." ... "I wish that God would help me to make for the Egyptian children—as poets made for children in advanced countries—poems that are close to them, from which they could gain wisdom and good manners according to their understanding." (*Al-Shawqiyat*)

Shawqi composed poetic stories on the tongues of the animals. He composed these tales in an easy and attractive manner and narrated 56 of those tales, the first of which was published in the newspaper "Al-Ahram" in 1892, entitled "Al-Deek Al-Hindi wa Al-Dajaj Al-Baladi" (The Indian Rooster and the Local Chicken); the story symbolized the occupying forces and Egypt (Hashim, 2013).

The poet's content crystallized into the following frames, respectively (Zalat, pp. 168-169):

1. The political significance (in tales that portray politicians and policy affairs, rulers and the royal court).
2. The moral educational significance (in tales that deal with behavioral and educational values and wisdom literature).
3. The national significance (in tales related to the growth of national consciousness and national resistance to the occupier).
4. The humorous and social significance (in poetic anecdotes, which tend to appropriate humor and hidden symbols).

The heroes of Shawqi's tales are typically animals; the lion is a symbol of power, the wolf of slyness and authoritarianism, the dog of honesty and loyalty, the fox of elusion, and the ass of stupidity and submissiveness. Birds like the hoopoe, dove, pearooster, lark, pigeon, parrot, and others were also mentioned in his poetry.

Shawqi also made use of famous men of religious history and prophets in his tales. Prophet Solomon and Prophet Noah (peace be upon them) had great power over the animal world, as stated in the Holy Quran. Shawqi utilized that Quranic source, portraying these events in a symbolic way to make them equivalent subjects of the events that took place in the country (Abdul-Wahab, 1987, p. 219).

In Shawqi's poetic tales regarding Prophet Solomon, peace be upon him, with the hoopoe, pearooster, and dove, Shawqi used these tales to highlight their elements as symbols of what he wanted to express, regardless of their incidents. In one of them, Shawqi says:

سليمانُ والهُدُودُ
وَقَفَّ الْهُدُودُ فِي بَابِ سُلَيْمَانَ بِدَلِّهِ
قَالَ يَا مَوْلَايَ كُنْ لِي عَيْشَتِي صَارَتْ مُمْلَهُ
مَتُّ مِنْ حَبَّةٍ بُرٍّ أَحَدْتَنِي فِي الصَّدْرِ غُلَّهُ
لَا مِيَاهُ النَّيْلِ تُرْوِيهَا وَلَا أَمْوَاهُ يَجْلُهُ
وَإِذَا دَامَتْ قَلِيلًا قَتَلْتَنِي شَرًّا قَتَلَهُ
فَأَشَارَ السَّيِّدُ الْعَالِي إِلَى مَنْ كَانَ حَوْلَهُ
مَا أَرَى الْحَبَّةَ إِلَّا سُرِقَتْ مِنْ بَيْتِ نَمْلِهِ
إِنَّ لِلظَّالِمِ صَدْرًا يَشْتَكِي مِنْ غَيْرِ عَلَيْهِ

Prophet Solomon and the Hoopoe:

The hoopoe stood submissively, at Solomon's door,
He said: O lord, help me, my life became boring,
I am dying of a wheat grain, which brought illness to my chest.
Neither the Nile's water, nor the Tigris' would quench it.
If it lasts a little more, it will kill me.
The high master pointed out, to those who were around him.
I only see that the grain, was stolen from an ant's house

The wrongful has a chest, That complains without an illness.

Shawqi inserted wisdom in his poetry to strengthen its poetic structure to be used for direct preaching or conclude his tales. Wisdom was delivered in Shawqi tales by the tongues of some of its heroes, totally merged and naturally generated.

Shawqi was able to bring out his tales in a theatrical way, based on a dialogue that included lightness and vitality to make it more effective and nearer to the reader (Abdul-Wahab, 1987, pp. 221-223).

Among the tales of “Kalīlah wa Dimna” (Panchatantra) that influenced Shawqi was the tale of (The Fox and the Rooster), a fictional tale from which Shawqi meant to teach children how to resist the liars and cheaters who lure people and mislead them. Shawqi said, photographing this scene (Al-Sheikh, 2006, p. 60):

The fox’s image, as Ahmad Shawqi presents it, is in its usual cunning nature of deception and slyness, as pictured by Lafontaine. Yet the fox’s trickery on the rooster, courting him through his “repentance”, is a bit different in the position of Shawqi’s tales due to the absence of the two dogs in Lafontaine’s story, followed by Jalal Othman. The lesson of the story was summarized in the last line of the poem (Zalat, p. 162). In this symbolic story (The Fox and the Rooster), there is a reference to the cunning and deception of those who fake religiosity and a call not to have confidence in them:

الثعلب والديك

بَرَزَ الثَّعْلَبُ يَوْمًا فِي شِعَارِ الْوَاعِظِينَا
فَمَشَى فِي الْأَرْضِ يَهْدِي وَيَسْبُ الْمَاكِرِينَا
وَيَقُولُ الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ إِلَهَ الْعَالَمِينَا
يَا عِبَادَ اللَّهِ تَوْبُوا فَهُوَ كَهْفُ التَّائِبِينَا
وَإِزْهَدُوا فِي الطَّيْرِ إِنَّ الْعَيْشَ عَيْشُ الزَّاهِدِينَا
وَاطْلُبُوا الدِّيكَ يُؤَدِّنُ لِمَصَلَاةِ الصُّبْحِ فِينَا
فَأَتَى الدِّيكَ رَسُولٌ مِنْ إِمَامِ النَّاسِكِينَا
عَرَضَ الْأَمْرَ عَلَيْهِ وَهُوَ يَرْجُو أَنْ يَلِينَا
فَأَجَابَ الدِّيكُ غُذْرًا يَا أَضَلَّ الْمُهْتَدِينَا
بَلَّغِ الثَّعْلَبَ عَنِّي عَنِ جَدُودِي الصَّالِحِينَا
عَنْ دُويِ التَّيْجَانِ مِمَّنْ دَخَلَ الْبَطْنَ اللَّعِينَا
أَتُهُمْ قَالُوا وَخَيْرُ الْقَوْلِ قَوْلُ الْعَارِفِينَا
مُخْطِئٌ مَنْ ظَنَّ يَوْمًا أَنَّ لِلثَّعْلَبِ دِينَا

One day, the fox emerged, holding the preachers’ logo.
Walking on earth, raving and cursing the cunning.
Saying; praise be to Allah, the Lord of the universe.
O slaves of Allah, repent! As it is the cave of the repentant.
Renounce the birds, as real life is the life of the ascetics.
Call the rooster to wake us, for morning prayer.
The rooster received, the hermits’ leader’s messenger.
Who presented the affair to him, hoping that he would agree.
Sorry, replied the rooster, o most astray of all the guided.
Tell the fox, on my behalf, and on the behalf of,
My virtuous crowned grandparents, who entered the cursed belly.
It was said, and the best words are those of the knowledgeable:
Mistaken is he who thought one day, that the fox has a creed.

This is how Shawqi's poetry presents the tales in a simple poetic style characterized by smoothness, consistency of ideas, and reliance on the whole image, which is composed of partial images contributing to the formation of the essence of the artwork, offered in a dramatic way (Al-Sheikh, 2006, p. 61).

Shawqi also emphasizes the consequences of foolishness, vanity, and not listening to the advice of the others. He also emphasizes the value of "essence before appearance", as appearances are lustrous but deceiving. Thus one should not rush behind the false sparkling, yet rather behind the right idea and proper essence, even though the talker was a black slave. In one of his witty poems, "The Bat and the Butterfly Queen", he said:

الخفاش ومليكه الفراش

مَرَّتْ عَلَى الْخَفَاشِ، مَلِيكَةُ الْفَرَّاشِ
 تُطِيرُ بِالْجُمُوعِ سَعِيًّا إِلَى الشُّمُوعِ
 فَعَطَفَتْ وَمَالَتْ وَاسْتَضْحَكَتْ فَقَالَتْ
 أَرْيَيْتِ بِالْغَرَامِ يَا عَاشِقَ الظَّلامِ
 صِفْ لِي الصَّدِيقَ الْأَسْوَدَا الْخَامِلَ الْمُجْرَدَا
 قَالَ سَأَلْتِ فِيهِ أَصْدَقَ وَأَصْفِيهِ
 هُوَ الصَّدِيقُ الْوَافِي الْكَامِلُ الْأَوْصَافِ
 جَوَارُهُ أَمَانٌ وَسِيرُهُ كِتْمَانٌ
 وَطَرْفُهُ كَلِيلٌ إِذَا هَفَا الْخَلِيلُ
 يَجْنُو عَلَى الْعُنْتَاقِ ، يَسْمَعُ لِلْمُشْتَاقِ
 وَجُمْلَةُ الْمَقَالِ ، هُوَ الْحَبِيبُ الْغَالِي
 فَقَالَتْ الْحَمَقَاءُ وَقَوْلُهَا اسْتِهْزَاءُ
 أَيْنَ أَبُو الْمِسْكَ الْخَصِي ذُو الثَّمَنِ الْمُسْتَرْخَصِ
 مِنْ صَاحِبِي الْأَمِيرِ الظَّاهِرِ الْمُنِيرِ
 إِنْ عُدَّ فَيَمَنْ أَعْرَفُ ، أَسْمُو بِهِ وَأَشْرَفُ
 وَإِنْ سُئِلْتُ عَنْهُ وَعَنْ مَكَانِي مِنْهُ
 أَفَاخِرُ الْأَثْرَابِ وَأَنْتَنِي إِعْجَابَا
 فَقَالَ يَا مَلِيكَةَ وَرِيَّةَ الْأَرِيكَةِ
 إِنْ مِنَ الْعُرُورِ ، مَلَامَةَ الْمَعْرُورِ
 فَأَعْطِنِي قَفَاكَ ، وَامْضِي إِلَى الْهَلَاكِ
 فَنَرَكْتَهُ سَاخِرَهُ وَدَهَبْتَ مُفَاخِرَهُ
 وَبَعْدَ سَاعَةٍ مَضَتْ ، مِنَ الزَّمَانِ فَاِنْقَضَتْ
 مَرَّتْ عَلَى الْخَفَاشِ مَلِيكَةُ الْفَرَّاشِ
 نَاقِصَةَ الْأَعْضَاءِ تُشْكُو مِنَ الْفَنَاءِ
 فُجَاءَهَا مِنْهَمِكَا يُضْحِكُهُ مِنْهَا الْبُكََا
 قَالَ أَلَمْ أَقُلْ لَكَ ، هَلَكْتَ أَوْ لَمْ تَهْلِكِي
 رَبُّ صَدِيقِ عَبْدٍ أَبْيَضُ وَجْهِ الْوُدِّ
 يَفْدِيكَ كَالرَّئِيسِ ، بِالنَّفْسِ وَالنَّفْسِ
 وَصَاحِبِ كَالنُّورِ ، فِي الْحُسْنِ وَالظُّهُورِ
 مُعْتَكِرَ الْفُؤَادِ مُضَيِّعَ الْوَدَادِ
 حِبَالُهُ أَشْرَاكَ وَقُرْبُهُ هَلَاكَ

The bat and the butterfly queen

The butterfly queen, passed by the bat,

Heading the flocks, in search of candles.

She bent and leant, then laughed and said:

O darkness lover! Have you been derogated by love?
 Describe to me, the sluggish naked black fellow.
 He said: you've asked about him, the one who could best describe him.
 He is the sufficient friend, with perfect attributes.
 His neighborhood is safety, his secret is concealment.
 With sleepy eyes, when the comrade floats nearby.
 Kind is he to lovers, listening to their longing.
 And all in all, he is the cherished love.
 She the foolish, said mockingly:
 How far is the cheaply priced, musk eunuch, from my friend,
 the apparent enlightening prince!
 When counted among whom I know, I feel highly risen and proud of him.
 And when asked about him, and my position to him;
 I boast my peers, and bend in admiration.
 He said: your majesty, the throne holder.
 It is in vain, to blame an arrogant.
 So turn away from me, and go to your perdition.
 She left him, mocking at him, and went away boasting.
 After an hour had passed away.
 The butterfly queen, passed by the bat,
 With missing parts, almost dead.
 He engrossedly came to her, laughing at her tears.
 Saying: Whether alive or dead, didn't I tell you?
 Many a black slave friend, has a white loving face.
 Ransoms you as his leader, by his soul and every precious thing.
 While a shining friend, with a beautiful appearance.
 Holds a turbid heart, his cordiality is wasted.
 His ropes are but a trap, his closeness is perdition.

In the story of "The crows' king and the servant Nedour", Shawqi confirms that he who does not follow the advice of his predecessors and make use of their experience will perish or get dreadful consequences. He also confirms in the story that nothing remains as it is; therefore, Shawqi says that man must be content and pleased by the advice and should take precautions and beware of the ominous things without arrogance and vanity when facing situations.

ملك الغربان وندور الخادم

كان للغربان في العصر ملك، وله في النخلة الكبرى أريك
 فيه كرسى، وخذر، ومهود، لصغار الملك أصحاب العهود
 جاءه يوماً ندور الخادم، وهو في الباب الأمين الحازم
 قال: يا فرغ الملوك الصالحين، أنت ما زلت تحب الناصحين
 سوسة كانت على القصر تدور، جازت القصر، ودبت في الجور
 فابعت الغربان في إهلاكها، قبل أن نهلك في أشراكها
 ضحك السلطان من هذا المقال، ثم أدنى خادم الخير، وقال:

أنا ربُّ الشوكةِ الضافي الجناحُ ، أنا ذو المنقارِ ، غلابُ الرياحِ
 أنا لا أنظرُ في هذي الأمورُ ، أنا لا أبصرُ تحتي يا ندورُ
 ثمَّ لما كانَ عامٌ بَعْدَ عامٍ ، قامَ بينَ الريحِ والنَّخلِ خصامٌ
 وإذا النَّخلةُ أقوى جذعُها ، فَبدا للريحِ سَهلاً قلعُها
 فهوتُ للأرضِ كالتلِّ الكبيرِ ، وهوى الديوانُ ، وانقضَّ السَّريرُ
 فدها السلطانُ ذا الخطبُ المهولُ ، ودعا خادمه الغالي يقولُ:
 يا ندورَ الخيرِ ، أسعفُ بالصياحِ ، ما ترى ما فعلتُ فينا الرياحُ؟
 قال: يا مولاي، لا تسألَ ندورَ، أنا لا أنظرُ في هذي الأمورُ!

The crows' king and the servant Nedour

Once upon the time the crows had a king, who had a throne on the greatest palm

On it was a chair, a boudoir, and cots, for the young crown princes

One day came Nedour, the servant, standing honestly and firmly by the door

He said: O branch of the righteous kings, you still love the advisers

A mite was spinning by the palace, passed through it and crept into the roots

So send the crows to wipe it out, before we perish by its traps

The Sultan laughed at this saying, then brought the good servant near him, and said:

I am the Lord of the thorn, with my abundant wings, I am the billed wind conqueror!

"I do not look into these matters, I do not see below me, Nedour".

Then passed a year after a year, during which a quarrel arose between the wind and the palm tree.

The palm's trunk was no longer strong, hence, easily uprooted by the wind.

It fell to the ground like a large hill, the couch, the bed, all went to ground

The Sultan was astounded by the appalling disaster, he called his dear servant saying:

Oh good Nedour, help by shouting! Can't you see what the wind has done to us?

He said: O lord, do not ask Nedour, "I do not look into these matters".

It can be said that the collection of the poetic stories created by The Prince of Poets, Ahmad Shawqi, included a group of behaviorally and morally fine concepts and educational values, representing embedded wisdom within them every now and then. He composed them in a symbolic manner, perhaps to be funnier and more charming for children than if the words were uttered by human beings, and to achieve the educational goal for which he wrote them for, indirectly, because human nature usually hates direct advice. There is no doubt that these poetic stories on the tongues of the animals reflect the talent and aptitude of this great poet.

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