

**Portrayal of Immortality through Literature;
A Comparative Study of Existentialism between
W.B. Yeats's "Sailing to Byzantium" and Mahmoud
Darwish's "Mural"**

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In general, existentialism has left its impact on Western and Arabic literature as well. Specially, in 20th century with the raise of political struggles. Western existentialists try to find liberation and freedom of all limits, whatever social, theological or politics. Meanwhile, Arab existentialists have formed and enclosed existentialism to politics. This paper aims to clarify the changing of Irish and Arabic literature under the impact of existentialism, in the light of "Sailing to Byzantium" (1927) by William Butler Yeats and "Mural" (1999) by Mahmoud Darwish. The study explores the moving from politics to existence. The role of exile in forming great intellectuals and writers. They go beyond the universe with their minds and hearts. They call for understanding spirituality that leads to immortality.

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Introduction

The twentieth century has been known as the era of worries and horrors, which are mainly politicized. Poetry defines as the predominant form of art. In spite of the process of development, many social, cultural and political events effect poetry. There is no appreciation of the aesthetic and no freedom of expression in the Middle East, nevertheless, within that place and variegated area, the hard effort for a changing goes on. The Irish literature had many setbacks because Ireland was govern by British colonization. There were dominate of English literary. In Irish, some writers decided to stay in their country and defend their nations, against the English dominating, forming in this difficult task a special Irish literary traditional works. However, there are other writers, like Oliver Goldsmith (1728-1774) and George Bernard Shaw (1856-1950); they chose to leave to other countries .Other Irish writers stayed in Ireland and fight with a complex concept of nationalism and difficulties in their country. With the beginning of the twentieth century in Ireland, a new nationalist traditional, way of life and beliefs appear. It defined as the Irish literary revival and it changed Irish history. The famous and prominent architect and writer of the Irish literary revival was William Butler Yeats, whose notable career cover this renaissance and the growth of European literary innovation in the 1920s and '30s. He took part in both movements. While the renaissance gave new life and new texts to Irish nationalism in the late of 19th century, Yeats aimed to produce a new kind of modern Irish literature in the English language. Yeats's philosophy is an ambiguous and unclear system of oppositions that deals with the poet point and intention related what the poet called "unity of being." This concept of system is important to make us able to understand this poet. Yeats marked as a Romantic poet, an heir to English poet William Blake. That has also made him special among many other great poets of that era, because chaos or disintegration represented a more attractive aesthetic. Two years before Shaw 1923, Yeats receive a Nobel Prize for Literature. Although Beckett and Joyce whom was most prominent literary figures in Ireland in the 20th century, were exiles. However, that century's literary history is also associated with the cultural and political changes in Ireland that the writers who not left home faced.

Comparatively, the modern Arabic poetry that began in the 19th and early 20th centuries, It was known as "the Arabic renaissance" or "al-Nahda", poets like Ahmad Shawqi and Hafiz Ibrahim started to discover the possibility of growing the classical poetic styles. Some of these neoclassical poets were familiar with Western literature but mostly continued to write in classical style, while others, denouncing and disapprove blind imitation of traditional poetry and its repeated themes. They look for inspiration from English romanticism and French. The next era was the romantic period and poets were called romantic poets. They have started far greater extent to understand and pay attention to the Western poetry, and felt restricted by neo-classical traditions, which the previous generation of poets had tried to stand for. Poetry became a very important high position in the Arab world. Mahmoud Darwish was regarded as the Palestinian national poet, intellectual and critics have studied the works of Mahmoud Darwish enormously .They have examined his humanistic features of writings that deals with the struggles which happened in his country. He searched for identity and existence in exile. In "Being and Nothingness" Jean Paul Sartre produces clear explanation for human duties and mantel suffering which are caused by political struggle and exile experiences. He provides that man can realize his rights and protect his freedom. The notion of

existentialism is meet the struggles of decolonization that deals with a questioning of doubt about the truth or purposes that relate the right of a person to have or do something in his place

1-1 Existentialism and its Impact on literature

Jean-Charles Seigneuret, a critic, defines existentialism as being: "... a confluence of themes and a set of shared influences rather than a body of doctrines. A fundamental feature of all existentialists is their revolt against any form of essentialism that identifies human reality with a priori philosophical, scientific, or religious concepts." (Weidhorn, Caldwell, Averill, & Sawicki, 1988) P. (297). It is a quest realizing the meaning of their life. It deals with how humans can understand themselves and their connection with the world. Namely, these will contain the concept of self-identity, human freedom, limits, the role of reason, the role of passions, and emotion, a way of thinking about the world, fear, and worry death, self-estrangement and their relationship with other.

Some philosophers were dazed to be characterized as existentialist because existentialism can be misunderstood. In general, human freedom is shared characteristics that existentialist interested in. They give attention and concentration on showing humans that they are free, to clear up them with the varacity of their freedom, which is unrecognizable. One of the existentialist philosopher of 19th century was Nietzsche (1844-1900) has turned against philosophy of understanding existence and knowledge, which dealing with man and his views of his place in the world. He rejected the super power of religious concepts that controlled man. He called for considering and examining of Christian values again. He refuses the self-deception and the submissiveness that controlled people in his time. Therefore, existentialism is a refusal of man to accept being submissive by the deception ideas that produced in the name of religions and Gods.

Humans have their own choices and value in senseless universe. Existentialists have refused the concept of a limited system of the world with a limited given meaning. Further, existentialist philosophers have carried burden of thinking about the meaning of the universe that they are existed in without knowing the reason behind their existence. What do existence mean? As it is always said, existence is before the essence. Seeking the depth of substance in the universe, human has no special designed nature or essence. Man essence is to be, to act to exist. Men is always more and greater than what he is. He is in a continuous quest trying to reach fulfillment. What are humans? Where are humans going? Where do they come from? What is the meaning in our life? We will be able to struggle with these questions if we follow the writings of literature by Kafka Camus, Dostoyevsky, Sartre, Kierkegaard and Nietzsche that show the essence of these questions and reflect the writer's way of thinking and their views about the world, death, life and the meaning that lies between them. Existentialism has its extreme effects on literature in twentieth century that was with the writings of Paul Sartre (1905-1980). Sartre's works has been regarded as the productions of the crises of 1945 despair and chaos in Europe. Generally, this philosophical movement had effected and left its impacts on Arabic and Western literature.

Existentialism is a philosophy movement and literary theory that is dedicated to an explanation of human existence that is to say man exist, that he must understand himself and should become aware of his existence. Human must be free because he is a human being and to become free that means to be in charge of his decisions and opinions that he choose for himself and others.

1-2 The philosophy of Existentialism in the Arab world

Anis Mansour (1924-2011) an Egyptian writer, in his article "Shall we Return to Existentialism?" States that existentialism is the convenient ideology for the Arab world because of its values of freedom, special attention given to actions, and people's responsibility of their choices and deeds.

In the first half of 20th century, existentialism became more important and controlled literature of that time, in particular with the raise of the political struggles of the Sues Canal war and Palestine. Western existentialists try to find liberation and freedom of all limits, whatever social, theological or political that make people be able to take their choices and responsibilities. Despite this, existentialist in the Arab world had formed existentialism to politics. Mansour calls for man's understanding of his appreciation of himself as a human being. He calls for freedom. He refuses fatalism. He also explains that, Humans are what they create of themselves to affirm and fight for their existence that find by their rights to choose and decide. Mansour in his article, express and depicts existentialism that reflects by sad experiences of the conflict. He calls the writers, men of religion and the philosophers to help the Arabs experience existentialism.

Jabra Ibrahim Jabra 1971 (the Palestinian author, critic and poet) argues the impact of philosophy on Arab world. He explored the development of Arabic literature during centuries and the influence of western literature on Arabic work of art. Jabra in his article "Modern Arabic literature and West" states, "People do

not have to accept of everything Sartre said, but his views became central to the writers who tried to find participating in the social and political issues of that time". (p.87-88). That shows the narrow realization of existentialism in the Arab countries. Because of the political Arab issues and struggle, Arab existentialist writers concentrated on political subjects and found a connection with the philosophy. Jabra insisted that one should not agree with all beliefs and opinions of existentialism. It is a reference to deny what is behind the philosophy concerning theological thoughts. They determine this philosophy and capsulated it to political subjects away from its essence.

2-1 Yeats's Journey in a Sea of the Intellect

William Butler Yeats, one of the greatest figures of twentieth -Century English-language, drama, poetry and literature. Yeats (1865-1939) is known for his poetry, He was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1923. He was extremely interested in occult and Irish legends. Those subjects feature in the first period of his literary works, Later; he turned to idealized beauty. He wrote with amusing intelligent way and with beautiful expression of the thoughts of the tension between the force of the mind and ageing body. He was also have a great effect in Literary Revival of Ireland.

His literary life is divided into three periods .The early romantic period in which he wrote Celtic mythology, folklore, and occultism work , such as the "The Countess Cathleen play "(1892) which stirred a religious argument among Catholics in Roma. That play is became the central literary moment of the restoration. It is the period of the Irish Rebellion. In the later period, Yeats interested in the matter of Ireland, especially during the years of revolution. His vision became progressively apocalyptic. The event that led to his most grateful work was the executions of the leaders of the Easter Rising especially the poem "Easter" 1916. His greatest poems are "The Second Coming" (1921), "Leda and the Swan" (1928), "Sailing to Byzantium" (1927s), and "among others, Yeats produced a series of works contain both the changing political events in Ireland in that years and his works related death and old age were appear through a careful detailed and through personal belief way. At the end of 1886, When Yeats started writing and concentrating his works on Irish events, he felt it is necessary to move with his family to London.

In 1927, Yeats have written "Sailing to Byzantium" Yeats announces that the country he has left is 'no country for old men' He felt out of that place. The title of the poem is a way to state that the speaker is not in Byzantium. We see that, the poem happened throughout a journey. A journey is an important subject in this poem. If we concentrate on the word 'to'.it is a directional preposition. We can say that, there is a journey to a new place. Looking forward, moving on, not influenced by the past. Travel is appealing. Byzantium is appealing. By this idea, the speaker try to make the readers think of this question, Why we concentrate on a bad past if we can get to an appealing future.

In 'Sailing to Byzantium', Yeats discuss the subject of existence. At first, he argues how the old men are neglected. He states that, the images of joy such as youth and birds singing are not the interests of the old. Life drives to death. Young people turn into aged. There is always a cruelty change because of natural repeated changes. Yeats tries to create a new way by travelling and leaving his place seeking about spiritual rebirth. He intends to limit the changes that form his life, and the first step for that is sailing to Byzantium. The change that may leads to spiritual rising and cleansing can lead also to the possibility of having a mental picture or idea of physical renewal. However, the speaker will die like all people; he has a mental idea that there would be a time when he would be able to live again in and through art.

Yeats states that, as a change that awaits, death appears and threaten all creatures. Birds going on singing, irrespective of whether they will die or not.

Birds in the trees, those dying generations – at their song, (2-3)

Transforming to spiritual inspiration as type of a complete change as birth of death itself. There is a requesting to have a heart re-form. It is a closely repeated beliefs of most religions, that often showing the need to submissive to a divine power. Getting advanced in age is not the end of everything. It is not a start of a break down mentally. "Sailing to Byzantium" is considered to be as a contemplating and soul searching of things that leave behind the age. As the death coming near, there is a turns towards a chance of rebirth man can choose as a way and a solution for the severe emotional pain caused by watching his body become worse and degenerate. What is between physical and spiritual rebirth become difficult to understand and cannot separate clearly. Yeats imagines putting his soul in an art, an object or a situation, which can achieve immortal for all creature.

Yeats differentiates the human's souls or hearts from nothing more animal nature of human body. Humans stuck in their bodies, Heart cannot accomplish its true ability as art. Yeats in his poem states that

no matter who or what we are, all creatures, which have bodies going to decay quickly. The moment we are born, we start to die. That means there is definitely no difference between the human race and other creatures in the universe. Yeats insists that man has the potential to be greater than just physically body that is only need a little efforts and work.

Consume my heart away; sick with desire
and fastened to a dying animal
It knows not what it is; (21-23)

Yeats also shows that, life takes control the minds of creatures. Humans do not often consider spiritual or philosophical questions, which do not influence their daily life.

The salmon-falls, the mackerel-crowded seas,
Fish, flesh, or fowl, commend all summer long
whatever is begotten, born, and dies. (4-6)

Yeats wants to tell us that there is two types of music sensual and spiritual one. The first kind takes almost of our attention and time. In a similar way if we caught up in the matters of daily life that is will lead us to neglect existential and spiritual questions. Spirituality of man and the art combine to gather. Yeats tries to find a way to pass and be outside the matters regarding human body. He shows a frequent conflict to check out the position of the heart. Is it in the human body? Does the heart will decay and die or it will have existence and life. How the soul be able to interpret itself?

Caught in that sensual music all neglect
Monuments of unageing intellect. (7-8)

The attractively energetic of the man soul saves human race from painful deteriorate into futility. It is not the human who is clapping. It is his own soul.

An aged man is but a paltry thing,
[...] unless
Soul clap its hands and sing, (9-11)

A new place of life to live. It is a journey to Byzantium. It becomes a way to think of future and past time without concentrating on the present situation.

Yeats is immense and vague. He concerns with changing, chaos around and inside him into art. He also emphasizes the fragility and weakness of life. Therefore, he demands his readers to struggle with the Anti self that self which created and imagined by him. Yeats stats that soul can last forever. He also calls for the regenerate the universe again. At the end of his poem, he says that the only thing that can save and protect us from the rottenness of the word is art. He states that art is exist in Byzantium and humans have not to give attention to what can easily forgotten easily and neglect the permanent products of humans mind such as philosophy and art. Man is able to leave and travel to that enormous sea of intellect. Humans are able to achieve that, only if they supported by the potential of the spirit and only if they are able to understand what does spirituality mean? Therefore I have sailed the seas and come to the holy city of Byzantium. (15-16)

2-2 Darwish's Interpretation of Immortality

Mahmoud Darwish (1941-2008) is regarded as one of the important poets of his time. His writings still show a clear and deep understanding of identity and exile subjects. He expresses deeply that exile is not just a geographical idea, you may be an exile even in your country, house or in your room. His poetry deals with the issues of separation, belonging. He asks, tries to explain and understand, what society, nationality and culture mean? He tries to know whether it is possible to go far away from subjectivity. Thus, his poetry moves continuously between the rootless man and a national identity. He said, "I don't decide to represent anything except myself, but the self is full of collective memory". Darwish works is a deep contemplating of existential concern that run through his writings. He concentrates on the experience of exile. It touches something deep in human mind, feelings and beliefs. Darwish's works go away from the political and move for making clear of something existing everywhere, represented in the human psyche and state. In Darwish's poem, "Mural" there is a moving from politics and history to existence. We surprises by observing the poem expresses, an existential worry, which leads the human self to the questions that includes in the poem. "Where am I? Where now is my where"? Darwish self-burns in these questions. It is a self -dialogue. Its Darwish experiences which deals with death. It is also our experience at the same time, pain of departure and the feeling of approaching the end. It is an existential pain, which

threat the human self in a moment of anxiety. There is no doubt that, this poem is full of the meanings and feelings of this concern.

At the gate of resurrection nothing hurts

Neither time past nor any feeling

I don't sense the lightness of things nor

The weight of apprehension

There's no one to ask:

Where now is my where?

Where is the city of death

Where am I?

In this no-here...

No-time and nothingness (P8, 9)

The main theme of the poem is death. There is an address to death. We will see what the experience of Darwish with death is. What are aesthetic and artistic values reflected in the poem? Who will be defeated Darwish or death in this poem? These questions and the poet's answers are survival through art, as Darwish explains, "Until my heart stop, I will slog over this endless, endless road...", "Darwish's "Mural" starts with a depiction of the place which showing that Darwish go furthest in his thoughts. He go beyond the universe, beyond dream and vision. This poem have three kinds of dialogue, self- dialogue a monologue an inner dialogue that depicted by the poet through the word "others". By internal dialogue, he reveals and express his thoughts, feelings and inner conflicts. Darwish returns and form a self- questioning. He shows his confusion that he feels in his journey to another world. Darwish introduces death as being an important character in his poem which enrich the poem with a trying to confirm the self-death's conflict. The second kind of the dialogue, it takes a confusion and anxiety way. The poet embraced death. He tries to explore what is death. By using, the word "be" There is a dialogue with death. He talks with "death" as an object that can discussed and ordered. He talks directly to death. As John Donne in his "Holy sonnet 10" taunts death with a strong tone, Darwish diagnosis death. We observe that Darwish talks to death by hope, ambition, dream in a strong tone to defeat it. Defeating death means to immortalize man through art. Darwish's "Mural" is not a work that deals with death as a biological issue. It is a dialogue, which expresses a new way of intellectual in an existential way. It establishes a vision of challenge and makes death as an issue of motivation for love and life. In spite of Darwish excepting and confessing the truth of the existence of death, but he does not stop addressing it in a way he wins, achieves victory and defeat death by his eloquence which means by the way he uses language to express thoughts and feelings. By nature and time, death is stronger than man is, but man is able to make art a means to resist it. Darwish considers art as being the destruction of death by what man created.

O death, all the arts have defeated you, all the Mesopotamian songs.

The Egyptian obelisk, the Pharaoh's tombs, the engraved temple stones,

All defeated you, all were victorious. You cannot trap the immortal.

So do with us and with yourself whatever you wish.

Thus, Darwish defeats death by immortalizing man through art. He reveals artistic values by the dialogue created by the poet with death. These artistic values reflects in the text, supported with a famous characters from the past time like (Heidegger, Al-Maari, Tarfa Bin Al-Abad) that to enrich his poem by experiences. By the present time and the past, Darwish explores the existence and contemplating, that reflect Darwish ability to use intense connotation that perform various functions. Therefore, Darwish was able to defeat death through art, which immortalize man, even taunt it. By artistic, aesthetic values, experience, dialogues, voices, and connotations he achieves one great picture, he called it "the Mural".

Conclusion

"Art is more powerful than war, oppression, suppression and human stupidity". Mahmoud Darwish

The two kinds of existentialism are different. In the Western world, poets used the philosophy as an attempt to achieve freedom. They try to achieve freedom for man of all limits that control him. It is a recall for a theological and intellectual liberation. While poets in Arab world enclose the philosophy to politics. They use existentialism for politics issues. As examined "Sailing to Byzantium" by William Butler Yeats and Darwish's "Mural" point out the difference between the two worlds in dealing with this philosophy. In spite of the differences, similarity can be explored in moving from politics to existence as well. That

movement happened under the impact of exile that leads the two poets for questing identity and immortality through poetry.

Interpretation of immortality through work of art return to ancient civilization. Roman and Greek sculptures have intended to create the ideal form. There is also the thought concerns the immortalizing of art powers. The idea of something that never ending is created and saved. As Shakespeare explains: "So long as men can breathe or eyes can see / So long lives this and this gives life to thee." (Sonnet 18.13-14) Shakespeare also as Yeats and Darwish shows the ability of art to immortalize people. He explains that the life of his subject will continue through the existence of his poem. The soul of the subjects in a work of art will immortalize. It will last forever in the minds of the future readers. Artists allow the work of art with spirituality raise above death. Mythologies and religions emphasizes the timelessness of the spirits. Shakespeare explores the living bodies of the readers ("breathe", "eyes") as a hint to spiritual immortality. Although the question stills: Does art have the ability to give life after death and immortality?

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