

**Portraying Sana'a as a Woman: A Critical Study of some of Abdulaziz
Al –Maqalih's Poetry.**

**Dr. Iman Abdullah Al- Mahdi and
Bushra Yahya Al – Hawri
Faculty of Languages, Department of
English,
Sana'a University, Sana'a, Republic of
Yemen**

Abstract

This paper analysis critically how Professor Abdulaziz Al –Maqalih portrays Sana'a city as a woman in 'The Book of Sana'a' by using all poetical devices such as simile ,metaphor and personification. At the same time, poet uses various ways and angles including historical, symbolical, mythical and autobiographical aspects. It is also found that Al – Maqalih is a skillful and creative poet in liking romanticism along with modernism while describing Sana'a city as a woman. The description and language is impressive, comprehensive and rich with historical, symbolical, autobiographical and mythical traces. The poet has used a unique approach in describing Sana'a city as a woman.

الملخص

13

Key words: Sana'a, Woman, Nymph, Sun, Daughter, Romanticism, Modernism.

Sana'a is the capital city of Northern Yemen. It is surrounded by huge mountains. This beautiful city is an attraction towards all foreign nationals. First impression of Sana'a city is more dramatic; the landscape erupts through the early morning mist line dawn of creation; visitors, Arab and European, have always been impressed by Sana's fortification, architecture and gardens. The city is basically a medieval creation, and many of the houses pre-date the nineteenth century, especially in their lower stories. German critic Niebuhr compared Sana'a with Damascus.

Sana'a has played a big role in Professor Abdulaziz Al- Maqlih's poetries. Al – Maqlih was born in a small town named Al- Nadirah, Ibb in 1939. He was seven when his family moved to settle in Sana'a, where they lived permanently. Since that date, he has become a great lover of this beautiful city, as he mentioned in his autobiographical essay. Sana'a in Al- Maqlih's memory:

“It was summer when I first came to Sana'a with my family. We travelled on the backs of camels heading for Sana'a. The furniture was made of animal's wool. The weather was cool and the Sun was shining. The houses were painted in silver color and mountains surrounding Sana'a, from all directions.”
(Al- Arab Magazine).

This excerpt sheds light on the first movements in which Al- Maqlih got attracted by Sana'a. The poet, completely fall in love with this city because of its beautiful buildings, weather, calm and cool environment. Poet's childhood memories were mingled with this beautiful city which has become his beloved in most of his poems. He is a prolific poet and writer of Arabic literature. He wrote so many collections of poetry, critical books and essays. 'The Book of Sana'a' is among his collection of poems. He is one of the most prominent poets in Modern Yemeni Literature. His great achievement and abundant literary production have made him a leading poet and a well- known literary figure in Yemen and Arab world. He is a poet, critic , prose writer, professor. In this regard, Abdul Ridha Ali says:

“Professor Al – Maqalih is a well-known poet, keen university Professor, eminent critic and unmatched prose writer, who has become a Cultural symbol for Modern Yemen” (qtd. Al-Fahd, 6).

Besides, Al Maqalih wrote many poems both in standard and colloquial Arabic that have been sung by famous Yemeni singers. Some of his poems and essays are taught in primary and secondary curricula in Yemen. Due to his popularity and highly literary value of his poetic works, many poems and collections of poetry have been translated in to many foreign languages such as English, French, Russian and Italian.

‘The Book of Sana’a’ which is translated by Bob Holman and Sam Liebhaber into English language. Many critics admire this book from the point of view of style, context and autobiographical traces. Abdulrazaq Al- Rubaiyee points out that “The book of Sana’a’ shows how Al- Maqalih is in love with Sana’a. He also observes that it is a work of praise for an imaginary woman that stands symbolically for Sana’a city with all its physical charm, historical connotations being an ancient and beautiful city; Sana’a has attracted the attention of poet s, writers, travelers and historians throughout history.

The following lines are taken from a famous lyrical poem that was written in Eighteenth century, this poem describes Sana’a showing the admiration of the beauty of the city and kindness of its people. This poem has been sung by many Yemeni singers.

“Nothing can be compared to Sana’a and its Citizens”

“ Oh , lovers of Sana’a hills, May God bless Sana’a

If I had a chance to visit it, I would come walking even on my head” (Al-Ansi, 98)

There are many factors have led to the great admiration and attachment to this beautiful city. The translators of the ‘The book of Sana’a’ observe:

“The moderate climate, the sweet water of her springs and the gentleness of her citizenry are well –trodden elements of praise for Sana’a, from Qasidhas attributed to mythical Qasidhas to popular songs heard in the streets, at weddings or wherever a Tape-deck is available. The delights of Sana’a have even been made available to an Anglophone readership by Tim Mackintosh

–Smith, whose recent translation of ‘City of Divine and earthly joy’.

be speaks his own attachment to this earthly Paradise” (The Book of Sana'a.Int.,2)

The Arabic text of ‘The book of Sana'a’ was published in 2000 by Riyad Al – Rayyes Books, Beirut. It is a poetic work by Professor Abdulaziz Al-Maqlih, written in free verse. It consists of 57 poems or Qasidhas.

Al – Maqlih loves Sana'a city very much. So he decided to write a whole book about his beloved city. He himself declared that, Sana'a deserves to receive poetic works like ‘The book of Sana'a’ because of its remarkable status in ancient history and civilization. Mohamed Abdulsalam Mansour a famous Yemeni poet and critic who wrote the importance of ‘The book of Sana'a’:

“This book is a unique; no similar book has been ever done in the same way. It excellently relates to the aesthetic art of poetry. It creates for itself a new form. It is not like other Divans of poetry; a collection of various poems or as one long poem but it includes fifty seven Qasidhas. Each poem stands independently from the previous one but the coherent in serial in an artistic unified frame work in forms and in content as if they were one poem built they are not Each one is a particular painting out of fifty seven paintings to Sana'a as it traced in the emotion of the poet”. (Mohamed: p. 9)

Many critics agree that ‘The book of Sana'a’ is biography for Al – Maqlih. Fakhruddin states,

“All Al- Maqlih draws the image of Sana'a with child hood illusion youth dreams, and manhood experience” (Fakharuddin, p.7).

The following lines from the poem express biographical elements of Al- Maqlih united with Sana'a city.

“To Sana'a just as the imagination of
A child and an old man conjured her.
I remembered her.....
I was a child with over whelmed eyes
I saw her charms and the shadow of her veil
I followed the flood of her steps
I drank her fragrance.

I bathed my eyelids in the moisture of her shade
While my heart saw angels painting the horizon
With Valleys and Palaces.” (4th. Qasidhas, 43)

Al –Maqalib combines features of modernism with romanticism in these poems. In some of his Qasidhas he described Sana'a city as a Sad Figure:

“How would I address Sana'a?
And how to address her grieves?
Can I say the child of coffee tree has disappeared” (Ibid: Divan, 345).

Poet addresses Sana'a as a lady covered with tears and Sadness:

“O Sana'a, who are you?
Are you a factory of grieves?
Or a burning furnace?

Tears have drowned your face since we saw you” (Ibid: 316).

In some poems he expresses his view as a sad but hopeful and defiant woman. For example, in the poem ‘The face of Sana'a between dream and the nightmare’, the poet describes as this city as a lady who can smile in spite of her troubles and create hope in others:

“The face of Sana'a that never gets old saves me,
The face I saw smiling in my dream,
She draws the sword in the face of our sorrows” (Ibid: 577)

The sadness of Sana'a in these poems can refer to some difficult historical periods and conditions that this city faced. It is noticed that poet is inclined to personifying Sana'a city in many of his poetic collections as a human being. It is clear that the best personification of Sana'a is in the form of Woman. The poet describing this city with female image indicates the great respect and love that a poet has towards the city with personal and artistic implications. The natural beauty of Sana'a city, which is rarely found in other cities of the worlds described by the poet in following lines:

“ For the beauty of those cities is affected and man-made,
But as for the beauty of Sana'a, it comes from God,
Who never fails to send his angles,
To cleanse it of sadness and soot,
To paint on its walls epiphanies,

Of joy and sweetness” (Ibid: 20- 115).

The poet portrays the city using the best and most elevated images such as Sana'a has beautiful nymphs as paradise has:

“Hush! The city nymphs appear in a rustling of their ankles”(Ibid:30-155)

The poet points out that describing Sana'a as a woman in an honoring method to this city because woman is the maker of life, the mother and life itself. This respected and universal connotation of women is found in most poems that describe Sana'a as a female figure, in his poems, he also compares Sana'a to a Nymph. Selecting this particular image shows the high position and status of a woman. This woman is not ordinary; she is a Nymph who falls from sky and turns into a city:

“She was a woman, who fell down from the sky in robes,
Of dew and became a city” (Ibid: 23)

It reflects the view as poet compares the city as a holy woman. This implies that the sky means heaven and that woman Sana'a was a nymph according to the poet's imagination:

“Sana'a sleeps under the Throne of God,
And anoints her trees blooming with perfume” (Ibid: 3 -39)

These lines express clearly the features and position of nymphs as it is known in religious texts. The poet alludes here to the 'throne of God', and so implicitly places Sana'a in Paradise. The lines above describe nymphs in paradise as reward for believers. It mentioned in many religious books that describes nymphs as having beautiful wide and lovely eyes; as the city's comparison to a heavenly woman. Though, this image the poet makes readers imagine the matchless beauty of this city. The poet uses a myth in his poems and appears with an attractive and suggestive style.

Another mythical element found in Al-Maqalib's poem that the poet describing Sana'a as an Eve. He refers to the first woman according to the Jewish, Christian and Islamic religions. All these religions state that Eve lived in the Garden of Eden with the first man Adam.

“Cumulus was the first to inscribe on her brow
The crescent of his desire the first who gave his
For her left rib bedrock” (Ibid: 3, 39-41).

Cumulus here is used by the translators as an equivalent of Gaiman Mountain. Indirectly, the poet compares the relation between Sana'a and Nuqum Mountain with relation between Adam and Eve. This is a metaphorical expression of the strong relationship between Sana'a and the surrounding mountains especially Nuqum. It is known that the old city of Sana'a was built from the mountains around it especially this mountain.

In addition, this refers to the historical and geographical link between Sana'a and Nuqum mountain. Sana'a has spiritual, aesthetical and historical links with this mountain. Because throughout history, Gaiman Mountain acted as Sana'a's guard against invaders. Besides, like Eve who was created from Adam's ribs according to the religious believe, Sana'a city was built from the stones and rocks of Gaiman Mountain. Linking the story of Adam and Eve to Sana'a and Nuqum Mountain shows the creativity and limitless imagination of poet and his great skill in employing religious and historical myths in his poetry. The following lines describe Sana'a as a daughter of the Sun:

“A beautiful pure morning,
O daughter of the Sun!

Nothing on my lips but the kiss of words” (Ibid: 31, 161).

The Sun in the above lines can symbolize beauty, higher and greatness. The figure of speech here used is metaphor. The poet describes Sana'a as if it is a daughter for its beauty, as well as a female figure. The description can be applied to personification as a literary device. So both Sana'a and Sun appear in his description as human beings. It refers the great poetic skills of using metaphor and personification for one idea or subject.

In another poem he describes Sana'a as an Ageless woman, who is not affected by the ravages of time. He compares the beautiful city with beautiful women who don't like to tell their ages:

“Beautiful cities are like beautiful women,
Neither reveal their age nor submit to the time counting.
Archaeologists date cities with a touch,
Doctors read the wrinkle's shadow,
And tell you the effects of time” (Ibid: 3- 39).

In this poem, the poet makes a nice comparison between the ages of women and ages of cities including Sana'a. Like beautiful women, beautiful cities hate age counting. While the impact of time on women is known by their wrinkles, the effect of time on cities is known by touches. The poet asks readers to look at her beauty and not to fish for her drawbacks as wrinkles and dust in her eyes. Here poet is using a figure of speech Simile.

“Look at her, drink deep and long wondrous eyes,
Face wrinkles will never tire you,
Eyelids dust will never sadden you,
Drink deep and long her marvelous mouth,
Her lips are a history of our people,

Tracing the floods that nearly washed away the mountains” (Ibid: 9 – 67).

The poet draws a beautiful portrait for Sana'a. He begins drawing her wondrous eyes, then face, eyelids and finally her mouth. The description of a charming lady in spite of her age. Moreover, the poet in the same time assures to the readers that Sana'a will never become old because she knows the secrets that make her an everlasting beautiful woman

It is obvious that the poet creates in this way a unique approach in unity the gentle features of woman with symbolic and mythical presentation in his poetry.

The language of Al- Maqalih's poetry is very simple and lucid so every reader is able to understand them. Thus, the poetical works of Al- Maqalih is gems of Arabic literature. They are very life of Yemeni culture. Though the literary giant Professor Abdulaziz Al –Maqalih expresses Yemeni literature, the beauty of Sana'a city and the religious comparison of his poems are understood by the common Arabic readers. All poetical works of Al-Maqalih has been translated into famous languages, and have produced wide readers throughout the literary world. Reading such poetry makes tremendous impact on an individual.

Hence, describing Sana'a as a woman in Al-Maqalih's poetry is a new literary philosophy that has its own peculiarities, style and functions. Portraying Sana'a in his 'The Book of Sana'a' is an eternal literary gift for his beloved city. It shows the poet's love for his country and culture.

Works Cited

1. Al – Ansi, Abdulrehman. Diwan Al – Qadi Abdulrehman Al- Ansi: Zamamalsiba. Sana'a: Al – Dar Al – Yemeniah for Publication, 1986.
2. Al – Fahd, Basheer. Imagery in Abdulaziz Al – Maqalih's Poetry in English Translation: A Critical Study. MA Thesis, Sana'a University, 2012.
3. Al – Maqalih, Abdulaziz. Al – Maqalih's Complete Poetic Works. Sana'a, Ministry of Culture and Tourism, 1990.
4. Al – Maqalih, Abdulaziz, The Book of Sana'a. Trans. Bob Holman and Sam Liebhaber. Sana'a: American Institute for Yemeni Studies, 2004.
5. Al – Maqalih, Abdulaziz. Al Maqalih's Diwan. Beirut: Dar Al – Awdh, 1986.
6. Al – Maqalih, Abdulaziz. Sana'a in a Writer's Memory, Al – Arabi Magazine Mar. 2004: 45 -54.
7. Al – Rubaiyee, Abdulrazaq, Al – Maqalih, The Monk of Poem, Al – Manamah: Al – Dawsari Corporation, 2011.
8. Fakhruddin Judat, Reflections on Al – Maqalih's The Book of Sana'a, Almothaqaf Magazine, 14 June, 2012: 6 – 19.