Waiting In-Between Becket and Al-Muqaleh

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Abstract: This research conducts an applied study on Samuel Becket’s play “Waiting for Godot” and Abd Al-Aziz Al-Muqaleh’s poem “Waiting for Godot” in an attempt to illustrate the notion of cause and effect, which is one of the comparative literature’s concepts. This research explores the notion of waiting for both of them, trying to find the points of similarities and dissimilarities between them and the depth of the concept in both of their works. The research, thus studies waiting in which Becket does not believe as he does not wait for anyone to come to offer him solutions and get him out of the argumentativeness of fateful situations that occupy him. Al-Muqaleh, however, stresses that solution and hope are forthcoming and deserve to be waited for. The research compares between the two literary works in terms of the idea of place, the language represented by dialogue and the idea of master and slave, which has become a human presentiment that should be looked at in a developed world which denies differences and aims at equality.

Key words: Comparative literature • Becket • Al-Muqaleh • Waiting

INTRODUCTION

Concept of Comparative Literature: The concept of comparative literature is one of the modern concepts in the contemporary literary study. Although it was not known for old Arab litterateurs in the same way it is known nowadays, we find some of their studies emphasizing their knowledge of it, where the idea of comparative literature was introduced mainly due to the French revolution [1].

However, modern litterateurs and writers were aware of this cause and effect and so they embellished books and studies about the roots of similarity and convergence and its origins in international literatures and how to benefit from them and add to them. Hence, comparative literature in its Persian meaning is: “The comparison between the literatures or litterateurs of one lingual group or different multiple lingual groups through studying the literary effects that surpass the lingual, sexual and political limits, such as the Romantic school in different literatures”[2]. The notion also implies a terminological meaning on which learners and those who are interested disagreed. The term literally denotes “studying literature outside the limits of one particular country and studying the relations between literature on one hand and the areas of knowledge and other beliefs, such as arts and philosophy, on the other hand”. To make it brief, comparative literature is “comparing one literature to another or to other literatures and comparing literature to other fields of human expression” [2]. It is also defined as: “studying the origins of similarity between literatures in their different languages, as well as their multiple complex relations, in their present or past time and the ability of these historical relations to cause or effect in many ways, as the aspects of the cause and effect may be related to general artistic origins of literary types and methods or intellectual streams, to the subjects, situations or persons imitated in literature, to matters of artistic formulation and partial ideas in the literary work, or to different countries as reflected in the literatures of other nations, as they are described as artistic relations connecting nations to countries through human relations that differ according to images and writers” [3].

Hence, comparative literature as seen by some “is not the one that, only, pairs or contrasts two or three different literary works. The inevitable comparison, from 1820 till 1830, between Shakespeare and Rassin, is a literary criticism and daintiness, whereas demonstrating what
Shakespeare knew from Montanni and how his plays were affected by Montanni is comparative literature. Thus, comparative literature is not contrasting, which is merely one of the methods used in the science that can be named: (this history of international literary relations) [4].

It is clear from the definition of comparative literature how important it is for learners of modern languages as it reveals the sources of the artistic and intellectual streams of national literature. Each national literature definitely come into contact with international literatures with which it collaborates in directing the human and national awareness in a way that completes and up-rises this meeting [3].

Waiting In-Between Becket and Al-Muqaleh: This research aims to explore the points of difference and similarity between the play of the Irish writer Samuel Becket “Waiting for Godot” and the poem of the Arab poet Abd Al-Aziz Al-Muqaleh “Waiting for Godot”, in an attempt to find the origins of difference and similarity and the convergence points between the two works through comparing between each writer’s way of presenting the value and absurdity of waiting. The depth of experience is found in Becket’s style of writing. He wrote his work at the age of 42 after composing a group of plays and poems as he gained experience in the world of writing and possessed a depth in vision and formulation. In contrast, the poet Abdel Aziz Al-Muqaleh had a short life and poetic experiences as he died at the age of 32. This did not allow him to present universal issues that concerned many philosophers across history.

We believe that if Al-Muqaleh dealt with the value of waiting in a later stage of his life, both his poem and vision would be different; as he was driven by his obsession to observe the multiple possibilities of waiting, his observation came out to be a traditional one that lacks depth and experience and a local one that tackles an individual issue and reflects a personal concern that may surpass to the surrounding group without surpassing it. The issue for Becket carries a human concern and presents a problem that can neither be received nor solved.

The idea of the play is based on a dialogue between Estragon and Vladimir. This dialogue personifies the notion of absurd waiting and waiting for the savoir that never comes. Becket also tries through the play to present the issue of questioning the existence of God. Hence, he takes it into a purely human direction to express the value of death which controls people and their destinies and represent the value waited for in Becket’s work.

Through the scene of the master and slave, where the master leads the slave with a rope from his neck, Becket tries to illustrate the absurdity of life and the dominance of the capital. He also wants to say that all people are controlled by the joint destiny and calls for human fraternization and getting out from under the oppression and domination.

Hence, the play is based on the absurdity of waiting, the inevitability of death and waiting for the non-coming. It is from the absurd literature that was established by Samuel Becket along with a group of European litterateurs in a certain historical stage.

“The title of the play has been under extensive research. The writer himself does not pronounce what he is certain of. He sometimes smiles with bewilderment and sometimes preponderates his head. It is said that he derived the name from the colloquial word (Goddio) or (Godwas). It is also a common convention that the word Godot is related to the English word God, which means Allah” [5].

In his play, Becket waits for nothing, not even for God. He blasts the idea of the existence of God the savior and tries to dispense with religion, without indicating the idea of begging for salvation. Even if God appeared in his play, he would assert that he is not a savior nor a stimulator for salvation. God “the absent and the waited moves the sentiment of Becket’s plays as he is in the middle of the play “Waiting for Godot”. He is the comer that endows every absurd matter in the world with meaning. Humans observe transfiguration, but Godot does not. He sends us who would make us believe that he is the god of the old age, who is cruel, sadistic and punishing and who exhausts grown-ups and children” [5].

"VLADIMIR: Did you ever read the Bible?

ESTRAGON: The Bible... (He reflects.) I must have taken a look at it.

VLADIMIR: Do you remember the Gospels?

ESTRAGON: I remember the maps of the Holy Land. Colored they were. Very pretty. The Dead Sea was pale blue. The very look of it made me thirsty. That's where we'll go, I used to say, that's where we'll go for our honeymoon. We'll swim. We'll be happy." [6]

Anything that has to do with religion for Becket in its best cases is gloomy and stimulates hunger and thirst. Religion cannot give salvation nor rest or assurance,
which totally contradicts the case in Al-Maqa'leh's work, for he opens his poem asking for salvation from heaven, which represents for him the support and strength he needs to get rid of the burden of fear, waiting and doubt. He absolutely believes that it is the only savior, shelter and rescuer when all roads are closed and doors are shut:

"From heaven. Maybe
From the wave's froth, from the land's wind which heaven has grudged
That thing must come, which many
Names have gathered around." [7].

Al-Muqaleh's waiting is not an absurd waiting, but a possible one. It is destined by God's will. Hence, he directly or indirectly waits for it through the creatures over which he has control and to which he gives orders. These creatures, for Al-Muqaleh, form God's soldiers who will patronize God, such as the waves and wind.

Becket, who has been exhausted by waiting for nothing, attempts to get away from waiting by committing suicide, which means death, for he believes it is inevitably coming, so why should he wait for it? Why does not he shorten the distance and go for it instead of waiting for it until it comes?

"ESTRAGON: Wait.
VLADIMIR: Yes, but while waiting.
ESTRAGON: What about hanging ourselves?
VLADIMIR: Hmm. It's give us an erection.
ESTRAGON: (highly excited). An erection!
VLADIMIR: With all that follows. Where it falls mandrakes grow. That's why they shriek when you pull them up. Did you not know that?
ESTRAGON: Let's hang ourselves immediately!" [6].

But it is totally different when it comes to Al-Muqaleh, who does not get tired of waiting for a long period of time. He will remain stable on the road waiting for Godot the savior. He will dig a hole in the door of hope to see him when he comes and will try to explore the night of alienation and fog in a desperate attempt to see the savior. Nevertheless, it is a possible try that is not far away from being achieved, as the wind may quench its sun, but he may not allow waiting to do so.

Therefore, he has relied on what Gog and Magog, who were mentioned in the Holy Qur'an, did, which indicates that he does not lose hope nor surrender to reality. The religious dimension, which is rejected by Becket, is mainly inclined on by Al-Muqaleh, although he does not seem to be interested in this dimension in his other poetic works:

"Our feet are stable on the road
Our eyes are bound to fire
We will not tire, no matter how long
No matter how far waiting will go
"Godot" …
Our prisoner is digging a hole in the door
To see you coming through the fog" [7].

If we search for the essence of waiting in Becket's work, we will find that it is a humanistic one that emerges from beliefs and visions which were formed and set in Becket's mind due to a long experience, which may sometimes be painful. Becket talks about major facts, worries and fears, which have been repeatedly talked about every three to four centuries. This makes Becket a "classic" writer, as he describes (the human fate) and (man's great issues). These issues which are considered to be eternal and very modern in critics' opinion include: fear of death, the meaning of the unreasonable, the useless search for a god and others [8].

Hence, time for Becket is absurd and existential. It has an effect in the soul and the soul is what endows it with its limitless limit. It bites as if it has silent nihilist rodents. How did Estragon and Vladimir suffer from the burden of time? They crawled on its skin and fought it without seeing it" [5].

Al-Muqaleh's perspective is a precise individual one that is limited by time and place and whose existence is framed by faith and belief. It is a perspective that is limited to specific incidents and does not surpass them to human or existential concerns.

Godot constrains himself to the Arabian Peninsula and bounds his mission to rescue children and men. He carries a specific mission which he is not allowed to outreach.

Place In-Between Them: The first place which Al-Muqaleh's work starts with is heaven, which is the same place in Becket's work. However, in Al-Muqaleh's, it seems to be a sacred place from which something is going to emerge one day and this is what he does not agree with Becket on, as waiting will last forever in Becket's work. Al-Muqaleh started talking from heaven, to move afterwards to places where he saw kind of sequence leading to the desired hope. Thus, he mentions (forts, wall, road, door and city) and takes us to (Tihama), the land / desert in the Arabian Peninsula, whereas the place for Becket is under
a tree, meaning on the road, which is a place open for any movement, but the movement which is represented by waiting does not come, nor does waiting do. Although Al-Muqaleh's movement is similar to Becket's, his movement will return one day to spinning out from waiting:

"When you return youth to the mother and the city
And the mother and the city
From behind each sad bloody tear
Watch "Godot" and get prepared for salvation
Pregnant from its sadness with bullets and bayonets
Then welcome hunger and tears
"Tihama" of sadness, after he comes, will not feel hungry
Children and men will not know hunger
Any hunger"[7].
But the place for Becket is on the move and there is no hope for its stability. This represents a case of nihilism and absurdity which Becket wishes to generate and make the ultimate focus and result:
"ESTRAGON: Charming spot. (He turns, advances to front, halts facing auditorium.)
Inspiring prospects. (He turns to Vladimir.) Let's go.
VLADIMIR: We can't.
ESTRAGON: Why not?
VLADIMIR: We're waiting for Godot.
ESTRAGON: (despairingly). Ah! (Pause.) You're sure it was here?
VLADIMIR: What?
ESTRAGON: That we were to wait.
VLADIMIR: He said by the tree. (They look at the tree.) Do you see any others?
ESTRAGON: What is it?
VLADIMIR: I don't know. A willow.
ESTRAGON: Where are the leaves?
VLADIMIR: It must be dead.
ESTRAGON: No more weeping.
VLADIMIR: Or perhaps it's not the season.
ESTRAGON: Looks to me more like a bush.
VLADIMIR: A shrub.
ESTRAGON: A bush.
VLADIMIR: A-What are you insinuating? That we've come to the wrong place?
ESTRAGON: He should be here." [6].

**Ruler and Ruled/Master and Slave:** There is a clear difference between the way Becket presents the issue of the master and slave and the way Al-Maqaleh presents the issue of the ruler and citizens. Becket covers his issue with experience and wisdom and calls for getting away from the arrogance the master shows when dealing with the slave as they will both have the same inevitable fate and will end up drinking from the same cup of death without any distinction. As death does not consider money nor poverty, everyone will fall its victim when it comes. The truth for Becket is: "that all people, including the master, the salve, the materialist, the indolent and the doctrinaire, are equal in falling into their fate and its tightly shut trap. Hence, Lucky, Pozzo and Vladimir are one person. Two of them are shouting and moaning and the third one is destined to remain silent, defeated and tortured. Thus, destinies are equal in their essence, even if they differ in their appearance and man is secluded and united even if he appears to be multisided" [5].

This is opposed by Al-Maqaleh's image of the ruler and the citizens, where the ruler tyrannizes his people, sends his dogs and soldiers to attack them, constructs forts in their roads and plants thorns in their way. Nevertheless, the people will wake up from their lethargy when their savior arrives; he shows in the prayers of mothers, sighs of prisoners, as well as in the longing and yearning of those who are waiting for him to come. All of this will enlighten the people's road, casting it with hope and waiting, whose end will necessarily be happy:

"Construct forts in their way
Build the wall of blood and tears
Put out their candles
Send forth whoever yells waiting for him hungry dogs
Nevertheless,
The sights of mothers and groans of prisoners
Our longing and yearning for him
Will lighten like daytime
His gigantic road" [7].

**Language In-Between Them:** The language Al-Muqaleh uses is almost similar to the language Becket uses. However, it deviates from the scope of direct speech to the scopes of motivating the recipient to imagine a dialogue between the contemporary Arab reality and its dreams. This indicates a vivid dimension of the technique Becket uses through the use of direct dialogue and straightforward answers:

"That thing must come, which many
Names have gathered around
Construct forts in their way
Build the wall of blood and tears
Put out their candles
Send forth whoever yells waiting for him hungry dogs" [7].
We notice here Al-Muqaleh's use of pronouns (must come / gathered / construct / build / put out / send forth). He turns to tear the plural addressee pronoun (you), due to its ability to form seeds of dialogue and await the answer which the recipient is prepared for.

Becket's language tends to be direct without any ambiguity. It leaves no space for the recipient's interpretation. As he has fulfilled his vision and decided what he wants, he does not wish for the recipient to participate in creating indications and forming visions. He does not want the text to have a creator other than him:

"ESTRAGON: What?  
VLADIMIR: Suppose we repented.  
ESTRAGON: Repented what?  
VLADIMIR: Oh... (He reflects.) We wouldn't have to go into the details.  
ESTRAGON: Our being born?" [6].

CONCLUSIONS

The research concludes that there are clear differences between Becket and Al-Muqaleh in terms of vision and formalization. Becket's deep vision is ruled by his perspective in life, which has been formed by his wide cultivation and entire knowledge of life. He earns superior life values which he attempts to defend and prove to be considerable and valid. However, Al-Muqaleh's cultivation has not pushed him forward to deepen the idea, due to his young age and the simple experience he had when writing the text.

The following points summarize the research conducted:

- Similarity is found in the subject and difference is found in the vision and the way of dealing with the notion of waiting.
- Similarity is found in the content and difference is found in cultivation.
- Al-Muqaleh fights tyranny with hope, whereas Becket waits for no one.
- In Al-Muqaleh's work, the place starts on the move and ends up being stabilized. In Becket's work, the place is on the move with no hope for its stability.
- Al-Muqaleh uses pronouns in his speech and attempts to generate a dialogue, whereas Becket's work is based on dialogue.

REFERENCES