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The Philosophical Dimension of Place in the Poetry of Othmane Loussif – Selected Models –
البعد الفلسفي للمكان في شعر عثمان لوصيف –نماذج مختارة-

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Abstract

Place stands among the pivotal keys to any reading strategy, lending poetry a profound significance and a distinctive semantic weight, for it constitutes one of the fundamental pillars in the artistic architecture of the poem. This paper accordingly sets out to unveil the philosophical significations and the aesthetic dimensions to which the poet Othmane Lousseif aspires through his deployment of place, and in doing so raises the following problematic: what are the principal philosophical dimensions of place in the poetic texts of Othmane Lousseif, ? and what significations issue from his handling of this poetic art?

Keywords: Place, Philosophical Dimension, Poetry, Cities, Open Place, Closed Place

الملخص:

يعد المكان مفتاحا من مفاتيح استراتيجية القراءة التي تكسب الشعر أهمية كبيرة، ودلالة خاصة؛ كونه أحد الركائز الأساسية في البناء الفني للقصيدة، ومن ثمة نحاول في هذه الورقة البحثية الكشف عن الدلالات الفلسفية والأبعاد الفنية الجمالية التي يرمي إليها الشاعر عثمان لوصيف من خلال توظيفه للمكان، وتبعا لذلك يمكن طرح الإشكالية الآتية : ماهي أهم الأبعاد الفلسفية للمكان في النصوص الشعرية للشاعر

عثمان لوصيف ؟ وماهي الدلالات الناجمة عن نظمه لهذه الفنية الشعرية؟ **الكلمات المفتاحية:** المكان، البعد الفلسفي، شعر، مدن، مكان مفتوح، مكان مغلق.

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1.Introduction:

Place stands among the most essential structural elements of the literary text in general, and of the poetic text in particular, for its presence is not confined to that of a neutral geographical frame within which events unfold or images are woven, but rather exceeds this to become a signifying structure bearing profound psychological, philosophical, and aesthetic dimensions, contributing to the disclosure of the poet's vision of the world and his relation to himself and to his surroundings. Place in poetry is not mere pictorial description, but a symbolic vessel storing within it the creative subject's affective experience.

From this standpoint arises the significance of studying place in the poetry of Othmane Lousseif, the Algerian poet whose verse has occupied a considerable space within the contemporary Algerian poetic experience, and who has drawn upon place in a striking manner throughout his various poetic texts, making of his cities, his villages, and his manifold spaces (Tolga, Setif, Ouargla, Batna, Ghardaïa...) a pivotal element in the construction of his poems.

This research paper seeks to unveil the philosophical dimensions to which the poet aspires through his deployment of place in his poetry collection *Lu'lu'a*, inquiring into the nature of the relation obtaining between the poetic self and place, and into the symbolic and philosophical significations that this relation may yield, whether the matter concerns open place (the sea, the

desert) or closed place (the street, the passageways), or place conceived as woman or as homeland.

The study proceeds from the following central problematic: what are the principal philosophical dimensions of place in the poetry of Othmane Lousseif, and what significations issue from his deployment of this poetic art?

In answering this question, we have adopted an analytical approach combining the philosophical method in treating the concept of place with a critical textual approach in analyzing the selected poetic models. The study has accordingly been divided into two principal axes: the first addresses the concept of place within philosophical studies and establishes its theoretical framework, while the second examines the images of place in the poetry of Othmane Lousseif through a set of selected models.

2. The Concept of Place in Philosophical Studies:

Place figures as a fundamental element in any literary work and among the most essential components in the construction of temporal experience, whether poetic or prosaic, insofar as it gathers within itself the whole of the creative elements. The concept has thus long preoccupied critics, theorists, and philosophers alike, who have come to regard it as the all-encompassing vessel of the manifold modes of artistic formation.

The philosophical lexicons define place as the object that contains the surface of the body and occupies it. Hence the formulation: "*a place for a thing upon which the body relies in order to attain stability*"[1]. A further philosophical definition holds that place "*is the meeting of the two horizons of the container and the contained*." [2]

What these two definitions share is the recognition that place, in its broadest sense, enters into a relation of mutual influence with the things it contains. It is neither independent of them, nor do they take shape apart from it. The existent attains existence only through its presence within a spatially delimited extent. Place and the things it contains thus occupy a single order of value. Indeed, this correspondence extends further still, to the very typology of place according to the number of existents it holds.

These definitions suggest that place is inseparable from the human being's apprehension of his own existence. It cannot be considered place at all except through the tangible sensory consciousness of the human subject, that is, through the descriptive accounts, communicative or estimative, that this subject renders of it.

Kant, for his part, held place to be a mental representation already formed in advance within the mind of the one who describes it, such that the descriptions offered of a given place are, in truth, no more than reinforcing stimuli fastening upon existents already known. The describer thus works upon what lies before him and seeks to match it against an image pre-formed in thought. For this reason, more than one place cannot be apprehended at a single moment, given the multiplicity of parts within it. These parts constitute it and can under no circumstances precede it.[3]

Philosophers, ancient and modern, have diverged in their conception of place, yet they concur on one point: that it remains a significant element of human life, its importance contingent above all on the extent of human awareness and consciousness of its existence. Were it not for the existence of the human being, the importance of place would never have emerged at all.

Place thus takes shape, on this account, as the container encompassing all things, or as that which surrounds the being of the human body, whether in stability or in flux, its value determined by the sensible things bound to it.

Taken together, these definitions, literary no less than philosophical, press upon us a further question, one bearing on the relation between place in the poetry of Othmane Lousseif and the poet's own philosophical outlook. For place here carries a double signification. It expresses the poet's sensory inner world even as it seeks to convey to the reader a set of implicit meanings beyond it. It is this relation that the present study sets out to examine, tracing the philosophical dimensions of place in Lousseif's poetry through a set of models. These models open onto the poet's inner contents, bound to an unconscious of which he himself may remain largely unaware. Yet this unconscious surfaces nonetheless in his poetic imagery, in the very act of description and figuration through which he traces his belonging, his identity, and his attachment to the social order in its full psychological, political, religious, and cultural bearing.

3. Images of Place in the Poetry of Othmane Lousseif:

Othmane Lousseif ranks among those Algerian poets who have sought, within their poetic texts, to reclaim heritage and national belonging, together with the very spirit of things, through a refined sensibility attuned to the landscapes of his earliest formation. Every fragment of his lived experience thus carries within it a distinctive signification, one that summons in the reader the linguistic image the poet seeks to convey.

As for his relation to place, he has rendered it for us in manifold guises. Place as life. Place as mother. Place as beloved. Place as lost dream. Place as safety and repose. Through all these images, and others besides, Othmane Lousseif works to play upon vocabulary and syntax, drawing on all that his soul

harbors, at times in pain, at times in sorrow, and at moments too in joy, in order to set before us his convictions, his hopes, and his aspirations, and to defend them by the word, which is his weapon. A weapon grown in fertile soil, and thus a weapon of peace, one that gives life rather than takes it.

Returning to his poetic corpus, we find place standing as a central marker for a range of subordinate symbols and significations, bound at once to material realities such as historical events and the figure of the militant, loving woman, and to abstract meanings such as hope and dream. This is to say nothing of the concrete geographical sites recurring across his various poems: Biskra, Tolga, Batna, Setif, Ouargla, the region of Kabylie and Tizi Ouzou. If this points to anything, it points to feelings of belonging and to the national identity of this beloved homeland.

Through an examination of the various prominent poems in this study, we observe the poet's marked concern with the element of place, whether through titles such as Ghardaïa, Setif, and Ouargla, or through content, given that "*the title functions as the miniature text, while the full body of the poem stands as the total signifying whole*".[4]

The philosophical signification embodied in the nature of the places set forth in the poetry of Othmane Lousseif is bound up with the extent to which they hold his emotions, with the degree of his own presence within these places, and with his attachment to the tangible things that populate them.

Among the examples of this:

A graveyard, and reptiles dragging their shrouds
creeping toward the grave [5]

He says also,in the poem "The Gallows":

Tolga!
Tolga!

When I sang of love
family and friends denied me
and my father told me this was heresy
and I, ascending in the tarawih
toward you, o woman
the gallows
toward my eyes
my blood flows forth as prayers
and the dew of a lily
ah, would that I were
in hell, or in the dew!
ah, Tolga!
ah, Tolga! [6]

And the negative relation between the self and place is fixed in his words:

Tolga journeys on with lovers
mad
embracing the jasmine
her palm trees forgetting their fronds
and her companion
weeping
over the tyrants
and the white flower
never bade farewell
to a heart overflowing with grief and lament
the wind bore her away
and no breath remains
to tell
the last remnant of the dying[7]

The negative philosophical signification between the creative artist and the surrounding place is determined through the

existents surrounding him, existents that may be said to have been the cause of the nature of the relation thus inferred.

It becomes evident from the first passage of the poem "Tolga" that the poet feels sorrow, constriction of heart, and disappointed hope, a description wholly pervaded by pessimism confined to the drawing of the image of the graveyard, an atmosphere gloomy and darkened, ruled over by nothing but reptiles, as though Tolga in this passage were nothing but a graveyard itself.

In this poem we can scarcely grasp any features or shape of the place beyond the mention of the graveyard, as though the latter had come as a symbol for the suffering the poet endures because of the customs and traditions instituted by his family, who denied his love for his beloved, and because of his conduct, from which the family turned away, as did his friends, leaving him alone as though dead in a place resembling a graveyard. It is as though, through this description, he seeks to free himself from that unjust town, notwithstanding its being his native homeland.

This inner conflict between belonging and belonging, between refusal and non-submission, between separation and connection, all these inner conflicts led the writer to immerse himself in the world of the unconscious, that he might there find what he sought and see his hopes fulfilled.

The same holds for the second and third poems. Despite the repetition of the name of the place, Tolga, which points to its being the central place, this very centrality generated in the poet a temporal distance between the dreaming self and the customary social law that imposed upon him a set of impediments standing between the self and its acceptance of the nature of place.

Self → acceptance and contentment with place → positive relation

Self → refusal of place → negative relation

From this we find him seeking an alternative in a number of similar geographical places, at times in the Aurès, in Batna, in Ghardaïa, this last of which he depicted for us in the image of a woman he had long sought in Tolga, yet who kept slipping away from him from one artistic work to another because of circumstances.

Ghardaïa came to embody this image, in an ebb and flow through which the poet finds himself passing, wandering between places, that he might find what he sought.

An image of you, a woman rooted in my veins and
in my imaginings
a woman who has scattered me across every place

Through what Othmane Lousseif has mentioned of these towns and others, he confined himself to a geographical naming interwoven with a subjective outlook. That is, the greater part of the descriptions attributed to these places remains subject to the situations he lives through and the circumstances surrounding him, together with his momentary feeling, thereby moving beyond architectural and urban description toward a description at once emotional and imaginative.

The philosophy of place in Othmane Lousseif took up the designations of reality and moved beyond them in description, so that it came to bear several significations, corresponding to sorrow, pain, liberation, and the search for safety and for peoples, and so forth. In this he followed the third method to which the writer Izz al-Din al-Manasra pointed, namely "*fusion into the very blood of the text, granting it new qualities*."[8]

He proceeded in the same manner while evoking places beyond Algerian soil, as in his depiction of Baghdad, Iraq, Jerusalem, and Egypt, most notably in his depiction of the Nile, which he regarded as an explicit historical symbol uniting within

it past and present, beginning and end, moving away from realistic and detailed description toward a subjective mode in which the speaking self becomes immersed with the place itself:

The Nile by day
or beneath the dew of dawn
and the Nile at sunset
or beneath the glow of the moon
an icon
of silver
and blazing purple
the Nile in every age
has been and still remains here
teeming with drunken boats
that dance upon the waves and scatter far
and wide [9]

The poet's tendency to blend, within his descriptions, place as a sensible element with intangible elements such as intoxication, dance, and beauty, if it points to anything, points to the poet's concern with the symbolic aesthetic dimension, insofar as he draws upon these aforementioned symbols as icons signifying the sources of strength, and even of weakness, proper to these places. The Nile stands as a symbol of continuity, of authenticity, of strength, and even of life itself, life and its cycle of renewal, that very thing which the poet Othmane Lousseif has long sought and has striven to project onto both material and abstract landmarks.

These principal, foundational places to which the poet refers throughout his poetry collections he treats as the central axis around which the subject of the poem is built, summoning in this a host of absent voices, whether poets, friends, family members, or a given community, to support his outlook or to stand opposed to his aspirations.

As for the subsidiary places that helped him trace the features of these principal places through their contents, their streets, their passageways, their sea, their shores, and their desert, the poet did not overlook them. They too are invoked to bring out his suffering, his feelings, his sensations, and those repressed inner conflicts, the poet attending in this to the totalities so as to arrive at the partial particulars, each of these bound to the other[10].

The poetic experience in Algeria has known development and richness at the level of content and theme, and place ranks among the most prominent themes drawing the poet's attention, given all that it holds of the city's features and meanings. The poets' interest in the city became apparent, and it stood among the themes around which their poetry revolved, occupying a space through which the poet draws his environment, resting upon reference points, for the stance toward the city is nearly an echo of the stance toward society.

The presence of the city may be traced in Othmane Lousseif's poetry collection Lu'lu'a through the following elements:

3-*1/ The City as Woman*

The poet bestowed upon the city of Setif the attributes of purity and enchanting beauty, portraying it in the image of a beautiful woman. He says:

I entered Setif upon a frond of southern palm
and shade surprised me before its season
I walked upon almond blossom
its streets were gleaming and its façades translucent
I murmure... and flew far away with the songs
and hovered above the hills
I said I would return to the palms
yet when I called out through the pathways

Setif, Setif!
and thus she stood before me in bridal garb
and I knew with certainty that passion was Setif
and that the bride was Setif [11]

Following the poet's verses in this poem, one finds him singing the enchanting nature of the city of Setif, describing for us its features, its hills, its pathways, its streets, its façades. There is no doubt that nature has bestowed upon this city a captivating beauty that has stolen the poet's mind and drawn him toward it, giving free rein to imagination in his words :and flew far away with the songs, upon the fluttering of a delicate carpet, setting her up as the bride in her white garment, and proceeding to court her and her charms, overwhelmed by the beauty of her captivating nature.

In the poem «The Wedding of the White», we observe that at the opening of the text the meaning may seem ambiguous to the reader, since he takes the woman and her beautiful attributes as his subject, yet by the end of the text the poet proclaims the name "Algeria." Here we observe a merging of the image of the woman with that of the homeland. He says:

Ah!
your body is the fruit of the sea
your body is the feast of mirrors
and your body is the course of galaxies...
you are the truth within my hands
and you are innocence dawning upon the Night of Destiny
o bee of light and of the storm
o flower of snow upon the gulf
and o woman who belongs, so that Algeria is named
your waist still stretches in the desire of the earth [12]

What may be observed in these verses is that the poet has bound the woman's body and its beauty to the beauty of white

Algeria, composing an artistic tableau formed of a cluster of alluring images. These images embodied in the woman's body point to something far more profound in his words, "your body is the fruit of the sea," "your body is the course of galaxies," "innocence," "the Night of Destiny," "light," "snow." Here his passion continues to grow for the city of Algiers, for the sea.

The sea, as an open place, brings forth political and human ideas and dimensions, and the sea, as an open place, plays a vital role at the level of understanding, interpretation, and critical reading[13]. The sea, as an open place, traces the very body of life and the spirit of those who dwell within it, offering the human being a portion of the reverberations of interaction and its flashes that set events in motion and cause them to grow, beneath a fabric of social relations. It offers the blessing of life and opens the doors and windows of the world, that the human being may come to know what he does not yet know. It is the stubborn place, the mighty, the generous, spreading its tables in hospitality, yet it is not truthful in its affections and its inner feelings. It is generous and openhanded, yet treacherous and faithless[14].

The human being has loved it and formed with it a close bond, embracing within it joy and sorrow, love of life and death alike. We find the poet Othmane Lousseif, in his poem "Hymn of the Sea," making of it the refuge in which he unburdens his sorrows and gives voice to his visions. He says:

Ah, your eyes are drowned
and the kohl entices...!
Ah, ah... it is the sea
today's refuge, where is the mountain?!
it might have been that the almond blossomed among the hills
and the partridge murmured its joy
it might have been that the jasmine held its throne

and carnelian flowed over every hill
it might have been what had not yet come to pass!
the sea sealed its verses
and the cosmos settled until it was complete.[15]

The sea blends the relation between past and present, between life and inner feeling, and the relation between poetry and the sea lives through the embrace of joy and the love of life, making of the sea a human being to whom the poet confides his sorrows and his longing. We find that he has joined together the realistic image and the mental image, granting the sea that very relation, coloring the place with a nature that has lent it life, beauty, and delight to the eye.

Ah! it is the sea blowing its flute
and the breeze caressing your hair
and the little stars gleaming in your gaze
and the light spinning its rainbow colors
upon your brow
o flower of the night ...
will you return?
and the waves grow tumultuous
the waves grow tumultuous
the waves grow tumultuous[16]

These verses bear meanings and images of great density. The poet here likens the sea to a human being who blows his flute simply at the sight of lovers, for it is the place they favor above all, one that instills in them serenity and calm. He thus turns to court his beloved, and this appears in his words, "the little stars gleaming in your gaze," "the breeze caressing your hair," "the light spinning its colors upon your brow," "o flower of the night." The image of the sea here is bound to love, for it is the companion of their solitude, and the moment he asks his beloved whether she will return, the waves of the sea grow tumultuous, a

sign of anger, and thus the sea stands at once for love and for serenity.

3-2/ The Desert

The desert space is marked by a captivating enchantment that has inspired poets to plumb its depths and venture into its vast world in search of its hidden secrets. They have thereby depicted for us scenes charged with unfolding events, enriching their experience with those distinctive colors and significations that have worked to draw the desert scene nearer to us.

Some of our poet's poems in his collection *Lu'lu'a* carry images of the desert. In the poem "Ouargla" he says:

Ouargla...
a flower amid the sands
Ouargla...
a kiss within imagination
and I, a wanderer cast forth by the wastelands...
my brow amber and dust
and my hand... a partridge
and I, a poet Ouargla...
a palm tree and shade
laden with dew
and springs...
and harvests...
Ouargla...
beads and pure gold
a lingering fragrance
a bride perfumed and spice
ah... o my flower!
ah... o Ouargla![17]

Ouargla ranks among the beautiful desert cities of the Algerian south, to which the poet turned as a traveler, singing the praises of its beauty and its enchanting nature, clothed in palm trees,

shade, springs, and harvests, for it is, in his eyes, the flower of the sands and the bride of the desert.

He has conveyed to us the most beautiful and the most splendid of images of the city of Ouargla, and here the grandeur of creation finds its embodiment.

3-3/ The Street

The street ranks among the enclosed places, and yet it constitutes a space bearing significations of great importance in the shaping of place.

We find in Othmane Lousseif's poem "The Streets":

The streets are dust grey
and the sun is scorching
and the pipes hold no water
the mirage
the panting of dogs
the destitute grow poorer
and.....walking toward the mosque
and no enchantment and no shade
and I was alone, wandering the roads
jinn dwell in these streets
lionesses dwell in them
going into the dust
the signboards contend over me
and glances snatch me away
as though I walked toward my appointed hour[18]

The poet alludes here to the afflictions from which cities suffer. He conveys to us images of drought, of intensifying heat, and of dust swirling through the streets, streets that have become a refuge for dogs and thieves, so that the street here comes to signify ruin and instability.

The Passageways:

The road or the passageway constitutes a point of connection among many places, being itself a place of crossing and of passage.

Othmane Lousseif says in his poem entitled "The Passageways":

Wandering through the passageways among the gardens
glances rouse me
and the light takes me captive when it resounds
wandering, and the planets descending into my hands
and ships sailing within my eyes
wandering... wandering, trudging through the shade
walking at an unhurried pace...
and Batna making her ablutions in the sun
Batna gleaming with passion
and drowsing between streams of wine and milk [19]

These verses lay bare the beauty of passageways made melancholy by gardens from which the light of the sun radiates, and shade, and stillness, and sweet streams that grant delight to the eye.

Such are the most significant expressive outpourings through which Othmane Lousseif has voiced his outlook on place, this singular element of poetic writing, its significations implicit and manifold, moving between love and hatred, between distance and nearness, between connection and separation, and he has borne witness to this through poetic images that come as close as possible to the reader's imagination, in their clarity and in their embodiment of meaning.

4. Conclusion:

It becomes manifest, through this inquiry into the philosophical dimension of place in the poetry of Othmane Lousseif, that place is no mere geographical extent, but rather a space of being, of contemplation, and of the quest for selfhood. The poet has invested it with significations bound to memory, identity, exile,

death, and life, making of it a mirror wherein his psychological experience and his vision of the cosmos stand reflected. Place, in the poetry of Othmane Lousseif, is thus transfigured from a sensible reality into a philosophical dimension unveiling the relation of the human being to himself, to the other, and to existence itself.

Notes

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[16] Othmane Lousseif, *Laylatun 'alā Shāṭi' al-Baḥr* (A Night on the Seashore), p. 78.
[17] Othmane Lousseif, *Qaṣīdat Warqla* (Poem of Ouargla), pp. 42–43–44.
[18] Othmane Lousseif, Qaṣīdat al-Shawāri' (Poem of the Streets).
[19] Othmane Lousseif, Qaṣīdat al-Mamarrāt (Poem of the Passageways).