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Abstract :

Ambiguity in modern poetry constitutes one of the most important manifestations of the shift from traditional poetry based on direct clarity to modernist poetry grounded in semantic multiplicity and interpretive openness. Mahmoud Darwish is considered one of the most prominent poets who embodied this transformation with clear aesthetic and intellectual awareness, as his poetry moved from directness to symbolic density, and from national discourse to existential reflection.

This research aims to study the phenomenon of ambiguity in the poetry of Mahmoud Darwish by tracing its development across the stages of his poetic experience, and by analyzing the artistic, intellectual, and cultural factors that contributed to its formation. The study is based on a fundamental hypothesis that ambiguity in Darwish's poetry is not an incidental phenomenon, but rather the result of an interaction between an internal development in poetic vision, a broad cultural openness, and a complex existential and political experience, in addition to a redefinition of the relationship between poetry and the reader.

Keywords: ambiguity, Mahmoud Darwish, reader, semantic multiplicity, interpretive openness.

الملخص :

يشكل الغموض في الشعر الحديث أحد أهم مظاهر التحول من الشعر التقليدي القائم على الوضوح المباشر إلى الشعر الحدائي القائم على التعدد الدلالي والانفتاح التأويلي. ويعد محمود درويش من أبرز الشعراء الذين جسّدوا هذا التحول بوعي جمالي وفكري واضح، حيث انتقل شعره من المباشرة إلى الكثافة الرمزية، ومن الخطاب الوطني إلى التأمل الوجودي.

يهدف هذا البحث إلى دراسة ظاهرة الغموض في شعر محمود درويش، من خلال تتبع تطورها عبر مراحل تجربته الشعرية، وتحليل العوامل الفنية والفكرية والثقافية التي أسهمت في تشكيلها. وينطلق البحث من فرضية أساسية مفادها أن الغموض عند درويش ليس ظاهرة عرضية، بل نتيجة تفاعل بين تطور داخلي في الرؤية الشعرية، وانفتاح ثقافي واسع، وتجربة وجودية وسياسية معقدة، إضافة إلى إعادة تعريف علاقة الشعر بالقارئ.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الغموض، محمود درويش، القارئ، التعدد الدلالي، الانفتاح التأويلي.

Introduction:

Ambiguity in modern poetry represents one of the most significant manifestations of the transition from traditional poetry based on direct clarity to modernist poetry founded on semantic multiplicity and interpretive openness. In this context, the experience of Mahmoud Darwish emerges as a rich model of the transformation of poetry from direct discourse to a dense text open to interpretation.

This transformation raises a central problem: is ambiguity in Darwish's poetry the result of the experience of exile and political distance, or is it the product of an internal aesthetic and intellectual development?

Mechanisms and Functions of Ambiguity:

Ambiguity in the poetry of Mahmoud Darwish does not arise from spontaneous complexity or linguistic closure, but rather emerges from a set of artistic mechanisms that combine to form a multi-layered semantic structure. Accordingly, the text becomes an open space for the production of meaning, which is only completed through reading and interpretation. The most prominent of these mechanisms can be identified as follows:

1/Intertextuality and the intensification of references:

Darwish relies on a wide network of intertextualities (religious, mythological, historical), which makes the text loaded with indirect references. This accumulation of references does not present its meaning explicitly, but remains suspended between texts, which creates a kind of productive ambiguity that requires a reader with high cultural and interpretive competence to understand it.

The poet evokes the story or event of the Babylonian exile, and in all this it does not depart from expressing the exile experienced by the Palestinian human being in the present era, as he was displaced from his homeland to live in refugee camps and cities of diaspora, yet he has not lost hope of one day returning to his country; he waits for favorable winds to sail his ship toward the homeland. His condition in Darwish's poetry resembles that of the Jews whom Nebuchadnezzar exiled and led to Babylon, where they remained awaiting any opportunity to return them to Palestine, the promised land, until that was realized during the reign of Cyrus the Persian, who returned them to their alleged homeland.

Darwish projects the experience of the Babylonian exile onto the tragedy of the Palestinian people, and the tragic Palestinian exile that occurred in the present at the hands of the Jews who transformed from victims into executioners. It is as if Darwish sees the two stories as similar, despite the temporal difference between them: the story of the Babylonian exile of the Jews in the Old Testament, and the story of the forced displacement of the Palestinian from his land in the present time ⁽¹⁾. The two stories merge in the poet's mind and become intertwined to the extent that it becomes difficult to determine whether the poet is referring to the Jewish exile or the Palestinian exile. Darwish says in the poem (I Love You or I Do Not Love You) ⁽²⁾.

**And we sing of Jerusalem,
O children of Babylon,
O born in chains,
You will return to Jerusalem soon,
And soon you will grow up.
...
Ah, O children of Babylon,
You will return to Jerusalem soon,
And soon you will grow up,
And soon,
And soon.
Hallelujah,
Hallelujah!**

The poet blends the two stories and equates them to the extent that led a researcher in biblical themes in Darwish's poetry to say that it refers to the story of the Palestinians' return to their homeland: "Jerusalem has prepared itself to receive its exiled children who face imprisonment and exclusion in the countries to which they emigrated." He adds that it is the story of the Children of Israel in their ancient exile in the land of Babylon, but it is also the story of the Palestinian exile today across the world, and what they face in terms of hardships and difficulties. Jerusalem still calls for its children, asking them to

grow up and to reap goodness and blessing after suffering and affliction, and the tears of exile and sorrow will become tears of joy and goodness. It is the hoped-for hope that the Palestinian sees and dreams of, that he may return to his homeland soon.”⁽³⁾ “This leads to the opening of the text to deeply ancient historical times, which become contemporaneous times, where the past merges with the present to revive the lived experience anew, laden with the tragedy of the Jewish past that continues in the tragedy of the Palestinian present.”⁽⁴⁾

2/ The tension between presence and absence:

Meaning appears in Darwish’s poetry as deferred or incomplete, where significance is constructed through both what is said and what is left unsaid at the same time. Silence, omission, and textual gaps all contribute to producing semantic ambiguity that calls for interpretation. Among this is his statement in the poem “Fog on the Mirror” ⁽⁵⁾:

We now know all the places

We follow the traces of our dead

And we do not hear them,

and we remove the times

from the bed of the first night. And ah...

Here, the poet practices erasure as a mechanism of writing, in contrast to the daily erasure suffered by the Palestinian human being. He relies on a structure of omission that leads the reader to complete what the poet has deleted, thereby creating for them a textuality different from the conventional meaning of language ⁽⁶⁾. It goes beyond the ready-made templates of familiar language to embrace other horizons untrodden by human feet, which gives the poet’s language a special presence that touches hidden areas of the reader’s sensitivity.

3/ Linguistic deviation (departure from the familiar):

Deviation constitutes one of the most prominent tools of ambiguity, as poetic symbols in Darwish deviate from their known meanings toward dense metaphorical uses. They thus become open signs and lose their semantic stability, leading to multiplicity of meaning, destabilization of semantic certainty, and the involvement of the reader in constructing meaning.

An example of this is the negative connotation of the color black, which, in the poet's work, has acquired new suggestive positive meanings. "This appears in his description of the eyes of his beloved—the homeland—with their blackness, which is an aesthetic quality that has had multiple descriptions in Arabic; however, in the poet's language, it goes beyond aesthetic quality to affirm the Arab origin of his beloved—the homeland—and the sense of national belonging under occupation, ⁽⁷⁾" as he says ⁽⁸⁾:

**Here I am smelling my loved ones and my people
in you, O you with black eyes... O my embroidered garment
...you have not grown old... you have not betrayed... you have not died
rather, I have only changed the colors of my coats
when the great beloved ones collapsed**

Thus, the poet succeeds in shifting the meaning of the color black and deepening its connotations, moving it from the common negative meaning to a more positive one.

4/ Polyphony (Multiplicity of Voices):

Darwish's poetry is characterized by the multiplicity of voices and their interweaving within a single text, as more than one voice overlaps in his work: the poet's voice, the voice of the collective, and the voice of the other (the adversary or the absent). Undoubtedly, this multiplicity of voices disrupts the centrality of meaning and prevents the text from being subject to a single semantic authority, thereby opening the way for multiple readings and deepening the level of ambiguity.

This can be illustrated by the poem "The Eternity of the Cactus," which includes certain events associated with Jesus (peace be upon him), events that have acquired symbolic and sacred qualities due to their connection with the sayings and teachings of Jesus. The poet incorporates them in a way that serves his poetic experience and reinforces his vision of the nature of the conflict in that period. He says ⁽⁹⁾:

**And a reckless tomorrow was chewing the wind
behind them in the long winter nights
And the soldiers of Joshua son of Nun were building
their fortress from the stones of their house, while they
were panting along the road of “Cana”: here
our Lord once passed. Here
he turned water into wine, and spoke
much about love. My son, remember
tomorrow, and remember Crusader fortresses
that the grasses of April devoured after
the soldiers departed...**

To grasp the symbolism of the events in this passage, the reader must return to their original sources. Certainly, they are connected to the incident of Jesus passing along the road of Cana and turning water into wine, in addition to the interweaving of multiple voices in the poem: the voice of the father and his son, and the voice of Joshua son of Nun. All of these contribute to enriching the symbol and endowing it with new meanings. “This passage in particular represents the peak convergence of all channels of memory at both the individual and collective levels without distinction, where several contextual clues converge to reveal the symbol through interpretation and refer to certain heritage sources, such as the Gospel.”⁽¹⁰⁾

In reality, all these voices that crowd into the poem work to nourish the symbol, expand it, and supply it with new meanings that contribute to conveying the poet’s vision he seeks to express. The poet returns us to a poignant scene—frequently repeated in his collections—the scene of the flight of the son and his father from the plain of Acre in a certain year, recording the dialogue that took place between them as they ran northward, crossing places that stir the reservoir of personal memory, particularly concerning the poet’s migration with his father to Lebanon in escape from the brutality of occupation.

The richness of this text and the density of its symbols compel us to read it carefully, as it takes us on a journey back and forth between the poem and the

self, from the present to the past, in a movement where voices and symbols intermingle and meanings intertwine. This rupture unsettles the reader's expectations and drives them to reread the text in search of meaning, thereby reinforcing the ambiguous dimension of the text.

5/ Intertextuality and the Intensification of References:

Darwish relies on a wide network of intertextual references (religious, mythological, historical), making the text loaded with indirect allusions. This accumulation of references does not present its meaning explicitly; rather, it remains suspended between texts, creating a form of productive ambiguity that requires a reader with high cultural and interpretive competence. The grain of wheat that is buried and reappears after the rainy season refers to Osiris, the god of wheat and barley in ancient Egyptian mythology, who discovered the cultivation of wheat and taught it to the ancient Egyptians. It also refers to Tammuz as the spirit of wheat in Babylonian mythology. The poet has expressed these experiences in the image of the grain that dies and is buried in the womb of the earth—the mother—then sprouts again in the next year's harvest or in the next generation of the human family. This image has been applied in the worship of the grieving mother or wife and her son or husband who suffered and met a harsh death and achieved a triumphant resurrection ⁽¹¹⁾. Darwish says ⁽¹²⁾:

**And whenever I befriended or
took as a brother a spike of wheat, I learned survival from
annihilation and its opposite: "I am the grain of wheat
that died so it might turn green again.
My death is life..."**

The image of the grieving woman is associated with Isis, who lost her husband and is in constant mourning for him; it may also be linked to Ishtar, who sacrificed her son and her husband Tammuz, the spirit of wheat, in the depths of the earth, and thus laments and weeps for him. The image is not far from Mary Magdalene, weeping at the feet of Jesus Christ after his crucifixion and death. Darwish says ⁽¹³⁾:

**A marginal phantom said: “Osiris
was like you, was like me. And the son of Mary
was like you, was like me”**

Thus, various mythological sources converge to form this unified, comprehensive entity, where there is room for the interaction of these symbols, such as the parallel between (Tammuz—Ishtar and Osiris—Isis). Each element serves as a necessary tool in enriching the artistic work, and this blending of symbols—despite their different origins—is a successful synthesis that deepens the substance of artistic expression in the mind of the recipient⁽¹⁴⁾.

6/ Breaking the Horizon of Expectation:

Mahmoud Darwish lived the cause of his homeland, which endowed him with many experiences that he expressed in his poetry. Through them, he was able to create his own symbols, depart from some inherited symbolic meanings, and express a different vision of the conventional significance of the symbol. Among these is the staff of Moses (peace be upon him), a symbol of challenge and miraculous power, with which he struck the rock and brought forth water, and parted the sea into two halves, each like a great mountain. Darwish says⁽¹⁵⁾:

**The stones are moving
this is my arm, swaying like terror
the Lord is not among the inhabitants of this wasteland
this is my arm.
The stones are moving
they did not steal the staff of Moses
and the sea is farther from my hand than from you
thus the stones are moving**

The poet directs his address to the Palestinian people, calling upon them to rely on the strength of their own arms to liberate their land from the claws of this oppressive colonizer, and not to depend on Arab peoples or rely on miracles and supernatural interventions, for that era has passed and ended. The savior will not come from others to lead them to deliverance. The enemy did not overcome the

Palestinians and seize their land by means of Moses's staff, nor did it wait for miracles and supernatural interventions. "The stones of the grave will not move for a savior to emerge and lead them to safety; rather, Darwish's statement in his poetry comes as a form of irony and mythologization of the cause, where the stones move so that he himself emerges from his grave, shaking his terrifying, swaying arm."⁽¹⁶⁾

7. Reversing the Meaning of the Symbol:

It is mentioned in the books of early historians that (al-Mu'tafikah) were five villages or towns located between al-Sham and al-Madina. God Almighty punished them with fire and brimstone; they were the people to whom Lot (peace be upon him) was sent, but they persisted in their disbelief and immorality, so God rained upon them a burning fire. They are mentioned in the Holy Qur'an and in the Torah. God saved Lot and his family, except for his wife, who was among those who perished because she was a disbeliever aligned with the people of Sodom. It is also narrated that she turned back, and a stone struck her and destroyed her⁽¹⁷⁾. She looked at the punished cities and became a pillar of salt, as also stated in the Torah⁽¹⁸⁾.

This symbol appears more than once in Darwish's poetry, such as in the poem "Winter Moon," where he portrays her as a martyr because she feared for her people and looked back out of sympathy for them, even though she disobeyed God's command. Darwish says⁽¹⁹⁾:

**I will gather your martyred body
and dissolve it in salt and brimstone
then drink it deeply...
like tea, like bad wine,
like a poem
...my heart is upon a moon
that has petrified in place, it is said... once was**

If God's punishment for Sodom, as mentioned in the Torah, was burning it with fire and brimstone "Then the Lord rained upon Sodom and Gomorrah brimstone and fire from the Lord out of heaven... and his wife looked back from behind him, and she became a pillar of salt"⁽²⁰⁾ then Darwish seeks to gather this

martyred body, dissolve it in salt and brimstone, and then drink it as one drinks tea or wine, because she is his moon that guides him in the darkness of life.

The wife of Lot is no longer portrayed as a disbelieving, disobedient woman who deserved punishment for betraying her husband Lot and his teachings and for sympathizing with her Canaanite people. Rather, she becomes “a symbol of martyrdom in Darwish, because she did not submit to the inevitable fate; she wanted to defend her people and her land, and to rebel against her reality, so she died a martyr and was immortalized by history.”⁽²¹⁾ She is an ancient Canaanite figure symbolizing sacrifice and redemption; she refused to abandon her people and leave them in a time of hardship to destruction and punishment. Her love for them, her compassion toward them, and her sense of belonging drove her to stand with them and disregard the divine warning. She turned back to look at what had befallen her people and thus suffered their fate. “As is the case with mythological figures, historical figures change once they fall into the hands of writers; the saint may become a sorceress (...) and the sinner may become a martyr. (...) Sometimes the historical figure merges with the mythical one.”⁽²²⁾

8. Multiplicity of Interpretation:

Darwish’s language is characterized by linguistic economy alongside semantic richness, as a single expression carries multiple layers of meaning. This density makes meaning resistant to reduction to a single interpretation and results in a kind of ambiguity arising not from a lack of meaning but from its excess.

In Darwish’s poetry, the text grants the reader the opportunity for reading and interpretation due to the multiplicity and diversity of meanings, as in the poem “The Road to Damascus”:

**Prepare for them whatever you can
and a moon splits within my body... the zero hour has struck...
and within my body a grain has sprouted into ears
seven ears, in each ear a thousand grains...
...so that... in Arab time... a day may be born**

Despite the contextual difference in the use of numbers between the Qur’anic text and the poetic text, there is a shared general meaning: that of multiplication and abundance. The birth of a new Arab time, in the poet’s view, is the result of

great sacrifices, like the ear of grain that is buried in the earth to die and thus gives other ears the chance to grow and live. What is particularly noteworthy is the use of the number seven, which seems to have a special connection to the title of the collection. This collection is the seventh in the poet's revolutionary experience; could the poet be alluding to the completion and maturation of his experience? One scholar of his collection suggests that the revolution Darwish committed himself to expressing is the seventh in the attempts of the Palestinian people to achieve liberation, as it was preceded by six revolutions. Thus, the seventh attempt is not only Darwish's attempt, but also that of the Palestinian people. In light of this interpretation, the significance of the number seven and its role in producing meaning and expressing the fertile revolutionary vision of the collection can be understood ⁽²³⁾.

Conclusion:

It becomes clear that ambiguity in Mahmoud Darwish's poetry is not a superficial phenomenon; rather, it is the result of a complex interaction between internal aesthetic development, cultural openness, existential experience, and the redefinition of the relationship between the text and the reader. He moved from direct poetry to dense contemplative poetry, and from mass discourse to a text open to interpretation, making his experience one of the most prominent in modern Arabic poetry.

It is evident that ambiguity in Mahmoud Darwish's poetry is the product of a complex trajectory that combines artistic development, cultural openness, existential experience, and the redefinition of the relationship between the poet and the reader. It is an ambiguity that does not rely on obscurity, but on density and openness, which makes his experience one of the most prominent in Arabic poetry.

The study also addressed the impact of cultural intertextuality, especially with the Biblical style, in deepening ambiguity through symbolic structure and contemplative rhythm, in addition to the role of the Palestinian experience and exile in transforming the homeland into a multi-signifying symbol. It concluded that Darwish's relationship with the reader has undergone a clear transformation, as he tends to elevate the level of reception rather than simplify the text, without separating from his audience.

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