

# **The Poetics of William Wordsworth and Nazer Qabbani: A Comparative Study**

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## **شعرية وليم وردزورث ونزار قباني دراسة موازنة**

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### **Abstract**

This research draws lines of comparison between the English poet 'William Wordsworth' and the Arabian one 'Nazer Qabbani'. It tries to present the main affinities between these two poets in terms of their diction, nature of poetry and its sources. The research tries to shed light on a seemingly non-proved fact, for the common reader, that although Qabbani belongs to different cultural backgrounds and Ages, he reacted to Wordsworth's poetics knowingly or unknowingly in a way to make it apt with the modern Arabian poetry and its cultural aspects. The present study presupposes that they completely agree in their 'theory' of poetics. However, it is not to be discarded that both write within the Romantic movement, having completely absorbed its sources.

This research falls into three sections and a conclusion which sums up the main findings of the research. Section one dedicates itself to Wordsworth's poetics and his main poetic contributions. Section two brings into light Qabbani's poetics and his contribution. Section three compares between the two poets.

### **المخلص:**

يرسم هذا البحث خطوط المقارنة بين الشاعر الإنجليزي "ويليام وردزورث" والشاعر العربي "ناظر قباني". إنه يحاول تقديم الصلات الرئيسية بين هذين الشعراء من حيث إيمانهم، وطبيعة الشعر ومصادره. يحاول البحث تسليط الضوء على حقيقة غير مؤكدة على ما يبدو، للقارئ المشترك، أنه على الرغم من أن قباني ينتمي إلى خلفيات وعصور ثقافية مختلفة، فقد تفاعل مع شعراء وردزورث عن علم أو بغير علم بطريقة تجعله ملائماً بالشعر العربي الحديث وجوانبها الثقافية. تفترض الدراسة الحالية أنها تتفق تماماً في "نظرية" شعرائها. ومع ذلك، فإنه لا ينبغي تجاهل أن كلاهما يكتب داخل الحركة الرومانسية، بعد أن استوعبت مصادرها بالكامل.

ينقسم هذا البحث إلى ثلاثة أقسام وخلاصة تلخص النتائج الرئيسية للبحث. القسم الأول يكرس نفسه لشعراء وردزورث ومساهماته الشعرية الرئيسية. القسم الثاني يسلط الضوء على شعراء قباني ومساهمته. يقارن القسم الثالث بين الشعارين.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الشعراء، القوام، الإثارة، البساطة، اللغة العامة.

## **١. William Wordsworth's Poetics**

### **١.١ Historical Context**

It is evident that the end of the ١٨<sup>th</sup> century world had witnessed a great upheaval in the body of philosophy and thought due to the great revolutions that took place in France and America as well. At that time, the world witnessed "a paradigmatic shift occurred in how people

viewed the world” (Bressler, ٢٠١٢:٣٤). The French revolution brought into the account of ١٩<sup>th</sup> century man the sense of equality, liberty and brotherhood since it was a protest against exploitation and slavery (Harris, ١٩٦٩: ٦٧).

It was the time in which people started reorienting their interest toward intuition rather than mind as a guide to attain reality (Bressler, ٢٠١٢:٣٤). In the light of this assumption, Bressler asserts the main differences between the ١٨<sup>th</sup> and ١٩<sup>th</sup> centuries in the way of approaching the reality of life. He states (ibid):

*The eighteenth –century mind likened the world to a great machine, with all its parts operating harmoniously, but in the nineteenth century, the world was perceived as a living organism that was always and eternally becoming. For the rationalistic mind of the eighteenth century, the city housed the centers of art and literature and set the standards of good taste. In contrast, the emerging nineteenth century citizen saw rural places as fundamental, as the setting in which a person could discover the inner self .*

In accordance with this new philosophy, man’s humanitarian nature in all its aspects and manifestations was highlighted to replace the rationalism of the previous century (ibid: ٣٥).

#### **١.٢ William Wordsworth in Brief**

William Wordsworth (١٧٧٠-١٨٥٠) was one of the pioneers who helped establish what is called the English Romanticism. He was born in Cockermouth, Cumberland, England. In the early years of his life and after the death of his father and mother, he moved to live in the Lake District with his younger sister Dorothy. After that, he finished his study at Cambridge University. At the Lake District, he met Samuel Taylor Coleridge. They worked together to publish their book *Lyrical Ballads* which contained their major poems such as Wordsworth’s “Tintern Abby” and Coleridge’s “Rime of Ancient Mariner”. With the advent of this volume, Romanticism emerged as well defined movement in English poetry (<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/william-wordsworth>).

In fact, Wordsworth was influenced by the French revolution and in ١٧٩٠, he visited France while the French revolution was in its climax. The declaration of the French Republic and the announcement of the first

manifesto of Human Rights were enough to inspire Wordsworth to adopt radical ideas in the content and form of his poetry, thinking that poetry is the reflection of its setting (ibid). However, although the French revolution failed to maintain its ideals, it remained permanent in the mind of Wordsworth. The revolution, (Sengupta, ٢٠٠٨: ٢٨١):

*...built him into a poet of Man; it added the enthusiasm of man to the enthusiasm of Nature; it took him away from contemplation of his own soul to live in hope for mankind, to proclaim his faith in and seek the love of mankind. It made him the singer of simple life, of honest manners, of poverty and its sorrow and of the honor of humanity in all its ranks*

Moreover, Wordsworth worked extensively to document his life experience in a long autobiographical epic titled ***The Prelude*** published in ١٨٥٠. Besides, for the second edition of the ***Lyrical Ballads***, Wordsworth wrote an extended preface which presented the basic elements and principles of his poetics and he explained the reasons behind his writing poetry which remained effectual and debatable till the present day (including the time of Nazer Qabbani's). However, in ١٨٤٣, Wordsworth was named as the laureate of the English poetry (ibid: ٣٦٧).

### **١.٣ Wordsworth's Conception of Poetry and the Poet**

Poetics is operationally limited aspects employed creatively: diction, nature of poetry and application of sources. However, all of William Wordsworth's poetic philosophy was elucidated in his Preface to the ***Lyrical Ballads***. These Prefaces clarify the purposes behind writing poetry and the methods through which these purposes could be realized. However, the basic aims of Wordsworth's prefaces, as documented by (Enright & De Chickera, ١٩٦٢: ١٦٤) were *"to choose incidents and situations from common life, and to relate or describe them, throughout, as far as was possible in a selection of language really used by men, and, at the same time, to throw over them a certain coloring of imagination"*.

On the other hand, Wordsworth insisted that the ordinary matters should be presented in a remarkable and extraordinary way to make them more interesting. Wordsworth affirmed that these incidents or even ideas should be associated with each other *"truly: though not ostentatiously ... in a state of excitement"*(ibid).

Concerning the poetic diction, Wordsworth rejected the phraseology of eighteenth century poetic diction in favor of a selection of real language. To enact his intention of relying on the language of the common people in poetic composition, he proposed two criteria:

١. Language is to be the heightened language of men in a state of vivid sensation. In other words, it is language that is ripped of any kind of suggestion or triviality.

٢. This language is in a realistic way for the purpose of keeping readers "*in the company of flesh and blood*"(ibid:١٦٧).

Added to this, Wordsworth deliberately directed his poetic language toward the country side since he believed that this kind of language which is "*the essential passions of the heart find a better soil in which they can attain their maturity*"(ibid:١٦٤). He emphasized that rustic people communicate with each other freely, honestly and passionately away from the hypocrisy and vanity of the city since they "*convey their feelings and notions in simple and unelaborated expressions*"(ibid). In the light of this conception, it is apparent that Wordsworth revolted against the ١٨<sup>th</sup> century poetry which was highly involved with issues of aristocrats and their Kings and Queens (Bressler, ٢٠١٢:٣٥).

Wordsworth was very fanatic against old inherited and institutionalized structures of the predecessors. He tried to lay down the foundation of a new kind of poetry which negates "*the inflated poetic diction of heroic couplets, complicated rhyme schemes, and dense figures of speech placed in the mouths of the typical eighteenth century character*" (ibid.)

In terms of these changes, Wordsworth went further in his conception of poetry. He redefined poetry to be more adequate and compatible with the simple language of the common man. He emphasized that poetry should be "*the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings*" (Enright & De Chickera, ١٩٦٢:١٦٥). In such mechanism of producing poetry, poems will never be "*produced on any variety of subjects but by a man who, being possessed of more than usual organic sensibility*" (ibid). In accord with this, Wordsworth did not want to put poetry under the mercy of reason as the ancient writers like 'Sidney' and 'Pope' did. He set poetry free to be highly emotional and passionate to the extent that "*a passion-filled imagination becomes the central characteristic of [his] poetry*" (Bressler, ٢٠١٢:٣٦).

Additionally, Wordsworth initiated a new genuine turning point to the status of the poet in society. He let the poet to descend from his ivory

tower as people used to see him into “*a man speaking to men*” (Enright & De Chickera, ١٩٦٢:١٧١). According to Wordsworth, although the poet is a simple man who can communicate easily with others without any kind of restraint, he still maintains some qualities which enable him to understand the inner self of others. In this context, Wordsworth wrote in his preface that the poet is a man who (ibid):

... [is] *endowed with more lively sensibility, more enthusiasm and tenderness, who has a greater knowledge of human nature, and a more comprehensive soul, than are supposed to be common among mankind; a man [who is] pleased with his own passions and volitions, and who rejoices more than other men in the spirit of life that is in him*

He proceeded to say that the poet has the ability to bring the absent things into present as if he is practicing the art of conjuring . A 'Wordsworthian poet' expresses his feelings and ideas out of his own will “*without immediate external excitement*” (ibid).

Although Wordsworth's poetry is subjective since it is the reflection of the passions of the poet himself, Wordsworth still believes that the romantic poetry has the grandeur of universality because his feelings and passions are “*the general passions and thoughts and feelings of men*” (ibid)

## **٢. Nazer Qabbani's Poetics**

### **٢.١ Nazer Qabbani in Brief**

Nazer Qabbani (١٩٢٣- ١٩٩٨) is a Syrian poet and diplomat. He is the fourth son of a family of four boys and a daughter. His family was a middle class, used to work in sweets making. He got his degree in philosophy in ١٩٤٢. Since his early life, he was influenced by his teacher in the National College Mr. 'Khalil Mardim'. Mr. Mardim helped him to reorient his talent from painting to poetry (قباني, ١٩٧٣:٤٥). Since his early writing of poetry was represented by his poetic anthology 'قالت لي سمراء' (Qalat Li Samra) in ١٩٤٤, his poetry was aggressively rejected by the social and religious authorities because his poems were considered a violation to the social norms of the Syrian conservative society and a break to the dominated taboos of love and sex. He was encountered a sever resistance from moralists who sensed that Qabbani revolted against their old established institutions (صبحي, ١٩٧٨: ١٥).

Fortunately, in ١٩٥٢, Qabbani was appointed in the Syrian Embassy in London, the birth place of Wordsworth, for three years. In London, he became more familiar with the English culture. He succeeded to dive deeply into the English society in all its features and thoughts. He got a kind of mental tranquility and comfort never used to feel them before in Syria. Under the atmosphere of freedom, he wrote his poetic collection entitled 'قصائد' (Qaṣa'id) in ١٩٦٠. He claimed that these poems were his best poems since they connected firmly with man's issues (ibid: ١٠٦).

### **٢.٢ Qabbani's Conception of Poetry**

For Qabbani, poetry cannot be outlined within one literary definition since he links poetry with intentionality. For him, the concept of poetry depends on the content of the poem itself whether it is aesthetic or social or political and so on. Therefore, it is not easy, in Qabbani's poetry, to capture one absolute concept of poetry since it varies from one to another, relying on the context of each one. He states in his book 'ما هو الشعر' (What is Poetry) that *"there is no poetic theory...each poet has his own theory and those who attempted to theorize their poetry lost both the theory and poetry as well"* (قباڻي، ١٩٨١: ٧٥).

However, in spite of the fact that Qabbani rejects to level poetry within one distinguished theory, one can easily deduce from his prose writings that he has his own attitude toward the kind of poetry he favors. In his essay 'قصتي مع الشعر' (My Story with Poetry), he introduces a definition to poetry which is to some extent compatible with the revolutionary concept of William Wordsworth definition of poetry. Qabbani associated poetry with the ability of the poet to visualize the horizons of imagination and to transform them into 'a kind of excitement' and shock in the body of society, aiming at making 'radical' changes in the social and political thought of the nation. In this context, he states (قباڻي، ١٩٧٣: ٢٦٠):

*The greatness of the poet is measured by his ability to fascinate, and fascination does not surrender to the common pattern of poetry which, with the passage of time, gets its eternal law. Greatness is the outcome of mutiny and rejection. Poetry is not to wait what is already waited, it is waiting for what is not expected to come. Real poetry is to get steps into the unknown and intuition. It is an adventure. It is a revolution planned and*

*carried out by an angry man, aiming at  
changing the world picture.*

For him, poetry should be modernized to break the poetic stagnation and stereotypic forms that dominated the literary scene before him. He showed how the traditional poetry lacks the potentiality to affect the reader since it is a readymade one (صبحي, ١٩٧٨: ١٠٨).

### ٢.٣ Qabbani's Tendency in Writing Poetry

As a matter of fact, genuine literary language is the main concern of Qabbani's poetics. It represents his tendency to modernize poetry. He succeeded to violate the world of readers through his using of simple and popular language tools. His language can be considered as a 'third language'. It is a mixture of the classical eloquent language with the simplicity and spontaneity of the common one (ادونيس, ١٩٧٧: ٢٠٥). He recognized the fact that the old classical language was no more able to change the present reality since for him, reality is the essential staff of the poetic content (ibid.). However, Qabbani's inclination to use the common language of the common people enabled him to make his poetry in a continual interaction with people, as seen in Wordsworth's poetry. In this regard, his poetry has succeeded to achieve its communicative purpose (قبايني, ١٩٧٣: ٣٠٢).

Apparently, Qabbani called for this kind of language 'third language' because he wanted to create a spontaneous 'radical' change in the body of language mechanism since he believed that language changes and interacts with social, political and intellectual milieus that embrace it (ibid: ٤٢٢). In this line, Qabbani demonstrates (ibid: ٣٧٤)

*When the poetic language was classical,  
arrogant, hard and proud, I taught it the art of  
public relationships and the way of the  
democratic debate. I forced language to  
descend into cafes, public restaurants and to  
be mixed with poor people. Briefly, I was the  
first who nationalized poetry before Swiss  
Canal being nationalized by Jamal Abdul  
Nasir.*

In the light of this assumption, Qabbani succeeded to put an end to what is called 'poetic ambiguity' that prevailed at that time. He believed that the vagueness of the poet and his poetry was not the criterion of his greatness and importance. In this context, Qabbani recites:



نرفض الشعر كيمياء وسحرا  
قتلتنا القصيدة الكيمياء  
نرفض الشعر مسرحا ملكيا  
من كراسيه، يحرم البسطاء  
نرفض الشعر، عتمة ورموزا  
كيف تستطيع ان ترى الظلماء  
نرفض الشعر أرنباً خشبياً  
لا طموح له ولا أهواء

[We reject poetry being Chemistry and magic  
Since we are being killed by the chemical poem.  
We reject poetry to be royal theatre  
From its seats the poor deprived.  
We reject poetry to be ambiguous and symbolic.  
Then, how we can see in darkness.  
We reject poetry to be a wooden rabbit  
Without ambition and desire] (قباني، ١٩٧٩: ٣٩٩)

However, through his attempts to employ a new language in his poetry, called 'the third language', Qabbani tried his best to achieve a kind of compromise between the standard Arabic language that is used by the educated people and the language of the common people since the language of the latter is deeply rooted in their minds, expressing their feelings and daily activities passionately and warmly. Here, Qabbani, is among the best poets who fused both the standard and common languages in one pot (ساعي، ١٩٧٨: ٢٣٢).

#### ٢.٤ The Sources of Writing Poetry

Qabbani rejected the metaphysical and abstract source of poetry because he believes that poetry should stem from human sources which are in touch with man in all his passions. For him, poetry is not a supernatural activity or a heavenly inspiration. On the contrary, poetry and its devices are 'purely human made'. To be prophet-like, Qabbani believes that the poet needs to dive into man's feelings and desires and to express them in their social context. In this meaning, poetry is a subjective reflection and experience. Doubtlessly, Qabbani implicitly refers to the romantic definition of 'catharsis' when he demonstrates that poetry is “*humanitarian output ... man utters poetry because if he does not do so, he may get suffocation because of the flood of passion inside him*” (قباني، ١٩٧٩: ٣٩٢). For keen readers and scholars, this hints at Wordsworth's exploration of the spontaneity of powerful feelings.

Looked at from another perspective, the importance of the classical sources of poetry is mostly minimized in Qabbani's poetry. He never relies on memorization of ancient poems since he considers poetry is a timeless spark. He adds that each poem is a new stage which leads to another new one and any attempt to react or recall the old poetry is a hinder to the ambition of poets (ibid: ٤٠٦).

### **٣. Comparison**

After presenting the poetics of both William Wordsworth and Nazer Qabbani, one can reach into a conclusion that

Qabbani's poetics is identical and compatible to a great extent with Wordsworth's one since both of them share the same sense of enthusiasm toward the daily issues of their society.

Both of them are rebellious, revolting against the old established and institutionalized patterns of poetry.

Both of them intend to produce a version of poetry which has the potentiality to communicate and interact with the feelings and passions of people directly and honestly.

Additionally, they reject the ornamented and decorated language of the classical time. Their poetry is clear, open and simple. Thus, they are in favor of the spontaneity of reciting their poetry rather than readymade models.

Moreover, they believe that the main purpose of poetry is to shock the reader and fire his own fascination and excitement.

Their poetry tries to avoid the old poetic meters, pentameters and rhymes. The musicality of their poetry result from the act of writing itself and from the continual suffering and the adventure with language.

Finally, they agree that the poet is a free man who resists authority and its allies where poetry should undermine and reveal the shortcomings of authority and its allies.

### **٤. Conclusions**

To read, decipher, understand and then interpret the poetics of these two great poets is not a simple dive into and with their running lines. A common reader would not be able to verify that the sources of their poetry versions are identical, mostly identical or even different.

Armed with the eye of a scholar, a unified 'theory' of poetics can be elicited from the two poets. This 'theory' is shaped with the following limits and lines:

(diction: simple, common, spontaneous and language; nature of poetry: revolutionary, radical and exciting; sources: reality, common incidence of common life and personal experience).

Now, it is quite logical to state that their poetry is not to be labeled as individual. On the contrary, it is within the realm of humanity, tenderness of mankind and vehement feelings and emotions. This is the call and recall of 'Romanticism'.

### الخلاصة

يعقد البحث الحالي موازنة بين الشاعر الانجليزي (وليم وردزورث) والشاعر العربي (نزار قباني) مستظهرا الشبه بينهما في توظيف المعجم الادبي وطبيعة شعرهما وتنوع مصادرهما. ويسلط البحث الضوء على ما يعتقد به عامة القراء من حقيقة لا دليل عليها عندهم وهي ان قباني، رغم فارق العصور و الخلفية الثقافية، قد ذاب بقصد او دون قصد في شعرية وردزورث وطوعها للشعر العربي وأسسها الثقافية. وهنا تفترض الدراسة ان الشاعرين يتفقان في أطر النظرية الشعرية وانهما يؤسسان لذلك من خلال حركة الرومانسية.

توزع الدراسة على ثلاثة مباحث رئيسية وخاتمة. سلط المبحث الاول الضوء على شعرية وردزورث وإسهاماته الشعرية. بينما يركز المبحث الثاني على شعرية قباني وإسهامه في هذا المجال. ويعقد المبحث الثالث موازنة بين الشاعرين. وخلصت الدراسة الى نتائج تتعلق بموضوع البحث. الكلمات المفتاحية: الشعرية، المعجم، الدهشة، اليسر والسهولة، اللغة الشائعة.

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