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Binary Oppositions in Ghazi Alghosaibi's from the Orient and the Desert

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Abstract

Few academic studies in English have been carried out to explore the literary works of the Saudi writers in general and the prominent literary figure Ghazi Abdulrahman Alghosaibi in particular. Given the significance and popularity of Alghosaibi's figure and works in Saudi Arabia, this paper examines his poetry collection titled From the Orient and the Desert (1977). As the only literary work that was written mainly in English, this is an ideal starting point to attempt to introduce his works to a global audience, thereby popularizing the Saudi culture as he conceived it. Through a comprehensive thematic and structural analysis, the present article will show how Alghosaibi's poems explore binary oppositions between the Orient where he comes from and the Occident which he encounters during his stay abroad. Moreover, the article will also highlight the amalgamation of romantic heritage and the modernist traits in his poetry. The study will conclude by proving the symbolic significance of the Orient desert as a source of peace and security serving as a protective mother to its inhabitants in contrast to the sense of alienation evoked by the Western cities.

Key Words: *Saudi Literature, Ghazi Alghosaibi, binary oppositions, Orientalism, Occidentalism, East, West, Desert*

1. Introduction

Ghazi Abdulrahman Alghosaibi is a prominent literary figure in Saudi Arabia, contributing extensively to the country's cultural tapestry. Most academic explorations of Arab literature are directed to the Arab writers from Egypt, Iraq, Syria, and Lebanon while English studies on Saudi literature receives little attention. Most of the studies about Saudi writers are mainly targeted to works written in Arabic language. Ghazi Alghosaibi, who is the main target of this paper, has been scantily researched by literary scholars for his English literary works or translations when compared to the high attention given to his Arabic productions. The present paper therefore seeks to examine his poetry collection titled *From the Orient and the Desert* (1977) which is the only collection that was mainly written in English and which, to the best of the researcher's knowledge, has not been studied academically. The collection, as the title signifies, portrays the Orient-Occident binary oppositions from the poets' own perception as an Orient who sees a contrast between the East where he was brought up in and the West where he spends part of his life during study and work missions. Thus, through a thematic and structural analysis, the study aims at highlighting these binary oppositions between the East and the West, desert and city, dream and reality,

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nostalgia and alienation, love and loveless, and light and darkness. In addition, the study explores the duality of his poetry combining both: the romantic heritage and modernism, being a private poet with public concerns affirming his Saudi culture and heritage. The study will conclude by proving the sense of purity, simplicity, peace, and freedom he associates with his Orient desert and the loneliness, alienation, and temptation he associates with Western cities.

2. Literature Review

The binary opposition between the East (Orient) and West (Occident) has been explored by many Arab writers in the middle of the 20th century for different reasons. One of these earliest studies about the East-West encounter through the eyes of Westerners is Edward Said's two influential books *Orientalism* (1978) and *Culture and Imperialism* (1993). In his former book Said claims that "Orientalism is a style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction made between 'the Orient' and (most of the time) 'the Occident'" (1978, p.2). Said claims that the Western writers portray the East as the other, stereotyping it as the inferior. Arab writers on the other hand, reverse this concept by presenting the image of the West from an Easterner perspective. They present multiple images of the West, carrying either positive or negative images of the West tinged with some political, religious, and cultural overtones. El-Enany's *Arab Representations of the Occident: East-West Encounters in Arabic Fiction* was the first study in English about the Arab portrayal of the West. He observed that in depicting the West, some Arab writers have an ambivalent feeling between "fascination" and "doubt." (2006, p.13). Ahmed Al-Malik (2014) examined the shifting image of the West in Arab fictional works written after 1990s reflecting their contempt and antagonist attitude especially after the second Gulf War. Recently, Asiri (2020) made a comprehensive study of the representation of the West in Arabic literature. Algosaibi's works in particular were analyzed by Asiri (2020) including his novels and autobiographic writing from the 1990s. The study notes that the image of the West in Algosaibi's work was obvious in his novels while absent in his poetry.

The present study seeks to explore the representation of the West by Ghazi Algosaibi in an attempt to highlight the binary oppositions of the Orient and Occident from the poet's own perspective. It concentrates on the representation of the West by Ghazi and other Saudi writers and its difference from that of other Arab writers. Asiri (2020) argues that since "Saudi Arabia had not been colonised, at least not in the era of colonialism in the Arab region, by the West", Saudi representation of the West "may supposedly be different from the images presented by their Arab neighbours who have experienced colonialism" (P. 16). Arab literature often focuses on maintaining their identity, while Saudis' focus on other topics such as maintaining their culture, religion, and traditions: "The representation of Al-Gosaibi cannot be characterized as contradict attitude due to the lack of astonishment and mordant criticism. Instead, the images are mainly associated with its context without harsh or direct judgments" (Asiri, 2020, p. 49). Studying his representations of the East-West encounter requires an awareness of author's personal life. This allows the researcher to better understand his vision and perspective of these two opposing cultures. Such an analysis uncovers social and cultural aspects of two nations, that of the Orient and the Occident which will be shown in the coming paragraphs.

3. Ghazi Algosaibi: Personal Life and Literary Career

Ghazi Abdul Rahman Al-Gosaibi (1940–2010), one of the most prominent and influential Saudi writers and thinkers, was liberal politician, diplomat, administrator, poet, and novelist who came from one of the richest trading families in Al Ahsa, at the Eastern province in the kingdom of Saudi Arabia. He was exposed to a variety of cultures from his early childhood till the end of his life: his father was from Najd, a closed community in the central region of the Kingdom, his mother came from Hejaz, an open society in the Western region of the kingdom. He was married to a German woman and spent his life between Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Cairo, Los Angeles, and London besides many other places during his official visits and vacations. He has one daughter named Yara and three sons; Suhail, Fares, and Najad. Despite the wealthy upbringing, his life was not devoid of tragedy as his mother died when he was only nine months old. He was then raised by two guardians of opposing attitudes, oscillating between the strictness of his father and a very loving over-protective grandmother. At the age of five, he moved with his family to Bahrain and studied his primary, intermediate and secondary schooling. In 1956, he moved to Cairo and attended the University of Cairo where he obtained B.A. degree in law in 1961. His life in Egypt was that of self-realization which is reflected in his famous novel *An Apartment Called Freedom*, 1994. At the end of the year 1961, he moved to Los Angeles to continue his higher education and enrolled in the University of Southern California where he graduated with a Master degree in international relations in 1964. It was a stressful time for him during which his brother Nabeel had a nervous breakdown and such traumatic event affected him deeply and intensified the feeling of sorrow, alienation, and loneliness which echo throughout his writings. In 1965 he went back to Saudi Arabia working as a lecturer at King Saud University and then he was selected to be a member of the Saudi-Yemeni peace delegation. In 1967, he went to London to obtain his PhD, and got married a year later, and earned his PhD in law from University College London in 1970. He then returned to Riyadh to teach at King Saud University where he was the head of the department of Political Sciences and later, a dean at the Faculty of Commerce. In 1973, he left academia and worked in a series of administrative positions for the government as a minister of several ministries including industry and electricity, health, water, and labor. He also worked as a diplomat from 2002 till 2010 first in Bahrain then in the United Kingdom. He oversaw the Saudi Ministry of Water and Electricity and of Labour from 2002 till his death in 2010 due to colon cancer at the age of seventy. Although Alghosaibi and his father before him, were close of the royal family, this close link did not prevent his works from being banned until 2010, and it was only two weeks before his death that the ban was lifted. His death was received with intense public grief and mourning. He left behind a body of works that, in variety and power, has a massive influence on many Saudis and Arabs of all ages. The variety of roles he played in his life, together with his complex character and reputation are incomparable: "Elders, youngsters, women, children - everybody was under the magical spell of his words" (Wahab, 2010). He received widespread recognition and appreciation as a poet, novelist, reformer, whose efforts in the development and modernization of Saudi Arabia are highly regarded. This is further evidenced by the fact that his autobiography titled *A lifetime in Administration* is recommended recently by the Ministry of Education to be included in the high school students' curriculum (Ahmed, 2018).

His autobiography shows that from the early years of his childhood, Alghosaibi was interested in reading extensively in all fields especially Arabic literature. Besides, he read a selection of English literature by William Shakespeare, Lord Byron, P. B. Shelley, Dylan Thomas, Robert Frost, Robert Graves beside many translated poetic works by Persian, Indian German, Spanish, Japanese writers and was interested in the Japanese Haiku. Alghosaibi had an intrinsic literary

genius which is manifest in his diverse writing: poetry, fiction, and non-fiction. His contribution to Saudi and Arab literature is evident in the massive production of his works which exceeds around 60 publications spanning between poetry, novels, autobiographies, in addition to books and essays on various fields. His literary works were mostly written in Arabic and few pieces were translated to English. Three of his novels were translated into English such as *An Apartment Called Freedom* in 1996, *Seven* in 1999, and *A Love Story* 2002. A few of his poems translated to English were published in magazines and newspapers in addition to two collections: *Lyrics from Arabia* in 1986, *Dusting the Colour from Roses: a Bilingual Collection of Arabic Poetry* in 1995. His collection *From the Orient and the Desert* is the only collection of poetry that was primarily written in English during his stay in England and was published later in 1977 in Great Britain. Alghosaibi explains in his autobiography that during his stay in England, an international symposium was held in Harvard where he was asked to read a poem in Arabic then translate it to English. He chose to read 3 poems from his Arabic collections and their translations. His poems were well received, and thus he was encouraged by his friends to publish in English. One year later, a friend of his translated a poem of Alghosaibi and published it in the journal of the university where he was studying in the USA, which received much appreciation. This event, together with the encouragement of his friend and English artist who suggested to provide the collection with his drawings encouraged Alghosaibi to publish this first English collection which was based on his earlier Arabic versions of poems. He states that his main aim was to introduce the voice of a modern Arab poet to English readers (2012, p. 99).

Alghosaibi was among the few who had an opportunity to visit, study and live in the West. This collection, therefore, sums up his various cultural experiences of living abroad in Western cities such as Los Angeles and London where his education and life experiences affected his perceptions of life and views on the West. Through an interpretive overview of this poetic collection, the study reflects his personal perspectives in the East-West contrast as discussed in the next section. The researcher has translated the works as required for the purpose of this research.

4. Ghazi Alghosaibi's from the Orient and the Desert

From the Orient and the Desert is a collection made up of fifteen poems which depicts the impressions of an Eastern young man who travelled from a quiet Eastern place to a very modern and rowdy Western world. The poems convey his multicultural experiences, creating a sense of ambivalence between two opposing cultures: the Orient where he comes from and the Occident which he encounters during his stay abroad. The collection contains poems that recollect the poet's past experiences in the Orient, juxtaposed against the more recent impression of the Occident. Through a subjective reading of its author, the analysis of the poems will explore Alghosaibi's impressions as a multicultural Orient fluctuating between two binary oppositions: the orient and the west, nostalgia and alienation, companionship and loneliness, love and loveless, and light and darkness, reality, and dreams. Similar to romantic poets who place the subjective experience as the main core of their poetry, Alghosaibi's poems reflect the poet's feelings, attitude, inner thoughts through the contrast between the East and West. The collection is illustrated by some drawings by the British artist Andrew Vicari who was a friend of Alghosaibi. The illustrator had had made multiple visits to Saudi Arabia, familiarizing himself with its culture. The drawings represent the stereotypical images of the Saudi people and their culture: the Saudi traditional clothing, the tent, the light of the full moon that enlightens the darkness of the desert and the act of praying. Such drawings illustrate the

intended meaning of the poems and capture their essence. The desert is the main image which dominates the collection and is presented not only as a geographical location but rather as a symbolic representation of traditions, customs and human values.

The dichotomy between the East and the West which Alghosaibi encounters during his life result from spending part of his life abroad either for education or work missions. This feeling of alienation accompanied him even when he came back to Saudi Arabia and coloured much of his writings. Frantz Fanon observes that “the native intellectual who comes back to his people by way of cultural achievements behaves in fact like a foreigner” which applies to Alghosaibi’s condition. (1967, p.223). It may be argued however that although living in exile is depressing, yet it is a gainful one. Alghosaibi found himself immersed in a multicultural and diverse environment, interacting with individuals from different backgrounds and perspectives. This exposure to a diverse cultural and linguistic environment had created an ambivalence that was the inspirational source of his poems and had a deep impact on Alghosaibi’s poetry, enriching his literary works.

It is also interesting to note the parallels between the poet’s work and the works of other English romantic poets. William Wordsworth, for example, defines poetry as “the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings” that “takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquility” (1988, p.177). Similarly, Alghosaibi’s poems are reflections of his subjective experience and inner thoughts as Wordsworth does. Alghosaibi explains that writing a poem is like a volcano that erupts his experiences, feelings and emotions and thus serves as a relief of his pain and sufferings (2012, p.159).

Alghosaibi opens his volume *From the Orient and the Desert* with “The Orient”, a poem that depicts the simplicity, innocence, and purity of the desert life: “Here, life is a virgin still/ who did not learn deceit/ or woman’s clever wiles” (1977, ll. 4-6). Similar to pastoral poetry, the simplicity of the orient’s life is conveyed in their simple needs for “food”, “moon for company” and “blissfully... sleep” in their “virgin” desert. This poem also reflects social and cultural aspects of Saudi culture. For example, “here” in the desert, love is not exposed directly but it is “allowed to breathe/ only on a wedding night” (1977, ll. 16-17) reflecting his conservative attitude which contrasts with the open society of the West. The repetition of the word “here” at the beginning of all its five stanzas emphasizes his strong attachment to his homeland as a peaceful place that relieves him from the harsh realities and loveless world he experienced while staying abroad. Like the romantic poets, he uses weather condition as pathetic fallacy symbolically to represent his life oscillating between two cultures, the West and the Orient. In contrast to the gloomy atmosphere and darkness of the West evoked by words like “cloud” and “mist”, the poet enjoys the brightness and clarity of the “sun” and “moon” in his homeland. Here, in the East, life is still “virgin” and free of “deceit”. This peaceful nostalgic image of the desert contrasts with the gloomy image of the city of Los Angeles explored in his poem “Los Angeles” which was written in Arabic and published in 1965. In “Los Angeles”, the Western city is portrayed as a seductive place that leads to temptation and evil: “I will write about you, my vainglorious idiot/ I will write about your mist and your evil dark paths/ About your heart, not beating, desert as a rock” (2020, p.105, translated by Mohammed Asiri).

As a matter of fact, it was in Los Angeles that Alghosaibi suffered a sense of alienation when he travelled there to proceed his higher education. Alghosaibi in his autobiography highlights a deeply sorrowful incident that affected him severely throughout his stay in the United States in 1961. His brother Nabeel had a nervous breakdown diagnosed as schizophrenia which remained with him for eight years till his death in 1969 at the age of 34: “it was not easy to see a sound person whom you love and who loves you turns suddenly to a deranged person who

no longer remembers anything even his name ... he turned the life of people around him to moments of anxiety, hope, and stress” (2012, P. 57). Besides, his grandmother died in 1965 while he was in a business trip in Yemen and in 1970 his sister in law, the wife of his brother Adel, died aged 29 in a car- accident (2012, pp. 71-72). Asiri confirms that Algosaibi’s “first experience in the United States left him psychologically wounded” (2020, p.193). These personal calamities had a significant influence on him and accounts for the deep sorrow and grief that recurs in his poems.

Algosaib was not the only Saudi writer who writes about cities expressing his nostalgia for his homeland and contrasting the Western cities with the Saudi ones he missed. Al-Harbi for instance, traced the portrayal of the Western cities in Saudi Poetry in the period between 1968-1990 and found that many Saudi poets who wrote poems while they were abroad in the Western countries expressed their discomfort and depression of their stay in the bustling Western cities and their sense of nostalgia for their home country. Among these are Abd Allah Al-Abbasi in his poem “Paris”, Abdallah Ba Sharahil in his poem “London”, and Al-Shabanah in his poem “The Motherland and Nostalgia” while he was in The Hague (2015, pp. 231-238). This sense of discomfort is the result of cultural shocks and the loss of human values which they were used to.

The significance of Algosaibi’s attachment to his homeland is obvious in opening and ending the collection with the image of the desert which marks the circularity of his collection. The collection ends with another poem that depicts his deep love and sense of peace to his homeland represented in “Sahara”, the Arabic word for desert. In a nostalgic tone, the poet explains how he roamed the world and found nothing more loving and peaceful than his own oriental home. Words like “pure”, “gold hair”, and “sand”, are used to describe the image of the desert as he conceives it. The poet personifies “Sahara” as mother who welcomes the arrival of her “son”:

“My son! My son!
Are you back?”-Yes, Mother
back—a child
of endless grief,” (1977, ll. 24-27).

In the West and as a result of the cultural shock, the poet feels “disenchanted”, “defeated” having “endless grief”, and like a “bird that lost its nest”. The poet capitalizes the words “Disenchanted” and “Defeated” to emphasize his sense of alienation and disappointment while staying abroad. The poet concludes this poem with the sense of company he finds in the desert if compared to the sense of loneliness he feels in the Western cities: “Your moon my neighbor/ and a poem my friend” (1977, ll. 28-29). It is only in “Sahara” where he finds solace and feels secure as represented by the repetition of the phrase “I am back” five times which is similar to the repetition of the word “here” in the opening poem “The Orient”. The illustrations in this collection enhance the effect of the text and help convey the meaning to the reader. The drawings show a man prostrating under the moonlight which can be interpreted symbolically as an act of thanking Allah for coming “back” to his motherland which is common in Muslim communities. The duality between darkness and light is reflected in the drawing as well, and the full moon symbolizes the inner light he experiences when he is back in his homeland after the darkness he feels abroad. The inner peace he enjoys in Sahara is reflected on the speaker’s face where “sea-water” is on his “face, and that his face is “washed with dew”. The symbolic image of the moonlight is evident in many of his poems and the corresponding illustrations. This agrees with the observation of Dahami who states that “The poems of the

Saudi poets about the homeland begin with subjective feelings that express longing and nostalgia for the homeland. Because of their deep love for their homes, everyone has a wealth of feelings for their country that are carried within them” (2023, p. 464).

“Your Eyes” is a poem that presents flashbacks of his childhood memories in Saudi Arabia and the cultural differences he encounters in the West. The poem is illustrated by a drawing of a little Saudi child walking lonely under the moonlight that enlightens the darkness of the night sky. The poem presents personal scenes of his memories while living in the beaches of the Gulf Sea. Alghosaibi used to spend his time playing in the “beach sand” collecting “sea shells” and unaware of “unseen shores” that he will encounter in his life later on. The sense of isolation reflects his early years of childhood where he was brought up with no siblings till he moved to Bahrain and attended school. The recurrence of purity and his longing for innocence of childhood might be interpreted as a result of his experience as an administrator where he encountered the greediness and evils of human nature. He explains that the new experience as administrator for the government allowed him to see aspects of human nature that were hidden from him earlier (2012, p. 96).

“Let us Briefly Dream” explores the cultural differences of the West and East contrasting the dreamy life found in the Western fairy tales with the hard reality of Bedouin life in Saudi Arabia. The unknown addressee is requested to dream with him “of a fountain spraying moonlight, / Of a swing hung in the stars” and “Of a cottage in the clouds” (1977, ll. 2-3, 5). The poem ends by declaring the roaming nature and instability of the Bedouin’s life who live in “tent” under the light of “sunset”. Alghosaibi wants to introduce to the Westerner reader an important cultural reality about the hard lifestyle in Saudi Arabia up to beginning of the 20th century with its traditions and customs and the transformation of Saudi Arabia to modernity which was taking place at that time.

The significance of both love and women in the poet’s life is also evident in this collection which discusses not just romantic love, but speaks of affection for friends, family, and motherland. His interest in women in his poetry is a reflection of their importance in his life where he states that:

A woman has always been part of my life and naturally part of my verse. I have been described many times as a woman-poet!: either through her real face, or as a symbol representing the land, or as a symbol referring to salvation, or a combination of all of these things together. If I cannot imagine my life without a woman, definitely, I cannot imagine my verse without a woman (2012, p.199).

The importance of love in his poetry either to a woman or homeland is emphasized by Alghosaibi stating that “love and poetry” are like “Siamese twins that cannot be separated from each other unless they are both killed” (2012, p. 203). In his poem titled “Rain”, “Rain” is used as a symbol for tears that result from love failure:

It was pouring;
Rain like the copious tears
Of some legendary woman
Grieving a lost love;
Just one wild night
We part, and
That is all. (1977, ll. 1-4, 12-14).

The poet here conveys how his experience with love in the West has been disappointing, as his

partner, despite pledging to be with him in his absence, leaves him in “one wild night”. In a melancholic tone, the speaker blames his beloved that she does not keep her promises when she “Tentatively” said: ““But love persists--/ after you go, / it stays—forever ””(1977, ll. 9-11). The word “Tentatively” which is capitalized reflects that her love is tentative and thus untrue. This grief over a lost love extends in the final poem “Sahara” where he states that “love is words devoid/ of love” (1977, ll.16-17) reflecting his disappointment of a Westerner woman. In “Yearning”, the speaker expresses his eager longing for his beloved in a series of rhetorical questions and sensuous imagery with a romantic flavor which deserves to be quoted in full:

The colour of my love?
Consult the sunset.
The taste? Touch flame.
And size? Attempt
the universe.

You swim in my blood,
And pulse in my heart;
And ring in my words,
And cry in my tears.
Escape?” (1977, ll. 1-10)

The intensity of his love is conveyed by the sensuous imageries he uses to depict his love: it has the red colour of the “sunset” and the hot touch of the “flame” and the size of the “universe”. Similar to the melancholic lover in Elizabethan poetry, the speaker is obsessed with her where she exists in his “blood”, “heart”, “words”, and “tears”. He ends the poem by the concise rhetorical question of “escape?” which suggests the impossibility of this love. In his poem, “When I am With You” the speaker contrasts the situations when he is in the presence of his loved one and when she is absent from his life. The drawing that accompanies the poem presents him wearing a suitcase which represents his situation during his stay in the West. Once he “sailed”, a word that is repeated four times to show the effect of his separation from his beloved, he feels himself as “weary traveler”, “rejected”, dominated by “sadness, hunger, fear”, while in her company, he feels satisfied of being both “accepted” by himself and his beloved:

But when I am with you,
I am what we both know;
I face the sun, accept
Myself, and am accepted
By your wildly generous
Love.) (1977, ll. 30- 35).

The beloved in this poem represents more than a woman and stands for his homeland. He uses words such as “wildly” and “generous” which spring from his unconscious image about the East. The visual imageries in “eyes”, “stars”, “glow”, and “sun” reflect the peace he feels in the East in contrast to the “sadness”, “fear, and “hypocrisy” he feels in the West. Alghosaibi emphasizes that: “the woman in my poetry is not necessarily a real one of flesh and blood”. She might be “a symbol for the feeling of peace and stability” or she might be a symbol of “the future with all its challenges and uncertainties” (2012, p. 45). “Can You”, which comes immediately after “When I am with You”, is a poem that explores the theme of platonic love that no longer exists in the modern Western world. The speaker elaborates the change in the

meaning of love in a series of rhetorical questions:

Do you know the old story of love?
How it grows from illusion to frenzy
How we call it Platonic, and yet
Are consumed in the fury of flesh?
How it feeds us? And how
Once we are fed, we forget? (1977, ll. 22-27).

According to the poet, in the modern West, love is a matter of physical pleasure “consumed in the fury of the flesh” which makes them “forget” their promises. Love is essential in the speaker’s life where he feels lost without it. The poet is full of “despair”, “pain”, “fear”, and “distress” and as a result, loses “hope” in life. In “Words of Love”, the poet addresses his beloved not to be deceived by his appearance or “fame” and requests her to “wait” and “don’t utter any words of love” till she makes sure that she knows him very well and loves him for “the depths” of his transgression because if she loves him for his “poetic words”, “desire”, or “for this wine, these roses, / or for the madness of a wayward kiss./ The wine may spill and roses drop” (1977, ll. 25-27). The poet insists that her love for him is abiding, despite his “rash behavior” and in spite of him being a “lost and hapless stray”. Such requests might reflect his unconscious worries about his future marriage fluctuating between his Saudi conservative society with its values and the American freedom and temptations. “When Yara Smiles” portrays another type of love which is the paternal one. In a Wordsworthian manner, the poet expresses his intimate love to his only daughter named “Yara” using images of nature to represent her state of mind. Images of nature participate in her happiness like the “rainbow” that “dances in her eyes”, “dawn” that “escapes her lips”, and “even objects seem to smile”. Similar to the romantic poets who use birds in their poetry to represent the state of minds, Alghosaiibi refers to the sweet sounds of the “pigeons” and “Fairooz” which sing when “Yara laughs”. While when she “frowns”, the “breeze”, “spring”, and “joy” are all gone. Thus, love is explored in many levels; to a beloved, home country, and his daughter.

Much like other poets, Alghosaiibi explores the theme of poetry composition. In “Can You” he addresses his beloved as Muse and expresses the difficulty of composing poetry because “The only true song that escaped from” his lips “is not caught in” his pen. In a pessimistic tone, the speaker feels his “ thoughts torn”, “perplexed”, “lost”, having some “meaningless passion”, “despair”, “pain”, and “distress”. He evokes his beloved to inspire him “to subdue” his “wild sonnets” since “the only true song that escaped from” his “lips/ is not caught in” his “pen” (1977, ll. 20-21). He ends by begging her: “Can you give more more/ Than ever any woman gave to her poet? (1977, ll. 28-29). “Small Thoughts” as the title signifies, tackles the topic of poetry composition where the poet has fragmented thoughts on various themes: poetry as musical art, as a mystery of life, the bright dreams that cannot be fulfilled because of “death”, and the theme of love. “A Song” presents the binary oppositions of life as a combination of sadness and happiness and that his poetry will depict both states. He opens his first stanza depicting sadness and its effect on him while the second stanza talks about happiness which reflects his optimistic attitude that there are always happy times after the sad ones. He gives the motto in the last stanza where he states that his poetry will be devoted to talk about “death and life”, resulting in a “sad” or a “happy” song.

The collection also contains scattered themes such as fate and sadness in addition to the more recurring themes such as isolation and alienation. “The Curse” for instance is a poem that evokes the harsh side of reality which cannot be escaped even by dreams. The poem concludes by stating that

human fate is the result of their deeds “for our curse/ is of our essence” (1977, ll.10-11). “Sadness” is a poem that depicts the sense of sorrow for approaching death by using objects of nature which is reminiscent of P. B. Shelley’s “Ode to the West Wind”. Alghosaibi compares the effect of sadness to natural images during the four seasons of the year. In “autumn”, sadness is compared to the fall of the leaves of “the trees” that are blown by the “wind” scattering them everywhere. In “winter”, sadness is compared to the “clouds” that makes rain to fall and “showers the earth”. In “spring”, sadness is compared to the “soil” that makes the land to grow with “grass and roses”. In “summer” sadness is compared to the “sweat” that “melts on every face”. Thus, unlike autumn, winter, and spring where sadness springs and affects natural images, it is only in “summer” that sadness results from humans: “sadness melts on every face / in drops of sweat” (1977, ll. 11-12) caused by the sun. The fall of leaves in autumn, rain in winter, roses in spring, and sweat in summer are all symbolic that can be interpreted in two levels. First, they can be interpreted as the end of someone’s life which leads to “sadness”. The second interpretation may be the sense of nostalgia for missing the old way of life when the Saudi country was approaching a new era in its shift to modernity where everything will be memory of the past. As Frank Kermode mentions: "Romantic sensitivity drags the poet into that mood of agony and encourages in him the tendency to feel alienated and isolated from his society"(1966, p. 6) which applies to Alghosaibi’s case. “A Man Dies” presents the inevitability of death that “suddenly” stops man’s “voyage” in this life. The death of his brother Nabeel at an early age might be the inspiration behind this poem. He feels that this death came “so suddenly” before they “grasp that it has been” and hence feels the whole world is gone. Sadness caused by death or alienation echoes his poems which result from his unconscious memories or store house.

Alghosaibi’s poetry is clearly a combination of many trends such as romanticism and modernism. His poetry is similar to that of his contemporaries in the region such as Salah Abdul-Saboor, Farouk Shoosha and Farouk Guwaida who were “dominated by a romantic mood with the existence of some modernist traits” (Aly & Abdullah, 2016, p. 38). The influence of the romantic poetry is obvious in his subjectivity, basing his poems on past memories, projecting his personal feelings and emotions, fusing his poems with sensuous imagery, mostly visual, auditory and kinesthetic, and the use of nature and the lyric form. His poems include key romantic words such as “lonely”, “loneliness”, “memory”, and “roamed”. The sense of alienation, solitude, melancholy, which are considered romantic features, are also regarded as modern features of his works. Besides, modernism is obvious in writing his poems in free verse, mostly stanzaic forms of varying length. The binary oppositions, which is regarded as a modernist feature, can be found in his choice of words that reflect both Eastern and Western cultures: “orient”, “sun”, “veil”, “tent”, “Bedouin”, “desert”, “Sahara”, and “sand” reflect his Saudi culture and Eastern background that contrasts with the Western heritage as indicated in words like: “mist”, “tune”, “rose”, “cottage”, “cloud”, “lighthouse”, “wine”, “sonnets”, and “platonian”. This contrast indicates “the awareness shown amongst Saudi poets of the importance of the desert in their lives. For them, it was a symbol that differentiated them from others” (Alharbi, 2015, p. 40) and hence this proves their cultural identity.

5. Conclusion

This study contributes to the literature gap related to academic studies of Arab and Saudi literature. It introduces the works of Alghosaibi, a cultural giant from Saudi literature, to the mainstream academic community, popularizing the Saudi culture. The above analysis offers a culturally accurate account of the binary oppositions between the East and the West through Ghazi Alghosaibi’s lens. As someone from the Orient with a multicultural upbringing, his

exposure to the East and the West provides him with a unique perspective of these cultures. In contrast to the Western counterparts, who treated the East as the exotic “other”, Al-Gosaibi reverses this misconception presenting the Orient as his homeland which provides him with peace and feeling of home, while the Occident is treated as the “other”, an alien culture. The importance the poet places on his homeland is manifested in the circularity of the structure where he opens and closes the collection with the image of the desert. Although his poems are mainly subjective personal poems, they are infused with social and cultural overtones. His poems and the illustrations that accompany them paint a graphic picture of the Saudi culture with its local aspects. The study recommends expanding academic research on the works of Al-Gosaibi as well as other prominent Saudi and Arab writers. Through studies such as this, one understands not just the literary aspects of the work discussed, but develop a deeper, humane understanding of another culture, highlighting the shared nature of major human experiences such as loneliness, temptation, a need for security, and the concept of home.

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Statements of Declaration

Competing Interests

The author declares no competing interests.

Data Availability

Data sharing is not applicable to this research, as no data were generated or analysed.

Ethical Approval

This article does not contain any studies with human participants performed by the author.

Informed Consent

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