

## The Principle of Pleasure as a Compensation for Existential Alienation. A Reading in Ṭarafa's Poem (Mu'Allaqa) and Prufrock by the English Poet T.S. Eliot.

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### Abstract

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In spite of differences that characterize the nations, in terms of time and place, there remain humanitarian orientations that affect the behavior and views, in similar life situations. The Arab poet who lived in the pre-Islamic period, versus the English poet who lived in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, is dissimilar in life style, Thinking and styles of using the language. However, despite this great discrepancy, it would be possible to say, that they have things in common, like a lineation and rejection of society, feeling of stress, and repulsion existing between individual and community. This article assumes that the poetic ego of the two situations: the Arabic pre-Islamic and the modern English, have adopted the principle of pleasure to compensate the psychological alienation, and the feeling of seclusion and repulsion. It attempts to reconcile with itself, instead of disintegration with the external reality. Our question in this article: To what extent, in the Arabic and English situations, the poetic ego succeeded in creating reconciliation with the self, through the principle of pleasure? And what are the components of the special pleasure in each situation?

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**Keywords:** Classic Arabic poetry, Ṭarafa Ibn al-'abd, Modern English poetry, T.S. Eliot, Principle of pleasure, Existential alienation.

### Disintegration with the External Reality

Those who trace Ṭarafa Ibn al-'abd (the pre-Islamic poet) great poem will discover a break between him and the external reality. There seems to be misunderstanding between him and his relatives who made him feel their injustice, so that he tends to liken this injustice to a sword stroke: "*The knife of kindred cuts keener than cowardice*" (O'Grady, 1997, 19).

The bad relative's treatment was expanded to become a kind of miscommunication: "*and my family disowned me and my friends deserted me, and I was left on my own like a mangy camel*" (O'Grady, 1997, 18).

The tribe includes the relatives, and the camel, which is scabby and badly sick, is usually treated with a tar, as a certain medicine, and should be detained until it becomes fully healthy. The likening of the poetic ego to himself as a mangy camel, is a good evidence how segregated he is, within his community. This also shows how greatly he suffered from alienation in his close society. In spite of that, Ṭarafa, the poet, points out two groups of people who expressed sympathy with him: the poor people like him, whom he described as created from earth: "*And the poor showed pity, and those far away chiefs live in broad tents took me in*" (O'Grady, 1997, 18).

The wealthy people enjoyed his company as well. In the English yard, we notice T.S. Eliot talks about a similar state of alienation, through his hero Alfred Prufrock who addresses himself: "*Let us go through the almost empty streets*" (Eliot, 1958, 11).

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He indicates the alienated aspects where he is disconnected with people, lonely and secluded. By this he likens the poetic ego in Tarafa great poem (Mu‘allaqa), when he treated himself by means of being like the secluded scabby camel. The camel’s disease and its cure by using a tar, may lead us to what Prufrock said:

*“Let us go then you and I,  
When the evening is spread out against the sky  
Like a patient etherized upon a table”*(Eliot, 1958, 11).

It’s evident that the sky is dyed with blackness, and the spread of darkness is like a patient anesthetic. The scabies and the black color for Tarafa, and the disease, and night for Alfred Prufrock, constitute objective correlative to a black state of existential alienation.

### **The principle of pleasure as compensation**

Human beings tend to compensate for deprivation through escaping the reality. It could become true through the principle of pleasure, which would lead them to another world of sensations, and to non-typical places, far from the nature of their daily life reality.

Tarafa in his poem, indicates plainly the principle of pleasure, and provides details later:  
*“I’d like old friends round my deathbed and three things of youth’s wildness”*(O’Grady, 1997, 18).

The poet is speaking, in general terms, as if the principle of pleasure is intrinsic pre- Islamic one, and the young must get pleasure as a kind of behaviors in the pre- Islamic society. This pleasure necessitates a different behavior which is reflected by his indifference to his visitors. Perhaps he also indicates the longtime of pleasure he enjoys, when suffering death, so that the visitors get disappointed from his close death, but he insists on keeping with his pleasure although it would lead to his death.

In return, in the English poem, we notice the poetic ego speaks about short pleasure, and doesn’t desire to repeat it, and return to places of pleasure:

*“Let us go and make our visit.  
In the room, the women come and go”*(Eliot, 1958, 14).  
It’s a feeling which may be caused by boredom or disappointment, and thus he says in another context: *“So how should I presume?”*(Eliot, 1958, 13).

Consequently, the size of alienation, in the English side, is bigger than that of the pre-Islamic poet Tarafa.

### **1. Psychological compensation- impersonating other**

When someone desires to impersonate others, it implies that he has reached a high degree of hopelessness, disappointment, and considerable despair, and the desire to exit from his own personal world; as a result, he attempts to transfer to another site where his being is changed. There is no doubt that this state of impersonating others implies an expression of compensation what he lacks, and is a form of reconciliation with the self. Alfred Prufrock compares between Hamlet and his friend Polonins, but he chooses for himself the character of Polonins who is genius and an advisor, but he is devoid of sublime values and ideals as opposite to Hamlet. In terms of the ethical system of values, Prufrock’s outlook seems superficial. He wishes to impersonate the brilliant character, but it lacks the moral content. It reflects that he is looking for the essential thing, and attempting to seize the first opportunity, and his intellect doesn’t excel in far extent maturity:

*“no I am not prince Hamlet, nor was meant to be,  
Am an attendant lord, one that will do,  
To swell a progress, start a scene or two,  
Advise the prince, no doubt, an easy tool,  
Deferential, glad to be of use,  
Politically cautious, and meticulous,  
Full of high sentence, but a bit obtuse,  
At times, indeed, almost ridiculous,  
Almost, at times, the fool”*(Eliot, 1958, 15).

Perhaps Hamlet hesitation was the main cause of the unwillingness of the poetic ego to impersonate his character, however, this probably, reflects a change in concepts and values, so that the example and ideal endeavor to reach intrigue even at the prince of ridiculous laughs at times. This coup which explains the reason behind the fact that Eliot gives his famous poem the title: “the waste land”. Opposite to his view, Ṭarafa doesn’t seek to impersonate another character directly, but attributes this to Alla’s willing, where he said:

*“If God wills I am Qays Ibn Khalid,  
If God wills I am ‘amru ibn Marthad”* (Az-Zawzanī, , 1972, 89-90)  
*My wealth would entertain the best of the tribes”* (O’Grady, 1997, 20).

Apparently, Ṭarafa used both of them to return the camels to his cousin Malik, especially, his cousin ‘amru ibn Marthad, and his seven sons (Ibn Al-’nbārī, ,n.d, 210).

He wishes if he impersonates one character or both, but God’s will prohibits that. The two poets, the Arab and the English, are similar in their quest for a role model to make the poetic ego impersonates. It includes an expression of the marginal role played by the two character and their dreams. This situation is a result of the political state in which the influence and positioning are reflected. Therefore, the difference is clear between Ṭarafa and Eliot in terms of the real event, Ṭarafa’s poem is realistic that reflects his biography, whereas Eliot the poet doesn’t appear in the poem, and instead a narrator Prufrock replaces him, and speaks about imaginary pleasures. For that reason he resorts to the nymphs (mermaids), and the magical realms. Besides, he wishes to impersonate imaginative personality like Polonius and compares it with other imaginative character like Hamlet. The historic Ṭarafa seeks to impersonate historic figure, while the imaginative Prufrock seeks to impersonate the imaginative Polonius too. This implies that according to Eliot’s concepts, pleasure is something imaginative and can be achieved through poetry, whereas Ṭarafa does actually live it voice and action. Prufrock’s personality represents the medieval mentality in the age of modernism, so the contradiction exists when a person is in another time. This explains why the contradictions appear superficially and not essentially at a time of impersonality. It would display the search for pleasure in love ironically. The poem entitled “love song” while the narrator’s life events lack any case of love, so that he denied the nymphs song directed to him (See: Güven, 2015, 80-87).

This situation reflects a state of self-deception to Prufrock personality, and embodiment that poetry is an illusion (See: Vujin, 2011, pp195-203).

In return, two real masters from Ṭarafa’s tribe appear honorably , and Ṭarafa wishes to be one of them. The way Ṭarafa treats reality bears the realistic philosophy, while Eliot treats reality in romantic philosophical terms, and aimed to reach irony and satire through the components of his modern reality.

## 2. Sensory Compensation- Wine and Women

When we talk about the principle of compensation, from materialistic perspective, types of pleasure must be suggested to be used by the poetic ego to achieve compensation. We refer here to types that suit both: the pre- Islamic poem and the English poem, with possible intersection between the two poems. The Arab poet, Ṭarafa, refers to the three types of pleasures:

*“But for three things in a bravo’s life,  
by god! I would not care  
when I saw my death bed visitors rising to leave:  
Beating the scolds  
to a drink of deep red wine  
that mixed with water  
bubbles over,  
Wheeling about,  
when called by one in need,  
a horse like a water-bound tree wolf  
when startled,  
And shortening a cloudy day,  
a cloudy day that gladdens,*

*under the high-poled tent flaps  
with a paramour*" (Sells, 1986, 28-29).

The first pleasure is wine, the second is helping the needy at time of war, the third is the enjoyment of fat women on long raining days. Following Tarafa's poetry you will find that pleasure is achieved, temporarily, to escape the reality, while death is mentioned, excessively, to express a permanent escape from reality ( Al-Jādir, 2002, 167).

Wine with Tarafa is enhanced by other temporary escape- women, whereas death is enhanced by another escape- chivalry. Therefore, one must understand "death" as a concept of pleasure which deepens the sense of alienation. Comparing these three pleasures with Eliot's poems, we find an intersection with two pleasures: wine and women. Our explanation for the absence of the third pleasure refers to differences in cultural circumstances, the Arab society was characterized by tribal system, which is governed by an individuals. Besides, the conditions of their life, imposed the invasion and the war as tools for achieving their daily source of living. These circumstances didn't exist in the English society. The two pleasures are treated in one context with Eliot's poetry:

*"Can I return to the bar again, to win my aim-love?"*( Eliot, 1958, 14).

In essence, the wine and enjoying the woman are universally linked since the dawn of history, but Eliot provides details in regarding the meaning of love, in symbolic and declarative contexts. The symbolic contexts are for example:

*"Do I dare to eat a peach?"*( Eliot, 1958, 15).

Eating peach symbolizes enjoyment of a beautiful woman.

The declarative contexts are for example:

*"In the room, the women come and go, talking of Michel Angelo".*( Eliot, 1958, 15).

In the context of mentioning the women through their dresses, he says:

*"... after the skirts that trail along the floor"*( Eliot, 1958, 14).

Tarafa says in a similar context:

*"And evening brings among us a singing girl  
in a bodice and saffron scented gown"* (Sells, 1986, 28).

The poet relates to the singer woman who changes her dress, once wearing a cloak and once a tight dress which reflects her beauty.

The coincidence of singing and women exists also with Eliot"

*"I know the voices dying with a dying fall,  
Beneath the music from the farther room,  
So how should I presume?"*( Eliot, 1958, 13).

Using the phrase "farther room" he means the presence of women.

The presence of water element represented by the wine, gives continuity to life by catching a pleasure. Water is the origin of life. Water element is also connected to enjoying a woman. It's a result of a sexual contact. In Tarafa poem it is mentioned in a form of rain, where the enjoyment of a woman usually occurs in a long raining day. Similarly, it's found in Eliot's poem in a context of the sea and the mermaids. In spite of the fact that women in Tarafa's poetry are something realistic and in Eliot's poetry is legendary, both are known by smoothness and tenderness. The excessive use of the water element symbolizes the mother with her holiness, fertility in the primitive societies. This is highly reflected in "al-Mu'allaqāt", the most significant poems. When Eliot mentions the mermaids he tends to signify despair of this waste land, and escape to what is unrealistic for achieving pleasure. Eliot portrayed the woman in his well-known poem "the waste land" negatively, as a creature who wishes to die after she had lost her beauty and youth.

As a result of presenting and describing the woman, as a person who suffers from boredom, lack of aspiration and frustration in love, Eliot emphasizes the concept of love, which is the origin of life, may lead undoubtedly to death in this lost world. Consequently, Eliot firmly warns the contemporaneous and secular human being of social, corporal, and psychological loss. This loss is caused by materialism. Eliot sheds also light on the emptiness of love and it's meaningless for the modern life(Abdul-ameer, 2008, 128-138).

This is probably, the reason behind perceiving the desire for women as temporary and short. Eliot in his poem “the love song of J. Alfred Prufrock” is greatly affected by mystic religious beliefs. Mr Prufrock is depicted as a tourist in a world devoid of religious, mastered by materialistic conditions, emptied of spiritualism. This spiritual emptiness is only explanation of Prufrock desire to seek the principle of sensory pleasure (Dimaggio, 2013, 35-41). The pre-Islamic person used to believe in earthy transcendence and strong will, to break the strength of death, through the act of chivalry, or evoke earthy pleasure as if he believed in the eternity of life, and denied the resurrection and life in the other world.

### Summary and Conclusion

This study aimed at searching the principle of pleasure as compensation for existential alienation with the two outstanding poets: Ṭarafa Ibn al-‘abd, and the English poet T.S. Eliot. The two poets have psychological compensation junction, through the desire to impersonate historical or literary figures, while in the materialistic compensation they share two pleasures: wine and women. This similarity between the two poets, in spite of the differences in time and place, is evidence of the humanistic dimension which guides the human being to face existential issues, like alienation and death. Ṭarafa believes that pleasure could be achieved realistically, while Eliot believes it could be achieved hypothetically and imaginary, within the two levels: the physical and the psychological.

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