



The Myth of Democracy in Yemen: An Analytical Study of Abdullah Al-Baradouni's Poem "The Soothsayer of the Two Caves"

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Keywords

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| 1. Election | 2. Symbolism |
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Abstract:

This research seeks to explore the political and aesthetic dimensions of Abdullah al-Baradouni's poem "The Soothsayer of the Two Caves," which is taken from his last poetic collection The Return of the Wise Ali Bin Zayed. Written in the aftermath of the first parliamentary election to take place in Yemen after the national unification, the poem serves as a typical model of modern Yemeni literature. It merges profound poetic sensibility with acute political awareness to critique contemporary political and social realities. Adopting a critical and contextual analytical approach, the study aims to deconstruct the poem's symbolic, metaphorical linguistic structures to uncover how al-Baradouni employs poetic symbolism as an artistic instrument to expose the illusion of democracy in Yemen. Additionally, the paper examines the poem's discursive framework as a form of resistance discourse that unveils the concealed machinations of authoritarian power that, under the guise of democratic slogans, perpetuates oppression and marginalizes rights. Ultimately, the research highlights the poem's symbolic and semantic structure as both an aesthetic and intellectual medium through which the poet articulates a profound critical vision, revealing the paradoxes between the proclaimed democratic ideal and the actual political practice. The study concludes that al-Baradouni establishes a literary discourse that artistically exposes Yemen's pseudo-democracy.

أكذوبة الديمقراطية في اليمن: قراءة تحليلية في قصيدة الشاعر عبدالله البردوني "عراف المغارتين"

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الكلمات المفتاحية

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| 1. انتخابات | 2. الرمزية الشعرية |
| 3. الزيف السياسي | 4. التناقضات |
| 5. الديمقراطية الزائفة | 6. السلطة الاستبدادية |

الملخص:

تسعى هذه الدراسة إلى تحليل الأبعاد السياسية والجمالية في قصيدة الشاعر عبد الله البردوني "عراف المغارتين"، من ديوانه الأخير رجعة الحكيم بن زايد وقد كُتبت هذه القصيدة عقب أول انتخابات برلمانية جرت بعد تحقيق الوحدة اليمنية. وتُعد القصيدة نموذجًا متفردًا في الأدب اليمني الحديث لما تحمله من رؤية نقدية حادة، تمزج بين الحس الشعري العميق والوعي السياسي الثاقب، مما يجعلها نصًا أدبيًا منخرطًا بفاعلية في نقد الواقع السياسي والاجتماعي. تنطلق الدراسة من منهج تحليلي نقدي يسعى إلى تفكيك البنية الرمزية واللغوية في النص الشعري للكشف عن دلالاته العميقة، وتحديد الكيفية التي يوظف بها البردوني الرمز الشعري كأداة فنية لفضح زيف الممارسة الديمقراطية في اليمن. وتتناول الورقة أيضًا البنية الخطابية للقصيدة بوصفها خطابًا مقاومًا يفضح آليات السلطة الاستبدادية المقنعة، التي اتخذت من الشعارات الديمقراطية واجهة لتكريس واقع القهر و تهيش الحقوق. وختامًا، تهدف الدراسة إلى إبراز البنية الرمزية والدلالية في القصيدة بوصفها أداة جمالية وفكرية تمكن الشاعر من تقديم رؤية نقدية عميقة تكشف التناقض بين القيم الديمقراطية المعلن والممارسة السياسية الفعلية، مؤكدة أن البردوني، من خلال شعره، قد أسس خطابًا أدبيًا يزواج بين الجمال الفني والوعي النقدي يكشف من خلالها أكذوبة الديمقراطية الزائفة في اليمن.

Introduction:

The unification of North and South of Yemen in 1990 marked a pivotal moment in the country's political history, culminating in the first multiparty parliamentary elections in April 1993. Although this transition was widely heralded as a democratic breakthrough, many intellectuals and citizens remain skeptical of its authenticity (Carapico 1993). Among the most vocal critics was Abdullah al-Baradouni (1929-1999), Yemen's preeminent poet and public intellectual. His poem "The Soothsayer of the Two Caves" serves as a sarcastic critique of the democratic experiment in Yemen, exposing the contradictions and failures of the experiment through rich poetic imagery and biting satire. The poem dismantles the rhetoric of freedom and representation through biting irony and vivid allegory. The depiction of democracy as a marketplace of deceit, al-Baradouni constructs a poetic narrative that critically examines the type of manipulation exercised by those in power as well as the complicity of the general populace. The poem excerpts from al-Baradouni's final poetic collection *The Return of Wise Ibn Zayed*, which is characterized by rich symbolic connotations and intentional ambiguity. The poem conveys al-Baradouni's anxiety and bewilderment regarding the boundless future, which he perceives as potentially obstructing the prospects of true democracy in Yemen.

Problem and Questions of the study

This study examines whether post-unification democracy in Yemen represents a genuine political transformation or functions primarily as a symbolic performance. This leads to the following sub-questions: How does the poem reflect the social and political realities of the post-unification period in Yemen?

- To what extent can poetry transcend censorship and reveal concealed political truths?
- What political and social message does al-Baradouni intend to convey through his poem?

Study Hypotheses

The poem adopts a radical critical stance that exposes the false nature of democratic and

electoral practices in Yemen, portraying them as a mere "falsehood" or "sham" designed to perpetuate subjugation and ensure the prolonged retention of power.

Objectives of the study:

- To emphasize the function of literature and poetry as instruments for social critique, resistance, the articulation of collective aspirations, and the rejection of political deception.
- To critically examine how the notion of democracy is presented and problematized in al-Baradouni's poem "The Soothsayer of the Two Caves."
- To investigate the intellectual and aesthetic strategies which al-Baradouni exploits to articulate the illusion of democracy in Yemen.

Significance of the study

The importance of this study stems from the fact that it offers a new critical perspective that highlights the role of literature in fostering critical social awareness and providing insightful critiques of social realities. Additionally, the study attempts to demonstrate al-Baradouni's unparalleled ability to address symbolically such a political ill.

Review of Published Literature

A substantial number of studies have been conducted on al-Baradouni's poetry and the political dimensions of his work. However, most have primarily focused on the artistic, philosophical, and aspects of poetic language techniques, and none have explicitly delved deeply enough into the topic of democracy in Yemen. Moreover, to date, no single study has specifically addressed the vicissitudes that democracy in Yemen suffered from. In his thesis *The Political Poem in Yemen: Al-Baradouni as a model*, Baabad (2005) investigated the poet's perspective towards the Arab nations and their domestic issues, highlighting several aspects where democracy was excluded. Likewise, Jaber (2018), in his master's thesis, *The Democratic Vistas in the Poetry of Walt Whitman and Abdullah Al-Baradouni: A Comparative Analytical Study*, examined democratic notions celebrated by Whitman and Al-Baradouni, such as

individuality, equality, and freedom as moral and secular rights that all human beings are entitled to have. He regarded these rights as inalienable—neither to be compromised nor confiscated—as they constitute an integral part of the human identity, regardless of religion, race, color, or sex. However, the present study examines how al-Baradouni envisions democracy as a constitutional and political entitlement that has been systematically undermined, suppressed, and distorted by the ruling elite. Al-Baradouni artistically asserts that the democratic right in Yemen emerged stillborn, with the promise of democratic practices being nullified by deceptive and propagandistic media narratives that sought to veil the reality of its failure.

Terminal and Procedural Definitions:

- البكر الجرب (Al-Bikr al-Karib) means the young camel.
- بيت سغب (Beit Saghib) means a big starving family.
- باب طنب (Baab Tunib) denotes a door crafted from durable, long-lasting wood and made of a certain type of wood known as Cordia. This type of wood is widely grown in Yemeni land.

Study Limitations and Determinants

The data of this study is restricted to a single poem of Al-Baradouni's, namely "The Soothsayer of the Two Caves," which limits the generalizability of conclusions to al-Baradouni's wider body of work in particular and Yemeni literature at large. The study also identifies key determinants influencing the poem's thematic and symbolic construction, including Yemen's socio-political realities, al-Baradouni's ideological stance, and the broader cultural-historical context. These determinants provide a framework for understanding how the poet employs imagery and symbolism to critique democratic challenges and engage social consciousness.

1. Discussion of the Poem

As is stated earlier, this study aims to discuss Al-Baradouni's poem "The Soothsayer of the Two Caves" through three main analytical dimensions. Before embarking on discussing the thematic, literary, and linguistic aspects of the poem itself, it is useful to provide an

overview of its historical, political, and social contexts.

1.1 Historical Context

"The Soothsayer of the Two Caves" was written by Abdullah al-Baradouni in (1993), a defining moment in Yemen's modern history, that is, immediately after the first parliamentary election was held after Yemen's national unification. That period, often portrayed as the dawn of democratic transformation, was in fact marked by deep structural tensions between entrenched authoritarian practices and the rhetoric of political reform. The poem thus stands as both a literary and historical document, reflecting Yemen's struggle to reconcile democratic ideals with the disappointing realities of post-unification governance. Al-Baradouni's nuanced allusions and imagery situate the text firmly within such a transitional moment, portraying the early 1990s as an era marked by growing disillusionment as aspirations for national revival were gradually eclipsed by the return of entrenched power structures and practices of political manipulation.

1.2 Political Context

Politically, the poem functions as a radical critique of Yemen's counterfeit democracy and the persistent autocratic grip lurking behind the façade of electoral participation and presentation. Through complex metaphors and biting irony, Al-Baradouni exposes how the ruling elite subverted democratic ideals into instruments of control and political spectacle. His verse reveals covert mechanisms of power such as vote buying, corruption, and rhetorical deception—that transformed the promise of democracy into another manifestation of autocratic continuity. The poet's voice operates simultaneously as a witness to and an accuser of the ugly reality, unmasking the government's manipulation of the electorate and its hollow claims to reform. In this context, "The Soothsayer of the Two Caves," transcends mere political commentary to become a poetic indictment of the power structures that perpetuate Yemen's democratic illusion (Al-Mahmoudi, 2024).

1.3 Social Context

From a sociocultural perspective, the poem reflects a shared sense of disenchantment within a society caught between the rhetoric of national unity and the realities of marginalization. Al-Baradouni channels the disillusionment of ordinary Yemenis who witnessed the commercialization of their political will, with votes being bought, voices silenced and promises deferred. The text's symbolic imagery of crowds being purchased and homes collapsing articulates a deep anxiety about ethical deterioration and the erosion of communal trust. At its core, the poem becomes a plea against social absurdity and a defense of human dignity, presenting symbolism as an act of cultural resistance. Through the integration of satire and emotional gravity, al-Baradouni reconceptualizes poetry as a moral and civic discourse that challenges the alienation of the citizen under a pseudo-democratic regime, as Al-Mahmoudi (2024) asserted.

2. Analysis of Poetic Themes

By intensively reading the poem, one can notice various motifs intended to inveigh against fake democracy in Yemen.

2.1 The Notion of Sham Election

The poem sets out with a defiant tone, exploiting the interrogative structure—an entryway that expresses absurdity and loss. It thus serves as a discourse constructed upon rhetorical questioning and existential bewilderment, which strips the political act of any real value.

Elect whom you will, or cast no vote at all

انتخب من شئت أو لا تنتخب

What will you gain, and what will surely fall?

ما الذي تعطي، وماذا تكتسب؟

He for whom one hopes has vanished

من جلا من يرجي حتى أختفى

Whether you withdraw or not, it is alike

والذي لم ينسحب كالمنسحب

(pp. Al-Baradouni, *The Return of the Sage Ibn Zayed*, 1703)

Such an interrogative technique clearly casts a question upon the very essence of political participation, suggesting that the electoral act, like many gestures within the political realm, has been emptied of its true substance. As noted

by Al-Bar (as cited in Al-Bar, 2007), this inquiry in al-Baradouni's poems does not operate as a genuine request for an answer but as a rhetorical declaration of futility, revealing the poet's conviction that all choices lead to the same void of illusion. This initial tone of doubt and disillusionment frames the poem's entire structure, as distinctions between action and inaction, presence and withdrawal, dissolve into a single image of existential and political stagnation.

The worthlessness of the electoral process in Yemen is further highlighted in the following verses, where the poet implies that those who are chosen are neither more competent nor more virtuous; rather, they belong to what he mockingly calls "the (scabby) she-camel", a satirical expression denoting that the candidates or the elected individuals are wholly unworthy nominees for leadership. The sarcasm peaks when he utters:

Your vote is cheaper than locust's eggs

صوتك الأرخص من بيض الدبا

He chooses, or it is from the (scabby) she-camel.

ينتقي أو هي من (البكر) الجرب

(Al-Baradouni, *The Return of the Sage Ibn Zayed*, 2011, 1703)

Al-Baradouni, through the above verses, underscores the commercialization of political life. The ballot box becomes a metaphor for a market stall, thus reducing democracy to a mere business transaction. The poet portrays the voter's opinion as a commodity "cheaper than a locust's eggs," a powerful metaphor that connotes worthlessness and lack of value.

He then links the voting process to the process of buying allegiances, as he exposes the phenomenon of vote-buying and the transformation of elections into a market for political money.

How seductive the bundle of cash!

حزم العملات ما أفتلها

Before they summoned me, "Redeem!," it said, قبل أن يدعوني قالت أجب

(Al-Baradouni, *The Return of the Sage Ibn Zayed*, 2011, 1703)

In the following verses, the poet speaks on behalf of the candidate, who is already aware of

his inevitable failure in the ongoing political competition. He depicts the candidate's frustration and the futility of his endeavor through densely symbolic language:

I knew in the outset that I would not win the election

عرفت قبلي سقوطي وأنا

As if I was getting closer to milk a she-dead camel

أدني من مينة كي أحتلب

(Al-Baradouni, The Return of the Sage Ibn Zayed, 2011, 1703).

The poet disguises the inevitable outcome of failure to win the election, underscoring the futile and meaningless nature of the election. He ironically likens the nominee to a person who is trying to milk a dead she-camel, symbolizing the pursuit of an unattainable goal, such as political victory or recognition, despite prior knowledge of its futility. This metaphor reflects the tragic paradox between the desire for achievement and the constraining reality, highlighting the candidate's self-reproach for attempting a pointless act, as Al-Jabri (2011) noted. The sense of futility continues through the second verse embedded in the self-reproaching:

O, you whose promises led me on—urinate upon my head

يا التي، بولي على رأس الذي

That got me down to thee, as I have a hungry household to feed.

منك أدناني ولي بيت سغب

(Al-Baradouni, The Return of the Sage Ibn Zayed, 2011, 1703)

These lines indicate that the candidate's efforts yielded no tangible results and that the environment he approached was devoid of hope. This intensifies the impression of political impotence and anticipated failure. Al-Baradouni's use of narrative voice appropriation allows the political critique to be internalized and personal, rather than merely descriptive (Ismail, 1986).

2.2 Corruption and Political Alienation

In this poem, not only does the poet depict the absurdity of the electoral complaint; he goes further by exposing the extent of administrative and financial corruption leading to the squandering of the public fund to manipulate election outcomes in favor of unqualified candidates. More disheartening is the fact that this corruption is sanctioned and perpetuated by those who are at the very apex of state power. The poem elucidates the shaping of political reality by prevalent corruption and systemic alienation. This is articulated through the poet's verse: "in vain you give and ask from another", while above both your heads is one who plunders." Such imagery serves to depict a state of affairs dominated by a tyrannical power that monopolizes national resources and preys upon the populace's livelihood. The poet symbolically alludes to the head of power, who is the source of deep-seated corruption, where he references the City of Marib¹ as his own garden—the poet criticizes how the ruling elite privatizes national wealth, turning collective resources into personal gain. The pronoun "He" allegorically alludes to the "ruler" who pretends his kinship to the Sabaean king Karib'il Watar².

In vain, you give and beg another,

عبثاً تعطي وتستعطي أخاً

While above your heads looms the plunderer.

وعلى رأسيكما من ينتهب

He who calls his garden Ma'rib,

من يسمي (مارباً) بستانه

And beholds his wife as the Mother of Karib²

ويرى زوجته أم (كرب)

(Al-Baradouni, The Return of the Sage Ibn Zayed, 2011, 1704)

In the following lines, al-Baradouni explicitly exposes the hollow pretense of democracy in post-unification Yemen, portraying elections as a theatrical ritual that masks tyranny rather than embodying public will. He further states, "All that is called an election is a deception",

¹ Marib is a governorate of Yemen. It is located 173 kilometers to the northeast of Yemen's capital, Sana'a. It is approximately 17,405 square kilometres (6,720 square miles). It is considered one of the wealthiest governorates of gas, oil, and other mineral resources.

² Karib'il Watar II was probably the most important ruler of the early days of the Sabaean Kingdom. He is sometimes regarded as the founder of the kingdom.

which unmasks the political deception in which citizens are drawn into a system that merely legitimizes existing power structures. The metaphor of "the robbed" becoming "a ladder for the robber's grade" symbolizes the manipulation of the oppressed, the ordinary citizens whose hope and enforced participation elevate their exploiters. This imagery reflects a sharp critique: where democratic processes serve as tools of domination rather than liberation, as Baharvand noted (2021). Furthermore, the color imagery, "falsehood blares in crimson or in yellow", embodies the political deception: "crimson" evokes the false passion of democratic rhetoric, while "yellow" suggests moral decay and cowardice. Through these symbols, al-Baradouni transforms democracy into a tragic metaphor for political deceit, echoing his broader critique of postcolonial Arab regimes that appropriate democratic language to consolidate authoritarian control, as Al-Olayani specified (2023).

2.3 Exposure of Pseudo-Democracy

The poet, through poetic discourse underneath, exposes the myth of formal democracy in Yemen. His poetic vision ultimately re-defines democracy as an ideological deception—an illusion of freedom that conceals the continuity of corruption and subjugation. In the words of Al-Baradouni:

All that is called an "election" is a facade,

كل ما يدعى انتخاباً خدعة

It places the robbed a ladder for the robber's grade.

تضع المسلوب مرقى المستلب

And what is called "democracy"—in its name,

والتي تدعى ديمقراطية

Falsehood can blare in crimson, or in yellow proclaim.

باسمها يحمر، يصفّر الكذب

(Al-Baradouni, *The Return of the Sage Ibn Zayed*, 2011, 1704).

The above verses offer a critical commentary on political processes, particularly elections and democracy, using vivid imagery and strong emotional language. The poem seems to be a lament or warning, delivered through a

dialogue and internal monologue, about the deceptive nature of power structures.

The poem's opening line characterizes elections as an act of "deception", immediately framing the political process as fundamentally fraudulent. The powerful imagery of the "plundered" being placed on "the ascent of the plunderer" suggests a cyclical and self-perpetuating system of political corruption. In the subsequent verse, democracy is personified as a falsehood; it is given human-like reactions: it "blushes" and then "turns pale." This suggests that lying and deceit are not merely present in democracy, but are actively practiced within its framework. The blushing could imply shame or a temporary show of embarrassment, while "turning pale might signify a deeper, more ingrained sickness. Indeed, it is a powerful indictment of how the ideals of democracy can be corrupted and used as a façade for deceit.

The colors have betrayed, O Maimoun

خانت الألوان يا (ميمون)

You were of color—you transcended the game

ما كنت لونياً، تجاوزت اللعب

(Al-Baradouni, *The Return of the Sage Ibn Zayed*, 2011, 1704)

The phrase "the colors betrayed" is rich with symbolism. "Colors" could refer to political parties, ideologies, or even the vibrant promises made during electoral campaigns. The betrayal suggests a loss of faith in the political parties. The use of color in visual poetic imagery embodies a "psychological dimension that profoundly influences the reader's emotional perception." It serves as one of the most significant means of affective communication and expressive representation, whether through language or visual art. Indeed, color constitutes one of the defining features of contemporary creative arts, functioning as a bridge between aesthetic form and emotional depth, as Al-Hadi expressed (2009).

2.4 The Loss of Intuition and Intellect

Having scolded the deceptive and hypocrite practices on the part of the political elite, the poet switched over to the next stage where he seeks to offer them a piece of advice,

employing classical eloquence with modern skepticism. The use of the interrogative "Where is the market of intuition"? evokes the poet's quest for authenticity in a landscape of deceit. The poet mocks the politicians whose minds are merchant-like. The marketplace is a metaphor for the commodification of intellect and integrity, suggesting that even moral and intellectual values are traded under a corrupt regime.

Not all that strengthen is purchasable—
كلما تقوى به لا يشتري

Who can weave such a thought,
And who can get it brought?
من يحوك الفهم من ذا يجتلب

Where is the market of intuition found?
أين سوق الحدس تشري سلة
To buy a basket whose gleam unveils the
bound?

ذات لمح يجتلي ما يحتجب؟
The utmost of what should be done lies within,
منتهى ما ينبغي تفعله

(Al-Baradouni, The Return of the sage Ibn Zayed, 2011, 1704)

Her the poet employs a figurative image, namely "the market of intuition," indicating the absence of insight and discernment. The reference to a basket of a gleam symbolizes spontaneous, innate perception, while alluding to the concealed signifies what is hidden from conscious recognition. This reflects a subtle social critique of the lack of foresight and insight within both society and leadership (Saeed, 2005).

That must be shunned is clear to reason's kin.
محتوى ما ينبغي إن يجتنب

Does it have a vision to see the start—
هل لها رأي يريها المبتدا

And to which direction does it aspire?
والى أي المناحي تشرئب؟
(Al-Baradouni, The Return of the sage Ibn Zayed, 2011, 1704)

The poet's reference to figures such as Maimun and Dhi Jadan broadens his social critique by engaging Yemen's mythical and historical consciousness. Through this strategy, ancestral figures are reimagined as reflective lenses for contemporary political realities. In this context, Maimun symbolizes the self-deceived citizens,

who are entrapped in a cycle of oppression and complicity. As for "Dhi Jadan," it signifies the nation's fractured strength and lost grandeur.

Who will shield Maimun from Maimun,
من يقي (ميمون) من (ميمون)

O Dhi Jadan, O fortress of bold Sirwah?
يا (ذي جدن)، يا حصن (صرواح) الأشب

The zeal of the aggressor and the schemer has
waned;

هان ذب المعتدي والمنتوي
Who will defend the people from within—will
truly defend?

من يذب الشعب منه من يذب؟
(Al-Baradouni, The Return of the sage Ibn Zayed, 2011, 1704)

This stanza skillfully condenses the paradox of a state that claims to protect democracy while actively subverting it.

3. Literary and Linguistic Analysis

The poem "The Soothsayer of the Two Caves" represents the most advanced phase of al-Baradouni's poetic development. It is characterized by its ambiguous and philosophical insights, exhibiting a notable shift toward free verse form and incorporating themes that critically engage with social and political issues, notably democracy, freedom, quality, and social justice. This study analyzes the ways in which al-Baradouni deals with such critical issues, utilizing literary and linguistic techniques like paradoxes, imagery, symbolism, and sarcasm to present his critique in an indirect, fascinating manner.

3.1 Signifier-Signified Paradoxes

The poem "The Soothsayer of the Two Caves" occupies a place of high symbolic value and political tension in modern Yemeni literature. It is a typical illustration of verbal resistance, where the paradox of poetry turns out to be an "aesthetic strategy" as well as a "critical weapon". The poet creates a realm of life over death and of silence turning into a voice of hopelessness through an intentional dialectic of "signs" and "meanings". The whole poem is based on syntactical and semantic paradoxes, as is evident from the following lines:

In Time, void of its meaning,

في الزمان الخلو من معناه،

Neither hatred hate,

Nor does the love.

لا يبغض البغض، ولا الحب يحب
Television offers no solace,
لا تسلي عادة التلفاز

Intoxication does not intoxicate, Nor medicine
cure

لا يسكر السكر، ولا الطب يطب

The graduate dons his illiteracy...

يلبس الخريج أميته

Like aged grief, in the child, matures.

كالعجز الهم، في الطفل يشب

(Al-Baradouni, The Return of the sage Ibn
Zayed, 2011, 1704)

Through these verses, the poet constructs an existential vacuum where emotions are drained of values. The vitality of "love" and "hatred" is denied through negation, symbolizing a society deprived of moral compass and genuine feeling. According to al-Himyari (2005,14), "Al-Baradouni does not merely describe the reality; he reconstructs it in inverted forms, turning life into a mask of death and consciousness into a mirror of absurdity". This is a paradox of dysfunction: the tools meant to stimulate, heal, or delight have lost their essence. The "television," "wine," and "medicine" become metaphors for a "collective intellectual paralysis. As Al-Musawi (2006) observed, "This technique reflects a symbolism of collective extinction, where things lose their functions to become signs of moral and mental paralysis". Here, the contradiction between "education and ignorance" exposes the decay of knowledge under corrupt institutions. The "graduate" becomes a tragicomic figure—educated yet unenlightened. The metaphor of "an old worry growing in a child" transforms the national condition into a ridiculous inversion of time: the young are born aged, and vitality is trapped in premature decay. As Said (1994) noted, this image "embodies the poetic realization of a lost civilizational project, where youthful potential dissolves under the weight of political sterility"³⁷.

A set of political factors that encouraged the leaders of both parts of Yemen to accelerate the establishment of Yemeni Unification was unpersuasive to al-Baradouni. Consequently, through the first parliamentary election, he symbolically extrapolated his concerns about

the democratic experience in Yemen, which later proved to be a formal democracy.

3.2 Symbolic Imagery

This study examines the role of symbols as one of the literary tools that al-Baradouni magnificently utilizes to address such a sacred right that is politically abused, to which al-Baradouni purposely resorts to claim because of the political status quo in Yemen at the time. "Soothsayer" is the person who can see beyond the surface sight, and can foretell futuristic events; "Soothsayer" is an allegorical image that signifies the poet himself, whereas "The Two Caves" might symbolize the two parts of Yemen; that is, North Yemen and South Yemen are depicted as two caves to signify the state of Yemen before unification in the 1990s. This interpretation is reinforced by the historical backdrop against which the poem was composed to highlight political issues intricately linked to the notion of democracy. All this unequivocally indicates that the metaphor "the Two Caves" serves as a symbolic representation of the two "parts of Yemen", namely the North and the South, and the poem encapsulates al-Baradouni's profound disillusionment following the unification period. The persistence of dual structures of power inherited from the pre-unity regimes—a symbolic continuation of the North-South dichotomy that unity failed to overcome, according to Muthanna (2021).

As part of the analysis of the poem's symbolism, this study examines how Abdullah al-Baradouni employs place-names such as "Marib", "Hamdan", "Sarwah", and "Ibb", along with personal names like "Abd al-Muttalib", "Maymun", and "Dhī Jadan". Rather than mere geographic or historical references, these names serve as concentrated symbolic signifiers that expose how the discourse of democracy in Yemen was appropriated and transformed into a performative spectacle. As noted by Al-Olayani (2023), "Al-Baradouni's later poetry often fuses historical memory with political allegory to challenge the narratives of post-unification power during the 1990s". Building on these insights, this study argues that the poet

converts the language of place and personal naming into a "rhetoric of political resistance—a poetic strategy that unmasks the theatrical nature of Yemen's so-called democratic experiment and reclaims the voice of the marginalized citizen through irony and symbolic inversion.

3.3 Sarcasm

Sarcasm is another literary tool that al-Baradouni utilizes to ridicule the malpractices of the electoral candidates. He employs grotesque imagery to depict the inversion of values and the absurdity of political life, to portray the degradation and distortion of democratic ideals in Yemen. He exposes the hollowness of lineage-based authority and the performative nature of Yemen's political democracy following the Yemeni unity. He poetically states:

If you fail to divine, it will suffice, O, Yahsub,
فإذا استعصى فيكفي (يحصباً)

That in your rope he sees one gathering wood.

أن يرى في حبله من يحتطب

Who cries out—"Son of Maysūn, claim your kin!

من ينادي يا بن (ميسون) انتسب؟

My mother's uncle was 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib!"

عم أمي خال (عبدالمطلب)

Who recalls the thunder of Hamdan,

من يعي عن رعد (همدان) إلى

Turning toward Aryat³'s crown, swept by the flood of al-'Alaleb?

حلق (إرياط) انتحى سيل (العلب)؟

Count again upon your tablets, dragged as you came—

عد على لوحيك مسحوباً كما

Carried by those who accompany your fall.

جئت محمولاً على من تصطحب

(Al-Baradouni, The Return of the sage Ibn Zayed, 2011, 1704)

The poetic narration, as mentioned above, for place names and personal proper nouns such as "Hamdan, Sarwah, Aryat, Yahsub, Maysun, Abd al-Mutalib", in which al-Baradouni intertwines "genealogical irony" and

"historical allusion". The invocation of such names transforms the poem into a field of "symbolic ancestry", where inherited prestige replaces genuine civic merit. By having his speaker ridicule those who boast: "My mother's uncle was 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib," the poet mocks the use of tribal and familial pride as a substitute for political legitimacy. Baharvand (2022) noted that al-Baradouni frequently stages the "fall" of heroic topography to dramatize modern political impotence. The poet contends that contemporary leaders employ tribal or regional prestige as a rhetorical device to legitimize their authority, leveraging lineage or territorial affiliation as qualifications. This strategy effectively masks the persistence of elite domination, replicating the very patterns of power consolidation that democratic elections are intended to prevent.

A wanderer said: I saw her homeland—

قال جوال: رأيت ديارها

One crowd bought, another seized by force.

يشترى فوجاً، وفوجاً يغتصب

A voice replied: "Don't visit a constituency,"

رد صوت لا تزر دائرة

What lure remains that draws one to that house?"

ما الذي يجي، إلى الدار انجذب؟

I came back—my pockets turned to banks,

عدت منها وجيوبتي مصرف

And my hands weighed with what they could hoard.

والتي أهت يدي كم تحتقب

He gave me his house—like one who owns

منحتني داره مثل الذي

A house whose door is cordia wooden-made.

عنده دار لها باب طنب

Give her your vote—she knows its price;

اعطها صوتاً فتعي مبلغاً

With half of it, you could buy the town of Ibb.

بحوالي نصفه تباع (إب)

(Al-Baradouni, The Return of the sage Ibn Zayed, 2011, 1704)

Here, the wanderer stands for the poet as an observer who witnesses a homeland whose

³ Aryat was an Aksumite (Abyssinian) military commander who assumed power after overthrowing the Himyarite king Dhu Nuwas. Numerous attempts were made to bring an end to Aksumite rule; however, these

efforts proved unsuccessful until Sayf ibn Dhī Yazan, with the assistance of the Persians, succeeded in terminating Aksumite domination.

districts (diār) are being commodified, in which a village is "purchased", and another village is "seized". The poet thus exposes how democratic participation has been transformed into a market of voices and votes. The word "seized" indicates semantically that the voters are psychologically forced by "tribal Sheikhs" to vote against their wills. The abovementioned verses craft a searing allegorical image of political corruption and commodification of democracy in Yemen post-unification elections. The wanderer goes further by describing how luxurious houses the candidates own, they seduce the voters into having the same style houses upon achieving electoral victory—wishful thinking that highlights the fragility of the candidate's fake promises. The final verse presents a biting irony—reducing the sacredness of "vote" to a currency, its price comparable to half of the city.

Through the stated satirical, rhythmic irony, a tangible imagery, the author exposes the collapse of democratic ideals into a theatre of purchase and deceit, transforming the poet into both witness and conscience of a nation.

3.4 Poetic Language

Linguistically, the poem is marked by precision and symmetrical tension, built upon antithesis, yet charged with local symbols. The rhetorical questioning heightens the sense of existential and political anxiety that vividly mirrors the turbulence of reality, while the rhythm conveys both urgency and irony. Through this interplay of structure and meaning, the poet transforms language itself into an act of resistance, where poetic irony becomes a weapon against political hypocrisy.

Results:

The results of the study revealed that:

- The data poem is a sharp critique of the way in which democracy is practiced in Yemen, depicting it as a political system no different in essence from other forms of autocracy.
- In Yemen, poetry remains a central medium for voices of dissent and resistance against political manipulation and false practices of democracy.

- As a poet, al-Baradouni represents a unique model in employing literature to serve the collective conscience.
- The poem "The Soothsayer of the Two Caves" revealed the falsity of Yemeni Democracy in 1990 and exposed political and financial machinations used to manipulate the electoral process and the electorate as well.
- The poet used symbolism and sarcasm as artistic tools to expose disguised tyranny and strip bare hollow democratic slogans.
- The poem sincerely and critically expresses the crisis of democracy and sham elections in Yemen and that literature serves as a true mirror of the experiences and political conditions of people.

Recommendations:

Based on the study results, the researcher recommends the following:

- **Recommendations for literary Scholars:** It is highly recommended that further critical research focus on examining al-Baradouni's other poems to show how his poetry can serve as a reflective critique of other political and social realities.
- **Recommendations for the Educational Institutions:** To incorporate al-Baradouni's literary works into the curricula of schools and universities to foster critical thinking as well as historical and social awareness among new generations.
- **Recommendations for Community Awareness:** It is recommended that the media institutions engage in rigorous and informed discourse on the themes of this poem and comparable literary works, to cultivate critical consciousness among youth toward political rhetoric and ideological manipulation.
- **Recommendations for Political Elites:** Those in power are well-advised to prioritize the genuine establishment of true democratic principles rather than relying on superficial or rhetorical slogans. The researcher also urges all members of the political elites to draw insights from this poem and other related works by al-Baradouni, to prevent potential political

challenges related to elections and the democratic process in the future.

Scholarly Contribution:

By connecting literary hermeneutics with the history of Yemeni politics, this paper adds to the research on Arab political poetics. It showed that poetry—through its symbolic and rhetorical structures—can be exploited as an epistemological instrument to reveal the mythologies of democracy in countries undergoing political transitions.

Conclusion:

The poem "The Soothsayer of the Two Caves" is an epitome of al-Baradouni's unique combination of artistic flair with political consciousness. The poem reveals, underneath its ironic surface, a profound philosophical question concerning such values and notions as truth, democracy, representation, freedom. It goes beyond simply mourning to a thorough examination and then eradication of the disease of illusion: democracy is believed to be a kind of verbal performative deception. Al-Baradouni, through this interpretive and critical lens, suggests the ethical duty of poetry as a space for reasoned resistance and mental emancipation.

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