



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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| 5. authoritarian Power | 6. pseudo-democracy |

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, exposing its contradictions and failures 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 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 genuine prospects for 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 Yemen in the post-unification period? 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 falsity 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 through which al-Baradouni articulates the illusion of democracy in Yemen.

Significance of the study

The importance of this study relies on offering 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 remarks on al-Baradouni's unparalleled ability to address symbolically such a political ill.

Review of Published Literature

Despite the abundance of studies conducted on al-Baradouni's poetry, most have focused primarily on the artistic, philosophical, and aspects of poetic language techniques. Although several scholars have examined the political dimensions of al-Baradouni's works, none have explicitly delved deeply enough into the topic of Yemeni Democracy is considered a due political doctrine that everyone has to sustain. Moreover, to date, no single study has specifically addressed the vicissitudes that democracy in Yemen is suffered and neglected. Baabad (2005), in his thesis *The Political Poem in Yemen: Al-Baradouni as a model*, articulated the poet's perspective towards the Arab and domestic issues, enumerating several aspects of illnesses 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 vistas, which included individuality, equality, and freedom as moral and secular rights that all human beings must possess. 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 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 their promise 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) is crafted from durable, long-lasting wood. made of certain types of woods known as Cordia. It is widely grown in Yemeni land.

Study Limitations and Determinants

The study acknowledges certain constraints that may affect the scope and interpretation of its findings. The focus on a single poem, "The Soothsayer of the Two Caves," limits the generalizability of conclusions to al-Baradouni's wider body of work or 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

This study discusses "The Soothsayer of the Two Caves" through three main analytical dimensions. The historical, political, and social contexts precede the poem's thematic, literary, and linguistic analysis.

1.1 Historical Context

"The Soothsayer of the Two Caves" (1993) by Abdullah al-Baradouni (1929-1999) emerged at a defining moment in Yemen's modern history—immediately following the country's first

parliamentary elections after national unification. That period, often portrayed as the dawn of democratic transformation, was in reality marked by deep structural tensions between entrenched authoritarian practices and the rhetoric of political reform. The poem 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 era marked by growing disillusionment, in which the aspirations for national renewal 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 continuing grip of autocracy beneath the façade of electoral participation. 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 both witness and accuser, 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 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, where votes were 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 with 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

The study discusses various minor topics revolving around fake democracy in Yemen.

2.1 The Notion of Sham Election

The poem begins with an interrogative structure—an entryway that expresses absurdity and loss. It serves as a model of text constructed upon rhetorical questioning and existential bewilderment. Such a double interrogation strips the political act of any real value. The Poem begins with a defiant tone by saying:

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 يرتجى 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)

Al-Baradouni inaugurates the poem with a profound interrogation that questions the very essence of political participation, suggesting that the electoral act, like many gestures within the political realm, has been emptied of substance. Drawing on Al-Bari's (as cited in Al-Bar, 2007) interpretation, 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 following verses illustrate the worthlessness of the electoral process in Yemen. 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, cheaper than the eggs of micro locusts*", he says:

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 metaphorical market stall, revealing democracy's reduction to an economic transaction. He portrays the voter as "cheaper than a locust's eggs," a powerful metaphor suggesting 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 أقتلها

Before they summoned me, "Redeem"! it said,

قبل أن يدعوني قالت أحب

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

The following verses, through which the poet speaks on the candidate's behalf. The poet adopts the voice of the electoral candidate, who is already aware of his inevitable failure in the political competition. He expresses his frustration and the futility of his endeavor through densely symbolic language, by saying:

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 ميتة كي احتلب

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

The poet disguises the inevitable outcome of failure to win, underscoring the futility and meaningless nature of the elections. He ironically likens his situation of attempting quiet to a person who tries to milk a dead 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) indicated. 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.

ملك أدناني ولي بيت سغب

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

The abovementioned verses 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, as Ismail pointed out (1986).

2.2 Corruption and Political Alienation

In this study, the poet not merely depicts the absurdity of the electoral complaint; he goes further by exposing the extent of administrative and financial corruption involving the public fund, which is squandered to manipulate election outcomes in favor of unqualified candidates. What is even disheartening is 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 a 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 entrenched 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 Watar*².

In vain, you give and beg another,

عبتا تعطي وتستعطي أخاً

While above your heads looms the plunderer.

وعلى رأسكما من ينتهب

He who calls his garden Ma'rib,

من يسمي (مارباً) بستانه

And beholds his wife as the Mother of Karib²

(ويروى زوجته أم (كرب

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

In the following lines of the same poem, 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*", 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, ordinary citizens whose hope and enforced participation elevate their exploiters. This imagery reflects a deep critique: where democratic processes serve as

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.

tools of domination rather than liberation, as Baharvand indicated (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. Al-Baradouni states:

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، يصفر الكذب

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

The above verses offer a sharp, 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 lies and deceit are not merely present in democracy, but are actively performed and manipulated 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

After the poet managed to criticize the wrong misconceptions of the political elite, he switched over to the next stage. He seeks to provide them with a piece of advice, employing classical eloquence with modern skepticism. The use of the interrogative "*Where is the market of intuition*"? evokes that the poet searches 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 political order.

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 سلّة

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)

The poet, through the above verses, employs a figurative image, "market of intuition," indicating the absence of a place where insight or discernment can be "purchased." The basket of a gleam symbolizes spontaneous, innate perception, while the concealed signifies what is hidden from conscious recognition. This reflects a subtle social critique, as Saeed (2005) pointed to the lack of foresight and insight within both society and leadership.

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?

وإلى 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 mythic 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*" 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)

The poet, through the above stanza, 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 in 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 that al-Baradouni deals with such issues, utilizing literary and linguistic techniques like paradoxes, imagery, symbolism, and sarcasm as literary tools in his critique.

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 complex instance of linguistic 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 the voice of hopelessness through an intentional dialectic of "signs" and "meanings". The whole poem is based on syntactical and semantic paradoxes, he says:

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.

كالعجوز الهم، في الطفل يشب

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

Through the abovementioned 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 authentic 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. 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 purposefully resorts to claim because of the political status quo in Yemen at that 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;

to illustrate more, they are depicted as "two caves", not "one cave". Let alone that the historical context that coincides with the poem's writing, whose political themes are intricately linked to the notion of democracy, unequivocally indicates that the term "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 poem's symbolic analysis, 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", in the poem. Rather than functioning as 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. Al-Olayani (2023) perceived, "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 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 أُمِّي 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 سبيل (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 places-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.
 يشتري 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 تبتاع (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 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

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.

and deceit, transforming the poet into both witness and conscience of a nation.

3.4 Poetic Language

Formally, the poem is marked by linguistic 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.

Study Results:

- The study results presented a comprehensive, radical critique of formal democracy in Yemen, considering it a system no different in essence from other forms of autocracy.
- The study results confirmed that poetry in Yemen remains a central medium for resistance and revealing political truths, and that al-Baradouni represents a unique model in employing literature to serve the collective conscience.
- The study results demonstrated that the poem "The Soothsayer of the Two Caves" revealed the falsity of Yemeni Democracy in 1990 and exposed the mechanisms of political and financial manipulation of the electoral process.
- The symbolic analysis showed that al-Baradouni used symbolism and sarcasm as artistic tools to expose disguised tyranny and strip bare hollow democratic slogans.
- The study results reveal that 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.
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Recommendations:

Based on the study results and analysis, the researcher presents a set of recommendations, including:

- **Recommendations for literary Scholars:** It is highly recommended to pursue further critical research focusing on examining such literary works, particularly al-Baradouni's poetics, in relation to political and social

transformations, thereby serving as a reflective critique of reality.

- **Recommendations for the Educational Institutions:** To incorporate al-Baradouni's critical texts into schools and academic curricula to foster critical thinking and 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:** to prioritize the genuine establishment of true democratic principles rather than relying on superficial or rhetorical slogans. Furthermore, the researcher 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 proves that poetry—through its symbolic and rhetorical structures—could be considered an epistemological instrument to reveal the mythologies of democracy in countries undergoing political transitions.

Conclusion:

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

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