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## **The Nile and the Egyptian Revolutions: Ecology and Culture in Modern Arabic Poetry 2015**

**Hala Ewaidat**

*Assistant Professor of English Literature, Department of English, Faculty of Education,  
Mansoura University, Egypt*

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### **ABSTRACT**

For more than thirty years the River Nile has been deteriorating as a result of the industrial activities, economic expansion, pollution, population growth and the destructive policies of the government of the former president Hosni Mubarak. The primary concern of this study is to introduce the profound connection of environmental changes on the River Nile and the culture of the Egyptian society that is reflected through the medium of twentieth century Arabic poetry. Beginning with excerpts of poems from the ancient period, the paper traces the relevance and meaning of the underlying cultural aspects of Egyptian society through representation of the Nile in comparison to the way these cultural attitudes are depicted in poetry written during the three major revolutions in twentieth century Egypt: the 1919 Revolution, 1952 Revolution, and the 25 January 2011 Revolution.

**Keywords:** ecology, pollution, culture, revolutions, Arabic poetry

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For more than thirty years the River Nile has deteriorated as a result of the industrial activities, economic expansion, pollution, population growth and destructive policies of the regime of the former president Hosni Mubarak (1981-2011). The primary concern of this study is to examine the profound connection between the image of the River Nile in ancient and modern Egyptian poetry and its relation to the ecological changes to the River during the three major revolutions in Egypt: the 1919 Revolution, 1952 Revolution, and the 25 January 2011 Revolution. By contextualizing and analyzing a selection of Egyptian poetry from the beginning of twentieth till the twenty first centuries, this paper examines the representations of the bond that ties the fate of the Egyptian people to the Nile, and the ongoing effects of political repression and environmental degradation on these representations.

Since Egypt earliest-documented history, Egyptians expressed their concern about the majestic Nile as the Mother of Egypt. The Nile is credited for initiating one of the oldest civilizations on earth that maintained one of the unique ecological relations:

The River was one of the first cognitive maps that interpreted the symbiosis of ecology and life by molding it into concepts and images. It was one of the earliest cradles in which humans coped with nature, a space in which experiences were organized and translated into ideas, practices, beliefs, and orientations. The Nile, as both the site of early beginnings as well as the space of mysterious diversity, has captured the human imagination since the earliest civilizations have resided along its banks. (Erlich and Gershoni 1)

The Nile has immeasurably influenced every aspect of life in Egypt, arts literature and religion. This monumental influence, as it has metamorphosed and evolved over time, has naturally been represented through the cultural media of the Egyptian people. One of these mediums is the venerable art of poetry. As, “eco-critics generally tie their cultural analyses explicitly to a ‘green’ moral and political agenda,” (Garrard 3), Egyptian poets commensurately describe the Nile as their sacred, holy and eternal symbol for resistance to all possible methods of suppression by corrupt regimes. William Rueckert “invokes here the first law of ecology, “Everything is connected to everything else.” and believes that “The idea that nature should be protected by human laws, that trees (dolphins and

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*\*Address for correspondence*

howaidat@ud.edu.sa

whales, hawks and whooping cranes) should have lawyers to articulate and defend their rights is one of the most marvelous and characteristic parts of the ecological vision." (Rueckert 108) But the Nile in the Egyptian vision is the protector and their life and death are connected to this River. With its Delta and Valley, the Nile is not only intimately bound up with history and nationhood, it is 'a place' which is , "inseparable from the concrete region in which it is found"(Casey 31). Places are "defined by "physical markers as well as social consensus"(Buell 63), and that are "centers of felt value"(Tuan 77), discrete if 'elastic' areas in which settings for the constitution of social relations are located and with which people can identify" (Agnew 263). Like present day eco-critics, ancient Egyptians were able to,

find the grounds upon which the two communities-the human and the natural-can coexist, cooperate, and flourish in the biosphere," consequently developing, "ecological visions which can be translated into social, economic, political, and individual programs of action." (Rueckert 107)

For ancient Egyptians the Nile represented a bearer of justice, an idea that is tied to the regularity of its irrigation patterns and the wealth that it inevitably brought to those living on his banks. They believed that the Nile was the centre of the world and offered their reverence to the River for the immense impact it held over their existence. Their poetry reflected not only their reverence and love for the Nile, but also their strong faith in the River as the source of their existence and greatness. The place, the non- human, gives life to the earth, the human, the trees and the cattle in 'Hymn to the Nile':

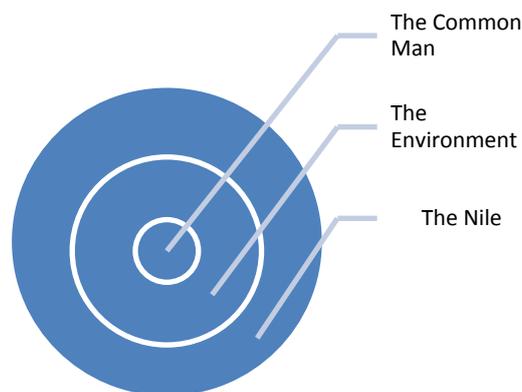
*Hail to thee, O Nile! Who manifests thyself over this land, and comes to give life to Egypt! Mysterious is thy issuing forth from the darkness, on this day whereupon it is celebrated! Watering the orchards created by Re, To cause all the cattle to live, you give the earth to drink, inexhaustible one. . You cause the workshops of Ptah to prosper!.Come (and) prosper! Come (and) prosper! O Nile, come (and) prosper! O you who make men to live through his flocks and his flocks through his orchards! Come (and) prosper, come, O Nile, come (and) prosper!(Thatcher 79-83)*

This song from ancient Egyptian Literature greets the Nile, the River that gives life to Egypt, the country that commemorates and rejoices over the day it has started flowing not from this earth but from the other world of eternity. The god of the sun, 'Re' or 'Ra', created the fruit gardens and the Nile 'Hapi'(Wilkinson 206) gives them life with its infinite water that also gives life to the cattle. The water of the Nile gives the earth its existence. It causes all that is created by the god of creation 'Ptah' to thrive. The repeated calls for the Nile to come and flourish follow all the praises. The choice of the words that are related to the River in the Hymen evokes the feelings of love, respect and inviolability, an image that poetry in later times will continue to reflect.

This relationship between the prosperous ancient civilization and preserving natural elements of the environment is observable in the history of Egypt since antiquity. Sons of the Nile, as Egyptians call themselves, took it as a duty to live in harmony with nature, and especially with the River which was pollution free(an ancient Egyptian needed to take to the grave an official document that he never polluted the Nile not even once in his lifetime otherwise he will not be allowed to pass through the gate to the other eternal life). This civilization, then, emerges from the commitment of the common man to maintain ecological balance that led to his involvement in environmental issues. The image of the relationship between the Nile, the common man, and the environment gives man no superiority over nature and its elements, he is surrounded by the environment that he preserves and the Nile protects both man and the environment. Derived from *Hymn to the Nile*, the following figure portrays this image of the river as the force that gives life to Egypt.

The relationship between the common man and his environment in Ancient Egypt as portrayed in *Hymen to the Nile*

It is an early ecological vision of the human – non- human relationship that Ancient Egypt introduced to the world. As the center of daily life this relationship between the Nile and the common man has also influenced the political movements that have engulfed the country up to the present time.



In 1919 the political party, “Al-Wafd,” started the first revolution in Egypt in the twentieth century. “The nationalist leader, Saad Zaghlul, with support from the entire country, openly demanded that Egyptians be allowed to determine their own destiny.” (Botman 17) Supporting independence and the evacuation of the British army after World War I, the Wafd Party called for a new constitution that would articulate the expectations of democracy and social justice.

Zaghlul “harnessed already widespread anti –British sentiment into a nationalist movement of significance that demanded a British withdrawal from the Nile Valley (Egypt and Sudan). In consequence, Zaghlul was arrested by British military personnel on March 8 of that year, along with others from his circle, including Ismail Sidqi and Muhamed Mahmoud, and deported to Malta. Within days, the country erupted in revolt, protesting against the portation of Zaghlul, the British occupation, and Britain’s refusal to allow Egyptian nationalists to represent their country in negotiations to determine Egypt’s post war status.” (Botman 17-18)

The monarchy, however, remained untouched and the King remained the Monarch of Egypt and Sudan. Unlike the German Revolution of 1919 that resulted in the replacement of Germany’s imperial government with a republic, Egypt’s Revolution of ‘the Peasants’ (Goldberg 261-280) succeeded in issuing the “1923 Constitution” based on a parliamentary representative system, and Saad Zaghlul became the first popularly elected Prime Minister of Egypt in 1924. In his 2011 book, *Ordinary Egyptians*, Ziad Fahmy evinces a belief that before the 1919 Revolution, all “popular media and culture” provided an opportunity for discussion and debate about “national identity” and an outlet for resistance to British and elite authority. In 1919 Revolution and later in 2011, the popular culture of pre-revolution Egyptian both eras ‘created a nation’ via satire, jokes, songs, and poetry (Fahmy 1)

In the context of the 1919 Revolution, the new school of the Revival of Modern Arabic Poetry introduced a group of poets who “changed the cultural life of Egypt and the Arab world. . .the Neo-Classical Arabic Poets, of the late nineteenth early twentieth century)” (Badawi 269) Mahmoud Samy Al-Barody, Hafez Ibrahim, Ahmed Shawqy Beik, Al-Zahawi, and Husaain Al-Marssafi and other Neo-Classical Arab poets, kept the same Arabic system of meter and rhyme, symmetry and unity of classical poetry. They all maintained emphasis on proper subject matter and established the intellectual and emotional foundations of modernization, and in so doing, renewed the social function of poetry and “the performance of modern Arabic literature is evaluated and judged primarily in terms of the objectives that its own producers set for themselves and the historical circumstances under which they wrote.” (Badwai 270)

One of the poets who revived Arabic poetry and praised Egypt’s greatness and her Nile was Hafez Ibrahim (1872-1932) Born on a ship floating in the Nile, and subsequently becoming concerned with the sufferings of his people, he is known as the “Poet of the Nile”. (Najmeldeen 11) “He believed that the Nile was the land, man, history, the past, the present, the future, welfare and beauty. . . He thought that the start and end of all relations was the Nile. All his poems never lacked a line on the Nile. As a linguist, he chose his words vigilantly, expressing new feelings and ideas uncommon among classical poets.” (Najmeldeen 12) Though Ibrahim’s lines on the Nile in his poem, “Look at the Eminent District of Azbakia”, echo the same meanings of ancient Egyptian Hymn, a new image of the River after building the Aswan Dam is described:

*I looked at the Nile, his banks shudder  
Flooding with blessings in the valleys  
Running slowly in each slope  
Never dried a land or intend to oppress  
He moved guarded by the men of irrigation  
As if he were a king guarded by his soldiers and court men  
The Nile used to complain the loss of his water  
Until the Aswan Dam was built.(Ibrahim 89-100)*

A sense of pride of the River, that is personified as a King, is merged with the poet's gratitude to the 'blessings' of the flood that never oppresses Egyptians or dries their lands.

Egypt's greatness is related to the Nile in Ibrahim's masterpiece, "Egypt Speaks for Herself",

*All creation stood still watching me  
Building the foundations of glory all by myself.  
As for challenges, I don't need to say  
The constructors of the Pyramids are enough.  
I am the crown of grandeur in the East  
...  
What beauty ever fascinated the world  
That I have not had, And why not:  
My ash is gold,  
My River is sweet and pure  
My sky glitters  
Wherever you go, there is a stream near a vine.(Ibrahim 89)*

His poetry is characterized by patriotism, pride of Egypt, of her past and her position in the East whose destiny is connected to hers. Personified, Egypt tells the universe how this country has built a great civilization that humans become motionless and astonished when watching the Pyramids that are living witnesses of her magnitude. The elements of nature in Egypt are sources of beauty even the ash is so precious. This pride is interrelated to the Nile and its ecological state in the beginning of the twentieth century when the water was 'sweet' and 'pure'.

This purity inspired the Arab Poet Laureate Ahmed Shawqi (1869-1932) to glorify 'The Nile',

*The pure Nile is a river from Heavens 'Al-Kawther'  
Paradise is his green banks  
Succulent with vernal scenery  
What magnificent and tender eternity  
The sacred, out flowing river  
Giving water to people and their plants  
And he spins what they wear  
He gives them the shiny cotton  
Benevolence is his attitude  
So the valley is always green (Shawqi 409)*

The Nile springs from heavens and the river banks are parts of Paradise. Personified, the generous Nile provides people and plants with water, and keeps Egypt's land green. Shawqi bestows sacredness of the ancient Hymns to the River and asks,

*When have you started flowing?  
And what type of generosity you bestow on the cities (what white  
hand you have on cities and towns)  
Did you originate from heavens or  
Sprang as streams from Paradise. . .  
Ages passed and you never change. . .  
You feed and water yet neither your pot nor your table is empty  
You pour water that formulates gold  
Overflow the land, long live Nile and your flood.(Shawqi 409)*

The poet starts with questioning the origin of the Nile and comes to this conclusion: it emerged from heavens or Paradise. Because of the eternity of the River and its endless water that creates cotton which is Egypt white gold, the poet prays for the river and its flood. Through reading Shawqi's poems, the reader recognizes that the Nile directs humans to be grateful because man and nature are not equalized, man does not master nature, the Nile is greater. The imagery leaves the reader to meditate on the Nile as a merciful body emanating from heavens. Shawqi's personification of the Nile and description of the relationship between the individual and the dominating element of environment recalls Neil Evernden's question in his essay *Beyond Ecology*, of

the role of the environment in the life of the individual' which he believes "is now transformed. . . Rather than: thinking of an individual spaceman who must slur up chunks of the world-"resources"-into his separate compartment, we must deal instead with the individual-in-environment, the individual as a component of, not something distinct from, the rest of the environment. (Evernden 97)

In early twentieth century Arabic poetry, the concept of the 'mutuality' of nature and culture may seem obvious. That is,

"the emergence of contemporary environmental criticism is in part the story of an evolution from imagining life-in-place as deference to the claims of(natural) environment toward an understanding of place-making as a culturally inflected process in which nature and culture must be seen as a mutuality rather than as separable domains'(Buell 67)

Thus, the Arabic poetry of Ibrahim, Ismael and Shwqi helped the common man and the 'peasants' of Egypt to preserve the love for the Nile and their country that the ancients had, to think of the Nile as an inseparable from their culture and existence even though there were few but serious ecological problems in the Nile by the end of the nineteenth and the beginnings of the twentieth century. The Aswan dam had "negative effects on the environment."(Couture- Eaton 1) Pollution of the drinking water in 1893 was an issue that Sir Edward Grey discussed in *The British Medical Journal*:

It cannot be denied that the dams the Irrigation Department has constructed all over the Delta have had a deleterious effect on the quality of the water. In many places the current is entirely stopped, the various reaches being thereby converted into many stagnant pools, in which the poisonous filth alluded to by us accumulates and putrefies. In numbers of such places the water is most offensive at certain seasons, and its surface covered with an iridescent scum."(Grey 199)

Although the building of the Aswan Dam in 1889 was encouraged, it has resulted in ecological problems. However, the water pollution had almost no impact on poetry of the period that continued to reflect the nation's reverence and love for the Nile.

In the forties of the twentieth century before the 1952 Revolution, the Wafd party, the Palace itself, the Muslim Brothers, and the Communists rejected the presence of British troops in Egypt and the Suez Canal. "Further, the larger question of complete political independence was cross-hatched with the economic difficulties faced by the majority of the population. The years after 1929 were the years

of the worldwide economic depression", (El Shakry 12) and in Egypt the people who were suffering supported the Free Army Officers in July 1952 who came to power, ended monarchy and started the Arab Republic of Egypt. They were calling for independence and evacuation of British troops, for a country free from the corruption that prevailed in politics and economy, in addition to social justice and the re-distribution of wealth, which was concentrated in the hands of a very small section of the population. Mohamed Nagib became the first Egyptian President, but in 1954, Gamal Abdel Nasser was regarded the rightful leader of the people and became the President of the Arab Republic of Egypt. Nationalism and patriotic feelings helped Nasser, who belonged to a family of the middle class Egyptian peasants, build a new Egypt (El Shakry 13).

With the 1952 Revolution the same tradition of the ancestors in respecting, loving and glorifying the Nile has been maintained in poetry. In *A Song for the Nile* Mahmoud Ismael (1910-70) expresses his deep love and sense of pride of the Nile,

*Hail the heart of existence and the fascination of the universe*

*Oh! Nile, the son of eternity, the wine of the Pharaoh*

*Hail heart of existence, my ancestors' home. (Ismael 200)*

Correlated to the whole universe as its heart and enthrallment, the poet's reverence of the Nile is merged with his sense of pride of belonging to Egypt. In this sense, the Nile serves as a symbol of national identity.

In another poem Mahmoud Ismael points out that even the highest political authority in Ancient Egypt respected the Nile. Being banished away from the river remained the severest punishment for an idol or indifferent man, as illustrated by these lines from his poem *The Pharaoh Addresses the Egyptians*:

*Do not touch the Nile if you do not exert effort,*

*Its pure water is not created for the indolent*

*Work hard everywhere in the galaxy*

*Or find another river to satisfy the thirsty (Ismael 198)*

The Nile is a river for people who are willing to build civilization, not just on this earth but also on other planets. The ecological function of the River in this poem, then, is not just a global one.

From the ancient times until the first half of the twentieth, greatness and purity have been the major features of the almost unpolluted Nile. However, in the second half of the twentieth century, the Nile underwent drastic ecological changes. The construction of the High Dam that started in 1960 and was completed in 1971, became the national project in which 30,000 Egyptians worked under Nasser's leadership. The High Dam helped to control the flood, to generate over 10 billion kilowatts of electricity every year for homes and industries and to irrigate the farm lands during the drought times. (El Shakry 10-13) However, the High Dam also caused silt to build up in Lake Nasser and thereby prevented this fertile nutrient from moving down the river, causing the nearby farmland to suffer from salt intrusion. These adverse effects had a large impact on the fertility of the farmland after stopping the natural flooding, "[the] sediment that once accumulated to form a shield against saltwater intrusion is scarce ... commercial and residential sprawl has sealed priceless soil underneath miles of concrete, the discharge of chemicals into delta lakes poses a threat to fishing and drinking water, and the Mediterranean coast is eroding" (Theroux 25).

After building the High Dam the risks faced by the Nile ecosystem were those related to various types of pollution, which is defined as: "an ecological problem because it does not name a substance or class of substances, but rather represents an implicit normative claim that too much of something is present in the environment, usually in the wrong place" (Garrard 6). In 2011, Mohamed Shmroukh and Ahmed Abdel Wahab proved in *Water Pollution and Riverbank Filtration for Water Supply Along River Nile, Egypt*, that, "Nile water in Egypt is facing rising sources of pollution despite all the programs for pollution control. Discharging industrial and domestic wastewater, return drainage of irrigated water, and flash flood into the River Nile represent the major sources of pollution." (Ray-Shamroukh 1) In rural areas, experiencing a rapid increase in population, sewage is often dumped into the river as a result of poor sanitation conditions. Furthermore, many industrial establishments do not follow the law, draining untreated wastewater into the river or even injecting it into the groundwater.

Usage of pesticides and fertilizers also pollute the river, as agricultural practices near the river use a high quantity of fertilizers and pesticides to cope with the changes in irrigation caused by the building of the dam itself. ( Ray- Shamroukh 5)

Before the 2011 Revolution of Egypt, these changes on the Nile and the documented increase in pollution are mirrored in contemporary Egyptian poetry. Farouq Goweda(1947), one of Egypt's prominent intellectuals and poets in the modern age, and Hisham Al Jakh(1979) criticize the economic, cultural, and social conditions, and reflect the frustrations felt by Egyptians in the last thirty years. In the following poem Goweda addresses the Nile in the title of the poem as 'A' River that lost its Contumacy.

*Why did you surrender ?  
For ages you suckled,us fear.  
You taught us silence and the impossible.  
Now you are hiding behind the years.  
You go back and forth like a faint apparition.  
Why did you surrender?  
You were once our pride  
You were the gift of the ungenerous time  
We let you break, though one day at your hands  
So many ages broke  
Your pride stayed above the time  
How did you become content with the caves of humiliation  
You used to go back and forth  
Carrying something dear for us  
It used to change the taste of the bad times  
Thus a luminous sea would flow out in the horizon  
And the sky would look as if newly dressed  
Embracing the land that dried  
You used to come  
And from you, we would drink the cups of pride.*

The poem starts with a question that personifies the Nile and states a fact: the River has changed and lost its pride, the nameless river is no longer the same sacred great Nile. It is the humiliation of the human and the non human that would lead later to the 25 January 2011 Revolution. "One of the slogans chanted during the revolution was "Lift your head up you are an Egyptian", which intended to overcome the feeling of humiliation and to empower dignity among Egyptians." (Bakr 72) Goweda uses the past tense to describe the river's sweet water that has always helped Egyptians to endure hardships all through their long history. That water 'was' the source of life and pride for Egyptians, but not anymore. Goweda uses rhetorical questions in the coming stanza to establish 'mutuality' of the human-non human relationship:

*Did they chain you as they chained us?  
Did they silence you as they did to us?  
My blood is from you  
Since you gave up, I saw my blood  
Liquidizes in my veins  
My blood became something queer for me*

*It is not my blood, water, or mud  
They taught us when we were young  
That our blood(just like the Nile) does not surrender*

The pronoun 'they' refers to the oppressors' thirty year- dictatorial regime in Egypt that 'chained' and 'silenced' both the Nile and the Egyptians. Both the water of the Nile and the Egyptian blood have changed, though they never did in the past. Curiously, the poet asks the Nile if it is fear then that made him descend into a state of humiliation:

*On your face remnants of grief  
In your eyes a collapse and fear  
Why are you afraid?  
You frightened monarchs in the past  
They feared your pride  
They feared your rage  
In the past sanctuary was worshipping you  
A King lived others died  
The king of kings you have remained  
They can never dethrone you  
But did they chain you  
To destroy inside us the time of pride.  
And the chains taught us the silence of humiliation,  
Slaves we became since they enslaved you.*

The answer for the question 'Why are you afraid?' comes in a series of reminders of the past greatness and power of the River that all Monarchs used to fear and worship; kings died and the Nile has survived. Yet, the poet believes that the destructive forces of Mubarak's regime were able to 'chain' the majestic River but they were never able to 'dethrone it'. Goweda finds out the reason for the present state of Egyptian 'silence of humiliation': it is their bond to the Nile: they are both 'enslaved'. Calling for the Nile to rebel in the last stanza, the poet tries to restore this bond by using the pronoun 'us',

*Oh Nile  
Let us revive the old spring,  
Let your water purify my hideous face  
Destroy your chains and mine  
The worst calamity is a paralyzed age  
Let us sow a new age  
To grow in the ugliness a beautiful face.  
When you and I surrender,  
My home address is humiliated pride  
Since you are not Egypt and you are not the Nile.*

Both the Nile and Egyptians can restore their lost pride when they rebel against 'those' who chained them. Regaining the old bond, 'you and I' at the end of the poem is to convey the final message of hopelessness as Egypt and the Nile are not what they were. 'During the last decade of Hosni Mubarak's rule the social, economic, and political tensions in Egypt were reaching levels hard to sustain in the long run.'(Naguib: 2011) The corruption that led to an incredible increase in poverty in

the country of the rich elite gave rise to a new generation of youth that preferred to die before reaching the shores of Europe on the death boats in their illegal immigrations rather than dying at home jobless and hopeless. For thirty years, "the state's strategies of repression . . . produced wealth for the few and impoverishment for the many." (Sowers and Toensing:2012)

Prior to the revolution, the Egyptian economy grew, but this growth did not trickle down, as it only benefited the regime's narrow social base. There were areas in Upper Egypt and Sinai that were completely deprived of the fruits of development leading to the marginalization of large sectors of society. Unemployment reached 9.7%, which is concentrated mostly among young people with university degrees.(Bakr 2011)

One of the youth of Egypt who never knew another president except Mubarak. In the new millennium the poet Hisham Al-Jakh (1978) regrets in a poem entitled 'Joha' his deep sense of belonging to the Nile and to Egypt and criticizes the political, economic, social and cultural crisis that the country faced on the hands of this regime. Aljakh writes:

*I am the one who grows gold in your land,  
Yet, the manure you feed me by your hand.  
I had no happiness, no luxury, nothing but disgust.  
My dignity, my bit of bread are objects for insult.  
You hate us! Why weren't you sterile.  
What does it mean Egypt is the "gift of the Nile",  
If every day I can't find water to drink within a mile.(Aljakh 3)*

With the degradation of the noble water of the River, the feeling of 'hatred' for the country, in this modern piece, substitutes the old love and reverence of the ancient Hymn or the classical poets. Lexically, for the first time a word like "manure" is used in Arabic poetry. The elevated classical Arabic of Ibrahim, Shawqi and Ismael is now replaced with the colloquial Egyptian Arabic of a young poet, who finds the prospects for a dignified life in his homeland dismal, none of his dreams can be realized because of unemployment and corruption that prevailed as a result of 'the policies that led to the impoverishment of the majority of the population.'"(Naguib 2011 ) The state of the Nile in the poem reflects the political and social degradation of life for an Egyptian. This type of personification was particularly useful for circumventing the often brutal censorship affecting artists and writers who chose to criticize the regime. The cynical tone in his questioning of the validity of the famous saying, 'Egypt is the gift of the Nile, indicates a new culture of indifference to what happens to the River when losing faith in one's country, in a present without freedom, and a future as yet unknown.

Lamenting the loss of freedom and the purity of the Nile, Goweda and Al Jakh realize that the deprivation that Egyptians have encountered in the last thirty years is tied to the activities that negatively affected the sources of water in the country. "Egypt faces a rapidly increasing deterioration of its surface and groundwater due to heavy discharges of polluted domestic and industrial effluents into its water bodies . . . Additionally, water pollution endangers the health of Egyptians because of 'excessive use of pesticides and fertilizers in agriculture.'"(El Saadi-Yousry- Jahin 18-30). These impacts are interconnected and form a complex system of interactions, the environment, the communities that rely on the Nile River for their livelihood, all the plants, animals, and humans that are negatively affected. "According to Rifaat and Mohamed (2004) the Nile River system receives a large quantity of industrial, agriculture and domestic wastewater; however, it is still able to recover in virtually all the locations, with very little exception."(ElSaadi, Yousry, Jahin 18-30)

Nevertheless, national and international efforts, green societies, and organizations have undertaken several initiatives that started cleaning the Nile and reducing the number of pollutants entering the

river. Among them is the '(RBF) or Riverbank Filtration', which is a technique for water treatment that can "improve surface water quality. . . the ability to resolve a broad range of water quality problems in an economic manner and to provide clean and safe drinking for the residents of a desert country such as Egypt." (Ray, Shamroukh 5)

It seems that the attempts to save the Nile from pollution had its impact on Egyptians. In January 25 2011, "young men and women of the middle class, most of them university graduates and all of them adept in the use of modern communications technology"(Heggy 22 ) conducted and spurred on the Revolution supported by people from all the classes, religions, and ideological orientations who participated in this revolution. The youth decided to save their future and demonstrate against the thirty- year old regime, they called for all Egyptians to join them,

On January 25<sup>th</sup>, 2011: the number of Egyptian men and women who took to the streets to demand change ran into the millions... Even taking into account the difference in the size of the population, the numbers were proportionally far greater than those who participated in the 1919 revolution or those who took to the streets in support of the army takeover on July 23rd, 1952... Thus the quantitative aspect attests to the fact that we witnessed the largest popular movement in Egypt's modern history, as well as one of the largest in the history of the world over the last two centuries.(Heggy 1)

The Egyptian revolution had triumphed. Nearly a thousand were martyred, tens of thousands injured, but Mubarak was history. "Egypt's January 2011 revolution ousted former President Hosni Mubarak."(Abou- El-Fadl2012). Al Jakh, who participated in the Revolution, documented this phase in the history of Egypt in his short poem *A Vertical View of Medan Al-Tahrir (Liberation Square)*:

*Hide all your old poems*

*Tear all your old notebooks*

*And today write poetry for Egypt as much as the old*

*No silence can impose its fear anymore*

*Thus, now you can write:*

*Peace be upon you: Egypt's Nile and her people (Aljakh 2011)*

Al Jakh apologizes to Egypt and her Nile, no fear will silence the people who restored their freedom, their country and lost pride. The Egyptian revolutionaries that the whole world has seen in the beginnings of the twenty-first century cleaning Medan Al-Tahrir after the success of the people's Revolution, can help in reincarnating the Nile of their ancestors and undo the adverse human-caused effects that were inflicted upon and in the River over the past century. When considering the human landscape, Peirce F. Lewis believes that it is, "our unwitting autobiography, reflecting our tastes, our values, our aspirations, and even our fears, in tangible, visible form" (Adams 1). The Nile, with its banks, with the lands it irrigates has always been their 'autobiography'. It evokes in Egyptians an emotional association that enables them, as Lydia R. Cooper puts it, "to embark on a transformative journey toward a more ethical-and hopeful-perception of nature and of the right relationship between humans and the environment."(Cooper 157).

The idealized descriptions of the Nile in the hymns of ancient Egyptians serve as basis for an early ecocritical vision. During the first two revolutions in Egypt in the twentieth century, 1919 and 1952, the classical poets of the modern age maintained the same vision reflecting the culture of a society that underwent political turmoil but never changed the people's relationship to the Nile. For the first time, in the thirty years of Hosni Mubarak's regime, the ecological changes to the River negatively affected the old bond between the Nile and Egyptians. The poetry of the period under the effect of pollution of the sacred water distorted the image of the historical pure Nile. Regaining a pollution-free Nile with the third revolution 2011 is becoming a dream as freedom has always been a dream that the people of Egypt made true.

## Notes

All verse translations of Arabic poetry used in this paper are the author's own work.

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## AUTHOR'S BIOGRAPHY

- Dr. Hala Ewaidat is an Assistant Professor of English Literature, Department of English, Mansoura University, Egypt.
- A former Head of the Department of English, College of Education, Dammam University, Saudi Arabia.
- PhD in English Literature and Culture, The Faculty of Arts, Ain Shams University, Egypt, 1997. The title of the thesis: *Deism and its Manifestations in the major works of : Shaftesbury, Pope, Dr. Jonson and Voltaire. A Cultural and Critical Approach*.
- MA in English Novel, The Faculty of Arts, Mansoura University, 1993. The title of the thesis: *The Anti-Utopian Elements in the Major Satires of George Orwell and Evelyn Waugh*.
- I have been teaching English language, Literature and Culture at Mansoura University and Dammam University in Saudi Arabia for 28 years.
- I taught English courses at the American University in Cairo.
- I taught Arabic courses for Canadians in ISWAP in Egypt.
- I am a member of: asle.UK , MLA, ACLA