

## The Poetic Space of Robert Frost and Mahmoud Al Breikan

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### Abstract

The paper is an attempt to explore the parallels, similarities and contrasts between the poetic experience of the modern American poet, Robert Frost (1874-1963), and the contemporary Iraqi poet, Mahmoud Al Breikan (1931-2002). It consists of three sections. The first is an introduction exploring the different dimensions of Frost's poetic experience and its impact on Mahmoud Al Breikan's writings. The second is concerned with Frost's and Al Breikan's concepts of poetry and its role in life. It also covers the aesthetics of writing as practiced by the two. The final section, much the longest, tackles the common thematic points and the general view of man and the world in their poetry. The conclusion is a summary of the issues raised.

Initially, a reference has to be made about the concept of 'space' as used in the present study, since it is a key element in determining the procedure of dealing with the topics in question. 'Space' is a broad term that includes not only the literal meaning of place (which is crucial in the poetry of both Frost and Al Breikan), but also the poetic and visionary worlds their imaginative powers have sought to erect. The literal and metaphoric suggestions, then, are inherent in this term which fits the practices of both poets very well. As will be shown in the following pages, the two levels often interlock and it is not easy to find demarcation lines between them, since fact and fiction form the cornerstone of their poetic enterprises.

When the American poet Robert Frost died in 1963, the Iraqi modernist poet, Mahmoud Al Breikan was only thirty-two years old and had already published a number of poems and essays. No concrete and reliable evidence of any direct contact between the two men is available. In terms of disposition and idiosyncrasy, Al Breikan from the very start is known for his interest in privacy and keeping a low profile. He has not shown much interest in travelling to European countries like his friend and fellow-writer, Badr Shakir Assayyab (Britain) or Abdul Wahhab Al Bayyati (Spain). As a matter of fact, Al Breikan's travels have been confined to Syria and Kuwait. Actually he has compensated

this lack of direct contact with Europeans and Americans through his fastidious study of world literature, whether in its original languages or through translations. In his influential study of the poetic achievements of the modern Arab poets, Professor Abdul Wahid Lulua states that in 1947, the Iraqi pioneering poet Nazik Al Malaika (1936-2007) published the translation of two poems from F.T.Palgrave (ed.), *The Golden Treasury of the Best Songs* (1861). This was the first time the Arab poets have been exposed to the new technical innovations and rhythms of the western poets (p.60). Jabra Ibrahim Jabra's translation of Sir James Frazer's *The Golden Bough* (1922) opened new vistas before the Arab poets as regards the manipulation of mythology in verse writing. Although AL Breikan's field of study is law, his competence in English was excellent both in speech and writing. Indeed it is no less adequate than that of Assayyab whose major was English. It is not certain, however, that the copy available at the Faculty of Education in 1947 includes Frost's poetry as it does in its centennial edition in 2002. Although there is no conclusive evidence about direct or indirect contacts between the two poets, Al Breikan's selection of topics, his general vision of man and the universe, and the narrative and formal characteristics of his poetry are sufficient to justify this comparative study. However, my personal contacts with the poet (he lived and died in Basra, Iraq) have convinced me that he was well-versed in music, and western thought as well as Arab literary tradition and philosophy. These elements will be felt in his poetry and his perspective of the world. As such, it is not surprising to learn that from the outset Al Breikan's poetry draws upon the symphonic structures, musical molds and their interrelations, as testified by one of his friends (Yassin, 26-7). Also it shows an advanced sense of awareness as regards the changes in the technical and stylistic aspects of European literature and thought.

In this regard it is worth recalling that Al Breikan, as in Frost's case, has remained loyal to the tradition and canon of his own culture, shunning as much as possible the tendencies to abstraction and deliberate mystification. Indeed both poets have capitalized on the direct, simple, and suggestive diction, which is one of the salient advantages of their poetry. In the poetry of both poets, there is an unmistakable lyrical touch and the poet's inner feelings and misgivings are expressly manifested. The points of comparison between them cover thematic and technical sides. One of these is the nature-culture relationship that engages a distinct position in their poetry. The thematic point lies in the emphasis of both poets on man's predicament and his helplessness before ruthless and crushing forces. Related to these is their interest in visionary worlds where the relation between man and metaphysical powers is deeply probed. Their poetry shows a keen perception of the unruly challenges of technology, wars, disasters and impending destruction. Both poets share a common concept of the nature of poetry and its role in life and society. In terms of form and style, both poets have

paid much attention to the linguistic, stylistic and phonetic structures of their poems so that the reader is enabled to glean various meanings and interpretations, according to his own experiences and literary awareness.

What matters, however, is that Al Breikan's poetic sensibility finds its impetus in the experiments of English and world poets like Cavafy, Lorca, Eliot, Yeats and Frost. Another equally significant tributary to his world cultural view is his deep interest in Arab tradition. Here the comparison stops as Al Beikan represents a special case in mood, disposition, and attitudes in life. His continuous retreat and shunning all types of publicity are matters to be considered in any serious study of his poetry. In the last thirty years of his career, the editors of literary journals in Iraq exerted great efforts in convincing Al Breikan to put an end to his solitude, at least temporarily. The editorial board of *Al Aqlam* literary journal devoted a special issue to his poetry and reviews and judgments of his achievement (Vol.3-4,1993), *Asfar* literary journal (Vol.14, 1992), and the memorial issue of *Al Masala* literary journal, London (Vol.4, Sept., 2002). Apart from these, it is difficult to have an access to his other published writings or the drafts that have not been published and lost forever after his death. Despite the dearth of the material that enables the researcher to give a thorough picture of the man and his poetic caliber, it is evident through the views, judgments and analyses of scholars and fellow-writers that Al Breikan has occupied an important position in the poetic movement in Iraq and the Arab world. The significance of his poetry springs from the successful mingling between form and content: the content is profound, comprehensive, and universal. The poetic form tends to be simple, crystalline, and fascinating in its striking scenic repetitions, flashback, rhythms and 'the mirror technique where the structure is reflective or literal' (Muhsin,14). His interest in the poetics of the language and its suggestiveness is a factor at work in endowing his diction with its fine and irresistible effects.

Frost represents the polar opposition as he is a celebrity, a charismatic figure who has won the admiration of his readers in America and Britain. He has won four Pulitzer prizes and received a number of honorary degrees from the best universities in America. His reputation reached the climax when President John Kennedy invited him to recite some of his poetry at the Presidential Inauguration in 1963 (Cox,4). Even the United States Senate passed resolutions honoring his birthdays. So Frost enjoyed all the advantages of a successful public figure, respected and admired by all types of readers except many of those involved in the critical scène. Indeed Frost's interviews and judgments of the critics of his age show a great extent of misunderstanding and misconception between the two parties. His poetic bent is basically romantic, lyrical and narrative. The New Critics of the 1960's prescribed certain molds and warned

against particular "fallacies" such as the "intentional fallacy", "pathetic fallacy", and the "affective fallacy" which do not appeal to a poet like Frost. He does believe that meaning remains within the control of the poet. His overriding principle is that of freedom in choosing and arranging his material in the way he likes,

All I would keep for myself is the freedom of my material—  
the condition of body and mind now and then to summons aptly  
from the vast chaos of all I have lived (Frost, 1964, vii).

The inevitable result of all this is a growing sense of discontent and unease marking the relation between Frost and his critics, a point that will receive much attention in the following sections.

In contrast to all this, Al Breikan has deliberately and stoically lived in a self-imposed obscurity and avoided as much as possible the dazzling lights of publicity. From the very beginning Al Breikan has been preordained to a career of introspection and philosophical speculation of the human condition which will materialize in many memorable poetic pieces. This serious meditation about man's unhappy lot is a recurrent theme in his poetry.

A passing look at the works of these two poets, for all the striking differences in poetic caliber, structures, and particularity, betrays some common denominators between the two. Curiously enough, they share some aspects pertaining to their views of others and themselves, for all the striking differences already pointed out. This rings peculiar and surprising when we bear in mind that, on the face of it, Frost is a national figure in his own country, while Al Breikan is a sort of hermit devoting all his life and energy to the philosophical meditations and fruitful excavations of memory. The studies of Frost's experiences and works show that under the misleading facades of overwhelming popularity and success, there are layers of dark sides: a gnawing sense of self-doubt, phobia and discontent. For instance, his battle with the New Critics and their debilitating critical standards is a point at work in his eventual psychological reactions. Moreover, he has had his own dilemma concerning artistic integrity and the sacrifices it entails. The critic Lawrence Thompson elaborates this issue in Frost's life when he quotes some of his confessions. Frost is quoted to be admitting that he is "merely a selfish artist most of the time" (p.ix). The extrovert and positive sides of his character (his affirmations, encouragements, tendernesses, humor, wit, playfulness...etc.) conceal the other dark and even opposite of all these ("the periods of gloom, jealousy, obsessive resentments, sulking, nervous rages...partly because he lacked confidence in himself, he suspected the presence of enemies everywhere, and he frequently indulged his passion for hurting others" (p.ix). Such is the complexity of his psychological makeup that he has been called "an extremely complicated man"

(Gawinn, 24). The irony is that for all the prestige and honor conferred upon him, Frost remains "an outsider" (Waggoner, 128), concerning the duality of his own literary predilections (writing simple and unadorned poetic statements) and what critics have expected or wanted him to do. Given these factors, poetry, in Frost's case, is a sort of relief or a means of assuaging his turbulent moments of self-deprecation and restlessness. These states of unease and dismay are felt in many of his poems where he tackles a variety of topics, not least of which are his apprehensions towards religious faith.

The Iraqi poet's career is no less controversial and problematic. Indeed it is subject to much hearsay, especially as Al Breikan<sup>†</sup> has done his utmost best to resort to a strict routine of self-enclosed activities and keeping a low profile regarding publicity.

Indeed this particular side of Al Breikan is an ancillary and even indispensable element in the controversy about his poetic achievement. All the efforts that have been exerted to figure out the reasons behind this unusual phenomenon in literary life have been only partially successful. One psychological theory, among a host of assumptions and guessing, is his personal idiosyncrasy, the peculiar disposition of doubting and fearing the public life and its heavy costs. It is his own austerity and great admiration of those poets whose personal life has been completely dissociated from their poetic practices, like the classic Abu Al Allaa Al Mia'arri (941-1027), the blind poet whom Al Breikan admires and perhaps identifies with for his great visionary view and gloomy and pessimistic concepts of life and human vanity. Indeed the visions of his allegorical text, *Risalat Al Gufran (The Epistle of Forgiveness)* swarm in Al Breikan's mind as a memorable text that deserves to be put in line with *The Divine Comedy* by Dante (1265-1321). In fact Al Breikan also has shown interest and consideration in Dante's journey to the other world, but with one striking difference: Al Breikan's woe-begone people stumble in their secular inferno and pathetically miss the guidance of a Virgil or, for that matter, Beatrice. They are entirely lost in a world they find lacking in equipoise and meaning. Another is the misgiving, the phobia of the mob and its subversive effects or encroachments on his meticulous poetic integrity. Despite this long solitude and infrequent appearance, withholding and publishing, Al Breikan has remained a key figure among his generation of poets who tried to give him his due in distinction and creativity. After his death, his entire achievement has been reevaluated and reconsidered. Many poets, critics, researchers and literary historians have given their testimonies, judgments and analyses of this poet, some of which are included in the present study. All this is an irrefutable token

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<sup>†</sup> All the translations of the Arabic poems and essays are my own.

that Al Breikan is a major figure in the Arabic poetic scene whose achievement is considerable and memorable. Moreover, his own poetic texts and views are successful enough to extract the credit they rightly deserve, without the intercession or promotion of their author. They are self-propelled, thanks to Al Beikan's painstaking efforts of revising, deleting, polishing and long periods of incubation.

Al Breikan has always been intent upon keeping away from the maddening crowd that leaves a damaging effect on the freshness of his artistry. More important, however, is the obsession or, if you will, the neurotic or morbid complex that prevents the poet from displaying the fruits of his imagination lest they lose their distinction and uniqueness. No matter how valid or invalid these claims and assumptions may be, the fact remains that he has written a lot and of the same quality of the pioneering leaders of Arab poetic modernism, but because of this side in his character he has not won the position he rightly deserves in the evolution of the poetic movement. Al Breikan, after all, is a key figure in the attempts to write a new type of poetry whose interest focuses on nothing but man and his ordeals in this world. Obviously, publicity or lack of publicity, as in the case of the latter, has its own merits and demerits in the type of poetry written and the expectations held about it as will be shown in following.

Leaving aside these worries and fears about both personal and impersonal destinies, both poets share an equally powerful faith in the social role assigned to poetry. Both are involved in a serious enterprise of making poetry an accessible means of pleasure and enlightenment. Indeed they are socially committed in the sense defined by Sartre in his renowned book; *What is Literature* (1948). Their concern is essentially human. They are known for their outright rejection of any denaturing or dehumanizing force in the face of man. Frost cherished a clear-cut conception of poetry and what is expected of it to do. This view runs counter to the formalists and their famous doctrine of the poem which "should not mean but be". In Frost's poetic practices and arguments, the poem appears to be a direct and straightforward message whose meaning is not hard to decipher. In his essay, "The Constant Symbol", he offers a rule of thumb by which we may judge his poetry or that of others, "Every poem is an epitome of the great predicament; a figure of the will braving alien entanglements" (Thorp, 45). The most important factor which Frost has emphasized is "the ulteriority" of the poem. Moreover, the overt and covert meanings and levels are there as well and it is left for the discerning reader to infer or bestow upon the poem this meaning or that. Frost gives here the impetus for poets like Al Breikan to write a poem that has a basic social role and other underlying meanings to be inferred. In other words, Frost's poetry, in addition to Al Breikan's, belongs to the "readerly" or

"lisible" type, specified by Roland Barthes, in its capacity to render more than one meaning concurrently (Culler, 32). Frost has continuously held a firm idea about the balance or synthesis between the social and aesthetic sides of the poem,

Poetry is the renewal of words forever and ever. Poetry is that by which we live forever and ever unjaded. Even the poetry of the trade names gives the lie to the inoriginal who would drag us down in their own powerlessness to originate (Frost, 1995, 775).

As in the case of other visionaries like Blake or Yeats, Frost finds that poetry is simply a passing glimpse at the mystery enveloping man's situation in this world. He sums up this matter in the following one-stanza poem, "A Blue Ribbon at Amesbury"

The lowly pen is yet a hold  
Against the dark and wind and cold  
To give a prospect to a plan  
And warrant prudence in man.

Indeed this is a laconic epitome of both the personal and impersonal tasks of the act of writing. The poet is there to inspire wisdom and stamina in man in his daily encounters and clashes with a hostile and baffling environment. The poet, seen from this vantage point, is a "sort of mystique manqué", an aborted or frustrated mystic. This ambiguous role of the poet is elaborated by the Abbe Bermond. The mystic, we learn, beholds "the ineffable vision as it lures him over the thresholds of silence, whereas the poet takes a quick pee and scurries back while there is still time to tell about what he has glimpsed" (Nemerov, 150). In fact there are many visionary poems written by both poets where the profound implications are skillfully dovetailed with the explicit levels. Hence the richness and plurality of meanings characterizing their poetry.

As in the case of his romantic predecessors, Frost cherishes a semi-romantic idea of poetry. Poetry, as perceived by Frost, is not simply a voluntary act of will or choice; rather it is an irresistible drive that forces itself in a verbal articulation. This Jungian perception of poetry does not rule out the role of the reader as an ancillary agent in the creative process. As he puts it,

A poem begins with a lump in the throat, a homesickness, or a lovesickness. It is a reaching-out toward expression; an effort to find fulfillment. My definition of poetry is that this formal fusion of distant elements shall achieve the personal idiom of the poet's expression without sacrificing that happy correspondence which must exist between his own experience and the experience of those who came often to read or hear the poem (Frost, 1929, 1).

He insists on a synthesis between form and content as he finds that "Art strips life to form". His dictum about this organic relation between these two elements is epitomized in the statement that "Poetry often makes you remember what you don't know you knew" (Frost, 1964, vi). This positive aspect of Frost's concept of poetry is of prime significance, since it acts as a springboard for his line of poetry which he has maintained throughout his long career. It is also the direct cause of his clash and resentment against the formalistic critics of his age. Therefore, his poetry is not simply an act of self-indulgence or an individualistic game. The social commitment of poetry is a point at work in Frost's understanding of literature in general. Again the other extreme of this sociological conception of poetry is to be avoided as Frost asserts, since the sloganizing or propaganda is a sort of anathema he is always against "A poem is not didactic, but provides an immediate experience which begins in delight and ends in wisdom." (Frost, 1964, vi). Its final message is that it "provides a momentary stay against confusion" (Cox, 21).

Such laudable views of poetry and its constructive and sustaining role in the life of the individual and community as a whole are felt in Al Breikan's view of what poetry is and what it addresses. Actually this is a recurrent and invariable principle in his thinking. Improvising a memorable and influential speech on the sixth anniversary of the death of Badr Shakir Assayyab (1926-1964) under the heading "Some Views about the Ordeal of Poets", Al Breikan elaborates his own understanding of poetry and its sacrifices. The split he raises here is actually universal as he talks about the Scylla of the allurements of the word and the Charybdis of the challenges of the actual world. In that speech, Al Breikan projects some of his own agonies on the writer in question since he admits that,

المرور بالشعر ليس عادة من العادات، انه اكتشاف يغير، او هو استصاءه بشراهه  
تضى حدود الأبد.

Passing by poetry is not merely a habit. Rather it is a discovery that radically changes the individual, an epiphany, a spark that lights the boundaries of eternity (Abdul Emir, 32).

Between the light of poetry and the darkness of the actual world, Al Breikan seems to be oscillating for a long time and the resolution comes in the last twenty years or so of his career when he devoted all his time and energy to writing poetry. He excluded all other worldly affairs and temptations from his primary interest. In an interview with the Kuwaiti literary journal, *Al Bayan* (1969), he spells out his views of poetry which do not veer very much from those of Frost's,



There is no single law binding writers. They are different in objectives and outputs. Some are content with publishing their works in journals and newspapers or transmitting them through broadcasting stations. They float on the daily march of events and address the common taste and seek fleeting renown and false personal success. However, there are others who aspire to have special achievements and produce significant works of art. Some maintain their integrity and, consequently, it is natural that they keep away from the chorus in art and literature. They are preoccupied with life and creativity and they intend to serve the cause of man in the way they deem fit. It is natural that the writer writes to be read, but he has the full right to select the manner of his commitment (Abdul Latif, 112).

Obviously, this is Al Breikan's last-ditch defence against the ceaseless process of vulgarizing and trading upon poetry for material and utilitarian purposes. As Frost suggests elsewhere, this striking conception of poetry represents a "momentary stay against confusion", and the "confusion" referred to is anything that plays havoc in the creative writing and its integrity.

Technically speaking, the two poets have some common points in presenting their material. It is quite obvious in any poem selected from Frost or Al Breikan that the dominant tone is narrative. The accumulation of details and the succession of shots are skillfully manipulated so that the ancillary meanings can be generated. Of all his poems, Frost's "Birches" (1916) is exceptional in its brilliant mingling between "the visual and the auditory senses" (Beach, 19). The factual and symbolic planes of the poem interlock in a superb way. Also the elements of oppositions, paradoxes, doubling and juxtaposition are present in the first stanza,

When I see birches bend left and right  
Across the lines of straighter darker trees,  
I like to think some boy's been swinging them.  
But swinging does n't bend them to stay  
As ice-storms do. Often you must have seen them  
Loaded with ice a sunny winter morning  
After a rain. They click upon themselves  
As the breeze rises, and turn many-colored  
As the stir cracks, and cracks their enamel.

The individual-nature relationship is central here, and it is the evanescence of things that receives much emphasis. The surface meaning of the poem is the assault of winter ice storms on the birches that have to put up with this weight till the moment of release. The implicit similes and extended metaphors show that birches are compared to girls in the sexual act. He describes it as follows,

They are dragged to the withered bracken of the load  
And they seem not to break, though once they are bowed  
So low for long, they never right themselves.

Frost is not content with this implicit comparison with human beings; he refers directly to the connotations of the whole situation,

Girls on hands and knees that throw their hair  
Before them over their heads.

Indeed the poem suggests that the "ice" here that topples the surface of the branches temporarily is a reference to the erotic act since the whole poem celebrates the act of 'subduing' and 'conquering' the birches. This is a roundabout way of saying that the poem is about enticing girls to sexual activity.

The dramatic dialogue is a key element in Frost's poetic technique. It is an unusual dialogue as the two participants involved are the poet himself and the natural or physical objects surrounding him and forcing him to raise questions which he does not expect to find answers for. This is the main thrust of his technique, as the critic Harold H. Watts forcibly argues (Cox, 105), but it is apt to remember that this technique is in fact a monologue as the addressee is Frost himself as seen in his culminating line of "The Oven Bird" (1916). The American warbler that builds a dome-shaped nest on the oven can only drive the poet to raise many questions not only about the bird but also about man in general,

There is a singer everyone has heard  
Loud, a mid-summer and amid-wood bird,  
Who makes the solid tress trunks sound again.

This striking vitality will suffer from entropy as the season changes and the weakness and inertia it inevitably brings,

And come that other fall we name the fall.  
He says the highway dust is over all.  
The bird would cease and be as other birds.  
But he that knows in singing not to say.  
The question that he frames is but words  
Is what to make of a diminished thing?

The concluding statement is marked by the brilliant and moving technical and stylistic innovation which the critic Frank Lentricchia identifies as a mark of distinction "Frost began to probe the power of his redemptive imagination" (Lentricchia, 107).

In "Out Far Nor in Deep" one can easily notice the use of juxtaposition between opposite views: the stars' fall and their renewed life; raining in the sea

and its saltiness. The alliteration is too self-evident to require further clarification,

Stars, I have seen them fall  
But when they drop and die.  
No star is lost at all.  
From all the star-sown sky  
The toil of an ant that  
Helps not her primal fault.  
It rains in the sea  
And still the sea is salt.

Apart from the natural elements which turn in Frost's poetry in to suggestive symbols such "space", "stars", "snow", "tress", "streams ".etc., the poet is also interested in making seemingly neutral objects like "house" or "farm" symbolize a whole society or even a whole culture (Tilak,63).

What kind of style Frost has followed? Obviously Frost is not content with Buffon's assertion that has style is the man himself. He has worked out his style from pragmatic and actual needs necessitated by the requirements of the poem and its particular world. Style in poetry or prose, according to Frost," is that which indicates how the writer takes himself and what he is saying" (Thompson, xiii). This simple but practical and independent understanding of style does not appeal to those critics whose yardsticks are the aesthetics of the poem, not its subject matter or even the intentions of its creator, since all these are fallacies, both "intentional "and "affective".

As already suggested in the previous pages, part of Frost's dismay is the invariably cool judgment of his verse. Hence James Cox's labeling him in a paradoxical way "He seemed untouched by the drift of poetry. Though it is impossible to speak of him as anything other than a modern, it is difficult to place him in the main current of poetry (Cox,4). So the modernity of Frost's poetry is temporal rather than technical, as his critics have kept reiterating, since Frost has always been adamant regarding his artistic choices which he has not been ready to give any concessions about. Modernism in the sense prescribed by its practitioners and theorists like Pound, Eliot, and Yeats, is alien and unacceptable to Frost, the man and artist. His poetry in mainly lyrical, idyllic,and more or less romantic.

This particularity in Frost' line of verse is what we come across when we study Al Breikan's poetry. In the forties of the twentieth century, most poets of his generation were encouraged to emulate and have that cross-fertilizing between the Arab tradition and western use of mythology put in vogue after the publication of Jabra's translation of *The Golden Bough* (1954). In Al Breikan's

case, there is a striking absence of myths and far-fetched metaphors and outlandish references to names, figures, myths and religious suggestions boosted by the translation of Eliot and his followers of imagistic writings. In contrast, his diction is direct, simple but lucid and rich when taken in its wider poetic context. In one of his poems, Al Breikan tells the reader of the necessity of looking at life afresh, sensing the beauty and charm inherent in the most common things,

أجمل ما في العالم  
مشهده العابر  
ومباهجه الصغرى  
طوبى لك  
ان كنت بسيط القلب  
فستفهم مجد الارض  
سحر الاشياء المألوفه  
ايقاع الدأب اليومي  
وجمال أواصر لا تبقى  
وسعادة ما هو زائل!

The most beautiful thing in the world is its fleeting scene.  
And little joys.  
Beautitude to you,  
If you are goodhearted  
You will realize the glory of the earth,  
The magic of common things  
The rhythm of daily wont,  
The beauty of short-termed ties,  
The pleasure of what is evanescent!

On the face of it, the poem is a plea for appreciating, enjoying, and seizing the passing lovely moment before it is wasted. We notice that the tone is a pensive one as the plea is provisional and in fact it is hard to attain since people's views always tend to all that is inaccessible and unapproachable. If Frost has stressed the double function of poetry in pleasure and enlightenment, it is most evident in this representative stanza which inescapably loses much of its charm in the act of translation.

Along with the terseness of diction, Al Breikan has a similar interest in the narrative type of poetry. There is a huge amount of repetition of scenes, events, objects, doublings, and dramatic monologues which will become evident as we approach the following section of his relation with nature. From time to time the

author allows himself to intervene and comment on the thematic implications of his verse. By careful use of the word and locating it in the proper context, Al Breikan has the merit of making the common appear uncommon, if we may borrow the doctrine of the Russian Formalists of "defamiliarization". In similar terms, Frost has already argued about the necessity of seeing the same material from a new and innovative angle,

The artist must value himself as he snatches a thing from some previous order of time and space into a new order with not so much as a ligature clinging to it of the old place where it was organic (Frost, 1964, viii).

All this will become clear as we turn to the theme of man-nature duality which is central in the poetry of both poets. Indeed it is the quintessence of the following section.

**II:** On the whole, Frost's poetry is often classified as pastoral. It is tinged with romantic streaks in its recurrent emphasis on the natural elements and their implications. Frost himself refuses this labeling of his poetry. He is quoted to be saying that he is not 'a nature poet'. Rather he prefers the term 'environmentalist' (Cox, 105). This point is worth-quoting in some detail as Frost's use of the natural objects serves a further and even a manifold function. Nature here is not celebrated for its aesthetics or healing effects as, say, in the poems of Wordsworth and Shelley. Frost is quite aware that he is addressing a specific sensibility of readers that have been preoccupied with the nagging questions of survival, hard living conditions and formidable challenges. The natural world as viewed by Frost serves as a kind of fulcrum, and objective correlative of the world at large. Nature in Frost's poetry is made to comment on and intensify the human condition, or to quote Rubin's phrase, "drawing the human condition from nature" (Rubin, 37). In other words, the natural scenery has a thematic level: a deepening or heightening of man's consciousness before both interior and exterior threats and challenges. Examples abound here. Suffices it to cull some typical pieces where the duality of the natural/nurtured, inner/outer, solitude/intimacy, physical/ spiritual informs its fabric. His own predilections are, as expected, pro what is natural and impulsive. In "But Outer Space", he crystallizes this expressly in a very short but suggestive stanza,

But Outer Space  
At least this far,  
For all of the fuss  
Of the populace.  
Stays more popular Than populace.

In the other poem "Fire and Ice", the topic of geology and apocalypses is pivotal. Here the poet speculates about the end of life and man, whether the destruction will be caused by natural catastrophe or by man's inherent moral weakness. His conclusion prioritizes the second,

Some say the world will end in fire  
Some say in ice  
From what I've tasted of desire  
I hold with those who favor fire.  
But if it had to perish twice  
I think I know enough of hate  
To say that for destruction ice  
Is also great and would suffice.

The poet's masterstroke is felt when the reader realizes that these two natural elements (fire and ice) are in fact fraught with human implications. Indeed "fire" in the Frostian terminology could refer to the genial and warm intimacy while "ice" is suggestive of spleen and indifference. To be sure, this is the climax of another poem "Out, Out\_" typifying the lack of warmth in human relationships. As indicated by its very title, nothing is interiorized and things remain on the external level "out", physically and spiritually. A boy in the countryside saws wood and suddenly cuts his hand. All hopes pinned on the doctor's arrival prove to be of no avail. Frost's description is laconic and suggests, more than it states, the ever-increasing chasm separating human beings from each other,

But the hand was gone already  
The doctor put him in the dark of the ether,  
He lay and puffed his lips and with his breath.  
And then the watcher at his pulse took fright,  
Little\_ less\_ nothing!\_ and that ended it.

.....  
*And they, since they  
Were not the one dead, turned for their affairs.*(my italics)

Man's misery, as suggested by Frost, does not stem from his being subject to unpredictable and gratuitous chances only, but what aggravates his pain is the growing wall of carelessness and ego-centric disposition.

In "Thrush Music", the theme of human desolation is associated with natural elements, this time a song of a thrush,

Far in the Pillared dark  
Thrush music went—  
Almost like a call to come in

To the dark and lament.  
But no, I was out for stars;  
I could not come in.  
I mean not even if I asked,  
And I had n't been.

It is worthwhile to note that the dualities of place and color sensation are present here—outside, inside, dark, light, and invitation, withholding. The final impression the poem gives is that of "loneliness and desolation" (Thorp, 43), even though the virtual situation in the poem is simply a bird's song. The darkness of the forest and the siren-like music of the bird trigger many associations in the reader's mind about the danger or threat lurking within and disguised in the seemingly beautiful song. It is a contrast between the conscious and unconscious, the innocent and the dismantling.

A further example supporting the poet's use of natural and pastoral elements to express human and universal topics is "The Bear". Indeed the idea of the caged bear will be felt in Al Breikan's circus lion that has been decapitated and stripped of any fierceness and power. Frost's "The Bear", has the advantage of bringing the reader to the realization that in the natural world there is a hidden and deep philosophy that human beings, preoccupied by daily and scientific enterprises, often fail to appreciate and abide by. Frost elaborates the duality of nature/culture relation through the scrutiny of the life and daily routine of the bear in comparison with man's mechanical and seemingly indifferent and rational world,

The bear puts both arms around the tree above her,  
And draws it down as if it were a lover.  
And its choke cherries lips to kiss good-bye,  
Then lets it snap back upright in the sky.  
Her next step rocks a boulder on the wall.

.....  
Leaving on one wire tooth a lock of hair.  
Such is the uncaged progress of the bear.  
The world has room to make a bear feel free;  
The universe seems cramped to you and me.  
Man acts like the poor bear in a cage  
That all day fights a nervous inward rage.  
His mood rejects all his mind suggests.  
The toe-nail click and shuffle of his feet,  
The telescope at the end of his beat,  
And at the other end the microscope,  
Two instruments of nearly equal hope

.....  
Or if he rests from scientific tread,  
'tis only to sit back and sway his head.

This an excellent example of Frost's interest in making the world of animals comment and actually juxtapose with that of human beings who smart under destabilizing worries and inflictions. As the New Critic, Yuvor Winters, observes, the poem shows that "the uncaged bear is a creature of free impulse; and is compared by implication to man as he would be were he guided by impulse; and the caged bear is compared to rational man as he is" (Cox,65). Al Breikan's "Al asad fi al sirk" (The Lion in the Circus) draws upon the contrast between his current situation and the dreaming of the dark ghosts of the jungle, his real indigenous and inalienable habitat. Also, man appears in the poem as the merciless persecutor of the emasculated lion, abusing him for certain utilitarian and selfish intents,

المهرج يغفو بلا اقنعه  
الاسد هادئ في القفص  
تتوازي ظلال الحديد على جسمه  
يتخايل بين الظلال  
شبحا غامضا لأله القبائل  
وجها مضيئا لليل الطبول  
ملكا للسهوب وللغابه الصامته  
يتحسس موت مخالفه  
وتفتت انيابه  
ويحرق متحدا بالظلام

The clown is already drowsy without masks  
The lion is quiet in the cage  
The shadows of the steel parallel on his body,  
He looks proudly among the shadows  
A vague ghost of the chief of the tribes,  
A bright face of the drum nights  
A king of the plains and silent forest  
He senses the death of his claws  
The decay of his pangs  
And gazes and gets identified with darkness.

The dazzling lights of the circus are contrasted with the darkness of the forest, which is the lion's native land from which he has been displaced because of the greed and expediency of man. Life and death, present and past, dignity



and humiliation, power and enforced weakening, natural scenery and the city, man and animal are points to be considered here and they are central as they have been in Frost's poem.

If the outdoor activities are one of the leitmotifs in Frost's poetry, they are an underlying principle in Al Breikan's poetry as his concern is laid on the potentiality of the text to generate meanings and suggestions. The aforementioned poems are good examples of this tendency in Frost's poetry. A further example of this is "Rihla al qird" (The Ape's Journey) (1979), where the dualities of the human and the inhuman, instinctive and man-made, scientific and natural are fully unfurled. Here the subject is how science is bent on developing its projects and plans at the expense of the misery and terrible sufferings of the mute animals. The contrasts between the sinister factory and the open and vast countryside are key images here. Interestingly, all the details of the situation are presented from the viewpoint of the bewildered and half-conscious animal,

رحلة القرد  
تنطلق الشاحنه في الطريق الذي  
يتلوى ولا ينتهي وهي تهتز  
يضطرب القرد  
لكنه يستعيد الهدوء  
ويواصل تحديقه  
المزارع خضراء صفراء غبراء  
تحت ضياء النهار  
النخيل، الصخور، النساء، الصغار  
البيوت، القبور، التلال، الوهاد  
القرى، المدن

The rattling truck moves in the winding and never-ending road,  
The ape gets confused.  
But soon he regains his peace  
And carries on gaping.  
The farms are green, yellow, dusty,  
Under daylight.  
The date palms, stones, women, children,  
The houses, graves, hills, vales,  
Villages, towns.

This panoramic scene of the countryside as the truck moves carrying the ape accentuates the contrasts between the mechanical world and the agrarian one as

the ape himself is part and parcel of that agrarian world. His displacement or banishment from his natural domain or Eden is enforced by man for selfish and pragmatic purposes. This impersonal account of the painful journey persists till the last stanza, where the poet allows himself to intrude and air his last awesome verdict,

The ape's journey looks as if it were  
An endless, magical thing.  
He gazes at the surroundings,  
All he can do is  
To gape.  
The ape does not know anything about the lab,  
The equipment room;  
The microscopes, the bloody scalpel  
Where experiment samples are made of  
His round, white brain.

رحلة القرد تبدو كشيء من السحر  
لا تنتهي  
انه يتفحص ما حوله  
كل ما يستطيع  
ان يحدق  
لا يعرف القرد شيئاً عن المختبر  
غرفة الأجهزة  
والمبضع الدموي  
حيث تصنع من مخه الابيض  
المستدير عينات التجارب

The onslaught against man's brutality and selfishness is self-evident here. The dualities of the rational/ irrational, natural/scientific, persecutor/victim are starkly brought to the foreground.

In his "Al tasahur" (Desertification), the poet does not have in mind the natural phenomenon of desertification. Rather, he is preoccupied with a spiritual malady that strikes human beings and all sorts of life indiscriminately. It is the ravages that are inflicted on the natural world that eventually render a kind of correlative to the human disaster. Al Berikan feels unbound to follow the law of cause and effect. What matters is the here and now. He does not specify the real reasons and symptoms of this uncommon ecological catastrophe. But its suggestive power substantiates the fearful impact of this poem. Obviously the desertification strikes indiscriminately both fauna and flora,

الطيور تهاجر في غير اوقاتها  
الصقور تحديق ساكنة  
صفحة الموج مغبرة  
السواحل مقفرة  
وهياكل من سفن غابرة  
طمرتها الرمال  
الصحارى المشعة تغلق دائرة الافق  
والشمس تهبط محمرة  
والرعود الخفية  
بين الغيوم تدمدم نائيه كوحوش

Birds migrate at inconvenient times,  
Falcons keep on gazing silently.  
Beaches are deserted  
And the frameworks of old ships are  
Buried in the sands.  
The sunny deserts block the horizon,  
The sun rays fall reddened  
The muffled thunders buried in the clouds  
Growl afar like beasts.

In this series of shots, the visual and even cinematic elements of Al Breikan's macabre images are vividly evoked to give a final and powerful image of man's predicament and the unpredictable forces jeopardizing his very existence.

In the examples already quoted it is quite evident that Al Breikan is also an environmentalist in that he draws our attention to the natural and man-made devastation taking place in nature and the continuous erosion inflicted upon it. The prophetic side of his vision can only be appreciated by the Twenty-First century where the serious cries about the decay of our planet are audibly heard and taken seriously.

In one of his very short poems, "Nafitha al sha'ir" (The Poet's Window), once again the poet achieves a kind of integration and synthesis between the expressive language of the poem and its universal content. The duality between the peace of mind sought by the poet contrasts vividly with the din and anarchy of the intimidating world. There is always this ever-widening rift between

expectation and actuality, fancy and fact, the subjective and objective. The poet, we are told,

Opens the window for hope, wind  
And the odor of the earth.  
From which rushes the hubbub of the world.  
He closes it forever  
As a coffin is closed once and for all.

نافذة الشاعر

يفتحها للنور والريح وعطر الارض  
يهاجم منها صخب العالم  
يغلقها كأنما لآخر الزمان  
ومثلما ينغلق تابوت الى الابد

Instead of the lovely and beautiful expectations, the poet encounters only disillusionment and humdrum reality. Monotony, pain and dreary reality are what we come across when we read Al Breikan's poetry.

**III:** Thematically speaking, the two poets have many points in common as we have seen in the examples already given. They share a common concern with the universal and endow the provincial or local with a cosmopolitan touch. Their emphasis is laid on the ontological void enveloping human life. The final vision their poetry evokes is the impasse or predicament lurking in man's way. Frost himself is quite conscious of this bitter fact when he tells us in his "The Constant Symbol" (the introductory essay to the American Library edition of his poems) that "Every poem is an epitome of the great predicament; a figure of the will braving alien entanglements" (1964, 45). The underlying philosophy informing all his poems is the existential vacuum where meaning becomes questionable and subject to much hairsplitting while arbitrary chance is the only predominant element. Indeed, he has talked about the impenetrable maze of life and the ways that have been enforced on the individual. Above all he has referred to choices that are basically random and illogical. In his unmistakable existential, if not skeptic poem altogether, "Trial by Existence", Frost tells us that it is futile to look for, expect or verify an explanation for the human ordeal,

I turned to speak to God  
About the world's despairs;  
But to make the matter worse  
I found God was n't there.

To be fair to Frost and do him justice, this extreme of skepticism is rare and often it is the by-product of some personal disasters and dissatisfactions which find their temporary expression in such bleak and volatile lines of verse. This blasphemous poem has its own counterpoise in the well-named poem, "Fear of God", where his tone runs in the opposite direction to what we find in the previous poem. Here he tells us, albeit in a half-serious way, about the need for piety and fear of God,

If you should rise from Nowhere up to Somewhere,  
From being No one up to being Someone,  
Be sure to keep repeating to yourself  
You owe it to an arbitrary god,  
Whose mercy to you rather than to others  
Won't bear to critical examination.

The theme of fences, barriers, and failure to bridge the ever-widening gap between people engages an outstanding position in Frost's philosophy. In his successful lyric, "Mending Wall" (1914) (the date of publication is a watershed experience as it records World War I) the ostensibly neutral place in the poem (a wall or fence) is made to induce thoughts of separation and isolation among people and perhaps countries. Already we have seen his successful use of the theme of separateness and isolation in his "Fire and Ice" and "Out, Out-". In "Mending Wall", the factual and symbolic run hand in hand to give the poem its deserved richness and multifacetedness,

Something there is that does n't love a wall  
That sends the frozen-ground\_swell under it,  
And spills the upper boulders in the sun;  
And makes gaps even two can pass abreast.  
The work of hunger is another thing.  
I have come after them and made repair  
When they have left not one stone on a stone  
But they could have the rabbit out of hiding,  
To please the yelping dogs.

Simple and straightforward as it is, the poet's diction here is sprinkled with many connotations and references to man's yearning to throw overboard all the man-made barriers and obstacles in his path. This prophetic and anticipatory vision materializes in the aftermath of World War II where the Berlin wall has remained a stigmatic emblem of the atrocities and crushing of all human aspirations of one indivisible world. Of course, the poet talks about a local issue in one of the farms of his native New England community, but further readings are not only possible but inevitable for a highly suggestive poem like this one.

The topics of abandonment, loneliness, unnerving darkness and oblivion (typically existential leitmotif) are present in his equally significant poem, "Bereft." The poet here gives a sort of concord or correlation between the outside material world and the disordered emotional and psychological state of the speaker,

Where had I heard this wind before,  
Change like this a deeper roar?  
Holding open a restive door,  
Looking downhill to a frothy shore.  
Summer was past and day was past.  
Somber clouds in the west were massed,  
Something sinister in the tone  
Told me my secret must be known;  
Word I was in the home alone  
Somehow must have gotten abroad,  
Word I was in my life alone  
Word I had no one left but God!

The recurrent repetition of the pronoun "I" shows not only the lyrical side of the poem but also that the speaking persona is actually the witness and commentator on the plight of man in Frost's poetic world. It is a sort of a divulging act, disclosing one's innermost secrets and burdens. The speaker betrays here the fear of the unknown, others' tragic failure to provide him with emotional support which he direly needs as a defense against life's setbacks and ordeals. The poem elaborates a typical absurdist topic— the gnawing process of waiting for death with all its concomitant apprehensions and misgivings. Everything here bespeaks abandonment and helplessness— the wind that changes into "a roar"; the accumulating clouds and their subsequent 'somberness'; the pathetic failure to know what is going on--- all these are manifestations of man's insoluble predicament. Given the growing sense of unease and tension, it is logical to share Lionel Trilling's cogent judgment that "I think of Robert Frost as a terrifying poet." (Trilling,450). Indeed many of his poems substantiate Trilling's verdict since they are fully steeped in the human tragedy, fears, and reactions to irrational complexities of life.

AL Breikan, likewise, has been classified as an existentialist in that his poetry is mainly concerned with raising rather than answering questions pertaining to human existence. Indeed Al Breikan has rightly called himself the poet who "envisioned the greater human destinies" (Al Breikan,30), in that his poetry is concerned with impersonal and wide-ranging issues. This is not a mere critical speculation or hasty impression. It is engrained in the very roots of his poetic enterprise. Al Breikan does state his objectives unequivocally behind his

writing and the topics that have engaged his thinking for a long time. Evidently he is preoccupied with the universal and human, rather than the provincial and temporary,

مطمحي ان اتفاعل مع كل شئ ولا اندثر في شئ. انني اذهب اكثر فاكثر الى سبر  
الأبعاد المجهوله للوجود، والى استشراف المصائر الكبرى. ومطمحي ان يكون الشعر  
فعلا عظيما من افعال الحريه والمغامره في مستوى النزوع الأعمق للانسان، ان يكون  
طريقه في الالتحام بالعالم والتعالي عليه وفي المضي الى قرار التجربه الانسانيه  
وتأملها بشجاعه. لقد اعتدت ان ادخل في التناقض الوجودي وان اجد كثيرا من  
الجمال في وجه الحقيقه.

My ambition is to interact with everything and not to be engulfed by anything. I aspire very much to probe the unknown dimensions of existence and explore the greater human destinies. I dream of making my poetry a great act of freedom, an adventure on a par with man's great aspirations. I hope it will be part of the universal, transcending it and moving ahead to fathom human experience and explore it daringly. I am used to getting involved in the existential dialectics and find much beauty in facing the truth (Al Ghanimi,1990, 109).

The poems already quoted revolve around the topics of cruelty, suffering, exploitation, and the keen sense of loss. People in most of AL Breikan's poems appear too helpless to establish any fruitful and meaningful contact with others in an intimidating and sinister world. In his masterpiece "Haris al fanar" (The Guardian of the Lighthouse), Al Breikan brings home the various manifestations of man's dilemma. The absence of the teleological function of the place is what strikes us most here. The poet does not present the lighthouse from the outside or from the perspective of the passing ships. Instead, the reader is enabled to peep inside the lighthouse and realize that in contrast to its name, its light is actually on the wane. This paradox is stated at the beginning and the lighthouse-sea duality is endowed with all the dimensions of "the cultural-historical memory" (Johnson, 18), that a place could have. Although the poem is in the first- person narration, its content is impersonal and related to man's collective consciousness as the impending destruction is not confined to a particular individual. The poem emphasizes the fall of all lighthouses, the predominance of the winds and the impending advent of wholesale destruction. The poet himself helps in disambiguating the universal implications of his poem where he tells us that his purpose is "to invoke the great destinies" and that "profound poetry inevitably turns out to be charged with thought. It, in fact, glows with a special kind of heat and carries sensations more than the lyrical one does" (Al Breikan, 1992, 48). The sense of loneliness, the futile act of waiting, its impending darkness,

solitude, and the avalanche of unanswerable questions permeates the whole initial scene of the poem and justifies the comparison held in the present study,

حارس الفنار

اعددت مائدتي وهيأت الكؤوس متى يجئ الزائر المجهول ؟ او قد القناديل الصغار  
يبقيه الزيت المضى.  
فهل يطول الانتظار انا في انتظار سفينة الاشباح تحدوها الرياح في اخر الساعات.  
قبل توقف الزمن الاخير.

I have arranged my table. And prepared the glasses. When will The Unknown visitors show up?  
I fill the small lamps with the remaining oil. Will the waiting be long?  
I am awaiting the ghost ship driven by the winds. At a very late hour before time finally halts.

In this poem the linguistic and semantic levels interlock to confer on its texture much density and compression. If Frost has employed the sense of place skillfully in his "Mending Wall", the same holds true to Al Breikan's use of the spatial, temporal and visual. Here the sheer silence of the lighthouse and the howling winds and the rough seas, the prevailing stillness in the small lighthouse and the overwhelming motion of the imagined ships driven by tempestuous powers, the confusion and restlessness of the memory contrasted with arranged furniture and the cozy spot amidst an infinite and intimidating surrounding –all these are mere references to his rare skill in making the details of his poem impinge on the memory and imagination of the reader. Indeed all the details of the brief interlude help in intensifying the mounting sense of fear and menace. The technique of the interior monologue articulated to empty chairs automatically brings to mind Ionesco's feat, *Chairs* (1952) where the role of memory, and expectation, fact and fiction are fully investigated. Apart from the host of symbolic references and suggestions emanating from the text, the space here has its plurality in that it transcends the mere geographical and physical boundaries. It turns into a sort of experience that is inextricable from the narrator's sense of agony and bafflement. The reader or beholder is forced to realize its substantial role in showing the thematic implications of this place and its surrounding, as Ghalib Halasa argues elsewhere (1989, 8). Frost's "Bereft" does show the ravages and humiliations of old age. But the suffering here is far deeper than that of Frost's poem, since everything in Al Breikan's poem is against the narrator's plans and hopes— time's halt, the failure of ship to arrive (or has it the sunk?) and the prevailing darkness and the nagging of a terrible memory. Al Breikan's narrator and alter ego is simply a means of speculating



about man's position in an irrational world. The overriding images are those of dreariness, blackness, and stasis,

في ظلمة الرؤيا  
سأركب موجة الرعب الكبير  
واغيب في بحر من الظلمات ليس له حدود  
انا في انتظار الزائر الذي يجئ بلا خطى  
ويدق دقته على بابي ويدخل في برود  
انا في انتظار الغامض الموعود،  
تحمله الرعود والرياح  
يوشك ان يحل الوقت  
الافق الطويل خال  
وليس هناك ظل سفينه  
يبدو الوجود  
كالقوس مشدودا ولكن لا علامه  
للرحيل  
سقطت فنارات العالم دون صوت  
الرياح هي بعد سيده الفراغ  
وكل متجه مباح

In the dark vision  
I will ride the wave of the overwhelming terror  
And vanish in the infinite sea of darkness  
I am waiting for the visitor who arrives without feet  
And knocks at my door and enters indifferently  
I am waiting for the promised unknown  
Driven by thunder and wind,  
It is almost the right time  
The long skyline is empty  
There is no shadow of a ship  
Existence seems tense like a tight bow  
But there is no sign of departure.  
The lighthouses of the world have sunk  
Without any sound. Winds predominate the space,  
And every direction is permissible.

This part of the poem that has been forcibly wrenched from a seamless whole, blends all times (past, present and future) and betrays the state of confusion and instability in the narrator's mind. The interaction between the

spatio-temporal elements has been observed and pinpointed as an integral part of the theme of the poem, "If time is blurred, the same holds true to space" (Al Breisam, 59), as the poet approaches the quintessence of his topic. At the poem's concluding moments, the poet appears to be the seer whose,

Visions are consummate and the skyline is about to revolve  
I am waiting for the supreme moment  
The orbit will close, and the black clock  
Will petrify on the wall.  
I am waiting,  
The black clock ticks,  
The ticking of a distant rhythm.  
Its pendulum is swinging, unstable, moving to the right,  
To the left,  
To the right,  
To the left,  
To the left.

ان الروى تمت، وان الافق يوشك ان يدور  
انا في انتظار اللحظة العظمى  
سينغلق المدار  
سينغلق المدار والساعة السوداء  
سوف تشل و تجمد في الجدار  
انا في انتظار  
والساعة السوداء تنبض نبض ايقاع  
بعيد  
رقاصها متأرجح قلق يميل الى  
اليمين  
الى اليسار  
الى اليمين  
الى اليسار  
الى اليسار

The vision here almost touches the infinite. The seer, as Al Ghanimi convincingly argues, "is involved in one way or another in the dilemma of articulation and inarticulation, stating the prophecy and evading it at the same time. Hence the number of gaps in the text to be filled and interpreted by the reader" (2002,19). Here, too, the main thrust of Al Breikan's poetry manifests prophetic, visionary and even apocalyptic images. His man is the last one

witnessing and reporting that terrible account of the sinking world with no compass and has much to resemble Arthur Rimbaud's "Drunken Boat." In that poem, the crew is killed by "yawping Redskins." If the sailors are dead, the boat, then, is free to move and roam the sea in its own, "the low sun stained with mystic horror", and, "green nights ablaze with snow". In other words, Al Breikan's guardian perceives a vision or short glimpse of exceptional and awe-inspiring worlds that dawn only to some poets endowed with that extent of imaginative power.

The two objects emphasized by the poem are "the ghost ship" and the "black clock" whose motions and colors are indicative of the imminent disaster. The awaited ship has lost its destination as everything is subject to the full control of the overwhelming power of the winds. It is not expected that such a ship, if any, would reach its destination, while the description of the swinging pendulum suggests that it has reached a standstill. At last the inescapable end has loomed and come into being. Everything in this nightmarish vision is suggestive of "dreary terrain" (Al Saidi,89), where the last man seems forlorn with no hope of salvation. Al Breikan can only offer this bleak image of man where no other forces can mitigate his solitary agonies or provide him with solace or consolation.

The final impression this poem and many others already cited, leave is that Al Breikan's poetic world is no less terrifying than Frost's in its emphasis on the state of bleakness and hopelessness facing his pathetic characters and animals. Indeed his diction is more suggestive and less obvious in stating man's worries and sufferings in Frost's pastoral "Birches",

It is when I'm weary of considerations  
And life is too much like a pathless world,  
Where your face burns and tickles with cobwebs,  
Broken across it, and one eye is weeping  
From a twig's having lashed across it open.

The difference, however, lies in the fact that Frost sees a glimpse of hope and a reason for survival since "Earth's the right place for love." It is true that the images of gratuitous death, loneliness, and dreariness permeate Frost's poems; nevertheless they cannot match the extent of blackness in Al Breikan's poems. For instance, Frost's "Once by the Pacific" has many parallels with Al Breikan's overriding view of man, the universe and the impossibility of reaching a final and decisive conclusion about the existential void engulfing him,

The shattered water made a misty din,  
Great waves looked over others coming in,  
And thought of doing something to the shore

That water never did to land before,  
 The clouds were low and hairy in the skies,  
 Like locks blown forward in the gleam of eyes,  
 You could not tell and yet it looked as if  
 The shore was lovely in being backed by the cliff,  
 The cliff being backed by continent;  
 It looked as if a night of dark intent  
 Was coming, and only a night, an age,  
 There would be more than one ocean-water broken.  
 Before God's last Put Out the light was spoken.

When the two are contrasted, Al Breikan's image is darker and more terrifying: the guardian's state of total isolation and approaching disaster is expressly evoked here. The natural elements in Frost's poem "Pacific" seem in a state of solidarity and mutual help (shores being supported by cliffs, while the cliffs themselves are backed by continents). Al Breikan's lonely figure is totally helpless and defenseless. There is nobody or nothing to support him and boost his morale. The metonymy used in Al Breikan's poem (the black clock and its unnerving ticking, the uncontrollable motion under his feet) is more suggestive and less outright in crystallizing the state of apocalypse. Indeed, Al Breikan's poem is strikingly devoid of any religious references or hope of salvation.

Interestingly, woman is conspicuously kept away from the bleak world of these poets. The woman in question is the lover, sweetheart, or wife whose main associations are fertility and posterity. Her absence is normal in a world that has gone awry. Of course this leitmotif in Frost's poetry has impelled critics to assert that he was "the great poet of contemporary tragic vision, evoking a terrifying universe of exposure and emptiness, the romantic vacancies of modern secular life" (Ruland, 282). When Frost learns in *The Paris Review Interviews* (Summer, 1960) about Trilling's view of his poetry, his answer indicates a tacit approval of the latter's findings "I don't know—I might run my eye over my book after Trilling, and wonder why he hadn't seen it sooner that there is plenty to be done about" (Frost, 1995, 88). I do not think Frost is in need of reminders of a poetic world that he has deliberately and meticulously hinged on indifference and pain. The matrix of such planes of experience is the outcome of daily encounters with things that are not always subject to reason and rationality. It might be objected that Frost did write some poems about love in its wider sense such as "Meeting and Passing", "Putting in the Seed" that talk about fertility and love. So does the poem "The Death of the Hired Man" where the husband Warren and his wife, Mary, take care of their old hired man till he dies:

'I can't think Si ever hurt anyone.'  
 'No, but he hurt my heart the way he lay

And rolled his old head on that sharp-edged  
Chair-back.'

.....  
'Warren.' She questioned.

'Dead,' was all he answered (Frost, 1964, 54-6).

These are exceptions in a whole gallery of deprivation, loss, and mounting despair. Even in the last poem, death seems to be victorious, and people's affection appears too weak to change the status quo.

Al Breikan shares all these impressions and has elaborated them further in his poetic works and essays. In one of the terse and compressed and felicitous stanzas Al Breikan sums up his view of life which is imbued with tragic and gloomy understanding,

ليس الحب مستحيل  
ولا الجمال خدعه  
ولا ندى السحر  
خرافه.. لكن يفيض مرقص البشر  
بالعنف والعويل

Love is not impossible  
Neither is beauty a ploy,  
Nor is the dew of magic a fable.  
But the human theatre  
Is brimmed with violence and wailing.

Then our world as perceived in Al Breikan's gloomy viewpoint can offer only tears and brutality. The poet derives this tragic vision not only from the current events of life but also he has his point of reference in the remote and immemorial history of mankind and its long series of suffering and self-inflicted torments. In his insightful explication of this witty aspect of Al Breikan's writing, the critic Al Jazzairi likens Al Breikan to world writers known for their expressive brevity in poetry like Henry Michaud, Paul Eluard, Louis Aragon, Nazim Hikmet and Yeshar Kemal (p.176). Thus the tone of his poems is elegiac and bitter since man can never stop dreaming, although the recurrent outcome is bafflement and torment, "violence and wailing".

To round off this study, one can fairly say that the two poets belong to two totally different cultures, experiences, social positions and critical appraisals. As already pointed out, Robert Frost has remained all his life loyal to his New England's puritanical roots, though he has his own skeptic viewpoints that are reflected throughout some of his poems. He states this view bluntly in his letter to P.T.Coffin (Feb. 1938) "I don't care to decide whether God did this for the fun

of it or the devil of it" (Frost, 1995, 774). If a clergyman, knowing the poet very well, calls him "a Job in our time" (Thomson, xii), the same extent of fortitude and stoicism is felt in Al Breikan's career and daily practices. In this particular point, the latter showed more stamina and readiness to sacrifice as he deliberately excluded himself from the facades of popularity, money and prestige. In his long moments of self-inflicted isolation, Al Breikan has been offered a rare vantage-point for perceiving the ordeal of modern man and his frantic and abortive pursuits of meaning and peace of mind. This bizarre voluntary choice of isolation is indicative of "a great soul, resisting all types of secular temptations" (Nadhim, 9). The direct outcome of this quarter of a century of virtual solitude is the composition of poems that deservedly engraved their author in the map of modern and modernist Arab verse. They betray serious attempts on the part of the poet to innovate and update its tools and molds. Above all, his poetry has given full rein to his visionary worlds where only suffering, futile waiting and catastrophes prevail.

Both have paid much attention to the nature-culture relationship and have expressed their preference of what is natural and impulsive. Indeed their artistic manipulation of the natural world and its creatures is so rich that the reader is eventually enabled to glean other understatements and echoes emanating from an ostensibly straightforward and direct text. In the poetry of both poets, there is a comprehensive and all-inclusive image of the predicament of modern man in search of meaning and solace in an indifferent world. Stylistically, the poems of both poets capitalize on the power of the word to suggest and insinuate rather than to report only. Symbolic and suggestive references go hand in hand in the poems of the two. The devices of deep structure, embedding, ellipsis, contrast, and semantic features have been skillfully and effectively used. Also both Frost and Al Breikan have relied heavily on the technique of paradoxes, narrative description, dramatic monologue, juxtaposition, flashback and other strategies and technicalities.

In their vision of the world and its challenges and entanglements, they share a similar viewpoint about the absurdity and irrationality inherent in the very existence of human beings. Man, for both poets, seems agonized and pathetic and subject to unpredictable and indiscriminate forces. In both visions, the universe turns out to be an intimidating force intent upon thwarting man's enterprises and hopes. In both man's lot is that of loneliness and suffering. Hence the dream or obsession of their people to aspire to fresh, less devastating worlds. As usual, these dreams turn out to be no more than a make-believe and self-deception.

## الفضاء الشعري عند روبرت فروست ومحمود البريكان

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### ملخص

البحث التالي محاولة لأستعراض نقاط التوازي والتشابه والأختلاف في التجربة الشعرية عند الشاعر الأمريكي الحديث روبرت فروست (1874-1963) والشاعر العراقي محمود البريكان (1931-2002). يتألف البحث من ثلاثة اجزاء. الأول مقدمه تستعرض الابعاد المختلفه لتجربة فروست الشعرية وتأثيرها على كتابات محمود البريكان. والثاني يوضح مفاهيم الشعاعين فروست والبريكان عن الشعر ودوره في الحياة كذلك يغطي جماليات الكتابه لدى الأثنين. اما الجزء الأخير الذي يشغل المساحه الأكبر من البحث فيتناول المواضيع المشتركة والتصوير العام عن الأنسان والعالم في قصائدهما. وينتهي البحث بأستنتاج يلخص الموضوعات الرئيسيه المطروحه.

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