

City Literature in Abdu al-Aziz al-Makkali's Poetry

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ABSTRACT

World literature teems with the portrayal of famous cities throughout the world. This kind of literature is unanimously known as city literature. It does not merely describe and portray places, objects, and landscapes for their own sake, it, however, gives readers a revisionist perspective to look afresh and introspectively into self, history, and culture. This paper aims to shed light on a city that witnessed great changes throughout its history. It is called Sana'a, the capital of Yemen, and it is one of such world-famous and ancient cities about which interesting and rich literature has been written. Sana'a has been immortalized in the prose and poetry of local and international prolific and intelligent writers such as Abdu al-Aziz al-Makkali, a famous contemporary Yemeni poet. Sana'a is magnificently portrayed in different exotic images in al-Makkali's collection of poetry entitled *Book of Sana'a*. The poet engages in a kind of dialogue with the city in a personal experience and unique particularity, but in the process, this particularity becomes cosmopolitan. Each poem is located in a particular space which gives the poet and reader alike a sense of the place, history, and culture, and an intense feeling of wider identification and empathy. Sana'a is anthropomorphically portrayed as a beautiful woman, sad woman, beloved lady, spirit, and city of heaven. It is fantastically depicted as a unique piece of artifact molded and designed by the hands of God. So, this piece of research attempts to analyze social and political imports and the different images of the city employed by al-Makkali in his poetic work: *Book of Sana'a*. As a theoretical framework, the paper adopts both historical theory of criticism as well as the formalist theory, so the analysis is focused on both context and text of the selected poems.

INTRODUCTION

World literature is full of descriptions and portrayals of famous cities that gained special significance due to their remarkable history and the role they play in shaping human history. In this regard, Desmond Harding (2011) writes:

As an art form in search of its own perfectibility, the city stands for the central foundation upon which the broad range of human experience draws its energy and charts its course. Indeed, culture-capitals have long been looked as symbols through which writers legitimate their struggles for cultural authority. (p. 37)

This literature has been categorized as city literature as it underscores the symbiotic relationship between the place and human activities and how they influence each other in a way that it becomes impossible to divorce them off. In *Invisible Cities*, Italo Calvino (1974) states that "Cities, like dreams, are made of desires and fears, even if the thread of their discourse is secret, their rules are absurd, their perspectives deceitful, and everything conceals something else" (p. 44), and Roman Payne (2007), in *Cities and Countries*, thinks that:

...one city gives you gifts, another robs you. One gives you the heart's affections, the other destroys your soul. Cities

and countries are as alive, as feeling, as fickle and uncertain as people. Their degrees of love and devotion are as varying as with any human relation. Just as one is good, another is bad. (p. 76)

Some world cities such as London, Paris, New York, and Cairo are well-recorded in different forms of art and literature. Sana'a, the capital of Yemen, is one of those world cities that has been given due attention by writers, historians, and artists. Today, Sana'a becomes a well-recorded city in almost all genres of literature and arts. The city is a wonderful piece of art expressed in different forms: spoken, written, photographed, sung, engraved, drawn, and painted. Yemeni poets have recently celebrated the ethereal beauty of the city. In this piece of research, readers are given a glimpse into the importance and uniqueness of Sana'a City through a detailed discussion and deep analysis of Abdu al-Aziz al-Makkali's poetry as he lively and anthropomorphically paints the beauty and magic of the city in his collection of poetry, *The Book of Sana'a*.

Literature Review

Travelers and journalists like Walter B. Harris were immensely shocked by the unexpected beauty and charmingly

variegated topography of Yemen. Harris visited Yemen in 1892 as one of the few Westerners who came to the place as a traveler and tourist. He wrote the impressions of his visiting tour in a book entitled: *A Journey through Yemen*.

Nothing can be imagined as more beautiful than the scenery of the mountains of Yemen. Torn into all manner of fantastic peaks, the rocky crags add wildness to a view that otherwise possesses the most peaceful charms. Rich green valleys, well timbered in places, and threaded by silvery streams of dancing water; sloping fields, gay with crops and wildflowers; the terraced or jungle-covered slopes,—all are so luxuriant, so verdant, that one's ideas as to the nature of Arabia are entirely upset. Well known as is, and always has been, the fertility of this region, its extent is almost startling, and it can little be wondered at that Alexander the Great intended, after his conquest of India, to take up his abode in Yemen. (Harris, 2010, p. 12)

Harris here was surprised by the unique beauty of Yemen and Sana'a is no exception to such a marvelous beauty described above. It is the capital of Yemen situated in the north-western part of the country rising 2200 meters above sea level. Sana'a means a fortified place and its population, today, is about two million. Shrouk Hussein (2021), a contemporary novelist, expresses her feelings towards the city when she visited a female friend residing in the old town of Sana'a.

I passed through the old neighborhoods and alleys, while the sunrays were beginning to shine down onto the street through the decorated old buildings, buildings that were standing like dignified and wise old women from the distant past. (Web)

In his book, *The History of Sana'a City*, al-Ræzi (854-925 AD) argues that Sana'a was chosen and built by Shem, the son of Noah after the Great Flood receded. It was called the city of Sam/Shem since then. Then, it was named Azal, a name derived from Uzal mentioned in the book of Genesis as the progeny of Noah. It is said that when Shem started to build the city, a bird came and snatched the thread with which he was designing the construction. The bird threw the thread at the foot of a high mountain, called Nuqam, where the first building was constructed (p. 76).

Although Sana'a has been destroyed and rebuilt numerous times throughout history due to wars and violent political changes, historians, travelers, and men of letters recorded their impressions of the exotic magic of the city. The well-known Yemeni historian, al-Hamdani (893-945 AD), states that Sana'a is a matchless city on earth (*al-Ikleel* 9). In *The History of Sana'a City*, al-Ræzi describes Sana'a as the most enchanting city and the most delightful of all God's places on earth due to its unique climate and geography (p. 147).

Sana'a was a pre-Islamic city where people of different religious backgrounds lived together until it was converted to Islam in 632 AD. It witnessed the rise and fall of many kingdoms and ruling dynasties. It was occupied by the Ottomans from the sixteenth century until 1918 when the Ottomans were defeated in the First World War and their empire collapsed. Then, it was controlled by Zaydi Imamate until the Yemeni Revolution took place in 1962. It became the

capital of the new and young republic and then the capital of unified Yemen from 1990 to the present time. Sana'a is famous for its ancient buildings and mosques such as The Great Mosque which was founded in the seventh century AD. The city housed the most famous palace of Ghumadan which dates back to the first century BC during the Sabaeen kingdom. Guinness World Records recognizes it as the earliest castle ever known in history and wonder of the ancient world (Web). The city has been the center of political, economic, cultural, and religious activities throughout history.

In the twentieth century, Sana'a has become the focus of many Arabic and international organizations concerned with world heritage, architecture, and culture. Being unique and deep-rooted in history, Sana'a receives considerable world attention. It was selected together with Fez, a Moroccan city, as a quintessential and representative city for Arabic and Islamic culture in the "Nomadism and Urbanization Exhibition" held in London in 1976. This exhibition was inaugurated by Queen Elizabeth and was a part of an Islamic grand festival. It was the first event to draw the world's attention to Sana'a. Consequently, Searjeant and Lewcock (1983) wrote a voluminous book on Sana'a entitled *Sana: An Arabian Islamic City*. It is a comprehensive work on the history, society, architecture, and arts of Sana'a city. Another big exhibition was held in Munich in 1987 under the title of: "Yemen: Three Thousand of Culture and Arts." Sana'a had the lion's share in this exhibition.

In 1981, UNESCO took the lead in sending special committees to Sana'a for conducting field research and studies on the culture, heritage, and architecture of the city. In a big conference on the level of foreign ministers of Islamic countries held in Sana'a in 1985, the UNESCO director called upon the participants to protect and safeguard the historical city of Sana'a. In the same year, Sana'a was registered in The Record of World Heritage by The World Heritage Organization in its 46th. Conference held in Sophia. The world interest was shown again when Sana'a was declared The Cultural Capital of the Arab World in 2004. It is impossible to mention all events related to the city as numerous conferences and exhibitions were held in different places all over the world.

The wonderful beauty and unique characteristics of Sana'a become available to the Anglophone readers by Tim Mackintosh-Smith's translation of *City of Divine and Earthly Joy* published in 2001. This book is originally in Arabic authored by Jamal al-Din al-Qasim. It primarily shows Sana'a as a rare and extraordinary city and the translation of the book reveals Mackintosh-Smith's admiration and attachment to this 'earthly paradise.' al-Qasim (2001) writes: "How then [to describe Sana'a] if one considers in addition delights which the tongue of the most eloquent commentator would fall short of being able to enumerate and describe in detail?" (p. 11)

Theoretical framework

In order to establish solid and well-grounded analysis and arguments, this piece of research has been analyzed in the light of both historical theory of criticism and formalist theory as a theoretical framework. The historical theory highlights the context while formalism sheds light on the text outside the

social, cultural, political, historical, and psychological factors. These critical theories, combined together, enable the researcher and readers to approach the selected poems from different angles and provide different ways of reading them.

According to the basic principles of historical theory, a literary text is replete with a plethora of outside factors and circumstances that once explored might suffuse it with additional import and signification. This theory assumes that works of literature are the products of a specific culture, time, place, and an individual and they may affect or perhaps change the postulates and constructs of the culture into which these works have been introduced. In his story "Barn Burning", William Faulkner (1950) states:

Nobody lives a completely isolated existence. Each of us is a product of more biological, intellectual, emotional, and spiritual influences than we can recognize. The reverse is true as well: To some degree, each human being affects the world he or she lives in—some in monumental ways; some in quiet, unnoticed ones; some leave the world better for their having lived in it; some seem bent on destruction. (p. 268)

Hippolyte Taine (1828–1893), a French critic and one of the earliest exponents of historical criticism, views that there are three aspects that decide the analytical trajectory of a work of literature: milieu, race, and moment. Taine argues that milieu is the summative experience of the author; his environment, relationships, family background, education, travel, marriage etc., race is the synonym for what is called today culture and it encompasses social and national characteristics featured in literary texts while moment refers to the ideas, assumptions, philosophy, ideology and intellectual currents that govern and dominate the epoch.

Consequently, analyzing the selected poems in the light of the historical theory of criticism entails informative knowledge of the poet's biography, history, and cultural actions and interactions. The analysis enlightens readers about conventions, trends, and currents that would have impacted the tastes and attitudes of the poet. Moreover, allusions to historical and local events are made clear and explicit, and different shades of meaning of special words and expressions used are explained.

Readers' aversion, however, to evaluate the merits of a work of literature solely on its context make them seek other perspectives and strategies to approach a literary text from its aesthetic aspects, so formalism came into existence. Formalism is a school of literary criticism that began in Russia in the second decade of the twentieth century as a reaction against the historical and Marxist literary theories which accentuate the reciprocal influence and roles of the text in society and the society in text. Anglo-American version of formalism, called New Criticism, flourished in America in 1930s. Both theories concentrate on the formal devices, how elements are pieced together, rather than the content, what it is about.

Ann B. Dobie (2012) explains:

...formalism puts the focus on the text as literature. It does not treat the text as an expression of social, religious, or political ideas; neither does it reduce the text to being a promotional effort for some cause or belief. (p. 33)

Formalism revolves on the practical and objective dimension of literature and art for it is form what makes sense. It has

to do with the structure of a text rejecting any external influence such as culture, society, content, and authorship and instead focusing on discourse, modes, genres, forms, and formal devices like metaphor, rhyme, rhythm, and meter. Dobie (2012) comments that formalism "...asserted that understanding a work comes from looking at it as a self-sufficient object with formal elements, laws of its own that could be studied." (p. 35)

Formalism attempts to make literary criticism and analysis systematic, methodical, and scientific, as it believes that literary works are autonomous and literary language is distinct and distinguished from the ordinary one. Its underlying principles can be summarized as follows: literary language ought to be analyzed in and of itself and the reader should enter the text to objectively examine it as if it were a piece of artifact. In addition to that, knowledge of linguistics is foundational in understanding and illuminating literary texts where the focus is mainly on textual and linguistic devices and not on external influences, reader's emotional reaction, or the author's intention, and writers should manipulate language in such a way so as to make it strange and unfamiliar. Ordinary language should be defamiliarized and instead of judging a work of literature as a true mirror to life, formalists see it as making strange. Defamiliarization was first coined by the Russian formalist, Victor Shklovsky who defines it as "... the artful aspect of a work that makes alert and alive; it causes the reader to intensify the attention paid to the text, to look again at an image in an effort to take in the unexpected." (as cited in Dobie, 2012, pp. 35-36)

So the underlying assumptions and ideas of historical criticism and formalism have been utilized in interpreting and analyzing the selected poems as the flashlight is focused on both context and the formal and linguistic devices embedded in these poems.

Statement of the problem

City literature is one of the interesting topics in world literature as writers engage in a kind of dialectics between external objects and social, political, and individual constructs and postulates. This kind of mediated dialogue and exploration render individual experience into something global as it is revealed in al-Makkali's poetry on Sana'a City. Cosmopolitan cities such as London, Paris, New York, and Cairo have been well-recorded and portrayed in different literary genres by popular versatile writers. However, Sana'a, the capital of Yemen, gets into oblivion and people do not know about this exotic city due to the dearth of research even though it was one of the deep-rooted seats of human civilization in ancient history. So this paper may contribute to introducing new cultural tropes and epistemological aspects on al-Makkali's poetry and his admirable city, Sana'a.

Research objectives

This article attempts to tackle the following points:

- To explore the different literary images of Sana'a employed by Abdu al-Aziz al-Makkali in his poetry.
- To show how Sana'a City is unique in its climate, architecture, beauty, and culture as it is depicted in al-Makkali's poetry.

Research questions

- What are the different literary images of Sana'a that can be found in al-Makkali's poetry?
- In what ways is Sana'a an exotic and unique city?

Research methodology

This article aims to minutely analyze a selection of poems written by al-Makkali describing the beauty and unique culture, architecture, and history of Sana'a city. al-Makkali presents Sana'a in a positive light as he delineates it as an enchanting and magical city through the vehicle of imagery and symbolism employed masterfully and skillfully to convey the intended messages. So this piece of research is descriptive and analysis-oriented and centers on the context and text of the selected poems.

Discussion and Analysis.

al-Makkali participated in the defense of Sana'a in the Seventy Days Siege. He was the late poet of the republican revolution against the Imamate. During the siege, he wrote a poem entitled "To Arms, Oh! My Countrymen." The peak of his poetic writing about Sana'a comes in his work: *The Book of Sana'a*. This collection of poetry is unique because it includes fifty-seven poems bound by one thematic thread.

The Book of Sana'a is an extended love poem in which the poet is infatuated with Sana'a. For the romantics, the city is the symbol of corruption, crime, and noise, in al-Makkali's work, however, it has a romantic and inspiring touch. *The Book of Sana'a* portrays Sana'a as the city of heaven and the spirit of the place. There is a strong unity between the poet, the city, and nature. The city gives the poet inspiration and identity. He sees it from the perspective of a child, young and an old man. It is envisaged as the bright face of modern life and the cradle of an ancient civilization.

The prevailing image of Sana'a in *The Book of Sana'a* is the image of a woman in her developmental stages. Moreover, different images can be found such as the images of a beloved, spirit, city of heaven, and host. The city is depicted in contradictions. Oftentimes, she is clad in silk and in dust other times which symbolize the alternation of happiness and sadness, construction and destruction. She is described as an elixir that gives life to her residents and visitors. The following paragraphs will shed light on the different prevailing images of the city.

A Beautiful woman

The opening verse of *The Book of Sana'a* depicts Sana'a as a beautiful woman wearing dew as a costume. She falls from the sky and becomes a city of wonder. The poet writes: "She was a woman/who fell from the sky in robes/of dew/and became/a city." (21) The poet sees her as an immortal city who stands against all odds and vicissitudes of time. She reveals her enchanting beauty and perfect femininity as a lady at the dusk time when the declining sun adds more splendor to her; "time departs from the dusk of time/a lady,/the perfection of

femininity." (Poem 1, 25) The poet stresses his argument that Sana'a is a pretty woman whose age cannot be revealed or surmised. Although she is deep-rooted in history, she never loses her youth, luster, vitality, and liveliness: "Beautiful cities, beautiful women/neither reveal their age." (Poem 3, 37)

Sana'a is delineated as a beautiful lady washing her body and spreading her plaits on the bank of a circling stream. She sits on the bank contemplating, daydreaming, and saying her prayers. This is an enchanting visual and auditory image. The musical murmur of the brook is intertwined with the mesmerizing beauty of the damsel; "Sana'a will spread the reverie of her plaits/on its banks she will pray,/and on its banks, she will record her dreams." (Poem 17, 95) There used to be a gushing stream running around the western part of Sana'a but it becomes dry because of drilling wells in the area; "there was a river in Sana'a/it washed the feet of the houses on its banks and sent/its breezes to other streets/and houses." (Poem 17, 97)

The city was born out of light. She is dazzling and everlasting in her beauty because she was split off the sun. The poet calls her the daughter of the sun: "O Daughter of the Sun!/nothing on my lips but the kiss of/words." (Poem 31, 159) When Sana'a became a big city after the revolution, she receives and embraces all her children who were expatriates or exiles in foreign countries. She has grown up and becomes a mother: "Sana'a is no longer a young child/she has matured/she has become a mother." (Poem 52, 449)

She is also a feminist. She sympathizes with women, shares their happiness and sadness, and keeps their chronicles of love, suffering, and aspiration. She is like a kind and passionate mother.

she searches in the handbags of time
for the names of mothers and grandmothers
she despairs of generations of women
who had eyes but couldn't see,
who had hearts that yearned but were refused love. (Poem 10, 69)

In the same poem, she plays the role of an efficient midwife who willingly takes care of pregnant women and women in the throes of delivery. She welcomes new babies and nestles them in her laps.

Sana'a is the midwife
who announces to every newborn
the home is a home and not a grave and women
are women and not chattel. (Ibid)

The poet invokes his memory when he visits Sana'a as a child. He conceives it as a gallant lady. The city has a special flavor and outstanding features. She has a soft breeze and brinded curls of clouds. At night the moon dances with stars as they cast their glimmer into bedrooms and oriels. The images of the dancing stars and the laughing moon create an enchanting, mesmerizing, and romantic atmosphere.

My ears heard the sound of her brush
and my eyes saw the clouds becoming
a color
as truth becomes a dream
the radiance!

I knew that I was in Sana'a

Night arrives
 Stars dance in rooms
 of sleep
 and the rainbow moon laughs from the oriels. (Poem 4, 43)

A sad woman

The other image of Sana'a is as a sick and suffering woman. She has undergone a succession of apocalyptic changes throughout history. She has been destroyed and rebuilt tens of times. Even her name has changed many times. The city has gone through several names. She was called Shem City, then Azal, and ultimately Sana'a.

The speaker records the recurring phenomena of happiness and sadness in the following lines: "sometimes Sana'a wears silk/sometimes she wears ashes." (Poem 2, 31) Here, she is portrayed as a woman who wears the garment of happiness at the time of peace and stability and the apparel of mourning at the time of war and destruction. Silk is a symbol of comfort and luxury while ashes symbolize death and destruction.

Sana'a is again depicted as a sick and weak woman. The poet perhaps alludes to the period when the city was under the tyrannical yoke of the Imamate before the 1962 revolution. That period was characterized by contagious diseases, poverty, ignorance, stagnation, backwardness, and despotism. The city is depicted as an old, senile, and ailing woman. She becomes decadent, disabled, desperate, and heartbroken.

Sana'a comes to you, pale leaning on
 A crutch
 She doesn't remember yesterday,
 She doesn't even remember today.
 Her walls are decaying,
 Her bricks are flaking away. I read
 A death-rattle in her stones,
 Her windows tremble with fear.
 I smell despair in the color of her eyes.
 Even her eyes are fading. (Poem 29, 149)

In poem nine, the speaker shows her as the first city of human civilization and as an oppressed and violated lady: "This is the first Sana'a, who planted the foundation stones/ of all civilization on earth, who/first battled with tyranny." (63) The story of her struggle against tyranny started from the time of her foundation. The consecutive ups and downs are revealed through her shaking off the ash of destruction and dust of time from her eyelids. This is a fascinating image as Sana'a becomes free again from despotism and dictatorship of the ruling Imamate after the success of the 1962 revolution. Imagery employed exposes the miserable conditions of Yemeni people living under the oppressing yoke of the ruling Imams: "specks of dust on her eyelids covered in/ clouds of sorrow.../She shakes her head and tosses/out the sand/and lice." (Ibid)

The speaker believes that she is a city that was born out of ethereal and beautiful things. She comes from a fairy and airy world. She can be found only in legends and fairy tales such as Arabian Nights. Yet, she is a hostage lady at the hands of tyrannical rulers. After defeating the forces of evil,

poverty, dirt, and backwardness represented by Imamate, she is breathing liberty. She finds herself and hopes for a healthy, wealthy, and prosperous future. Her loving people have regained her from the hands of tyranny and totalitarianism.

She comes from the water,
 From A Thousand and One Nights.
 She is returning to herself,
 She is returning to her people,
 She is returning to a time that sparkles with
 Reflections of hope. (Ibid)

She is a guardian and godmother who safeguards the treasure, dreams, and aspirations of her people. Ancient trove refers to past mysteries, stories, and legends that are kept in her innermost. This treasure is inscribed and engraved in courtyards, colorful rocks, and walls surrounding her. The night connotes miserable and melancholic stories taking place in the city right from her foundation. Although these stories are tragic, yet, they add a precious value to her sense of immemorial past. The image of 'braziers of perfume' brings into mind the custom of Sana'ani women who put incense into frankincense burners to scent the air and mitigate cold winter nights.

She guards a trove
 of dreams in her depths,
 in courtyards where lustrous weddings take place.
 Qasidas are born from her rock,
 but it's the color white that writes them
 and the night that inscribes this story, weighed down
 by clusters of melancholy
 and braziers of perfume.
 On the smooth inner wall. (Poem 1, 27)

Poem five reveals an esoteric and medieval-like image of the city. She is an attractive woman on the exterior but she is sad inside and has many stories of suffering and agony. The setting is at night when people are at home and all daily activities come to a halt. The city alleys are bathing in colorful light reflected from the stained-glass windows of the houses. The poet records an experience at night in the narrow streets of the old town. It is exactly the time of the night prayer between seven and eight o'clock pm. The employment of the words 'pity' and 'crying' brings into mind the agonies and sufferings of the people living in the city at the time of unrest, poverty, and social injustice. The images of 'almonds' and 'raisins' falling, inadvertently, from the top of the new ruler's palace for half-awake children underscore the concept of poverty and scarcity. Even sparrows at window sills are cold and uncomfortable. They are waiting for dawn to enjoy their time. This symbolizes the state of people who are waiting for the revolution to achieve freedom, prosperity, and social justice.

Prayers rise slowly
 in the neighborhoods farther back
 where the light passes sluggishly
 in alleys of pity and crying.
 With the eyelashes of their half-closed eyes,
 newborns sense the last of the almonds and raisins
 that spilled from a spire where the new prince lives.
 The houses lean against each other.

Sparrows rest on the window sills, tremble
and absorb sleepy murmurs,
waiting for the first dew. (Poem 5, 49)

A beloved

Sana'a is portrayed as a beloved pursued by the encircling mountains: "Between Sana'a and the mountains that surround her: an ancient love." (Poem 30, 153) The mountains surrounding her function as a warm and loving lap and as a natural protective wall. They give her a variety of landscapes and climates such as lingering light mist, magical, hanging white clouds, and rainbow-like shining light. Even darkness at night has positive connotations for she feels safe and peaceful as she goes to sleep as long as these lofty and massive mountains keep eyes on her: "sometimes the mountains enclose Sana'a with darkness,/sometimes they wall her in with haze and light/they are her guardians, her sentries. (Poem 30, 155)

The poet states that she feels comfortable as she sleeps on the lap of her guardians and lovers. Seven huge mountains enfold her and tens of minarets decorate and give her a mystical experience and spiritual atmosphere. This makes the city warm despite the cold. That is why the poet challenges cold as he tries to permeate the city; "But Sana'a, she still sleeps in her cozy bed/Seven tall mountains guard her and/Seventy minarets/Come on, Cold. Pick up your pace!" (Poem 39, 198)

In the twenty-third poem, she feels safe and peaceful as long as her guards are the surrounding mountains. She does not suffer from insomnia or depression. Her swords are roses and basil which stand for a pacifist attitude and atmosphere. She never feels frightened from darkness or vicissitudes of time. Consequently, her gates are never closed because the huge walls of mountains stand on alert.

Her walls were the mountains
And her swords were rose blossoms and
Stalks of basil
She didn't fear the dark
No need for a watchman at the gates.
Insomnia didn't moan in her eyes
And sirens of panic didn't shatter
The innocence of night. (Poem 22, 123)

Nuqam is an outstanding mountain. Embracing her in the east, he is personified as an honest and trustworthy guardian and as an amorous lover. The images of caressing and kissing intensify the symbiotic, deep-rooted, and intimate relationship between Nuqam and Sana'a: "He is her eternal guardian:/he caresses her when she arises,/kisses her when she falls asleep,/he is her pillow when she dreams." (Poem 2, 29)

Nuqam means revenge. In some poems, Ghaiman, the earlier name for Nuqam, is used. Nuqam and Ghaiman are used interchangeably. Perhaps the name of Nuqam comes from a famous revenge battle that took place at the foot of the mountain. Nuqam keeps courting with the city at the time of war and peace; whether she is wearing dust, ashes, sitting on the debris of time and destruction, or decorating herself with colorful garments: "'Revenge' flirts with the rubble of

history/yearning to change his name." (Poem 2, 31) This mountain wishes to regain his earlier name because his current name does not comply with his amorous and flirtatious nature. The speaker protests for the bad name of the mountain because it implies revenge, savagery, cruelty, and loss of passion and kindness. He also drinks morning coffee from the hand of his beloved without feeling ashamed.

How can you sip your morning coffee
(from the hand of your beloved)
and not feel ashamed
when your new name summons
the dust of vengeance? (Poem 2, 33)

She is the first and last love of Ghaiman. Ghaiman means a cumulus; a large white puffy cloud. A cloud often hangs over the mountain because this mountain is one of the highest peaks in the Arabian Peninsula: "'Cumulus' was the first to inscribe on her brow/the crescent of his desire." (Poem 3, 37) The close connection between Ghaiman and Sana'a is not only spiritual. It is also physical as he provides her with basement and white stones for her palaces. The poet, here, refers to Ghumadan Palace which was one of the wonders of the ancient world. It was built at the foot of the mountain. The palace stones were quarried from there. Ghaiman eternally stands over Sana'a flirting her, guarding her, and watching her ups and downs of fortunes.

the first who gave his left rib
for her bedrock.
from his flesh, he gave her alabaster that waits for the sun,
windows that loom over the wadi.
He stands next to her, his eyes reflecting her light. (Poem 3, 39)

In the eleventh poem, the poet addresses Sana'a not to uncover her face or body since neither the sun nor the moon will be able to understand her mysterious nature. It is a city that hoards the secrets of history. The word 'veil' is heavy with a cultural significance and domestic connotations as Sana'ani women cover their faces with black veils letting out only their bright, beautiful, and brown eyes.

O Sana'a...
Don't lift your veil!
Neither the sun nor the moon shall read your fortune
Or touch the secret talisman in this cryptic qasida. (Poem 10, 71)

The creature or object that knows the enigma-like talisman is only her loving bed-rock mountain. He has the keys to the secret treasures of her history and the generic story of human struggle. The city is likened to a dagger that is pierced into the body of the mountain to underline their symbiotic relationship and shared history. There are reciprocal love, sympathy, and understanding between them.

Is she a dagger that jabs into the belly of a mountain?
Is she the reckless eyes of men who pulverize stone
Insentient of their pain?
In these narrow clefts, the mountains hide
The keys of the city
And enfold secret centuries. (Poem 11, 73)

Spirit

The image of Sana'a as a spirit is complex and many-sided. She is the capital of the spirit, the spirit itself, and she confers on her inhabitants the spirit and force of life at the time of happiness and tragedy. In poem ten, the speaker raises a rhetorical question to underscore his belief that Sana'a provides people with a sense of spirituality and force of life; "in dreams, there is nothing to fear/who could be destitute of spirit?" (p. 67). The poet contends that the city is not merely a group of houses built out of unfeeling stones. She is, rather, a living being with a spirit that can feel, play, sing, sleep and tell stories. She is compared to sweet melodies and the fragrance of jasmine. She is always gay.

Sana'a is not houses...

Sana'a is music, the scent of jasmine from her oriels.

She sings when she is content,

She sings when she is heartbroken.

She flings her childhood to the clouds,

Scatters fables to her folk and then sleeps. (Poem 10, 133)

Sana'a is the spirit of the place. This city grants the soul its peace and tranquility: "Sana'a! Capital/of the Spirit!" (Poem one, 23) In the same poem, Sana'a occupies a very important rank, being the capital of the spirit, in the hierarchy of famous world capital cities.

Mecca is the Capital of the Quran

Paris is the Capital of Art

London is the Capital of Business

Washington is the Capital of Might

Cairo is the Capital of History

Baghdad is the Capital of Poetry

Damascus is the Capital of Roses

Sana'a is the Capital of the Spirit. (Poem 1, 25)

The poet reiterates the image of the spirit in the fourth poem. Sana'a is the soul of Yemen. She is throbbing with life, vitality, and vivacity. The invocation of 'incantations' in the second line conforms to the analogy of the spirit. The speaker remembers when he comes to the city for the first time from the village. He enters her at noon when the sun is bright and blazing. He describes her as naked, shining but in tattered rags. 'Tattered rags' may symbolize the destructive consequences of the war between the republicans and the royalists after the 1962 revolution.

Sana'a of the Spirit

flooded light and incantations.

The trees of my memory blaze with light when I enter her

I see her in her tattered rags, incandescent, naked

under the embers of midday. (Poem 4, 42)

The wonderful architecture of Sana'a enhances the idea that she is the capital of the spirit. This architecture is exotic and unique as the houses are built from different colorful stones. The contrastive colors of the houses constitute a harmonious mosaic and magical rainbow. These stones are put in layers of alternative colors as if they were colorful candles aflame celebrating the birthday of the city: "A stone layered in white, another/Entirely black,/Celebrate Sana'a of the Spirit on her/Birthday." (Poem 34, 175)

No one can gauge the mystery of the city or appreciate her beauty unless the visitor approaches her from within. A quick

tour of her alleys gives only a distorted image. The picture becomes complete just when one steps into the stairs of the buildings enjoying the unique architecture and the amazing scenery from a special spacious room called mafraj. This room lies on the last floor which is typically the sixth or the seventh one.

Sana'a may be a beautiful image,

But unless you go beyond the surface passing

Through her walls and spaces

Straight inside of her, you can

Never know her

Stop in manwar!

Climb to it from the mafraj!

Let your eyes pass to the other side of the glass. (Poem 8, 61)

Sana'a is delineated as a perfect piece of art with rare and exotic architecture. She has both external and internal beauty which interplays in harmony and unison. She is a perfect natural portrait that Salvador Dali cannot replicate or produce from his imagination. Even the beauty of the rainbow does not match her magical beauty. The heavenly charm of Sana'a surpasses other natural or man-made beauty.

Let your mind rest with the rest

Of this painting. Not a

Lightning bolt,

Not a rainbow,

Not even the brush of Salvador Dali,

But she, she! Who crafted these windows and

Painted these walls in marvelous light. (Poem 8, 61)

City of heaven

Sana'a, according to the poet, is eight thousand years old. He supports his argument by introducing a kind of imaginary dialogue between him and archeologists. Archeologists can find out the age of cities with a touch and doctors can figure out the age of people with wrinkled faces. These two visual and conceptual images help the poet gets his point across that the city was the first one established on earth.

Archaeologists date cities

with a touch,

doctors read the wrinkle's shadow

and tell you the effects of time.

One of these archaeologists turns to you and says:

"Indeed, Sana'a was first born eight thousand years ago, created from the ribs of the mountains surrounding her."

(Poem 3, 37)

She is seen as the city of heaven that falls from the kingdom of God. She is under the custody of God and sleeps under His Throne: "Sana'a sleeps under the Throne of God/and anoints her trees blossoming with perfume." (Poem, 37) The word 'anoints' concentrates on the religious and spiritual significance of the city as her blossoming trees odorizing the air with the scent of perfume. The poet envisions her being outlined by angels. They are sent by God to paint the topographical and geographical features of the city. She gives the poet a sense of spirituality. There is a deep spiritual relationship between the poet and the city: "I bathed my eyelids in the moisture of her shade/while my heart saw angels painting the horizon/with wadis and palaces." (Poem 4, 42)

The city is seen as a holy city. She is Jerusalem, the center of the universe. When a visitor enters the old town of Sana'a via Bab al-Yaman Gate, s/he feels the fragrance of the ancient history and the tranquility of the place. The imperative sentence, 'kiss the ground,' implies holiness and spiritual significance. The beauty of the city is intermingled with the physical and the spiritual. This beauty is ecstatic, thrilling, and nourishing.

of Bæb al-Yaman,
a poet writes:

Sana'a! Hospice of Light! Enter
in peace, kiss the ground ten times
and draw from her fresh beauty
nectar that will add a lifetime to your life. (Poem 1, 27)

In poem thirty-seven, she is seen as a human being who is fed and nourished by the hands of God. 'Milk' symbolizes nutrition and nourishment. It comes directly from the kingdom of heaven. The speaker, here, refers to the clean, crystal, and cold streams of water gushing out from the rocks of the surrounding mountains.

From the milk of the rock in the District of Musk,
May God feed you
May he nourish you
With the water of that rock
May your eyes be washed. (Poem 37, 190)

Time appears to be astonished at the time when Sana'a first existed. Time is personified as he walks in the zig-zagged alleys in the old town of Sana'a. It seems that time does not know the date when this city was established. The city was there before the existence of time. This hyperbole signifies the immortality and pastness of the city as it came directly from the realm of God: "Time takes his time in the alleys,/Does he remember when Sana'a came from the clouds! To settle on the Earth (Poem 21, 115). Interestingly enough, time becomes old, senile, and dilapidated while Sana'a is steadfast, permanent, and standing: "Time itself has withered with age, but/Sana'a, though old,/Is still standing" (Ibid, 117).

To emphasize the argument that Sana'a was the first city of God on earth, the poet alludes to Amin al-Rayhanni, a great Arab historian in the nineteenth century. al-Rayhanni was also a famous poet and novelist as well as a traveler. He visited many Arab cities including Sana'a. He was startled when he saw the mesmerizing beauty of the city for the first time. He expressed his admiration in many of his writings. Sana'a as the city of humans and jinn underscores the feeling that the city has a metaphysical bearing and occult hermetics.

The Arab poet and traveler Amin al-Rayhanni
Had seen half of the modern cities
Of the world
But when Sana'a loomed before his eyelids, he cried out:
"Sana'a!
History reports that you are the Queen of Time,
Science reveals you as the Lady of Knowledge,
Fables sing of you,
Mistress of Human and Jinn.
These are your towering houses!

These are your sighing palaces!" (Poem 31, 161).

It turns out that the city is envisioned as one which belongs to heaven as the poet compares her with the most famous cities in the world. He makes an implicit comparison with the famous and ancient cities of the world which might have been built with silver or gold. In comparison, Sana'a is the sweetest and most precious city because her houses are decorated with different kinds of fragrance-producing plants and flowers such as jasmine and basil. It is the habit of Sana'ani women to put big earthen jars filled with soil where natural flowers and roses are grown. These jars are put on oriels or balconies. When a visitor comes to the old town of Sana'a, he might be startled by its medieval-like architecture and sweet atmosphere saturated with a refreshing fragrance.

The sweetest city
is not surrounded with silver bricks,
with gold bricks.
The sweetest city
is surrounded by jasmine
that washes the heart
and inspires the eye
with sudden tranquility. (Poem 4, 45)

In the following lines, the comparison becomes explicit. The poet compares Sana'a to the world cities of a well-known reputation and history. Paris, the French capital, occupies only the second position to Sana'a in terms of perfume, beauty, gossip, and decorated facades: "Paris: second to you/In perfume and magic,/In innocent chatter/And decorative facades." (Poem 20, 111).

Similarly, London, the capital of the United Kingdom, comes second to Sana'a in matters of natural beauty and weather. The sun in Sana'a is milder and more shining than in London. Even shades and shadows are more vitalizing and refreshing. Summer is not scorching or unhealthy as is the case in other cities. It is rather moderate and mild when the sky is dotted with light white cumuli at daytime overhanging the city and smoothly gliding from one place to other providing transient shades. These little white clouds look like street lamps shining from light-posts.

London: second to you
In light and texture
In radiance and shadow,
In clouds, as luminous as street lamps, nodding in a
Deep summer's afternoon. (Poem 20, 111)

The image of Sana'a as the oldest and most beautiful city in the world is reiterated and asserted again and again. The poet mentions some famous modern world cities such as Paris and London as well as the capital cities of the ancient world. He believes that these cities are man-made and appear artificial and affected while Sana'a is real, heavenly, and God-given. The city is haunted by the angels of God to console her at the time of war and sadness and to implant joy and happiness in every nook and corner.

Paris is second to you in beauty, so is London
And the capital of the Byzantines and the Americans.
To reconcile emotion and truth
The poet has added a sentence: "For
The beauty of those cities is affected

And man-made,
 But as for the beauty of Sana'a, it comes from God who
 Never fails to send his angels
 To cleanse it of sadness and soot,
 To paint on its walls epiphanies
 Of joy and sweetness. (Poem 20, 113)

The unique design of the windows and arches of Sana'ani houses gives the city an exotic aura of sacredness and magic. It seems to be a wonderful and colorful piece of mosaic. The alternative colorful pieces of glass used in windows and arches reflect a rainbow-like shining light on the narrow streets especially at night when the moon is full and fair: "This is what the colored light speaks of,/cast from the glass windows above/they toss their reflections/onto darkened streets,/refracting into footsteps' gleam. (Poem 4, 45) The poet wonders whether Sana'a is merely a typical city or something different. He raises many rhetorical questions about the genesis of the city to highlight her uniqueness and strangeness. The speaker is sure that the city was born out of ethereal and beautiful objects. She is a city of mystery, dreams, rhymes, and violets. These words have rich and deep connotations; "Did she rain down from a book of mysteries?/Or did she rise from the violet fields?/Or did some rhymes conjure her/from the spring of an ancient/dream?" (Poem 1, 25).

In poem thirty-three Sana'a is compared to the face of a saint due to her purity, innocence, and brightness. She is also compared to the tongue of a sage because of the precious wisdom and experience she holds. She is also the voice of a martyr as he willingly dedicates his life for the sake of his country and people. His voice is valuable as he offers his soul to defend his country. She is, moreover, compared to the fickle caprices and whims of a poet as he tries to produce the best melody ever written; "Sana'a has the face of a saint/The tongue of a sage/The voice of a martyr/And the proclivities of a poet." (Poem 33, 73).

A Host.

Sana'a is characterized as a steward or host. She welcomes all kinds of individuals and different nationalities. Tourists and travelers have been visiting Sana'a since time immemorial. These visiting people feel at home when they enter the city. The city wall is built out of mud except the main gate called Bab al-Yemen which is made of stones. There are ancient inscriptions on some of these stones from the Himyaritic and Sabaean periods.

Sana'a is yours and mine
 On the first line
 Above the wall of Ancient History
 On the gate of Ghamdan, an inscription lights the scene.
 Its flowering characters spell a greeting:
 "Don't feel ashamed if you have misplaced your lanterns
 and map,
 If you have forgotten the addresses of your lovers
 or the curves of your name." (Poem 6, 51)

The speaker states that Sana'a is omnipresent and omniscient as she feels the desires and knows the ambitions and story of every visiting individual. She is not a local city. She

is a cosmopolitan city, the city of the people. She loves company and warm, lively night chit-chat.

From the time she was positioned on the axis of the earth,
 She has known who you are
 And those whom you desire.
 Since that beautiful morning when she cast off her burdens
 And blew the dust from her latches
 She has tried to fulfill all of her promises.
 She yearns for company
 And some idle chatter (Poem 6, 51).

The city becomes a cordial and welcoming host for all different kinds of people because of its climate which is mild and moderate throughout the year. Even the hottest days of summer are clement and refreshing. The early shining of the sun rises her up from her sleepy dreams: "Peace be upon Sana'a. /Sweet is her water, /in winter the drought is a friend/ in summer even the dog days are light/At the downpour of sunlight /

she awakes," (Poem 1, 23) In this regard, the famous historian, al-Ræzi states:

[Sana'a] is the most delightful of all of God's countries, in its climate, weather, water, gentleness, repose, and cuisine. The wells in the outlying villages are like cooled cisterns; the water in them is so cold you can hardly drink it, even if it were the middle of a blazing, hot summer (p. 147).

In this quotation and the previous ones, Sana'a is described as an incomparable metropolitan city whose climate, architecture, culture, and scape posit it as an exotic natural and cultural phenomenon. In his poetic endeavor, Abdu Al-aziz al-Makkali succeeded in bringing out the uniqueness of the city in trans-historical and transcultural poetic language rich with cultural, political, social, economic, and artistic connotations and implicature.

CONCLUSION

Abdu Alaziz al-Makkali, Yemen's prolific and outstanding modernist poet, contributes to the literature written on Sana'a with a famous collection of poetry entitled *The Book of Sana'a*. He utilizes the exotic cityscape where places and objects are transformed through the mediums of formal devices such as imagery and symbolism, as well as context, into something organic and vital throbbing with life and regenerative power. Sana'a is presented as the oldest city on earth. The poet endows the city with a kind of spirit by humanizing it through a series of enchanting and exotic images. He portrays the city as a beautiful woman, sad woman, beloved, spirit, host, and the city of heaven. The poems do not merely describe objects and scenes. They, however, metamorphize these objects and places into something forceful and energetic where the poet engages in cultural hermeneutics and explores the extraordinary power of poetic language and artistic creation.

al-Makkali's idiosyncratic poetics of *The Book of Sana'a* puts into question the organic symbiosis between the place and humanity, and the power of dream vision in creating new insights and establishing new realities. In this collection, he adds a new depth, flavor, and imaginative perspectives to the literature written on city. His work opens the door for

further studies and discourse on identity quest, power of dream-vision, and magical realism. al-Makkali's dexterous employment of elevated poetic language, unique utilization of the cityscape, and admiration of his city have all garnered the poet attention and reputation in literary circles.

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