

Compensation in Hawkar Kalary's *Your Knitted Scarf*: Transcendentalism and Confronting Loss

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Abstract

Poetry has often been misunderstood to be exclusive to the few elite. However, magnificent talents keep surfacing, and such talents are certainly worth the research focus. This paper explores the well-known philosophy of Transcendentalism as adopted by the Iraqi Kurdish poet Hawkar Kalary.

Kalary is a postmodern poet who has suffered from loss early in his life. He finds his way, though, to deal with those losses in his collection *Your Knitted Scarf*. Writing is a therapeutic way through which he deals with his feelings. As a dedicated reader, he displays the philosophies of the East and West in his poetry to reach a philosophy of his own that may or may not agree with the writers he has read for.

The paper displays the theories Kalary is affected by as well as the philosophies that have cured him and helped him reach the state of reconciliation with his past and present. The poems have no titles nor are they numbered in the collection; nevertheless, they are short sketches that start on page 1 and end in page 99. The researcher finds it fit to refer to them by their page numbers.

Keywords: Poetry, Hawkar Kalary, Kalary, Transcendentalism, compensation, Your Knitted Scarf

التراخي في شعر هاوكار كالاري: دراسة في فلسفة التعالي ومواجهة فقدان

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المستخلص

غالبًا ما يُساء فهم الشعر بمعنى أنه مختص بالنخبة المثقفة، وهي الفئة. ومع ذلك، تواصل مواهب فذة الظهور خارج هذا الإطار المحدود. تستحق مثل هذه المواهب حقا الدراسة الأكاديمية والاشادة بها أيضا. يعرّج هذا البحث على الفلسفة الشرقية المعروفة باللغة العربية باسم "الفلسفة المتعالية" التي تبنها الشاعر الكردي العراقي موضوع هذه الدراسة، هاوكار كالاري.

يعد هاوكار كالاري أحد شعراء فترة ما-بعد-الحدائث. كان الشاعر قد عانى من الشعور بفقدان والده في وقت مبكر من حياته؛ وعلى الرغم من ذلك، يجد طريقا للتعامل مع تلك النكبات المستمرة في مجموعته الشعرية (وشاح الصوف). كان الشعر، ولا يزال، علاجًا للعديد من الاضطرابات النفسية لأنه يدفع الكاتب الى التعاطي مع ما يحمله بداخله من مشاعر. وبصفته قارئاً شغوفاً، يتعامل كالاري في شعره مع فلسفات الشرق والغرب للوصول إلى فلسفة خاصة به قد تتفق، أو لا تتفق، مع الكتاب الذين قرأ لهم وأفاد منهم شعريا بشكل مباشر أو غير مباشر.

يتناول البحث النظريات الفلسفية التي تأثر بها كالاري، إضافة الى الفلسفات التي ساعدته على الوصول إلى حالة التصالح مع ماضيه وحاضره. تخلو قصائد الديوان، وهي عبارة عن خواطر قصيرة، من العناوين، وتحلّ بدلا عن ذلك أرقام الصفحات التي تبدأ في الصفحة 1 وتنتهي في الصفحة 99. لذلك، وجد الباحث أنه من المناسب الإشارة إليها بأرقام صفحاتها.

الكلمات الدالة: الشعر، هاوكار كالاري، الشعر الكردي، الشعر العراقي، وشاح الصوف

... style is 'our accomplished Mrs. B' who likes to define Transcendentalism, according to Emerson's journal, 'with a wave of her hand [and the words], *A little beyond!*'. [1]

Transcendentalism is a philosophy that is originally inspired by the Eastern religions. It has basically started in England and USA around 1832 [2]. The interest in the Eastern religions, however, has started long before this; the Romantics have been interested in the fascinating Orient which mesmerizes them with its beauty. Nonetheless, the definition of Transcendentalism is best coined by R.W. Emerson (1803-1882) who has written essays affected by the Orient [2]. It is considered more of a religion than a philosophy [2]. Meese believes that "Transcendentalists were sometimes religious or literary or political figures. Some were all of these; but, in the strictest senses of the terms, some were none of these" [3]. The Transcendentalists belittle the divinity of Christ ("noxious exaggeration about the *person* of Jesus") [4] and consider the eastern religions (like Hinduism and Buddhism) to be the divine revelations [2].

There was a conservative impetus in the Emersonian aesthetic, in that Emersonian Transcendentalism subordinates poetry and the arts to the religious impulse, just as Puritanism did before it. The Emersonian figure of the poet as prophet and seer is much more in line with Puritan than with Unitarian thought But though it harked back to Puritanism in some of its elements, Transcendentalism was most certainly a nineteenth century phenomenon and a result of "liberal Christianity" and comparative religion mixed together. [2]

Emerson believes in the existence of justice in this life, not the afterlife. He believes one would get as many sufferings as he would blessings. He calls it "polarity" [5] to indicate the existence of the opposites in life. "Nature hates monopolies and exceptions" [5], Emerson declares. For instance, he ensures the existence of the good and the bad side by side, the goodness and evil, and the delightful and the excruciating. He insists on this "polarity" because he has attended a sermon in which the priest makes people wait for justice in the afterlife. The priest, at that time, tells people that those who endure suffering would go to heaven because that is how they will be compensated for their suffering. However, Emerson refuses to agree and coins the term "polarity" in his essay "Compensation."

Transcendentalism is not a denial of the existence of God, as the law of compensation may indicate. The fact that it focuses on the possibility of justice requires admitting that a higher being is going to enforce it. Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) clarifies this confusion:

There are certain things that we have and could have absolutely no theoretical evidence for, but which, Kant believes, we have moral reasons for believing, for if they were not true morality would be an empty fantasy. In particular he believes that morality demand that we believe in the immortality of the soul and the existence of God, and he calls these two beliefs postulates of practical reason. [6]

Kant calls God, or the God-like being "the highest good, that is a necessary connection between happiness and virtue in the world " [6]. To be satisfied with the kind of life one has, one needs to follow the morality compass and to trust that God will bring him the justice he fails to obtain. Being a human being makes people vulnerable and have a tendency towards setting things right by their own hands. Moreover, believing in God diminishes this tendency and makes Man more dependent on the "highest good".

Emerson's compensation relies heavily on this kind of justice and, thus, denying God is not an option. Emerson, instead, mingles God with Nature. Thus, being in Nature is the easiest and purest way to connect properly. This inclination is popular during the Romantic period of English poetry as the Romantics resort to Nature to rid themselves of the industrial cities they have inhabited.

Nature, at that time, can be anything that is not affected by the gluttonous humans. In other words, children are inherently as natural as any tree in the forest because they have not been corrupted yet by their societies. Moreover, the Romantics display this mingling in the best poems written on the subject as they reject the religious system of the city which depend on utilizing people.

Poets like William Wordsworth and William Blake see God in Nature, seeing eye to eye with the Emersonian Transcendentalist way. In its best shape, Transcendentalism focuses on the divinity of the individual, idealism, and the holiness of Nature. Transcendentalists believe that every human being is unique enough to carry the "divine" within himself/herself. "Everything divine shares the self-existence of Deity", writes Emerson[4]. Emerson also says he is "part or particle of God" [7]. For instance, believing he is pure enough to unite with the universe, Blake is reported to have said that he has seen God outside his window, emphasizing the fact that God does not exist solely in the Churches. Blake's paintings often portray angels as he allegedly has witnessed them as well.

Emerson and the Transcendentalist poets enjoy this form of the direct relationship with the universe, with God; God is now accessible to Man not only to priests. Thus, Emerson continues to write about the poet being a prophet; the poet is supposed to bring people to the right path and enforce the righteous behaviors through his poetry.

The poet is the sayer, the namer, and represents beauty. He is a sovereign, and stands on the centre. For the world is not painted or adorned, but is from the beginning beautiful; and God has not made some beautiful things, but Beauty is the creator of the universe. Therefore the poet is not any permissive potentate, but is emperor in his own right. [5]

It is the poet's job to fight the corruption of industrialism. Emerson clarifies that the poet is one of three essentials in the universe. These three are created together like the theological trilogy (Father, Son, Holy Spirit). Emerson decides that the poet is a "sayer" which is the third of the trilogy: the Knower, the Doer and the Sayer. He is responsible whether he realizes that or not. Being a poet is not about pouring one's emotions onto paper. It is more of a message to be delivered to the other human beings. He is given the talent of addressing and guiding the masses and by chance he can put that into rhyming words, not vice versa. This gift is his unerring connection with God through Nature. "By

transcending, the individual becomes larger, knows more, and more deeply. It is not a matter of 'escape from'; rather it is a 'progress forward.'" [3]; Maslow simplifies the act of transcending saying that "Clearly the self can no longer be identified with the biological entity which is supplied with blood from his heart along his blood vessels. The psychological self can obviously be bigger than its own body." [8].¹ Moreover, Darnall argues a similar theory by suggesting the existence of an "inner voice" which is "more potent than all the voices of reason" and that it is the "soul of man which transcends what may come into the mind by the avenues of the senses" [9].

Furthermore, Kant believes that "Our moral commitments, then, mean that we should hope that both the good and the wicked will get what they deserve...." [6]. Emerson is believed to have derived the idea of polarity from this Kantian philosophy. There is no 'otherness' as every item sounds important and occurring according to a certain universal scheme. Thus, the ugliness in the world is as important as the beauty. They emphasize one another and create the world as we know it. Nothing is postponed to an afterlife. Justice is created on Earth in this life as each human being is destined to see those binaries; every Man is to live through difficulties and loss, but all would be followed by love and empowerment. Polarity agrees with the modern theory of Dualistic Thinking, in which the world is divided into binaries or sets of two supposedly opposites. The male and female, for example, are a binary in the system of life, so are the mind and body [10]. Meese writes on the subject of the 'binaries':

Correspondence may be operative when an individual employs the One and the Many, the particular and the universal, the subject and the object, or the microcosm and the macrocosm in a way that somehow involves a reference beyond the immediate visible world of the perceiver and the quantity perceived. That is to say, when the One is viewed as the simple, unifying, and ultimate model for the visible world which is generated, analogies are easily drawn between these two realms. Similarly, when the macrocosm is merely a synonym for the One and the microcosm is synonymous with the complex diversity of the Many, correspondence may bridge the particular and the universal. [3]

II

One of the best examples of modern Transcendentalism can be found in Kalary's collection of poems *Your Knitted Scarf*. Hawkar Kalary² is an Iraqi Kurdish poet who focuses on the law of compensation as he fights through loss until transcending to a better person waiting for the good and the bad equally through accepting whatever comes from God. He always connects the dots of whatever is happening to him: for instance, he starts

¹ Maslow presupposes the existence of basic needs that are of variable importance. The fulfillment of the needs satisfies the human being that he transcends out of being mere flesh and blood.

² Hawkar Kalary (b.1980) is a Kurdish Iraqi poet. He was born in Kalar and raised in Hawler. He attended University of Kurdistan-Hawler. He wrote one collection of poetry in English which is *Your Knitted Scarf*, published in 2018.

writing poetry after the death of his father. He connects the two incidents in Poem 82³ saying:

God took my father and
gave me poetry
he took my words and
gave me silence (Poem 82)

Linking writing to the loss of his father makes him feel compensated rather than being a miserable person. For anything taken away, he will be waiting for the good to come according to Emerson's polarity. His poetry composition becomes a message to be delivered to the masses of his readers rather than simple rhyming words. God has also taken his words and gave him silence in compensation. The silence is in contemplating the message before writing; the words taken are, thus, those of the reckless human being and he is given instead the silence of the Wiseman. The wise message of the Emersonian "sayer" can be found clearly in the essence of the poems.

Like any Transcendentalist, and without referring to any religion, Kalary manages to feel connected with God and Nature and he gets inspired by both faith and beauty. Transcendentalism is about being connected to God through what Emerson calls the "particle of God", as mentioned earlier. Like other Transcendentalists, Kalary believes that God is everywhere and to be able to get closer you need to rid yourself of the materialistic surroundings. Moreover, like Emerson and the Transcendentalists, Kalary glorifies Nature as the source of life. Kalary agrees with this same belief as he roams in the field of love for the sake of companionship (he longs for love in 6 poems, but it ends in a disappointment). Nevertheless, it is not satisfactory enough for him. He resorts to the idea of compensation to recompense for his continuous losses.

The law of compensation alleviates the feeling of loss as it promises the thinker to be recompensed soon with something better (or an opposite) than the one he loses. He clings to compensation because it offers a freedom from the agony of deprivation. In the dedication to the book, he connects his ability of composing poetry to the fact that he lost his father more vividly emphasizing the fact that he has not been endowed with this privilege before. Kalary begins his book with the excerpt from Poem 82 and follows it by an explanation in the "Preface". The 'gift' comes in compensation of the suffering he has endured; God has taken his loved ones and given him the aptitude of composing poetry. Thus, composing poetry, for Kalary, is more like "raging through [his] pen"[11] at the beginning until he realizes the true gift.

In Poem 20, he poses a new form of reconciliation, a kind of reconciliation with himself. This new form of reconciliation is presented in a Romantic Pantheist cover which would save him from self-torture. The universe lies within Man, he disputes, because it exists *for* the Man. In Poem 20, God comes "back" to the poet's heart because he lost his way for a while and he has to recompense with God to be able to do with himself.

³The poems have no titles nor are they numbered in the collection; nevertheless, they are short sketches that start on page 1 and end in page 99. The researcher finds it fit to refer to them by their page numbers.

I stopped
 I stopped being mean to myself
 I was tired to be picky to me. [sic]
 And when I stopped
 God came back and sky was blue again
 I then realized heaven was on earth
 It was hidden within me. (Poem 20, lines 1-7)

Kalary, or Kalary's speaker, is not waiting for the afterlife to see heaven and justice. Like Emerson, he believes that "heaven was on earth" and he can visit it easily by transcending into a more supreme being, by acceptance and reconciliation. Another example of self-acceptance lies in Poem 21:

Let inner peace
 light your way,
 as the road to self is dark and misty
 let hope take you
 to undiscovered territories,
 let happiness give you
 wings and help you fly. (Poem 21, lines 1-7)

It is stated that one should go through suffering and darkness to reach reconciliation and allow the happiness to reach him and grant him wings to fly away from suffering. Kalary calls acceptance "inner peace" in this poem, as the acceptance and reconciliation with one's surroundings and pain bring this form of inner peace and eradicates inner struggle along with suffering.

In Poem 2, Kalary positively observes a storm waiting for the rain. The storm and the rain are both natural images, and thus, they are both positively displayed. He is waiting for the rain to follow the storm to give life to his "earth" and help flowers blossom. Kalary is not rejecting the storm here but rather viewing it as a gateway to the life given by the anticipated rain. Kalary introduces the notion of having to have a "gateway" to cross the barrier of being human into the gifted side of the 'fence' of being a poet. In Poem 17, Kalary suggests the existence of that gateway to reach the state of acceptance: this gateway is "tolerance". He misses the ability to be tolerant in this poem due to his consciousness of the ugliness of the world around him. Dankness has apparently infected him.

Tolerance is a gateway to love,
 but my heart was darkened
 by the pain of your lies
 that i [sic.] missed that gateway. (Poem 17, lines 1-4)

Being aware of the ugliness is the same dilemma the Romantics have had facing industrialism at their time. Being in direct collision with the horridness of the world may deviate the poet from his actual message. Kalary's so-called tolerance may be confused with the philosophy of stoicism. The old coinage of the term means accepting all that comes from God. Kalary's Point of view, though, is accepting the fact that one has to live life with its variations, with its ups and downs.

Also related to the transcendental experience Kalary is having (after facing the darkness) is the theory of Bolzano which emphasizes the effect of the surroundings. It is not only the speaker and what he says, Bolzano believes, but also the "state" in which he says it:

If you are thinking, then there is, not only (i) you and (ii) the property of thinking that you exemplify, but also (iii) the state which is your thinking. States are, paradigmatically, the terms of the relation of causation. [12]

Bolzano's "state" refers to the experiences one has at the time of writing, or composing the text. Kalary, in Poem 18, agrees with Bolzano as he links his feelings to the experiences he goes through. Therefore, the feelings of reconciliation or being compensated are not facts or beliefs. They are rather feelings that depend on his most recent experiences. Poetry (or art in general) is *not* about facts after all.

The experiences
we have in life
are the outer effects
of our inner thoughts. (Poem 18, lines 4-7)

In Poem 25, he resorts to using the negative connotation of words like "Emptiness" and "Loneliness" [*sic*] (lines 4 and 5) to identify another kind of darkness he faces. The speaker reaches "grave" (line 5) with the amount of depression and negativity. However, he soon recovers and transcends to his higher self, saying "I am asking for an end, but it was just the beginning" (line 6). This sums up the transcending for the universe refuses to give up on the poet/sayer and insists on giving him the chance to recover and resume dispatching the message he was groomed for.

The inner struggle before reaching the state of compensation is once more displayed in Poem 26. The speaker is helplessly waiting for reconciliation but the long waiting made him despair and believe the "door" (line 4) does not exist as that kind of acceptance has vanished. The use of "vanish" is usually associated with "thin air" as in "He has vanished into thin air." However, Kalary uses "vanish into ash" in line 5, as if that gateway is deliberately burned to prevent him from finding the way to happiness, or from transcending to the accepting self.

The existence of the evil along with the good is not denied in Transcendentalism. The 'polarity' or 'binary' emphasizes the existence of both. Kalary is aware of the duality or polarity of life in the "Preface". He comments, "we all have two things in common pain and love". Polarity is emphasized at its best in Poem 1 as the opposites are mentioned:

love and hate,
life and death,
peace and war,
pain and joy,
you and me. (Poem 1, 6-10)

The last line shows the alienation of the poet from his surroundings as he poses himself as an opposite to the other ("you"). The arrangement of the opposites shows a complete acceptance as he does not divide them into positive and negative, but rather alternates the

first word that the reader feels they are of the same importance and they occur successively or will eventually happen, no exceptions possible. Thus, the placement of himself and the other is not a matter of depression but merely stating an opposite probably in thinking or priorities. He simply does not feel himself belonging where he is at the time of writing.

The binary is mentioned over and over in the poems by setting opposites that may not exist together. In Poem 47, for instance, there is the poverty/poetry binary. The thunder/rain binary appears in Poem 53. Another Example is given in Poem 22:

It's honor [*sic.*] to
become a slave
in the kingdom of love
than to be a king
in the kingdom of hatred. (Poem 22, lines 1-5)

Polarity is vivid in the display of the king/slave binary. Kalary presents a speaker who prefers to be a slave rather than a king. The position here is social and clearly does not degrade the person nor his actual state of happiness. To be a king living with hatred is not favorable if compared to living in simplicity (as a slave) with love. Meese writes:

[Sampson] Reed conceives of transcendence in terms of the reconciliation or two corresponding particulars; the reconciliation of subject and object produces perfect understanding, which leads the mind to participation in a higher order of being or meaning. Truth is revealed. [3]

Therefore, the poet/sayer accepts the simplicity of love and rejects anything that might compromise his unity with Nature or the "higher order".

If the happiness is to come untimely, it will last for a very short time as in Poem 43: "On Monday's afternoon/ he cried for that laugh on Sunday's morning." (lines 1-2). Happiness is as temporary as pain, and it does not last especially if it does not come as a compensation for sadness. The compensation happiness tastes better as it soothes the pain it follows; it is not happiness for happiness' sake. The soothing effect helps it be more effective even though the poet knows it is temporary, as well.

Poem 28 is the finalization of the theory of Transcendentalism and the 'recipe' to understand life. Finding a "fireless world" (line 2) or "a storm-free world" (line 3) or a "perfect world" (line 5) is quite impractical, Kalary believes. The actual world is a perfect balance between happiness and sadness. It is, nevertheless, possible to endure the pain caused by the imperfections of the world. "It is how we approach those pains/ makes it all look different" (lines 7-8). Poem 42 focuses on the same belief as he asks the reader to "Follow your wound" (line 42). Therefore, the reconciliation is manifested here not in the wait for the compensation. It is in seeing the pain as a necessity to go through, or as something with a definite end.

Another Transcendentalist importance for pain is empathy, as Kalary disputes in Poem 46: "Through suffering and pain,/ we learn to grow compassion for all." (lines 1-2) The empathy helps one to be able to cope with society as they watch the others' pain and understand it. Empathy is a human feature and it seems that Kalary believes that it is impossible to maintain without living the pain yourself.

III

Hawkar Kalary proves to be a poet of humanity through embracing the diversity and ignoring the minor differences. He eliminates discrimination by neglecting it, treating all human beings the same and speaking on the behalf of humanity rather than for himself or a certain group.

He establishes himself through *Your Knitted Scarf* as the poet of the masses, as Emerson's Sayer with Blake's vision. Transcending through the strenuous experiences he goes through makes him authentic enough for his readers.

The postmodern themes and style mix with the 19th century philosophies and theories to bring out the outstanding poems that have been written consciously or subconsciously to reach the ears and eyes of the audiences around the world. These poems are composed to make a difference and transcend the world into a healthier place.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

There are no conflicts of interest

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