

The Representation of the Snake in D.H. Lawrence's "Snake" and Abou Al Kasim Al Shabby's "The Philosophy of the Sacred Snake"(*)

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Abstract

In spite of the evil and the fear that the image of the snake summons, it is symbolic of other various elements. Throughout different ages in different cultures, the snake represents a number of contradictory concepts such as life and death, poison and cure, good and evil. In their poems "Snake" and "The Philosophy of the Sacred Snake", both Lawrence and Al-Shabby present the snake from different perspectives.

Contrary to the common beliefs and views, Lawrence selects to present the snake as a good and peaceful creature. It is made superior to man; it is deified. With such depiction, Lawrence criticizes man's flaws: violence, deceit, stupidity, and vanity. That evil disguises itself in a good outer appearance is also implied. The snake also represents wild nature and the evil side of man's nature that man should reconcile with in order to achieve the balance of life.

Al-Shabby's snake corresponds with the common beliefs about reptiles. The snake attacks, envenoms, and devours. It represents the tyrant who not only practices evil but justifies it. The scene of the snake attacking the sparrow and the dialogue between them, as an assailant and a prey, sums up the everlasting conflict between the mighty and the weak. Both Lawrence and Al-Shabby, in spite of their different cultural and religious backgrounds, refer obliquely to divine manners, scorning man's violence as a means of proving himself.

Keywords

Snake – evil – violence – contradictory – life – death - fear

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المخلص

يعد الثعبان واحداً من أكثر الرموز المعروفة والمختلف عليها وعلى الرغم من ذلك الخوف الذى تثيره صورة الثعبان فى قلوبنا وذلك الشر الذى تستدعيه فى عقولنا فإن الثعبان على مر العصور وفى مختلف الثقافات يمثل مجموعة من الأشياء المتناقضة كالسم والترىاق، الخير والشر، الحياة والموت. وفى قصيدتيهما "الثعبان" و "فلسفة الثعبان المقدس" تبنى كل من لورانس والشابى وجهتى نظر مختلفتين، فعلى النقيض من جملة الآراء والمعتقدات التى ترى فى الثعبان تجسيدا للشر، أثر لورانس أن يقدم صورة نادرة للثعبان كمخلوق جميل الهيئة، مسالم الطباع، واثق الخطى. وقد بالغ لورانس فى الاحتفاء بهذا المخلوق إلى الحد الذى جعله أكثر رقيماً من الإنسان نفسه بل إلى الحد الذى جعله يبدو كإله تحيطه هالة من الجلالة والسمو. ولعل لورانس قد أراد بهذا التصوير أن ينتقد تلك الصفات الإنسانية الذميمة كالعنف والخداع والغباء والغرور الزائف ولعله أيضاً أراد أن يصهر معاً الخير والشر فى ذلك المخلوق بشكل يجعل الإنسان يتصالح مع قوى الطبيعة الجامحة كما يحب جمالها الأخاذ بغية تحقيق ذلك التوازن المرجو فى الحياة. أما عن الشابى فى قصيدته "فلسفة الثعبان المقدس" فقد تطابق تصويره للثعبان مع المؤلف من المألوف من المعتقدات والآراء حول هذا المخلوق، فكغيره من الزواحف يهاجم الثعبان ويقتل ويلتهم ضحيته بلا رحمة. وقد جاء الثعبان فى قصيدة الشابى ليجسد الصراع الأبدى غير المتكافئ بين الأقوياء والضعفاء. وعلى الرغم من اختلاف الخلفية الثقافية والدينية لكلا الشاعرين إلا أنهما اتفقا على تمجيد تلك الصفات الربانية التى أودعها مخلوقاته وازدراء ذلك الغباء البشرى الذى ساق الإنسان لاعتماد العنف كوسيلة لإثبات هيمنته.

الكلمات الدالة

الثعبان - الخير - الشر - العنف - الغرور - الخوف - الحياة - الموت

Perhaps more than any other symbol, the snake is one of the most common and multifaceted. In spite of the evil that the image of the snake summons in our minds and the fear it provokes in our hearts, the snake symbolizes a number of contradictory elements in different cultures. Although the negative aspects that the snake stands for have been widely used, the snake symbolizes also some other positive aspects such as power, healing, and immortality.

From the earliest records of civilization it is clear that the snake played a significant cultural role, as an enigmatic creature with supernatural powers, alternatively seen (even in the same community) as benevolent creator and protector of wisdom and eternal life, or

perpetrator of evil and agent of death. Serpents are mythologically associated with the origin of the world and creation, with veneration of ancestors, bestowal of wisdom and power and as a symbol of mother earth and eternity. (Retief 553)

In both Greek and Roman cultures, the snake stands for medical excellence and healing from poison and so the Greek god of medicine Asclepius – the name that was modified by the Romans to be Aesculapius – has been depicted as a snake; a similar depiction linking the snake to medicine is still used in the medical field. Because a snake can cause death to its prey or let him stay alive, snakes, in ancient Greece as well as in Ancient Egypt, are said to be the intermediary between life and death, the earthly life and the underworld, and because they shed their skin during their life cycle, snakes stand for immortality "a serpent biting its tail was a common Egyptian emblem for eternity" (Skinner 44). The pharaoh's crown thus carried the image of the snake goddess of Lower Egypt "Wadjet" (Skinner 45) as a guardian and a protector of the king. In addition to the good aspects that the snake symbolizes in ancient Egypt, a number of devils and evil spirits took the form of snakes. Apophis "the serpent of darkness" was probably the most prominent (Skinner 45).

That the opposites are not always in conflict is a fact that is emphasized by the dual nature of the snake, which brings together such paradoxes as life and death, poison and cure, good and evil in one entity. Much more emphasis is given to this fact through the biblical story of Moses and the serpent in which the snake stands for both God's benevolent deeds and devil's malicious deeds. The Lord asked Moses and his brother Aaron to go to the Pharaoh to ask him to let the people of Israel go out of Egypt but the Pharaoh refused and asked them to prove their prophecy by a miracle and so they cast down their pole which turned into a snake. Angrily, the Pharaoh, in order to overcome them and refute their evidence, commanded all the sorcerers to come to show people their arts of magic. Obediently, they cast down their poles which also turned into snakes but Aaron's pole swallowed their poles (The Bible, Exodus 7: 8-12). The story

is also mentioned in some verses from The Holy Qur'n. "He said, "What if I bring you something convincing?" He said, "Bring it, if you are being truthful." So he cast his staff; and it was a serpent, plain to see" (The Qur'an, Ash – Shu'ara 30-32). "Now throw down what is in your right hand—it will swallow what they have crafted. What they have crafted is only a magician's trickery. But the magician will not succeed, no matter what he does."(The Qur'an, Taha 69). "Then Moses threw his staff, and behold, it began swallowing their trickery" (The Qur'an, Ash – Shu'ara 45). Away from the dual nature of the snake as presented in the Bible, The snake is depicted in these chapters from The Holy Qur'an as a fearful creature; God asks Moses to throw his cane down in order to cast terror in the heart of Pharaoh and his followers. The detested image of the snake is also affirmed by some sayings from Sunna. The prophet Mohammed asks Muslims to kill the snake because it is a devil "in Al Madina, there are a number of jinn; if you see any of them, give it a chance to leave thrice then kill it; it is a devil" (Moslem 2236); elsewhere he says "kill the black two in prayer, the snake and the scorpion" (Ibn Maga 1245). The snake is also known as a kind of God's punishment for disobedience; according to the Islamic beliefs it appears in the graves of those who do not pray. The presence of the snake as an evil loathed creature is still recurrent in some important situations from the Islamic history; among these situations – although it is not proved to be true – is that of Abu Bakr Al Sdeek who was stung by a snake when he was with the Prophet Mohammed in Heraa grotto.

In the Bible, the story of Moses' bronze snake is mentioned. On their way out of Egypt, the people of Israel witnessed a lot of hardships; they found no water and no food and so they wrathfully spoke against The Lord and Moses, blaming them as they were the main cause of their inevitable death. As a punishment, God sent them some blazing serpents and many of them were bitten. They went to Moses to repent asking him to pray to God to forgive them and dismiss the serpents. When Moses prayed to God, God asked him to make a flaming snake and put it on a cane and those who were bitten by the snakes would be good if they saw Moses' bronze snake (The Bible, Numbers 21: 4-9).

The popularity, however, of the image of the snake as the embodiment of evil and fright comes perhaps from its accordance with the initial image of the snake in the Bible in which the snake seduces Eve to eat from the forbidden tree, the sin that has affected humanity (The Bible, Genesis 3: 1-6). Jacques Derrida asserts that the book of Genesis is the main source that depicts animals as passive silent creatures and consequently animals are misrepresented in cultural heritage. For a full understanding of the other beings, how it is different from us as humans, and the shape of the relationship between animals and humans, it is important, Derrida stresses, to rethink the status of animals as distinct from their depiction in the book of Genesis. Derrida finds that poetry is the most suitable sphere to handle the relation between human and nonhuman species since poetry always stands by the side of the other speaking on behalf of him (Barcz 168-69).

This study, therefore, aims to answer such questions as what do Lawrence and Abou Al Kasim Al Shabby's snakes represent? What are the main differences between their snakes? Do their different cultures affect their views? What are the main devices both of them employ to support their viewpoints?

In a revolution against the most familiar image of the snake as a loathsome awful reptile, D. H. Lawrence in his poem "Snake" (349-51) chooses to present the rare image of the good snake. To fully grasp Lawrence's poetry on animals, one must look at his philosophical views on nature. Lawrence rejected the forces of society and believed instead in the forces of nature and in the distinct life of all living organisms. Unlike the human world's perversity, the natural world of flowers, birds, and animals is marked by its purity, spontaneity, and naturalness. Lawrence consequently had longed to delve into "the blood, the flesh of man, of animals, of flowers" and to make such "union with this life force, this dark, unseen flow was a means of justifying human life and breaking down walls of human isolation" (Williams 79). In his works Lawrence celebrated this living world, stressing that man should be in touch with nature in order to be in touch with its Creator. In her book *Stalking the Subject: Modernism and the Animal*, Carrie Rohman states that animals are peculiar beings that reject

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mechanical responses and embrace inherent secrets; Lawrence sought to make humans adopt such traits (101).

From the very beginning of Lawrence's poem, the snake is depicted as an innocent, harmless creature. As the poem goes on, the snake is deified and given heavenly glory and royal splendor as well. The poem depicts an encounter between the speaker and a snake. On a hot day in Sicily, the poet in his pajamas goes to his water trough to fill his pitcher and suddenly finds the snake there for the same purpose. He waits in complete respect for this thirsty creature that came first.

A snake came to my water-trough
On a hot, hot day, and I in pyjamas for the heat,
To drink there.

.....

I came down the steps with my pitcher
And must wait, must stand and wait, for there he was at the trough
before
me.

.....

And looked around like a god, unseeing, into the air
For he seemed to me again like a king,
Like a king in exile, uncrowned in the underworld,
Now due to be crowned again.

And so, I missed my chance with one of the lords
Of life. (349)

With vibrant, simple, and colorful diction, Lawrence evokes the scene. Under the Carob tree with its overpowering scent, the snake drags his soft yellow belly out of a crack in the earth to put his mouth on the edge of the water trough and begin sipping water. The snake drinks, and then looks at the poet surreptitiously as cattle do; it stops for a while and then drinks again as the poet is standing and watching silently. Abruptly, the poet recalls an old lesson that the Sicilian yellow snakes are poisonous while the black ones are not. On remembering this lesson, the poet is torn between

past knowledge and concrete reality, between his actual feelings and what ought to be; and between his desire to let it go and his mind that urges to kill it. The poet admits that he likes the snake; he is honored because it paid him such a quick visit. It is a guest and so he must be generous with it. He asks himself, therefore, if it is cowardice to let it go peacefully.

In god-like magnificence, the snake looks around itself after it "flickered his tongue" and licked "his lips"; it slowly drags its soft body backward the dark hole from which it came. On seeing the snake disappear, the poet puts his pitcher and picks up a log to finish the snake off, but most of its body enters the fissure before being hit.

Feelings of regret and sorrow fill the poet after his failed attempt to kill the snake. He despises himself for doing so, describing his deed as "vulgar" and "mean". Because of his "pettiness", he misses a chance with "one of the lords of life"; the snake was as majestic as a king, but unfortunately this king was in exile and needed to be crowned.

The theme of man's inclination to evil and perversity is implied. Man does not only tend to be evil, he justifies it, or rather, beautifies it. Contrary to familiar beliefs and common ideas, the snake is portrayed as a quiet peaceful guest that seeks hospitality. The snake is likened to cattle and then given one of the most attractive attributes that man has: peacefulness. Evil is not only welcomed, it is also made superior to man.

A constellation of opposite ideas may arise from the snake's seemingly innocent appearance. That the poet warns man of evil which may be disguised in an innocent semblance is likely. Eve did not know that the snake was a tempter so she was seduced easily. That the poet implicitly urges man to release himself from the bonds of mind and the limitations of logic is also likely. Man does not have to take matters for granted but should wage "a crusade against mind" (Williams 83). In order to find the truth, one must experiment and verify beliefs oneself, "the supreme lesson of human consciousness is to learn how not to know. That is, how not to interfere, how to live dynamically, from the great Source, and not statically, like machines driven by ideas and principles from the head" (MacLean 169). Even with religious matters, Lawrence revolted against the mind in order to

judge things and refused to consider things as bad or good only because orthodox Christianity classed them such (Williams 77). Lawrence emphasizes that "the mind's terror of the body has driven more men mad than ever could be counted" (MacLean 169). Man, Lawrence claims, should depend instead on instinct because it is – as defined by Malebranche - not only the "natural inclination or propensity" but also "a kind of innate knowledge"; instinct is something like "an impression of God himself"(Drever 97), thus man's yielding to instinct looks like listening to God's voice that always inclines and leads him to good. Mind and education should enhance confrontation with other creatures, should permit man try and learn, and should give him the enough bravery to adapt but what happened in "the snake" is the opposite. The mind binds the persona making him look like a mere machine. In his real experience of meeting a snake, the voice of education is away

I saw a beautiful brindled adder, in the spring, coiled up asleep with her head on her shoulder. She did not hear me till I was very near. Then she must have felt my motion, for she lifted her head like a queen to look, then turned and moved slowly and with delicate pride into the bushes. She often comes into my mind again and I think I see her asleep in the sin, like a princess of the fairy world. It is queer, the intimations of other worlds, which one catches.

(MacLean 170)

This encounter between the poet and the snake can stand for the confrontation between abstract ideas and physical reality. The poet is torn between the old voice of education that urges him to kill the snake and his real experience of meeting a snake.

On the day of Sicilian July, with Etna smoking,
The voice of my education said to me
He must be killed,
For in Sicily the black, black snakes are innocent, the gold are
venomous. (349)

Nothing is able to refute these abstract ideas except the sensory, tangible

experiment. Everything in the scene is concretely brought to life. The snake is personified: a detailed description is given to the snake, the way it drinks, the way it moves, its color, and its traits. Although stronger, the physical world is defeated by abstract ideas.

In his initiative to kill the snake, the poet documents this defeat, announcing the victory of education and abstract ideas over the real world. It is a complete submission to the voice of education that led to the poet's confusion, then to wrongdoing and consequently to regret. Man is portrayed as imprisoned and suffering comparable to the snake which proves its freedom and independence. Unlike the snake that has grown more free and sublime than the human being, man surrenders to his blood instinct to fulfill himself. No wonder then to find that the snake drank and went back to its kingdom peacefully and regally whereas the narrator's story ended with regret and dishonor.

By the same token, the encounter between the poet and the snake can stand for the confrontation between man and social norms. The poet is sure that the snake is peaceful and harmless. It is as domestic as cattle, glorified as a king and reverent as a deity but this assurance does not prevent him from yielding to social norms.

The Western – especially Italian – ethos of macho virility insists that a real man would kill a poisonous snake – ostensibly to protect family and community, but more essentially to prove his manhood. Violence becomes an initiation rite, a litmus test of masculinity, the strength of the male body pitted against an opponent, be it animal, other men or, we may presume, woman.

(MacLean 163)

Yellow snakes are venomous – it is commonly believed, so the persona chooses to go along with the accepted norms, not out of conviction but to avoid social guilt. His manhood will be impugned if he does not kill the snake "And voices in me said, if you were a man you would take a stick and break him now, and finish him off". It is social norms that make him ask if it is cowardice to spare the snake. The reference to violence as proof of masculinity reminds us of how the poet portrays the snake as a peaceful

creature, thus underscoring the negative aspects of social norms that impose violence and injustice as a means of proving oneself.

Critics have also used the narrator's violence to highlight gender differences. The thrower of the log is a male; he submits spontaneously to the roles the society draws for him. According to social expectations, a female would not be expected to perform such a violent deed. "Culture, in general, does not require a woman to kill, but to give birth. The role of killing has been incumbent on the man for a long time. It is he, according to tradition, who hunts and kills" (Kakoliris 249).

On picking up a log to kill the snake, the poet asserts his domination over other creatures; he asserts his position as the master of the universe. Such status is given to man by God and man has to keep it even if through the use of violence. In the Bible, one can read

And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth. So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them. And God blessed them, and God said unto them. Be fruitful and multiply, and replenish the earth, over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth. (The Bible Genesis, 1: 26–28)

The snake does not only defy the poet-narrator, but also the heavenly power inside him; it enters his home, drinks from his water trough and pays no attention to his presence and so it is attacked. The snake's violation of man's rights and his biblical superiority over other creatures stands behind the narrator's immediate violence. Violence is thus not a natural instinct in man.

Through such violence against the snake, the narrator can reach the moral conclusion which emerges from his sense of guilt. Without throwing a log at the snake, the narrator would not experience regret. He becomes more human after being guilty. He admits his love directly for the snake after attacking it, referring to it as "my snake". Nature and society constantly bring man moral challenges and man's response to these challenges

determines his position in the moral structure. It is the narrator's inner voice of education that turns the poem from a narration describing a natural setting and a majestic creature into an inward monologue. A simple encounter with a snake ends in an ethical problem and his confusion as to killing the snake or letting it go peacefully is an implicit call for the reader to share the persona's perplexity and reach a solution to the multilayered dilemma.

As the lord of the underworld, the snake symbolizes the harsh mysterious forces of nature that man continuously fears. The ordinary experience of encountering a snake is thus an incarnation of a man facing the wild face of nature. Lawrence claims that the snake symbolizes the malicious side of the human nature "We are devils and angels both", affirming that we should reconcile with the snakes within our selves making peace with the creative-subversive ambivalence of nature in order to achieve balance (Rani 2). He differentiates between the individual awareness that can not identify the differences between beings and the social awareness that, through education, understands the split of ourselves into "rational" and "instinctual" sides but cannot unite them in one whole. The instinctual side is called "the blood-self"; both of the society and the rational side of the self favor intellect and fear instincts. Lawrence, on the other hand, affirms the importance of allowing the "blood-self" to control our deeds. On meeting the snake, the persona experiences a clear conflict between intellect which fears, avoids, and loathes reptiles and the blood-self which appreciates the beauty of such creatures. Because it is a part of ourselves and a part of the nature we belong to, we should accept the snake with its dual nature, its beauty as well as its harm, Lawrence claims.

To stress the idea that opposites unite, or rather reconcile, to form the whole being, Lawrence fuses in one entity both the snake and the man. From the very beginning, the poet stresses the similarity between the narrator and his guest, the snake. Both of them are driven by their natural instinct of quenching their thirst; they share the basic instinct of survival. Both are living creatures that live under the sky, enjoy the light of the moon; eat, drink, and sleep. They struggle to live and are both doomed to death. On depicting both the poet and the snake standing at the edge of the same water

trough, one can not distinguish the line separating them as creatures of different species; one can only see two living creatures. To highlight this fusion, the snake is never referred to as "it"; it is personified. On talking about the snake, the poet uses the pronouns "he" and "his"; the snake is "someone", the first comer and above all a "king". The likeness the poet makes between the narrator and the snake is given a deeper dimension when he makes them share some anatomic features. On using their tongues, gums, and mouths for drinking water, one cannot discriminate the difference between the two species; one cannot perceive the snake as a latent evil. Both man and the snake are, thus, two equal parts of the universe; they unite to complete the life cycle.

Throughout the poem the snake is personified or rather glorified. He is not an ordinary passerby; he is a distinct character; he has a peculiar personality. He is strong, independent, dignified, and free, having a viewpoint. Imagery, free verse, and diction are skillfully employed to highlight this depiction. The snake is portrayed as superior to man. In a reversal of what appears in the Bible in which the snake whispers at man's ear, seducing him to disobey God, what whispers to the narrator here is a voice from himself. Man, therefore, is frequently the source of evil but he always prefers to blame others for his sins. Certain words are used to stress the snake's peacefulness and man's latent evil. The resemblance, Lawrence makes, between the snake and "cattle", for instance, implies a number of points. The snake is as domestic and harmless as cattle. It is also used by man everywhere and at any time and is slaughtered by man without a sense of guilt. The snake's look at the narrator after drinking, "And looked at me vaguely, as drinking cattle do", has also some implications. In his article entitled "The Animal That Therefore I Am", Jacques Derrida states that animals are not only looked at; they can also look at man and because of the frequent encounters between man and animals, such gaze from the animal to man is not devoid of meaning, through which the animal can form his viewpoint as for this man

The animal is there before me, there close to me, there in front of

me-I who am (following) after it. And also, therefore, since it is before me, it is behind me. It surrounds me. And from the vantage of this being-there-before-me it can allow itself to be looked at, no doubt, but also-something that philosophy perhaps forgets, perhaps being this calculated forgetting itself-it can look at me. It has its point of view regarding me. (380)

The contrast used by the poet intensifies man's utmost foolishness and confusion, and consequently punctuates the snake's superiority. The narrator feels honored by the snake's visit and asks if it is humility to welcome it. He likes the snake "I confess how I liked him", he "longed to talk to him", he was "glad" as it paid him such visit but he "picked up a clumsy log" to kill it. He is fascinated but terrified. The manner in which he kills the snake is also worthy of consideration. In bewilderment, as if he is a thief, he "looked round" and "picked up a clumsy log" to attack the snake while it is withdrawing. Like any other coward, he is able to act when the snake turns its back. In this an ignoble deed, Robert MacLean asserts that man fails on all levels: from the perspective of virility, he fails to act nobly with his enemy instead of attacking it from behind. He cannot be a "macho" whose strength implies chivalry as well. Moreover, the abruptness of his attack "betrays his previous fragile and precious communication with the snake" (165). He did not give any sign of enmity to the snake and so the snake did not take precautions against any potential hazard. The narrator's wrongdoing is, therefore, depicted as a great sin that one needs to "expiate"- a term always associated with religious matters.

In his article "D.H. Lawrence and the Resources of Poetry", Presley stresses Lawrence's successful use of verbs which intensifies the snake's superiority "The human receives second-class treatment; the absence of a finite verb allows the static participle to change the human into a fact, a passive bit of environment, while the snake acts through a full verb" (Presley 9). The narrator is just a viewer with mere knee-jerk reactions while the snake controls the whole scene. From the very beginning, highly rich descriptions are given to the snake's activities "A snake came", "He

reached down from a fissure", "trailed his yellow-brown slackness soft-bellied" "rested his throat", "He sipped with his straight mouth", "He lifted his head", "looked at me vaguely", "flickered his two-forked tongue".....and so on. On the other hand, the verbs that are used to describe the narrator's deeds have negative connotations to stress his stupidity and clumsiness "I looked round, I put down my pitcher /I picked up a clumsy log/ And threw it at the water-trough with a clatter", "I regretted", "I thought how paltry, how vulgar, what a mean act", "I despised myself ", "I missed my chance with one of the lords Of life/ And I have something to expiate: A pettiness". He initiates his actions with foolishness, passing through regret, ending with shame. That all the verbs in the poem are in the past tense is also noteworthy. It makes the poem look like a confession; the narrator confesses his past sins that need expiation.

One of the other devices that Lawrence uses to stress the dichotomy between life and death, sin and regret is allusion. He firstly alludes to Etna volcano and its mythological story to stress the similarity between the snake and the earth, as both can embody life and death. The snake is a symbol of cure and a cause of death as well; similarly, earth can contain the enlivening seeds and the blazing flames. "Being earth-brown, earth-golden from the burning bowels of the earth /On the day of Sicilian July, with Etna smoking".

Based on a real experience of meeting a snake, Lawrence wrote this poem when he was at Sicily where Mount Etna was within sight. Etna Volcano was active at that time and Lawrence found it a suitable occasion to refer to its story and the mythological snake, Typhon. Typhon was a giant monster; he was so tall with a head reaching the sky. His arms were also so long that they could reach the North and the South; they ended in dragons' heads. The lower part of his body consisted of numberless hissing serpents. His eyes and mouth were fiery. He was so fearful and even gods were unable to face him; they disguised themselves as animals to flee from the battlefield. At last, Typhon was defeated at the hands of Zeus who threw Mount Etna on top of the monster; but under the mountain, the monster

ignited fire every now and then. The inhabitants of this place used this story to interpret the activity of the volcano. With such reference to Etna Volcano, the snake is likened to the gigantic serpent, Typhon (Hansen 233).

Of equal importance is the allusion to Coleridge's "the Rime of the Ancient Mariner" where the sailor killed an albatross and so became cursed: all of his crewmates died, and evil spirits haunted the ship. As a sign of penance, the sailor wore the dead albatross around his neck. Moreover, he saw snakes walking upon the water surface; the curse ended when he considered those snakes as "god's creatures of the great calm". The dead albatross eventually dropped off his neck. The narrator here fears being cursed like the mariner, so he regretfully avows his sin and the necessity to expiate it.

The snake's influence apparently affects not only the narrator but the poem itself. In order to illustrate the spell of the snake, Lawrence adopts "a serpentine form for the poem" which is based on "repetition and long curving sentences" (Rani 3). Because of the strangeness of the topic - the snake's god-like majesty and superiority over man – Lawrence pays much attention to every detail in the scene to affirm its reality. From the very beginning, words are frequently repeated. Several examples of repetition include "On a hot, hot day" - to make readers acquainted with the setting and its characteristics, "And must wait, must stand and wait"- to stress the narrator's reaction on seeing the snake drinking, "as cattle do"- to familiarize the reptile, "earth brown", "earth golden", and "the black, black snakes are innocent"- to justify his violence against the snake because it is yellow and thus venomous. The stark confusion of the narrator is also stressed through the repetition of both "afraid" and "so honored". Such repeated words as "dark", "hole", "forked", and "wall" are intended to emphasize the snake's power and its mysterious world. The repetition of the "s" sound which is relevant to the hissing sound of the snakes is equally important to make readers feel the experience of meeting a reptile as if it is real. In addition to its sibilant sound, the letter S, which is so close to the shape of a snake, can suggest the slithering movement of serpents. The variation of line length from very short to very long suits the movement of the snake; it also suits

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the narrator's confusion and vacillation between the disturbing thoughts in his mind and the physical beauty of the snake. Through the use of enjambment, Lawrence elongates the lines so as to simulate the snake's long body.

The recurrent use of alliteration is also noteworthy. The several instances of alliteration from the very beginning – "strange-scented shade", "from a fissure", "brown slackness soft-bellied", "He sipped with his straight mouth / Softly drank through his straight gums, into his slack" "flickered his two-forked tongue", "like lightning", "the lords of life", - not only help keep the unity of narration but also help captivate readers. The readers' ears are under the spell of the snake.

Contrary to Lawrence, Abou Al Kasim Al Shabby in his poem "The Philosophy of the Sacred Snake" (137) adopts the common image of a powerful evil snake – the Image that conforms to his Islamic culture. The dialogue between the fatal snake and the weak sparrow, besides keeping readers engaged and motivated to finish the story, gives the poem a deeper dimension: the snake and the sparrow are not mere animals; they symbolize the recurrent conflict between power and weakness. They are personified to embody the brutality of mankind as well. From the very beginning, the snake is not a deadly reptile that stings, devours, or envenoms, but a dominating entity with its own viewpoint. It does not only practice evil but it justifies it, attempting to convince its prey that it is doing it a favor.

Al Shabby begins his poem with a description of the scene; the snake and the sparrow meet in the spring and everything is fascinating. The sparrow is happy, dancing and singing amid the flowers and the greenery. The dazzling beauty of the scene is intoxicating.

The spring was like a youthful dreamer, a soul in
perfumed garb

Walking upon the surface of the universe, touring in a charming
parade

The horizon was filled with kindness as if it was the heart of this
bountiful world

So chaste, the cosmos is like a sanctuary, and the forest is like a niche

The sparrow was dancing, singing to the sun, above the roses and the grass

In happiness and peace, drunk on this astonishing world

Jealous of the sparrow's joy and liveliness, a snake attacks it as if it was God's punishment or curse upon this poor bird. Shocked, the sparrow screams and begins a desperate dialogue with the snake asking "What have I done to deserve such punishment?" affirming that it has done nothing except admiring the beauty of other creatures and warbling in the forest. It asks the snake "is this a crime, where is justice then, my comrades"? The snake, in boastfulness and vainglory, replied "Nowhere; the sacred law here is that of the most powerful / the happiness of runts is a crime that deserves a punishment from the mighty / peace is a lie and justice is the philosophy of abating flame".

As an expert who deeply believes in the hegemony of the power philosophy, the snake asks the inexperienced naïve sparrow to listen carefully to its speech, stressing the fact that there is no justice without equal power, and terrorism should be met with terrorism. The snake describes itself as wise and so its duty is to excise the ignorant clumsy sparrow with its unruly emotions that have no place in reality. The dialogue then takes on another dimension; the snake is no longer the envious detestable creature, the powerful dominating entity, or the wise advisor; it far exceeds such descriptions. Now, it describes itself as a deity that people have been worshipping, fearing its curse and punishment. Out of piety, people sacrifice themselves optionally and happily for appeasing their deity. According to the snake's unfair philosophy, which is adopted by tyrants, the runts should be happy if they are devoured by the mighty because they become part of their strength. The sparrow will be given eternity when it becomes a part of the imperishable snake. Symbolizing despots everywhere and every when, the snake convinces the sparrow that it does it a great favor.

In my divine soul, you will dwell sacredly, pure of impurities

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are not you happy to settle in my flesh and sinews
to be resoluteness in my blood, glow in my eyes, sharpness in my
fangs
melts in my everlasting soul, acquiring, thus, some of my godhead
and youth?
I wish you eternity, living a godlike in my immortal soul

Sardonically, the snake asks the sparrow to think about its offer – a strange image of a poor bird between the jaws of the snake being asked to think about being annihilated. The difference between the innocent bird at the beginning of the poem and the mature subjugated one at the end is reflected in the sparrow's reply to the snake's offer. It says "the runts, even if they have rights, have no say; only the tyrants have / execute your will then and save your majesty from hearing my speech / all oppressors veil their evil aims behind wise dialectics".

Unlike Lawrence's "snake" which employs free verse to suit the snake's independence and free movements, Al Shabby makes his poem "The Philosophy of the Sacred Snake" rhymed to suit the snake's dominance. Every thing is in the snake's fist and under its control even the lives of the other creatures. To impose its philosophy, the snake knows well what to do and how to do it. The well depicted plan that depends on logic and determination is reflected in the tight form of the poem; it seems that the domineering snake controls the lines too.

To stress the difference between the weak and the mighty, Al-Shabby chooses the sparrow which is known for delicacy and freedom and the fearful reptile which is known for harm. Unlike Lawrence's snake that shared some features with the narrator – some of them were anatomic- this snake has nothing in common with the weak bird. The runts and the mighty share nothing. They are of different species. To stress the distance between the snake and its prey, the snake is no longer a creature, but a deity. It is not the merciful or just deity; it is the deity that enslaves creatures.

The two poets, from different cultures, despite the difference between their verse styles, indirectly share a world-view: they believe in

equality and implicitly criticize violence. Both Lawrence and Al Shabby emphasize peacefulness as a positive trait: Lawrence shows the peaceable snake as worthy of compassion, in the face of the human aggressor, while Al-Shabby transfers this attribute to the sparrow who has done nothing but praise God's creatures, and is attacked by the snake, here symbolizing unjust power and tyranny.

Finally, despite differing religious backgrounds, both poets obliquely refer to divine morals and ethics: Lawrence's persona confesses the sin of attacking an innocent creature, while Al-Shabby's bird worships God by appreciating His creatures, and is killed by the unholy force of tyranny. Thus the two poets, from different cultures, share a world view that glorifies compassion and peace as divine.

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