

Exploring Relationships between Poetry and Nature in Salah Jaheen's "On the Name of Egypt"*

Iman Adawy Ahmed Hanafy

*Associate Professor of English Literature, English Department,
Faculty of Arts, Benha University*

Abstract

This study explores the relationship between poetry and the natural world; the question of whether language can ever faithfully depict the natural world. To address this issue, Salah Jaheen's poem "On the Name of Egypt" (1971) will be analyzed. It is a historical document in which Jaheen narrated the history of Egypt from the pharaonic era till a moment of history in which Mohammad Farid, the ideal patriot was fighting for freedom. Although the poem is not viewed within the scope of ecocriticism, according to the third-wave ecocritics, the poem can be analyzed from this angle—the way poetic depiction of the natural world reflects human culture and intention, rather than the physical world. While Jaheen attempts to get hold of the natural world through poetic techniques, his technique fails to achieve this goal by recognizing the distance that exists between words and the worlds to which they refer.

To address this critical gap, Jaheen uses three strategies —the limitations of language, qualifying language, and the theme of loss-- to examine the complex relationship between poetry and the natural world. The examination suggests that Jaheen makes the poem an object of

inquiry, the outcome of the inquiry is the creation of knowledge; a form of epistemological phenomenon.

Keywords

Ecocriticism, Third-wave ecocriticism, Salah Jaheen's poem "On the Name of Egypt", limitations of language, qualifying language, theme of loss, performative language, nature, and culture

الملخص :

تستكشف هذه الدراسة العلاقة بين الشعر والعالم الطبيعي؛ مسألة ما إذا كان يمكن للغة أن تصور حقاً العالم الطبيعي. لمعالجة هذه المسألة، سيتم تحليل قصيدة صلاح جاهين "على اسم مصر" (١٩٧١). في حين أن القصيدة هي وثيقة تاريخية روى فيها جاهين تاريخ مصر من العصر الفرعوني حتى لحظة من التاريخ الذي كان محمد فريد، الوطني المثالي يقاتل من أجل الحرية و على الرغم من أن القصيدة لا ينظر إليها في نطاق نظرية النقد البيئي، وفقاً للموجة الثالثة للنقد البيئي، يمكن تحليل القصيدة من هذه الزاوية - طريقة التصوير الشعري للعالم الطبيعي التي تعكس ثقافة الإنسان، بدلاً من العالم المادي. في قصيدة "على اسم مصر" يحاول جاهين استكشاف العلاقات بين الشعر والطبيعة من خلال التقنيات الشعرية، ولكنه فشل في تحقيق هذا الهدف من خلال الاعتراف بوجود مسافة بين الكلمات والعوامل التي تشير إليها. لمعالجة هذه الفجوة الحرجة، يستخدم جاهين ثلاث استراتيجيات - العجز اللغوي، ولغة الوصف، وفكرة فقدان - لدراسة العلاقة المعقدة بين الشعر والعالم الطبيعي. وتشير دراسته إلى أن جاهين يجعل القصيدة موضوعاً للتحقيق حيث يدرس جزء من القصيدة جزءاً آخر منه: إن نتيجة التحقيق هي خلق المعرفة. إن استخدام نهج الموجة الثالثة للنقد البيئي أسترعى الانتباه إلى الطريقة التي قام بها الشاعر تصوير العالم الطبيعي. في هذه الحالة، سيظهر كيف أن حب الشاعر لأرضه، أرض مصر، يقوده إلى حب الأرض كجزء من عالمه والعالم الطبيعي.

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الكلمات الدالة:

النقد البيئي - الموجة الثالثة للنقد البيئي - قصيدة صلاح جاهين "على اسم مصر -
العجز اللغوي - لغة الوصف - فكرة فقدان

This study explores the relationship between poetry and the natural world; the question of whether language can ever faithfully depict the natural world. To address this issue, Salah Jaheen's poem "On the Name of Egypt" (1971) will be analyzed. While the poem accurately describes the natural world in certain parts, language is limited in its ability to represent the natural world in other parts. To address this gap, a third-wave ecocritical approach will be used to examine the complex relationship between poetry and the natural world. The examination suggests that Jaheen makes the poem an object of inquiry where one part of the poem examines another part of the poem, and the outcome of the inquiry is the creation of knowledge; a form of epistemological phenomena. The poem, also, draws attention to the way our conceptualization of nature often reflects human culture and intention, rather than represents the nonhuman world. Therefore, the third-wave ecocritical approach is used to call attention to the way the poet's depiction of the natural world is constructed. In this case, it will be shown how the poet's love of his land, the land of Egypt, leads him to love of land, that is earth as part of his world and the natural world.

The term "nature writing" or "nature-oriented literature" (Murphy qtd. Barnhill 277), while often debated, refers to writers' response to the natural world. The idea of nature as distinct from human is

conceptualized in several ways. It has been seen as a place of retreat from humanity (Roorda 139), as an external “other” (Slovic 4), as a place for communion with the spiritual (Cronon qtd. White 19), or as the object of a new, environmentally focused value system (Foss 42). Whatever the differences in their conceptualization of nature, the environmental crisis catalyzed the emergence of ecocriticism, a discipline that studies depictions of the environment and nature in literature and the role those depictions play within a text. The term ecocriticism grew during the 1960s and 1970s with writers such as Aldous Huxley and Rachel Carson (Love 563) and gained strength in 1996 with the publication of Cheryl Glotfelty and Harold Fromm’s *The Ecocritical Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*. (Bennet 7)

Broadly speaking, ecocriticism investigates the textual depiction of nature in literature. It includes the “cultural connections between the environment, culture, and art” (Weidner 190). Buell’s division of the field into “waves” (*The Ecocritical Insurgency* 702) suggests that ecocritical methodologies can be split into first-wave ecocriticism, second-wave ecocriticism, and a third-wave ecocriticism. The accepted division of ecocriticism into critical “waves” simplifies the fact that ecocritics differ widely in their views. They are brought together by a common political project or point of view, rather than a shared theoretical approach. (Heise 506)

The term “waves” is problematic because it suggests a transition from one school of thought to another. The first-wave of ecocriticism developed in the 1970s and 1980s (Bennett 207). It analyzes literary

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writings which describe a traditional conceptualization of nature, wilderness, and the nonhuman environment, supporting the values of the green movement (Armbruster and Wallace 10). The first-wave ecocritics mainly address environmental concerns and assert that ecocriticism can use “nature as a ‘critical’ concept” (Coupe 4) to challenge the practice of industrialization. In this sense, first-wave ecocritics cast “nature” as the “victim of modernization but also as its opposite and alternative” (Heise 508). Hence, first-wave ecocritics tended to promote texts that raise moral questions about human interaction with nature, and provide solutions to environmental problems. The aim of such critics is to bring the reader’s attention to environmental issues.

From 1990s some ecocritics broaden the scope of the field’s inquiry. Nancy Easterlin (2004) criticizes the use of traditional definitions of nature and environment, arguing, “Although ecocritics no longer generally use these words in a tacit and unreflective manner, they typically resort to standard dichotomies that sever human from nature” (6). In *The Future of Environmental Criticism* (2005), the first-wave ecocritic, Buell admits that his own initial focus on traditional concepts of nature was too restrictive and anthropocentric for a mature literary criticism (22). The first-wave ecocritics do not view humans and urban habitats as part of nature, and therefore these are excluded from ecocritical analyses (Bennett 208). For the second-wave ecocritics, the term nature encompasses both humans and nonhumans; it includes not just animal and plant life, but cities and urban living. This reconceptualization has shifted ecocriticism’s focus from promoting the

green effectiveness of a text to examining the “interconnection between urban and non-urban space, humans and nonhumans, traditional and experimental genres, as well as the impact of race, class, gender, and sexuality on how we use and abuse nature” (Bennett 208). This is considered an important turn in ecocriticism, but one that may have been limited by “a community of ecocritics [that] has been relatively non-diverse and also has been constrained by a perhaps overly narrow construing of ‘white’ and non-white’ as the primary categories of ethnicity” (Adamson and Slovic 6). As a response to the perceived limitation in the ecocritical community, Adamson and Slovic edited a special issue of MELUS (*The Journal of the Society for the Study of the Multi-Ethnic Literature of the United States*) containing a collection of essays from a diverse group of writers, not constrained by racial, national, or gendered categories. The result as they write in the introduction to the issue, is “what seems to be a new third-wave of ecocriticism, which recognized ethnic and national particularities and yet transcends ethnic and national boundaries; this third wave explores all facets of human experience from an environmental viewpoint” (6-7).

Third-wave ecocriticism begins to emerge in 2000. Its common goal can be broadly stated as intended to address the criticisms raised against the first and second waves. For example, the first and second waves are narrowed down to the use of realism and representationalism when examining a text, besides a focus on Western texts and Western definitions of “nature.” The problem with the use of realism in contemporary literary theories is that realism examines texts that depict

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nature whereas texts with concepts of nature that fall outside the ecocritic's world view, such as socio-economic or cultural position, might go unnoticed. Michael Cohen explains that "younger critics have become suspicious of personal narratives about nature produced from privileged positions of gender, class, and ethnicity" (29). On the other hand, a representational approach means a belief in "reference"—the idea that words refer to an objective reality. Although such an approach previously underpinned "literary representation throughout most of Western history" (Brewton), Third-wave ecocritics avoid limiting their analyses to questions of signification and representation. Thus, the third wave ecocritics explore how language reflects our culturally informed interpretation of nature, but not nature itself, that is, the focus is the text and the concepts depicted in that text.

Salah Jaheen (1930-1986) is an eminent Egyptian poet, lyricist, playwright and cartoonist. His nationalist and patriotic songs marked the revolutionary era of the Egyptian president Gamal Abdel Nasser, and were performed by the famous Egyptian singer Abdel Halim Hafez. Salah Jaheen was highly inspired by the 1952 Egyptian Revolution. His poetry describes the idea of a society struggling for freedom. In 1971, Jaheen wrote his epic poem "On the Name of Egypt". It is "a historical document" (Enani 14) in which he narrated the history of Egypt from the time of ancient Egyptians till a moment of history in which Mohammad Farid, the ideal patriot was fighting for freedom. Although the poem is not viewed within the scope of ecocriticism, according to the third-wave ecocritics, the poem can be analyzed from this angle—the way poetic

depictions of the natural world reflect human culture and intention, rather than the physical world. While Jaheen attempts to get hold of the natural world through poetic techniques, his technique fails to achieve this goal by recognizing the distance that exists between words and the worlds to which they refer. To address this critical gap, Jaheen uses three strategies—the limitations of language, qualifying language, and the theme of loss-- to explore the role of the poem in explaining the poet's relationship to the natural world.

Jaheen explores language limitations in two ways: first, that the poet's depiction of nature is constructed rather than representative; and second, that each interaction creates a uniquely different construction. While words may only point to the world, they are necessary because it gives a new way of thinking and speaking. Nature, in literature, is an important issue for ecocritics because of the way in which the poet depicts the natural world—how he perceives, refracts and recreates the world (Easterlin 6). The third-wave approach embraces this duality by examining the depictions of nature in a text, while still giving new knowledge and forms of these depictions. It engages with the notion that the meaning of language is unfixed and contextually created, as Coupe states, “that nature is nothing more than a linguistic construct” (3). The idea that literature requires a physical reality that can be influenced by beliefs that arise from the poet's linguistic construction.

From the beginning of the poem, Jaheen's depiction of the natural world is influenced by cultural and personal history. He said:

The palm trees are tall and towering.

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The Nile running, unwavering.
Wherein reflections are upside down.
No concern of mine. (37)

In his reference to the upside down image of palm trees in the Nile, Jaheen embodies the crisis of the Egyptian citizen who seems to be indifferent to political and social life. In spite of the adequacy and the presence of the physical world, Jaheen attracts the attention of the reader to the preciousness and particularity of his dilemma: the poet describes an interpretive moment between himself as observer (subject) and the Nile as object where the observer draws on historical information in his portrayal of the natural world, eventually leading to a coalescence of subject and object.

Jaheen's use of specific names for generic categories reflects the value and the particularity of the object he describes. By specifying the name of the element of nature, Jaheen moves away from abstraction towards the specific and valuable.

Why is wheat called wheat
Today, yesterday and tomorrow.
Why should Egypt be denied that,
Why should a heated argument start
On the Name of Egypt? (39)

By his identification of "wheat" with Egypt, Jaheen comes closer to his "nature" and consequently to nature. Phillips explains that "There is no doubt that literature can be realistic and even in some limited sense representational: it can point to the world" (597), but still it only results

in a human classification of the natural world, not the natural world per se. Jaheen's association of wheat with Egypt is historical rather than representative—an argument which adds to the tension of the poem: although it depicts and directs our attention to nature, it carries a deep historic significance. Throughout, descriptions conflate individual and cultural constructions with representations of the natural world.

Along with historical meaning, Jaheen's poem reflects personal information of what is being described. His personal association with the natural elements shapes the way he sees it:

Winds whistling and wave surging
The stamping hoofs of horses galloping
Drawing [a carriage with girls] ululating,
A bunch of difficult tunes reaching
My ears one by one, pressed
Into my skin pores, with my blood,
Winding rills and canals watering
The tissues of my body, with every thread
Perfectly tuned, whether heard
As whisper or as plangent sound, (38)

The speaker recognizes something of himself in the “winding rills” and “canal watering” his body, which suggests the link between himself and the elements. Jaheen describes how the biological needs connect human with the objects of nature which run into “my skin” and become part of “my blood”. In this stanza Jaheen expresses his love for Egypt which runs in his blood, the same way water runs through his veins.

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Jaheen's description does not represent the natural world per se, but instead that meaning is interactional—and his interactions with other elements of nature determine what nature means for him. Depictions of nature are, in part, depictions of ourselves.

This limitation of language can also be seen in Jaheen's association of the Egyptian leader Orabi with his horse. Jaheen's association shapes the way the speaker beholds the animal world. In describing Orabi's horse, the speaker uses a culturally based description—"Orabi's horse is beautiful/ Of pedigree Arabian breed,/ A long-tailed steed," (54) which suggests that the speaker knows and interprets the animal through his own cultural references. By exploring the animal world, Jaheen's description of Orabi's horse suggests that both culture and personal history influence the way the poet experiences, interprets, and creates meaning about the natural world. While Jaheen continues to depict the animal world as particular, "With other horses he spent the night talking/ Venturing opinion, though uneducated" (54), his poems draw attention to the constructed concepts as knowledge about the animal world. The act of observation creates a unique description that arises from the speaker, rather than an objective description of the horse. As Jonathan Levin states, it is important to "pay careful attention to how we experience the natural world, as well as our literary representations of it, in order to devote a great consideration to the many ways in which we invariably shape the world we inhabit, for good and ill" (Arnold et al 1098).

As the poem proceeds, meaning is created dynamically and changes for each unique interaction. Jaheen extends his image of Orabi and his horse to delineate important moments in the history of Egypt, rather than an objective description of the animal world. The stanza refers to Ahmed Orabi, the first political and military leader in Egypt who organized the 1879 mutiny against the British and French influences over the country. A description stems from performative interaction that is, meaning as constituted through the act of performing the very meaning said to be its results. Jaheen says: “When [Orabi’s horse] was hit by an explosion/ He felt the pain of a nation—of Egypt” (54). The poem thus becomes performative and relational; in the words of Cooperman “a poem is relational, an *act* (my emphasis) as much as an artifact” (186).

Another way Jaheen creates meaning is through his use of qualifying language in expressing his belonging and affection for Egypt. Jaheen’s expression of love of Egypt shapes and informs his own imagination where imagination has traditionally been seen as a human ability to find connections. By observing the biological connection between human and bird, “The contours of the lips/ The way she looked/ The colour of the eyes/ The eye-brow arch/ The eye-lash arrow,” the poet discovers a certain similarity between human and bird. This similarity confuses the poet who wonders “Whether she was of human kind/ Or a winged bird.” (40) The poem suggests that humans are not estranged from other creatures and the poet is aware of his place within a larger ecosystem. It is this understanding which breaks down the binaries between the human and the natural world, and explains Jaheen’s awareness of the chain of

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beings, the place of nonhumans within humans. Cooperman argues that by being aware of the way literature forms relational entities, we come to perceive the way we use nature in poetry, which allows us to shape and understand our interaction with the physical environment (184).

Moreover, the poet qualifies his descriptions by using symbols. Words, he implies, can only symbolize, rather than embody the world. Jaheen's subjective description of the East, West, South and North winds create a unique critical perspective. Jaheen's depiction of the wind challenges the ontological idea that underpins realism, that is, in conceiving the wind as a natural phenomenon— interactions rather than distinct and independent entities. Barad argues that " things do not have inherently determinate boundaries or properties, and words do not have inherently determinate meanings" (813), but, instead, things materialize out of performative relationships.

In fact, Jaheen's depictions of the four types of wind symbolize an ideological position in which nature is textually constructed. The East wind strikes "With the noises of the auction charade. /Singing out of tune, any way she likes, /'I am the east wind, my name is Scheherazade!" (59). The poet's association of the east wind comes as an expression of the East with its particularities. Compared with the West wind

Which blocks the nose with a strange odour,
And is, like a whore at a funeral, singing;
I'm the west wind with a gold colour!
I am like the desert sand yellow,

Ruthlessly burying the green below!

By the rabble the door in my face was barred,

Well, said I, let the village then be charred! (59-60)

The poet is not an outside observer of the world but an integral part of it in its ongoing “intra-activity” (Barad 828). He associates the west wind with the desert sand with its deadly effect that buries all signs of green. This reflects the way the poet perceives the west and not the natural world.

Then comes the south wind with its allusion to the South with its blackness, poverty, and struggle

With the smoke of fat-burning for a smell

It sang: ‘my name is the vile-uncouth,

As black as is the gallows well!’

I am as black as a boa constrictor coiled

As the ashes of sleep in eyelids scattered

As naked people in miry meadows gathered

Who, happy or unhappy, still danced!

(60-61)

Through using qualifying language, Jaheen uses the poem to inquire into the relationship between poetry and the world. His knowledge of the South is created and reflects the complex relationship between the word and what it signifies. Then comes the North wind with the poet’s association with the North. “Desdemona is the name they give me/ Have crossed the sea so hopefully/ For a dark Othello to strangle me!” (62). As these examples suggest, the natural world cannot be described outside

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human beliefs, a desire to break down the binaries between nature and culture; and the underlying ethical goal, which is to understand the implications of how we conceive and depict nature in literature.

While the poem is primarily about the poet's love of Egypt, it also explores how meaning is created through the act of seeing and describing.

O weather-cock standing on high,
A piece of tin around a nail turning,
Tell us what the four winds do in the sky,
Describe it, if you know what is happening! (58)

The speaker momentarily identifies himself with the weathercock and makes the process of thinking itself a material feature of the scene, as if poetry could render the natural world as inseparably part of what and how the world gets realized. Yet, the weathercock challenges the speaker's ability to perceive the world and turns into "Characterless, an object of fun,/ Crucified and martyred in agony!" (62). By highlighting the interaction between the speaker's description of the weathercock and the weathercock's rejection of that description, meaning is created or continued by the poem. Through this self-conscious use and refusal of figurative language, Jaheen creates tension in his poem. Jaheen uses tension as a strategy to explore whether poetry can ultimately represent the natural world.

Jaheen's depiction of the natural world, as earlier indicated, is heavily influenced by his love for Egypt—his home land. By his use of qualifying language, combined with detailed description of the natural

world as particular and knowable, the poem suggests a connection between the poet and the land. By carefully paying attention to particular elements of nature, Jaheen interprets the natural world—the Nile, Wheat, Orabi’s horse—through his cultural filters, in the sense that they are always laden with historical and personal meaning. In this case, language does not reflect an objective reality, but is created through interaction.

Another strategy used by Jaheen to explore whether poetry can ultimately represent the natural world is his handling of the theme of loss, especially in regard to the loss that occurs when language cannot recreate the world. That is, a sense of loss develops when the speaker recognizes the gap between the world and the words he uses to try to know it. As suggested earlier, he makes the poem an object of inquiry: so that one part of the poem examines another part of it, thus meaning materializes through interaction, where the “boundaries, properties, and meanings are differentially enacted” (Barad 828).

“On the Name of Egypt” is partially a lament for the loss that occurs in the translation of the physical world into human language:

Now to Egypt I say
Why should your children be that way?
They either live in humiliation
Or commit acts of oppression!
I fear for them, though their enemies love it.
If they don’t change, we shall all regret it!
From that day on, the Nile regularly

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Each year, just before autumn, had a flood,
Filled the entire country
With water the colour of blood,
And filled the breeze wherever you went
With a strange and fearful scent !
It's my own perfume, the Hat-Hur fragrance,
Fearful, kind and soft in texture,
It brings joy every year, but only once,
Whispering: Egypt, beware, and remember! (52)

Jaheen expresses his grief at the loss of a connection between the world (Nile, flood, breeze) and words that signify (blood, fearful scent). This can be read as an interrogation of the new thinking while focusing on specific memories of the past in order to show how they can be recalled through language. Jaheen himself does not fully believe this loss is final: that is, he resists the implication that there is no connection between words and the world. "But then the neighing of Orabi's stallion/ Woke up every battalion/ to reunite Egypt!" (53). For Jaheen, words become an experience in themselves, outside of their representational element, and it is this argument that the poem performs.

Jaheen's concrete and specific memories create tension in the poem. He uses the description of the speaker's memories, which he can only recall through language, to suggest that words perform a function.

Now I touch the stones of the turret,
And stamp the ground with my heel;

The echoes in the fort reverberate,
Reminding me of the torment I feel:
How pitiful is it to a country
Without a popular movement,
Where a rebellion is mounted by the army
Alone in discontent,
While the people danced to the tune along,
Like an old man pretending to be young!
“Rise from the grave, Orabi” I said,
“And recount what then happened” !
But Al-Tahtawi’s image appeared,
Pale, haggard, though smart,
With a serious wound in the heart,
His tears richly flowed
For the love of Egypt ! (55)

The memory of the speaker helps him to re-experience how he felt “the torment I feel”. Jaheen uses the words not to depict the world, or even a particular moment of speaking the words, but to reaffirm the way language can constitute an experience through emotion; this emotion acts as a catalyst for the speaker to recall other memories—creating a new experience. Robert Miklitsch argues that

... words are a kind of magic, magical as life itself: they constitute a world, a continuous self (discourse)—neither a past world (which is irredeemably lost) or the “real” one (which is discontinuous)—but an

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imagined world, a world of imaginings. If there are limits to imagination,...those limits are language. (5)

While recollection through language involves loss, a certain type of “magic” occurs—so that words still allow the speaker to engage with the world. Though the whole poem is an expression of loss that “the poet wanted to recover a faith that had been lost, irrecoverably lost” (Enani 30), the close of the poem is mostly read as a resolution. If anything, the poem is an affirmation, taking language and moving it steadily towards resolution.

“O Egypt ! Listen to him [Muhammed Farid] who’s leaving this world!

This is my last will and testament:

Let there be a socialist revolution,

Let there be construction,

Not a landlords movement

But a real revolution ! (71)

The idea is supported by the final passage of the poem, where the speaker questions his conclusion that even though distance may exist between words and the world—between memory and experience—that words still allow the speaker to engage with the world. This leads the speaker to conclude that language as recollection may be valuable in itself.

The third-wave ecocritical reading used in this study provides a clear framework through which to conduct a close and extended discussion of the strategies Jaheen uses to depict nature in his poem. Rather than being an objective representation of the natural world, meaning is influenced by historical, personal, and situational information. It can be argued that such an approach suggests a new reading of Jaheen's poem for their textual rather than representative purpose. In this way, the approach moves the argument beyond how Jaheen depicts the physical world, to how his depictions are inextricably linked with his conclusions about the relationship between poetry and the natural world. The outcome of the argument is to celebrate the poem as something in itself, rather than a representation; a means of connecting with what it supposedly describes.

To conclude, My reading reveals that Jaheen's use of the three strategies—the limitations of language, qualifying language, and the theme of loss—imply that cultural and personal interpretations play an important part in the way meaning is created about the natural world. The first strategy, that of showing the limitations of language, draws attention to the way names and descriptions are individual, cultural, and contextual constructions. Although Jaheen's description help us to pay attention to the natural world, his poem also suggests that the historical discourse embedded in language influences the way meaning is created about the natural world. By exploring the limitations of language, Jaheen's poem asserts that meaning is interactional rather than, as in realism, arising exclusively from the relationship between sign and referent. Such a depiction implies that language is not an objective way of knowing the

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natural world, but rather performative interactions. To further investigate the limitations of language, Jaheen uses another strategy—that of qualifying language—to signal his unease in using the nonhuman world figuratively. This stems from his concern that poetic description reflects human intentions. The strategy relies on tension arising from Jaheen's continued use of particularization of description. Finally, Jaheen's third strategy, the theme of loss, explores the relationship between poetry and the natural world. This stems from the tension he creates between his use of accurate names and particularization of descriptions and his limitations of language and qualifying language of poetic technique. Jaheen uses the tension to enact an argument as though to explore, ultimately, the question of the capacity of poetry to represent the natural world. By using the theme of loss, especially in regard to the loss that develops between the world and the words, Jaheen makes the poem into an object of inquiry. It performs an argument about the role of poetry and its relationship with the natural world; the outcome of the argument is to celebrate the poem per se and the poetic depiction, as a worthwhile experience.

Notes

* * The English text of Salah Jaheen's poem is translated by M. Enany in his *On Translating Salah Jaheen and Other Essays*, Cairo, GEBO, 2015.

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