Introduction

I

The term voice has come to acquire particular importance in modern criticism as a result of the critical preoccupation with considerations of the author. As the first chapter of this study discloses in more detail, the emphasis in modern critical thought ('modern' here used to designate the period dating as far back as the New Criticism, and extending up to the Post-modern age) has been on impersonality and the necessity of banishing the author from the kingdom of the text. The modern critical controversy over the author has developed from stressing the need to exclude any considerations of the author from assessments of his/ her work, and the emphasis on his/ her role as catalyst (Eliot, 1937 and 1960), to pronouncing a death verdict, meant to deny the existence of the author as the origin of the discourse (Barthes, 1995). As the argument in Chapter One seeks to demonstrate, the concept of voice has come out of that controversy concerning the author, in so far as the very essence of the concept of voice announces a presence behind the utterance, thus leaving the door open for the re-admittance of the author as a possible presence. Since the term 'voice' is here used to designate the nature of the presence(s) behind the poetic utterance (Abrams, 234), an examination of voice in the poetry would involve an assessment of the speaker(s), and consequently, of the mode of discourse-whether lyrical, narrative, dramatic...etc. Though primarily a technical concept, voice is also viewed as capable of linking the poet's vision to his/ her technique (Maio 53).

This study undertakes a comparative examination of voice in the poetry of the South African Dennis Brutus (b. 1924) and the Palestinian Maḥmūd Darwīsh (b. 1942). This is done with the aim of tracing the development of the underlying conflict of voices in the two poets' poetry across four major stages representing their entire careers. The study then attempts a twofold task; to trace the development of the conflict of voices in the poetic output of the two poets, and to undertake a comparative analysis of the development of that conflict in their poetry, with the purpose of assessing how their poetry has developed in relation to the concept of voice, and of comparing the techniques used by each poet in each stage of development. As the analysis hopes to reveal, some of the techniques are found to be shared by the two poets, while there are in each poet's poetry some techniques and strategies that remain peculiarly his own.

By undertaking the analysis, the study intends to demonstrate how the two poets' poetry, generally pronounced as lyrical, is in fact far from uniform as far as voice is concerned. The analysis hopes to show how in each stage of the conflict of voices their poetry exhibited a variety of voices and techniques, finally leading to the creation of the distinctive character of every stage.

II

In the scholarship of the two poets, there has not been any serious critical attempt at a lengthy study of the use of voice in their poetry. While there is almost a critical consensus on the basically lyrical nature of the two poets' poetry[1], there have been scattered remarks on the use of the persona of the troubadour in Brutus' early work[2], while Maḥmūd Darwīsh's use of voice has not received adequate attention except in studies of his most

---

[1] See opinions of Amuta, Solaimān and others, outlined in Chapter Two.

[2] See Tanure Ojaideand Mildred Hill-Lubin.

recent poetry[1]. Such critical remarks, though usually illuminating specific areas of the use of voice, are not developed into a more systematic study of that aspect, and remain restricted to individual works. By taking voice as the target of the analysis, the dissertation aspires to introduce a novel approach to studies of the two poets' work.

On the other hand, the dissertation hopes to demonstrate the importance of undertaking a comparative study of the two poets. Though the African and Arab literary and cultural traditions are widely distinct from each other, the poetry of Dennis Brutus and Maḥmūd Darwīsh, as well as their life histories, show striking resemblance. Perhaps the major and also most general point of resemblance appears in the very nature of the political and social situations in their two countries. South Africa and Palestine are perhaps the last remnants of a colonial world whose fast decline in Africa and Asia was witnessed in the past few decades. However, the situation in the two countries is easily distinguishable from other kinds of imperialist orders. Each of the two countries witnessed the establishment of a state that had formerly had no existence outside of its new confines- one that was primarily built on the politics of racial segregation and social injustice. While the movement of history has only helped to give those two "new kinds of metropolitan centers" (Jameson 48) international sanction, the struggle of the oppressed majority continues with a history of success and failure[2].

Both Brutus and Darwīsh had been actively involved in the opposition movements while living in their countries, and both continued their struggle after embarking on voluntary exile very early in their careers. While Dennis Brutus was a vital presence in SANROC (The South African Non-Racial Olympic Committee), and led various successful campaigns for the exclusion of *apartheid* South Africa from participation in international sports events, Maḥmūd Darwīsh was closely affiliated with the PLO Executive Committee, and was, particularly during the seventies and eighties, one of Yāser ʿArafāt's closest advisors. Interestingly enough, the latest developments in the political struggle in the two countries have meant, for the two poets, the dissociation from the organised fronts of resistance. This has not, however, guaranteed an immediate giving up of the long-standing status of exile[3].

Even though their opposition to the political and social establishments in their countries was severe (involving persecution, banning and ultimately exile), Brutus and Darwīsh continued to view their predicaments in broader universal terms. There is a tendency in their poetry to perceive the personal not only in public, but also in universal terms, which usually entails downplaying the particularities of the immediate context for the sake of stressing its more general implications. This is closely linked to the two poets' philosophy of tolerance and their tendency to exclude bitterness and hatred from their attitude towards the 'enemy'. While Brutus has been strongly influenced by Ghandi's idea of *Satyagraha* or "non-attachment" (McLuckie and Colbert 14), and has been frequently

---

[1] See Ghālī Shukrī and Fakhrī Sāliḥ.

[2] The doctoral thesis on which this book is based was completed between 1994 and 1998, when the political changes in South Africa had not been clearly marked.

[3] The two poets are still living in exile, although they are officially allowed to go back to their homelands.

attacked by critics for his "religion of love" (Tejani 140), Darwīsh has always expressed his belief in the inner goodness of man, regardless of his race or colour:

> I do not take the Jews as my enemies; and, fully aware of what I am saying, I say to you that Man- regardless of his colour or nationality- is my treasure.("Interview." *al-'Ādāb al-Bayrūtiyya* 6)

The tendency to move beyond the narrowness of the political situation and to view the personal crisis in more universal terms has also resulted in toning down the propagandist edge that is expected in this kind of poetry.

In spite of the affinities evident in the two poets' art and philosophy, no comparative study of their work has been undertaken so far. Barbara Harlow's book *Resistance Literature* 1987 deals with the work of the two poets, among that of other Third World writers, as representing resistance movements in various parts of the world. In her postulate that in resistant societies literature can function as "one of the arenas in which the struggle is waged" (39), Harlow is providing the wider premises for a comparative study which her book expectedly does not undertake. Being more preoccupied with the investigation of how literature reflects the political and social preoccupations of a people than with how it functions as art, *Resistance Literature* does not represent an interest in going deeper in the analysis of the more technical aspects of the literary works it deals with.

The present work thus aspires to introduce a twofold contribution to the two poets' scholarship: one being the introduction of the concept of voice as a means of studying that poetry, and the other the comparative study involving the two poets. In examining the theoretical foundations of the study of voice in poetry and attempting to link it to the Modernist and post-Modernist preoccupation with the question of authorship, and, in the light of that, coming up with a working definition of voice and applying it to the poetry of the two poets, the study hopes to represent a contribution not only to the scholarship of the two poets, but to criticism of voice and authorship.

III

Following from the definition of voice in poetry, which sees voice as signalling a presence behind the poetic utterance[1], the study relies primarily on the critical writings of critics who have, in the last few decades, provided a reconstructed conception of the author, involving an assessment of his/ her place in the text, with particular emphasis on relating those views to voice in poetry. Works such as Maud Ellman's *The Poetics of Impersonality*, call for a reconsideration of the place of subjectivity in the poetic creation, maintaining throughout that the starting point of poetry remains the poet's personality. Such views, expanded in Samuel Maio's *Creating Another Self: Voice in Modern American Personal Poetry* 1995, David Kalstone's *Five Temperaments* 1977, and Alan Williamson's *Introspection and Contemporary Poetry* 1984, re-admit the author as one of the possible origins of the discourse. In the work of Robert C. Elliott and Charles I. Glicksberg, these radical views regarding the author are developed in relation to the idea of the persona, which serves as a metaphor for the self.

---

[1] See Chapter One for a detailed account of the definition(s) of voice adopted in this study.

Such views provide the conceptual framework within which the study of voice is conducted in this book. The critical views of those critics, as well as those of other critics who have given the question of voice in poetry considerable space, are consulted and used to ensure a systematic approach to the study of voice. This includes such works as George T. Wright's *The Poet in the Poem* 1960, W. R. Johnson's *The Idea of the Lyric* 1982, James Calderwood and Harold Toliver's *Perspectives on Poetry* 1968, besides the works of Ellman, Elliott, Maio, Williamson, Kalstone and Glicksberg, referred to above.

While the critical writings of those critics provide the background of the investigation of voice in this study, constructing the framework of analysis for voice is primarily based on the nature of the two poets' poetry. In its examination of the development of the conflict of voices in the poetry, the study primarily constructs a framework based on the close examination of techniques that are responsible for the creation of voice in poetry, and the analysis of major patterns of those techniques in each poet's poetry. It then attempts to link major shifts in those techniques to the concept of voice in the poetry. This often entails a close examination of the technical aspects of the poetry, such as the use of the persona, the use of genre, as well as the use of poetic form. The analysis of voice also involves an examination at the micro level of the text, involving the use of language, as well as the use of imagery and formal constituents such as rhyme and rhythm. Closely related to that last point is the examination of tone, depending mainly on the use of irony, paradox and intertextuality.

Because voice is a concept that links vision to technique, and because the nature of the poetry dealt with makes it almost impossible to overlook the larger socio-political context in which the poet writes, the study is also concerned with linking the changes in the two poets' vision during each stage to the nature of the development coming upon voice in their poetry. The analysis of voice is therefore concerned with studying the changes coming upon the two poets' views regarding the political situation and their own status as exiles in relation to its impact on their vision as reflected in voice. Particularly relevant in this respect is the investigation of the role of memory and the element of time. Thus, the framework of the analysis of voice in the dissertation depends on the integration of thematic and formal elements.

Giving preference to such an approach obviously stems from the nature and aims of the study, which primarily have to do with technical elements. More traditional approaches to the study of 'resistance literature'[1] are naturally abandoned. In the context of dealing with political poetry, and especially that produced in a colonial context (South Africa and Palestine being no exception), the Marxist approach is often dominant. In its emphasis on the need to incorporate social and historical factors in the assessment of a work of art, the Marxist critical theory has often regarded the investigation of the aesthetic aspects of the work of art as an 'elitist pursuit' that should be minimised for the sake of studying the link between the literary work and the social and historical conditions, as well as investigating the nature of its reception (consumption) by the masses (Williams and Eagelton). In this respect, the traditional Marxist approach did not seem to serve the purposes of investigation in this study.

---

[1]   The term is used as a convenient, rather than accurate, designation of the poetry. Space does not allow
      for a detailed discussion of the controversies that have arisen regarding its accuracy.

Likewise, Formalist and Structuralist approaches were not deemed suitable to the nature of the investigation in this study. In their preoccupation with digging out the work's underlying structure/ system and uncovering schemes of textual organisation, such approaches go into the other direction, that is, by minimising the relevance of social and historical conditions to the study of the work. As the study concerns itself with investigating the correlation between the socio-political conditions and their reflection on the poets' technique, it cannot commit itself wholly to either approach. This, however, does not mean that those approaches are completely rejected. Whenever relevant, Marxist and Formalist views on literature are consulted and often prove to enhance the main approach derived from studies of voice in poetry. As already pointed out, this approach is mainly concerned with discovering and analysing dominant techniques leading to the production of voice, while constantly focusing on the influence of historical conditions on the development of the conflict of voices in the poetry.

IV

The study falls into five chapters, an introduction and a conclusion, in addition to three appendices. Chapter One, entitled: **Authorship in Criticism: Theoretical Foundations for the Study of Voice**, examines the critical theories concerning the place of the author in the text. It attempts to give a systematic critique of the theory of impersonality, launched by T. S. Eliot in his seminal essay "Tradition and the Individual Talent" (1960), and then traces the development of the doctrine in the critical writings of Wimsatt and Beardsley, Roland Barthes and Michel Foucault. The chapter then examines the more recent criticism of impersonality, trying to show how it almost turned against itself, by providing a reconstructed view of the author. This reconstructed vision of the author is then examined with the purpose of relating it to the concept of voice in poetry. This part provides an outline of more recent works by Samuel Maio, Maud Ellman, David Kalstone, Alan Williamson, George T. Wright, and others whose theoretical views and critical practices the study will utilise in evolving the larger framework of the investigation of voice. The chapter finally underlines the relevance of studying voice in poetry to the context of resistance literature.

Each of the following chapters represents a stage in the development of the two poets' poetry. Each stage is, moreover, characterised by a distinct shift in the direction the conflict of voices takes, and each is seen as an outcome of major changes in the poets' life-journeys, as well as in larger historical conditions. Chapter Two, entitled: **The Dialectics of Emergence and Withdrawal: Pre-Exile Phase** undertakes an examination of their poetry written before they embarked on their exile journeys, and attempts to prove that this period, usually viewed by most critics of both poets as uniformly lyrical, in fact represents diversity of strategies of voice. The analysis demonstrates how the two poets' poetry moves between two opposite poles, one representing pure lyricism, and the other representing the tendency towards the withdrawal of the lyrical impulse and the creation of impersonal structures. Between the two poles, the study designates the place of the persona, which is here studied in its capacity to unite personal and impersonal elements. By showing that this stage is far from uniformly lyrical, the analysis seeks to demonstrate that this stage carries the seeds of the conflict of voices that is to erupt in later stages.

Chapter Three, entitled: **Conflict Erupting: Early Exile Phase**, deals with the two poets' poetry in the early stage of their exile journey. The introduction to the chapter discusses the concept of exile and the meaning it held for the two poets, stressing the paradoxes

inherent in the phenomenon of exile, and trying to relate it to the conflict that is born in this stage. Unlike the case with the previous chapter, in this chapter, it becomes difficult to examine the poetry of the two poets in relation to the same technique. The analysis of voice in this stage reveals that, in presenting the conflict of voices, each poet uses a variety of techniques that are uniquely his own. While Brutus' art proves to depend mainly on the use of the persona and on textual strategies such as irony and paradox, Darwīsh is seen to have relied primarily on the coexistence of two opposite impulses (tones, forms, genres and styles), as well as on the use of the dramatic monologue as a form capable of generating irony.

In Chapter Four, entitled: **Temporary Retreat: Exile Anew**, the introduction outlines the change coming upon the two poets' perceptions of exile. During this stage, exile becomes a more complicated, because a more insidious, phenomenon. The analysis of voice in this chapter posits the tendency towards the withdrawal of the conflict of voices as well as of the lyrical impulse as the major feature of the poetry. Brutus' use of the *haiku* and the elegy, and Darwīsh's opting for the mode of the epic and his use of the persona are discussed with particular emphasis on the ability of those strategies to disguise lyricism and curtail subjectivity.

Chapter Five presents the latest stage in the two poets' development. Entitled: **All in One: Exile Within**, the chapter first outlines the two poets' reactions to the recent political changes in their countries, showing how exile has now turned into a kind of internal phenomenon for both of them. The analysis of voice within the chapter seeks to demonstrate how this latest stage represents a consolidation of the formerly conflicting voices, which now appear as unified in the poetic "I" that strongly emerges during this stage. The return to lyricism is also examined with the purpose of showing how this lyricism is of a different kind from the one present in the two poets' early career, with particular emphasis on the capacity of the lyrical impulse to dominate all others. This stage is seen to represent the closure of a circle in that it constitutes a return to lyricism that echoes the poet's desire to assert his presence in the face of annihilating circumstances. The use of memory in the poetry of this stage also reflects the poet's desire to rewrite his and his people's story as a final act of self-assertion.

The conclusion to the thesis briefly outlines the findings of the research, with particular emphasis on the possibilities this leaves for further research in the same area. Three sections are appended to the dissertation: (A) the Arabic texts of Darwīsh's poetry given in translation in the body of the dissertation, (B) fax interview with Dennis Brutus, and (C) personal interview with Maḥmūd Darwīsh (both done by the author and published with permission of the poets).

Since the study deals with the two poets' poetic output from the early 1960's to the mid 1990's, it is bound to be selective in its choice of the individual poems examined. In addition to corresponding to major historical changes, the four stages of development designated by the study are marked by the production of individual poetry collections. Maḥmūd Darwīsh has produced a *Complete Works* that falls into two volumes containing

his fifteen poetry books, each of which is given a clearly-marked date of publication[1], in addition to 1995 collection *Why Did You Leave the Horse Alone*. In the case of Dennis Brutus, the task of chronicling his poetry is of a more complicated nature. Prior to leaving South Africa, Brutus had produced one book of poetry: *Sirens, Knuckles, Boots* 1963. Though most of the poems in *Letters to Martha and Other Poems from a South African Prison* (1968) were composed while still in South Africa, the book itself appeared one year after his departure. Both books were much later included, along with selections from his other books and newer poems, in *A Simple Lust* 1973 and *Stubborn Hope* 1978. In its concern with chronicling development, the study tries, where possible, to follow the year of composition of individual poems, regardless of the year of publication of the book in which they appear.

Notwithstanding the existence of various published translations of selections of Maḥmūd Darwīsh's verse, all translations of his poetry appearing in the present study are done by the author[2]. Though most of the available translations are admittedly of higher quality, being done by professional translators, it is deemed appropriate to maintain consistency by providing one source of translation. In some cases, acknowledged translations of titles of collections are retained, as a means of facilitating reference to those collections. The Arabic texts of all the translated parts used within the book are appended[3].

---

[1] His very first book, *ʿAsāfīr Bila ʾAjniḥa* (Sparrows Without Wings) 1961, produced when he was 19, was not included in his *Complete Works*, and was not seen by the author as contributing to the argument of the dissertation.

[2] Translations of quotes from Arabic critical books and articles are also done by the author.

[3] See Appendix A.