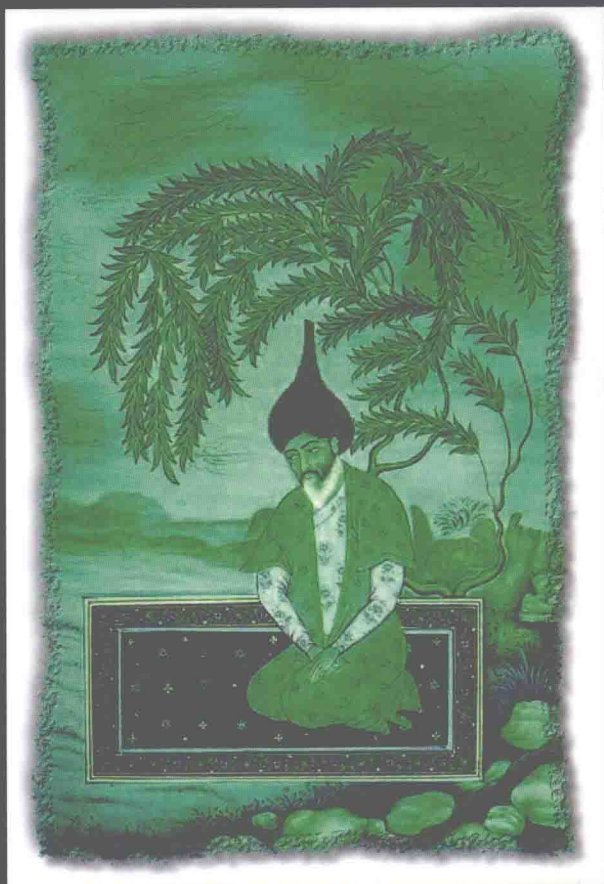


The Road to Self-Revival

SUFISM, HERITAGE, INTERTEXTUALITY
AND META-POETRY IN MODERN ARABIC POETRY



JAMAL ASSADI &
MAHMUD NA'AMNEH

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PETER LANG

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To
My Brothers and Sisters

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We wish to assert that all the poems discussed in this book in full or in part are our translation. Furthermore, all quotations from Arabic sources which appear in this book including the titles of these sources were translated to English by us.

J. A. & M. N.

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Introduction

In the aftermath of the revival of Arabic poetry in the late 19th and early 20th century Arab poets became concerned with the shape, content and themes of the Arabic poem. While a great number of poets, notably Hafiz Ibrahim, consciously used the themes and forms of some of the earliest poets, others rejected the Arabic neo-classical style and were inspired by the English romanticism or the French symbolist movement. But the concern over the form and content of modern Arabic poetry never stopped. With the rise of the various intellectual streams in the Western world in the second half of the twentieth century, modern Arab poets recognized the need to promote the Arabic poem. They knew that the road of self exploration and promotion begins in the ancestral legacy. Hence, the poets and critics redefined poetry and its relation to heritage. The return to the roots in order to promote the present is attained through the employment of the Sufi masks and literary techniques such as intertextuality and meta-poetry.

The book will explore the tendency of modern Arabic poetry to summon Sufi figures, their philosophy and terms, and their attitudes and practices. Specifically, this volume will focus on the poetry of four Arab modernists: Abdul Wahab al-Bayyati (1926–1999), Ali Ahmad Said known as Adonis, (1930-), Salah Abdu-s-Sabur (1931–1981) and Mahmud Darwish (1941- 2008).

The book traces a number of Sufi figures in the poetry of these poets. These figures are: Bishr ibnul-Ḥārith Al-Ḥāfi (767–840), Al-Ḥusain Ben Mansūr Al-Ḥallāj (858–922), Farīd ed-Dīn Al-'Aṭṭār (1145/46–1221), Muḥyī ed-Dīn bnul-'Arabī (1165–1240) and Jalāl ad-Dīn Moḥammad Rūmī (1207–1273).

The numerous research which deals with the topic of Sufi tendency in modern Arabic poetry can be classified into two major categories: First, studies which

investigated Sufism in general. Second, studies which considered the impact of one Sufi's mask on Arabic poetry. The former category presented papers in local and international periodicals both in Arabic and English. The stress in these studies was on Sufism as a general inclination without relating to Sufi characters. The latter category offered studies which searched that mask in detail and discussed its intellectual and historical background and its influence on the targeted poet.

Both types of studies compared the Sufi inclination in modern Arabic literature with modern Western literature. These studies also varied in length, literary level and the depth of the topic being covered. Some traced the mask's character of a certain Sufi in the works of a number of poets while others traced the Sufi tendency in the poetry of one certain poet with disregard to others.

This book will inspect the modern Arabic poem which conjures the character of the Sufi and invests the Sufi inheritance. It examines the poem from the perspective of the essence of the Sufi character, the thoughts and vocabulary of Sufism and it eventually traces the destination of the modern Arab poet through investing the Sufi world with its sacred characters.

This book answers the questions: Who is the Sufi character invoked in the modern Arabic poem? What are the Sufi ideas presented in the modern Arabic poem? What is the Sufi vocabulary used in the modern Arabic poem? Why does the modern Arab poet invest the Sufi inheritance at all? What are the common grounds between poetic and Sufi experiences? What is the relationship between them? And what are the common grounds between the Sufi saint and the modern Arab poet?

The book is divided into seven chapters. Chapter One relates to the major terms that constitute the core of this book. These are traditional Arabic poetry, heritage, Sufi trends, masks and intertextuality. This chapter will investigate the various definitions of poetry, look into heritage and show its relevance to modern poetry, study the Sufi tendency in the modern Arabic poem, illustrating its cause, its various manifestations and pioneers and trace the use of the Sufi mask in the modern Arabic poetry and its purposes. It will also give a historical account of Arabic conceptions of intertextuality, review the Western reflection of this phenomenon in the writings of modern Arab critics and present the various modern definitions of intertextuality by modern Arab critics in view of modern critical theories.

Chapters Two through Six study single poems where the Sufi mask is introduced. First the Sufi character will be identified, the reader will learn about the biography of the saint, and subsequently the picked poem will be studied deeply by applying the concepts presented in the first chapter. Each chapter demonstrates

the extent of the presence of this character in modern Arabic literature in general, including poetry, and to assert the features of this summoned character which fascinated modern poets.

Chapter Two investigates the figure of Muḥyī Ed-Dīn bnul-ʿArabī as portrayed in one of the mask poems by Abdul Wahab Al-Bayyati, the famous Iraqi poet. The poem discussed in this chapter is called “Ayn Ash-Shams *Aw Taḥwulāt* Muḥyī ed-Dīn bnul-ʿArabī *fi Turjumān al-Ashwāq*.”

Chapter Three will discuss the mask of Farīd ed-Dīn Al-ʿAṭṭār as portrayed in the poetry of Abdul Wahab Al-Bayyati and Mahmud Darwish. Despite the gap of time that detaches Darwish and Al-Bayyati from Al-ʿAṭṭār, they have common points. This chapter will study one of Al-Bayyati’s poem and another by Darwish. Al-Bayyati’s poem is a long poem of ten length-varied parts titled, “Parts of Farīd ed-Dīn Al-ʿAṭṭār’s Tortures,” which is derived from his volume, *Mamlakat As-Sunbulah* (*The Kingdom of the Spike*). Darwish’s poem is called “The Hoopoe,” taken from *I see What I Want*.

In Chapter Four we again discuss the mask of Jalāl ed-Dīn Moḥammad Rūmī chosen by Al-Bayyati. Al-Bayyati’s poem, “A Reading of the Volume of *Shams-ed-Dīn* Tabrīz by Jalāl ad-Dīn Moḥammad Rūmī” appears in Al-Bayyati’s *Kingdom of Spike* (*Mamlakat-es-Sunbulah*).

Chapter Five deals with the figure of Al-Ḥusain Ben Mansūr Al-Ḥallāj, whose career indicates he is a project for social redemption. It is not strange that Al-Ḥallāj is considered one of the most employed characters in modern Arabic poetry. Al-Ḥallāj is particularly favored by Abdul Wahab Al-Bayyati and Adonis. The poems chosen are Adonis’s “Al-Ḥallāj’s Elegy” (*Marthiyyat Al-Ḥallāj*) and Al-Bayyati’s “*Adhab Al-Ḥallāj*” (*The Torture of Al-Ḥallāj*).

Chapter Six deals with the Sufi saint Bishr ibnul Al-Ḥārith Al-Ḥāfi, who was one of the early Sufi masters and a teacher of *Imām* Aḥmad iben Ḥanbal, the founder of the *Ḥanbalī* doctrine. Abdu-s-Sabur was so much haunted by Al-Ḥāfi’s figure and line of thinking that he employed him as a mask in his poetry. The poem chosen in this chapter is “Memoirs of the Sufi, Bishr Al-Ḥāfi.” This poem is taken from Abdu-s-Sabur’s third volume called, *Ahlām Al-Fāris Al-Qadīm* (*Dreams of the Old Knight*).

And the last chapter reaffirms a number of major points. First, it confirms that the modern Arab poetry is strongly related to heritage. Additionally, the modern Arabic poem is rich with Sufi vocabulary, attitudes, thoughts and practices and it employs the medium of the mask to enrich itself. Furthermore, the modern Arab poet wears the Sufi mask in order to tell about his meanings while distancing himself from immediacy and objectivity. Thanks to the mask, he tells

his messages freely away from the chains of conventions and the threats of authorities. Moreover, the employment of the ancient Sufi heritage in modern Arabic literature entails the use of intertextuality. And in each discussed poem there is a meta-poetical dimension. The modern Arabic poet dreams of attaining the poetical utopia by reaching the kingdom of poetry just as the Sufi figures dreamt in their poetry and practices.

Traditional Arabic Poetry Revisited

Traditional Arabic poetry, heritage, and Sufi trends, *masks* and intertextuality depicted in modern Arabic poetry are major terms discussed in this book. Since the meaning of these terms requires deeper study and the relationship between them is intricate, it is most necessary to introduce them in this chapter.

Arabic Poetry

The semantic definition of poetry confirms that it is a rhythmical saying whose meters follow one strategy called the rhyme (As-Saadani, 1989 11). Furthermore, poetry has an expressive message, being the textual expression formed by the different codes and rules characterizing it. Poetry is also an expression that is limited by the potentialities of indication, grammar and signs of communication and leading to what might be called aesthetic indications (Reis, 1981 269).

This definition which illustrates the features of poetry is old. It emerged when the first Arab critics divided speech into two categories: rhymed, or measured, and prose, with the former greatly preceding the latter. The rhymed poetry falls within fifteen different meters collected and explained by Al-Farāhīdī in what is known as “The Science of ‘*Urūd*’”. Later another meter was added to make them sixteen. These meters are known in Arabic as *buhūr* or seas. In every line (*bayt*) of the

poem there are a few units known as *taf'ilahs* that the poet has to observe. Also, in rhymed poetry, every *bayt* ends with the same rhyme throughout the poem.

This classification, as Ibn Khaldūn asserts, does not include the Quran which apparently deviates from the aforesaid definition. The language of the Quran is defined as a detailing of verses that closes in pauses. Good linguistic taste testifies that meaning of speech ends at these pauses. In the next verse the speech is reiterated with commitment to one letter constituting *saja`* rather than rhyme. According to Ibn Khaldūn, this is exactly the meaning of the verse, in the chapter of *Az-Zumar*, 23 which says: "*Allah* has sent down the Best Statement, a Book (this Quran), its parts resembling each other (in goodness and truth) (and) oft-repeated. The skins of those who fear their Lord shiver from it (when they recite it or hear it) (653.)

Over the years there have been countless attempts by theoreticians, critics, writers, philosophers and poets to define poetry. Bannees, the famous Moroccan critic, advocates that Heidegger, the existentialist philosopher, regards poetry as the source of language and art (1989, 75). This definition considers poetry as the spring from which language flows. More important, this indicates that, had it not been for poetry, language would have died and vanished. This definition is analogous to the definition of some critics who preferred to define poetry through describing its function. So they claimed that poetry is the first factor that preserves the origin of language against loss (Miri, 2001 95.) This proposition, albeit philosophical, is parallel to what scholars of speech said about genre of poetry. These scholars looked at poetry from the perspective of logic with the intention to pay homage to the mind by regarding poetry as the tool which helps man to achieve his human existence in the best way possible (Ar-Rubei, 1983 267). Hegel (1770–1831), for example, regarded poetry as the art of talk which stands in the middle between sculpting, architecture and music. According to Hegel, poetry is very much like music because it relies on comprehending what gets inside on the one hand and creates intuitions and objective world which is close in its clarity to the world of sculpting and photographing, on the other (Ghanim, 1992 172–3).

The old concept of poetry introduced by poets affirmed that poetry is rhymed, metered speech. Ibn Tabātaba Al-`Olwī wrote that poetry is the literary art which meets the saying which "is the speech welcomed by the sharp mind, accepted and filtered by the psyche; the limbs shiver upon hearing it thanks to man's intuition and eventually it is either admitted or rejected by the psyche" (1992, 14–15). And in his interpretation of *Dīwān al-Hamāsah*, Al-Marzūkī (1030) advocates that poetry is seen as a living proverb, a rare metaphor or a close metonymy. If the literary art, he adds, manages to meet the standard of metonymy, to be fused by

the best of meter, to strike harmony between the choice of utterances and meaning and to match between utterances, meaning and rhyme, this art becomes poetry (Al-Marzūkī, 1951 7–8.)

This definition is parallel to Iben Ja`afar's proposition that poetry is applicable to the

[S]peech that has meter, rhyme and carries a certain meaning. And *speech* is the language; *meter* is an embrace of the well-known Arabic meters of poetry according to Al-Khalīl ben Aḥmad's *buhūr*; the rhyme is the point which separates between a state of speech that is metered and rhymed and between a speech that lacks rhymes and meters; and the *carrier* of meaning refers to the distinction between the speech that is rhymed, metered and suggests meaning and speech that does otherwise" (1963, 15)

Ḥāzem al-Qirtājennī (1211–1285) asserts that poetry is a rhyme talk with a meter and reconfirms the previous idea that poetry emerges from the power of imagination motivated by the interactions and the excitements of the psyche (As-Saadani, 1989 11.) In other words, it is an answer to the psyche's call and reaction to the impact of the coming intellectual import. Al-Qirtājennī, as As-Sadani maintains, also adds that it is the desire of the poet to befriend the reader and convey to him through his verse what he himself likes. The opposite is also valid (11).

Iben Khaldūn (1332–1406) regards poetry as the eloquent talk which is based on metonymy and descriptions, detailed by parts consistent by meter and rhyme (each part is completely independent of its previous or following parts in terms of target and topic) and is in harmony with the methods which the Arabs believe are characteristic of poetry (Farrukh, 1960 126).

Iben Khaldūn must have been aware of Aristotle's ideas concerning poetry. Aristotle believes that poetry can be epic, tragic or comic and that the evaluation of poetical work is based on its impact on the human mind. The kinds of poetry according to the Aristotelian criticism are the product of imitation. The man-poet rereads the universe around him in his own language. Imitation, thus, is the shortest and only way to read the data of the universe poetically. In his opinion, poetry which is well-structured is surely to meet the pleasure peculiar to its kind (Aristotle, 1997 145). Similarly, Iben Khaldūn proposes that the classical Arabic poem is erected on well-built structure. This, Iben Khaldūn concludes, creates the direct reason for the reader's or recipient's ecstasy.

In the criticism of new classics in the Arab world there are numerous definitions of poetry. The old concept of poetry was confined to the constantly quoted definition which affirmed that poetry is the rhymed, metered speech. Modern

critics promoted it by annexing well formed definitions of prestigious poets. One such poet is Az-Zahhawi, who says, “If poetry does not make you shiver upon hearing it, it is not worth naming it as poetry.” Another description is by Ahmad Shawqi, appraised as the Prince of Poets: “And if poetry does not evince memory and compassion or wisdom, it is reduced merely to rhymed expressions and meters” (Al-Khal, 1987 13–14). And Ar-Resafi regards poetry as the response of the artist to the world in which he lives (Matlub, 2002 13–15.)

In the poetry of post-modernism, it is impossible to find a consensus on the definition of poetry owing to its countless concepts. So there are numerous standards that are taken into account when it comes to classifying the standards of poetry in postmodernism. It can be said that the post-modern poetry is a blend of intermingling sounds that are not subject to consideration (Miles, 1972 1). According to Ihsan Abbas, poetry is an independent world which, thanks to the merits manifested in its intellectual and literary materials, is alienated from the occurrences of the real world although it mirrors the issues of the world and man (Fadel, 1989 167–198).

Likewise, Ali Shalash thinks that poetry does not adhere to the logic which people or logicians agree on. Every poem has its own logic designed by the poet and changes in accordance with the poet’s logic and time. Shalash, therefore, sees that the simplest and the most difficult definition of poetry is inherent in the saying that poetry is the art that is compared with prose. He adds that poetry is “the singing; it is the singing of sayings and pains. From singing poetry was born. It is the first spoken art and it has its special universe. The basis of its universe is man. Hence, poetry is originated in singing (Shalash, 1980 7–8).

The association of poetry with the emotional side of man draws on the sphere of psychoanalysis. According to Freud, poetry reflects a vague, persistent thought which is free of any context so that if subjected to the world of precise thinking loses its essence and is no longer poetry. This suggests that for Freud poetry in its fundamental nature is emotional away from the performance of the brain.¹

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1. In a letter to a friend complaining about his weak creativity, Freud writes that the reason for his friend’s complaint lies in the pressure imposed by the friend’s ideas on his own imagination. Freud adds that it is futile to make the mind check precisely all ideas that jam on the gates of minds. Freud believes that if we ponder deeply an isolated idea, we will find it insignificant, but it might become very useful when it is associated with the next idea. It acquires its meaning when it joins another group of ideas which seem similar to it. So the mind cannot govern all these ideas unless they combine together. He concludes that it is his content that the guards of intellect