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Manifestations of poetic loss and ghosts of the absent in ancient Arabic poetry: Deconstructive Approach

Midani BEN AMOR
Benamor-midani@univ-eloued.dz

Abderrahmane BEN AMOR
benamor-abderrahmane@univ-eloued.dz

Meriem SALEMI
salemi-meriem@univ-eloued.dz

Hocine MECHARA
hocine-mechara@univ-eloued.dz

Khalifa GAID
gaid-khalifa@univ-eloued.dz

Fouzia TEGGAR
teggar-fouzia@univ-eloued.dz

Salim REHIOUI
rehioui-salim@univ-eloued.dz

Thoraia BERDJOUH
berdjouh-thoraia@univ-eloued.dz
University of Martyr Hamah Lakhdar, El Oued, Algerian Republic

Abstract
The concept of Hauntology or Spectrology manifests in deconstructive approaches through the recurring concern with how the past continues to shape the present, and how the dead resurface in the lives of the living. ***The scars of the dead emerge in uncertainty in the language and writings of the living, and any discussion carrying the voices of the absent has within itself poetry of loss. It is committed to the authority of absence, instigating the fragmentation of the audience and the removal of its premise. This study applies deconstruction to examine the poetics of loss within pre-Islamic Arabic poetry. It explains how Arab poets seem to be more joyful of the beloved's departure than their return, meaning that Arabic poetry is most stunning and poignant aesthetically as well as emotionally only when the poet can be certain that the beloved has left, when she is gone from sight.*** *What remains are only traces: the imprints of tents and the deserted homes of those who have gone. The study also considers how this artistic inclination connects to early spectral intertextuality in ancient Arabic literature, raising the question of whether one might speak of "the death of the audience" in selected examples from the Arabic poetic tradition.*

Keywords*: Deconstruction, spectral poetics, poetics of loss, intertextuality, death of presence*

Manifestations de la perte poétique et fantômes des absents dans la poésie arabe ancienne : approche déconstructive

Résumé
Le concept de hantologie ou spectrologie se manifeste dans les approches déconstructives à travers la préoccupation récurrente de la manière dont le passé continue de façonner le présent et dont les morts refont surface dans la vie des vivants. Les cicatrices des morts émergent dans l'incertitude du langage et des écrits des vivants, et toute discussion portant la voix des absents comporte en elle-même la poésie de la perte. Elle s'engage à respecter l'autorité de l'absence, provoquant la fragmentation du public et la suppression de son postulat. Cette étude applique la déconstruction pour examiner la poétique de la perte dans la poésie arabe préislamique. Elle explique comment les poètes arabes semblent se réjouir davantage du départ de l'être aimé que de son retour, ce qui signifie que la poésie arabe n'est esthétiquement et émotionnellement la plus saisissante et la

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plus poignante que lorsque le poète peut être certain que l'être aimé est parti, lorsqu'il a disparu de sa vue. Il ne reste alors que des traces : les empreintes des tentes et les maisons désertes de ceux qui sont partis. L'étude examine également comment cette inclination artistique est liée à l'intertextualité spectrale précoce dans la littérature arabe ancienne, soulevant la question de savoir si l'on peut parler de « mort du public » dans certains exemples tirés de la tradition poétique arabe.

Mots-clés : *déconstruction, poétique spectrale, poétique de la perte, intertextualité, mort de la présence*

Introduction

Entities do not reveal the depth of their existence except when we sense that they are preparing to withdraw from the center of our awareness. **It is as if we fail to notice the full weight of their being at the height of their presence, until we are overcome by the piercing perception that they are vanishing, or that they no longer actually exist among us.**

The dead, in a way, are more alive to our presence and awareness than the living. Their leftovers, words, and wisdom are magnified; their light glows harder in our minds much more than it did when they were in flesh, among us healthy and well.

We rarely feel urgency in reading a book we know to be widely available, existing in countless printed and digital copies, accessible at any time. Yet we read with hunger and deep attentiveness when the librarian tells us that the copy before us is rare and must be returned tomorrow afternoon, even if the subject and style of another, more important book await us. **This heightened engagement is due to the momentary sense that what we are reading might never traverse before our eyes again.**

Here, we encounter an annoying question that keeps bothering our minds: Why is it that we know the actual value of things, of individuals, of locations, of coincidences, and of significant encounters only when we lose them—or when we believe that we are about to lose them?

Why do we return to such profound lyricism and augmented feeling in pieces thick with foreboding of loss, pieces that keep us vulnerable to our longing and vulnerability, when we have so little craving for full embracing of what is irretrievably ours?

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Do not human ethics and the arts alike share a search for a world once lost—for experiences that hover between defeat and recovery? It is as though these works strive to prove that the intensity of presence is always accompanied by an equal sense of its potential disappearance. Presence, then, becomes illuminated precisely through its eclipse, suspended between the two poles of being and absence.

Why, too, do these themes return again and again, reappearing in different expressive forms, circling around the same idea—each time seeking to recall the same origin through new spectra and shadows? With every artistic attempt, we persuade ourselves that we are creating new forms and negotiating innovative meanings, when, in truth, we are merely rearticulating that same primordial reference through multiple approaches and voices.

This study seeks to engage with the complex phenomenon of *attachment*, the human tendency to become emotionally and conceptually bound to subjects precisely when they become vulnerable to loss. It further investigates how this dynamic amplifies their impact on the self and discourse. **Using a deconstructive approach, we examine the power of presence in its paradoxical form when present in absence, when the subject is absent in body, but survives through its ghostly trace and spectral iterability.**

1. Arabic Poetry and the Desert (Trace/Tattoo)

In the vast existential narrative of Arab identity, the self's yearning for its object of desire finds expression in ancient Arabic poetry. Yet, **in its pursuit—to harmonize with, touch, or hug the desired—it loses itself in the endless expanse of the desert. The desert stretches out endlessly**

before the poet's eyes, an open plain of wandering wherein horizons dissolve in a haze of receding light. The wind sings along its landmarks, thunder laughs across its emptiness, and lightning capers, erasing the markers of those who came before. The poet, now bereft, becomes aware of their presence only through their absence. What remains is the scar, the *trace*, inscribed not on the earth but within the soul.

Poetry begins at this precise threshold: when the self confronts the impact of what has vanished, bare and thunderous. The *effect* itself is the first declaration of *absence*. The poet does not contemplate the desired subject except through the act of announcing its departure. Consider, for instance, the opening lines of Ka'b ibn Zuhayr's ode in praise of the Prophet (peace be upon him):

Wa mā Su'ādu ghadāta al-bayni idh raḥalū illā
aghunnu ghaḍīḍu al-ṭarfi makḥūlu.
And Su'ad, the morning after they departed,
seemed to me
the richest among those whose limbs are slender
and eyes dark with kohl.

Here, Su'ad's beauty—her grace, her gazelle-like qualities—emerges only in the moment of her absence. **The poet, having gazed at her so long, can view her face in all its beauty only after she has passed. Her beauty, paradoxically, is compounded by distance; she glows because she is unattainable— transformed into an object of desire, of imagination.** Su'ad grows richer only when she becomes susceptible to loss, escaping the immediacy of shared existence.

This detachment from the everyday contract of being, our habitual coexistence governed by reciprocity and familiarity, reveals how absence grants new significance to presence.

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Within ordinary human relations, comfort, safety, and pleasure arise from habitual proximity; we rarely notice their depth until they vanish. It is only in absence that we truly grasp the importance of presence.

The German existentialist philosopher Martin Heidegger articulated this phenomenon with remarkable clarity, explaining that "objects do not manifest their pure existence as isolated elements; rather, they exist as parts of a complex *structure de renvoi*, a network of references that constitutes the world itself." Each element in this chain exists *for* something else, referring to another being, just as the hammer refers to the nail, and the nail to the wood (Schürch, 2009).

We become aware of an element's existence only when it loses its functional immediacy. **A hammer, in fulfilling its purpose, goes unseen; buried in its use, it is existentially silent. It merely cries out when it shatters, when it can no longer perform its role, leaving a lack, a void that shatters our flow of sense. That is when the hammer, as Heidegger indicates, breaks free from its chain of references and is a thing to be thought about rather than a thing of use.**

As if the end of her presence only comes into being by ending her absence. This is precisely what Arabic poetry embodies in the verses of its poets. We would not know the names of their beloveds were it not for the moment of their loss, when they departed, said farewell, or when the tribe's caravan carried them beyond the tearful gaze of their poets.

What we express in language, and what survives of us through writing, is nothing more than an *impression*, an effect we strive to capture before it disappears into silence. Human language itself seems to record numbered events

and engrave symbolic graves that preserve mortal and fleeting moments, moments we wish to make eternal.

Our sense of passion and the intensity of the subject's presence ignite only when we bury it in writing. Hence, throughout Arabic poetry, poets' laments intersect in grief and longing over the deserted homes of their loved ones. They mourn the faint traces left behind, marks shaped by the passing of seasons and the hardships of time, signs that still nod toward the dwellings and ruins of those who once lived in the valleys of endless estrangement.

Torfa ibn al-'Abd writes:
Li-Khawlatin aṭlālun bi-Barqati Thahmadin,
talūḥu ka-bāqi al-washmi fī ẓāhiri al-yadi.
"For the remnant of the lightning of Thamad
waving like the rest of the tattoo on the outside of the hand."

The traces once cherished by the dead still remain—such as the leftover traces of a tattoo on the back of the hand. The poet here beautifully illustrates the potency of what remains from moments of closeness and camaraderie, comparing them to the lingering marks of a fading tattoo that lingers softly radiating on the body. Every time we turn to words to hold onto something transitory, we are actually marking its loss. By then, we possess condescendingly frail strands that shimmer in remembrance—strands upon which we drap our most abject desire and most fervent emotions.

When we read the prelude of *Al-Bayd ibn Rabi'ah* in *Al-Taliyah*, we encounter:

Wa-jalā al-suyūlu 'ani al-ṭulūli ka-annahā
zuburun tujiddu mutūnahā aqlāmuhā, aw raj'u
wāshimatin asiffa nu'ūruhā kifafan tu'arriḍu
fawqahunna washāmuhā.

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"And the torrents gleamed from the tall as if they
were flowers whose texture finds its pens,
Or the return of tattoos whose lights were sorry enough
to be exposed above them and their tattoos."

We encounter here the same haunting repetition of vision that haunts the imagination of Arab poets—repeatedly, the reappearance of the tattoo, the revival of worn-away lines from an old text ("a zabar that finds its text"). The smudged marks on the body, as on a worn manuscript, become the metaphor for the poet's ongoing love affair with a culture that speaks emotion in visible, tangible terms, where writing turns into a scar of desire and survival.

When we look at these opening lines of verse, we witness an existential struggle within the poet himself as he tries to revive what is fading before his eyes. When we read the line "the tattoo returned to its light," we understand that the hue of the tattoo had almost faded from the skin, but it was brought to life once again by re-drawing the outline so that it had definition again.

Perhaps the reader of the poetic preludes in Arabic poetry will notice a recurring tension—one rooted in the poet's attachment to the *trace* or *effect*. The poet searches for and mourns this trace, treating it as an artificial or symbolic substitute for the natural stimulus of separation. As has been observed, "the *ṭalal* is the comparative or industrial stimulus, and if the beloved is far from feelings, her home has replaced her in provoking passion" (Al-Ḥufī, 1958).

The poet's language reveals that the lover often clings more strongly to this substitute, the visible remnant of the

beloved's presence, than to the beloved herself in the moment of union.

Freudian psychoanalysis interprets such behavior in a way that *Jacques Derrida* later approached through his notion of *repetition*. **Freud hypothesizes that people are motivated by the terror of such great loss to recreate their past in mind, to smell a familiar fragrance, see a similar face, or reenact previous events. In this constant reenactment, the person unwittingly tries to master or domestic loss, to denigrate its self-destructive potential, and recapture the fleeting feeling of security that was previously experienced before loss was experienced.**

For *Derrida*, Freud's idea of repetition provided a foundation for his own deconstruction of linguistic discourse. He saw repetition not as the mere recurrence of a phrase or expression, but as a mechanism that destabilizes meaning. Through repetition, meaning reveals its inherent instability, contradiction, and continual deferral. If meaning were ever fully achieved through a linguistic sign, there would be no room for concepts such as intertextuality, implication, opposition, or quotation. Each act of repetition opens a wider semantic field that allows for personal projection and the re-creation of meaning according to one's existential experience.

Thus, we should not be surprised by the structural, thematic, and semantic symmetry found in Arabic poetic preludes (*muqaddimāt ṭalaliyyah*). When examined collectively, they form a ritualistic pattern—a repetitive framework through which revelation or insight emerges. Derrida, in reading Freud, also noted this ritual repetition: the act of returning to the same images and words operates as a kind of magical incantation to control loss, repression,

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or deprivation. "One of the most important concerns of the linguist," as Derrida notes, "is to understand some form of repetition, which serves as an indication of a systemic ritual experience (*expérience systémique*) engraved in the collective memory of a linguistic community. In fact, when the 'ego' (*le Je*) repeats the experience of the 'we' (*le Nous*), it reveals the way linguistic signs are refined and shaped by collective use" (Anquetil, 2020).

There is also a ritual dimension which keeps on repeating in Arabic poetry whenever poets reflect on such matters as the ṭalal (ruins), talisman, act of drawing or standing in memory, renewed weeping, and tattoo or calligraphic writing symbolism. These are recurrent patterns of lamentation and remembrance.

As Ibn Salamah al-Ghamdi writes:

Li-man al-diyāru bi-Tawla'in fa-Yabūsin, fa-bayāḍu
Riṭatin ghayru dhāti anīsin;
amsat bimustanni al-riyāḥi mufilatan, ka-l-washmi rujji'a
fī al-yadi al-mankūsi.

"To the homeland with a fondness for Phoebus,
the white of Ritah is not the same as Anis.
She touched the wind blaster,
like a tattoo returned in the broken hand."

Likewise, *Imru' al-Qays* laments:

Li-man ṭalalun abṣartuhu fa-shajāni, ka-khaṭṭi
zabūrin fī 'asībi Yamāni.

"For those who have lost their sight, Shajani
is like a line of psalms in Asib Yaman."

And *Zuhayr ibn Abi Sulma* echoes:

Wa-dārun lahā bi-al-Raqmatayni ka-annahā
marāji'u washmin fī nawāshiri mi'ṣamī.

"And he turned to her with the two numbers
as if they were tattoo references in wrist diffusers."

Here we continually encounter the steadfast vision of the trace, the tattoo, and the inscribed line— each representing humanity's struggle to withstand the fascinations of death and the pain of distance in an infinite world of wandering and estrangement. By such metaphors, the poet makes mourning eternal. The tattoo is therefore a sign of immortality, a permanent sigil that cannot be wiped away, forgotten, or destroyed by the petty work of time. Even under these impulses, poets also expose the paradox of memory: in an attempt to immortalize touch, they expose their separation.

Yet under these impulses, poets also unveil the paradox of memory: in their attempt to immortalize connection, they disclose their isolation. Forgetting about the public symbolic and sensorial experience uniting human beings, turning from this social dimension, they turn inwards, recourse to solitude amid emotional intensity. Thus, the poet repeats what countless others have done before, reciting familiar imagery as though performing a collective ritual spell. In this repetition, he confronts the thunderbolts of absence, his isolation, and his own existential desolation.

2. Original and Spectral Loss Motifs

The notion of the *phantom* manifests in the imagination of early Arab poets through their pursuit of illusions—phantoms of the original beloved—expressed in what might be called *originaire répétée la perte* (the repeated origin of loss). In this framework, the primal experience of loss reemerges through modified, compensatory sensory responses, but always intensified by doubled emotion. This dynamic recalls the neurotic model described by Vichy, for

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instance, in psychoanalytic discussions of fetishistic displacement—where desire is redirected toward substitutes such as articles of women's clothing, which serve to evoke desire in the absence of the real sexual object.

Similarly, Freud (1905) classifies *fetishism* as a form of sexual perversion:

> "In cases where the natural sexual object is replaced by another object associated with it, even though it does not achieve the normal sexual pleasure that would be produced by the natural object." (Fedi, 2000).

Through such substitution, the true subject of desire is excluded. After repetitive sensory and imaginative practices become normalized within the psyche, satisfaction can no longer be achieved except through these indirect, symbolic means that recall the original person or object of desire. Thus, the *spectral substitute* manifests through the imaginary evocation of the lost subject, by way of linguistic suffixes, euphemisms, or associative symbols in discourse. **This situation is complemented by what later came to be formulated by Jacques Lacan as sliding signifiers under his structural psychoanalytic theory.**

Classical Arabic poetry offers vivid illustrations of this displacement, where the poet's emotional energy shifts from the beloved herself to her traces, her remnants, or the physical environment once associated with her. *Qays al-'Athari* famously says:

Amurru 'ala al-jidāri jidāri Laylā,
uqabbilu dhā al-jidāra wa-dhā al-jidārā;
wa-mā ḥubbu al-diyāri shagafna qalbī,
walākin ḥubbu man sakana al-diyārā.

"I pass by the wall, the wall of Layla;
I kiss this wall and that wall.
It is not love of the home that has enraptured my heart,
But love for those who once dwelt within it."

Here, the poet's passion does not linger on his beloved's body hug but rather on the neurotic act of kissing a house's walls that have been vacant for so long of her presence. The law deals with the poetics of loss, a paradoxical beauty in which lack is the very source of poetic epiphany. Even later narrative traditions preserved this theme: one account describes Qays as crying out "Layla... Layla!" while placing ice upon his heart to cool its burning pain. When Layla herself appears and says, *"I am your desire, your beloved, I am Layla,"* he replies, *"Away from me, for your love distracts me from you."* (Ibn ʿArabī, 2020).

In this moment, Qays's identity becomes inseparable from his longing rather than from the beloved herself. Her reappearance only undermines his existence, which had been sustained entirely through the ritual of loss. This spectral attachment culminates in his legendary death. According to *Kitāb al-Aghānī*, Qays was later seen chasing wild antelopes, crying "Layla... Layla!" until he perished (Al-Iṣfahānī, 2008).

The antelope, one of the motifs of his poetry, had also become a metaphor for Layla—a living embodiment of the beloved ghost presence. Through this transformation, Qays fulfills his yearning not through reunion, but through fusion with the ghostly image that his desire had created. The *spectral fetishism* thus reveals the tragic persistence of love beyond its human object—a devotion that survives only through its phantasmal repetitions.

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When we state that Qays used the antelope as a fetishistic substitute for the beloved lost through a disastrous existential loss, we are saying so because his poems associate the beauty, fragility, and indefensibility of the antelope with his own situation quite explicitly. The antelope, in his poems, is described as a portrait of elegance as well as a victim who is oppressed by the tribe—symbolized by the wolf. Qays says:

Ra'aytu ghazālan yarta'ī wasṭa rawḍatin,
fa-qultu arā Laylā tarā'at lanā ẓuhrā;
fa-yā ẓabiyu kul raghadan hanī'an wa-lā takhaf,
fa-innaka lī jārun wa-lā tarhab al-dahra;
wa-'indī lakum ḥiṣnun ḥaṣīnun wa-ṣārimun,
ḥusāmun idhā a'maltuhu aḥsana al-habrā.

"I saw a deer in the midst of a meadow, and I said: *I see Layla*. She saw us at noon.
O antelope, every abundance is blissful; fear not, for you are my neighbor, and do not be afraid for all eternity.
I have for you a fortified fortress and a sharp sword; if I act, I shall act for the best of good."

Through these lines, Qays gradually substitutes the human beloved, whose union he was denied by social laws, tribal hierarchies, and restrictive symbolic exchanges, with the animal totem of the antelope. In this shift, he imagines a parallel world, an alternative society free from the prohibitions and constraints that thwarted his desire for Layla. He thus finds in the antelope a spectral counterpart, a *fetishistic double*, through which he fulfills his repressed yearning. His death among the stones of the valleys, surrounded by herds of antelopes, becomes the final act in

this ritual of substitution: he dissolves into the phantom of his desire.

This phenomenon of poetic displacement and spectral attachment recurs in Arabic *'Udhrī* (chaste) poetry. For instance, *Jamil ibn Mu'ammar* (Jamil Buthayna) expresses the same paradox of desire and renunciation when he declares:

Yamūtu al-hawā minnī idhā mā laqītuhā,
wa-yaḥyā idhā fāraqtuhā fa-ya'ūdu.
"My passion dies if I find her,
But lives if I lose her—so it returns."

Here, love survives only through loss. **The poet weaves an existential narrative that defies social order, a private mythology in which the absence of the love is more pivotal than her presence. This paradox is the secret of his entire emotional life: he will not permit the unmaking of his tragic narrative through restraint of consummation.**

Therefore, the poet is rather more concerned with staying inside the wound than healing it. His poetry, rich in tenderness, grief, and compassion, becomes an aesthetic substitute for the lost love object. In poetry, he transforms suffering into a shared patrimony of sentiment and finds in the sympathy of other people a deeper, spiritual gratification than he might have achieved in early coition.

In the final verse, we have an intense conflict of opposites, life and death, meeting and departure.

Through such antithetical tension, the *original* (the real beloved or experience) is effaced, while the *copy/spectrum/tattoo/trace* becomes the enduring site of meaning. This process mirrors the deconstructive displacement that *Vichy* associates with structural centralization and existential anxiety: the self perpetually oscillates between the loss of the real and the persistence of its spectral representation.

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4. Repetition and Regenerative Spectra

Philosophical deconstruction introduces modern criticism to the notions of postponement (différance) and deferral, which emphasize the unattainability of a final or ultimate sense of any sequence of signs. Meaning is always deferred, never conclusively verified; and functions that appear similar never yield identical interpretations, as they constantly refer to renewed forms of estrangement and infinite difference. As Heraclitus once remarked, *"We never step into the same river twice,"* because the waves of *becoming* continuously renew their flow through different experiential contexts. However much an action or expression may appear repetitive, it remains ontologically new—a reformulation of experience rather than its reproduction.

Immersed in this flux of becoming, we attempt to recall origins and beginnings, yet we lose our compass to the very processes of forgetting and transformation that define existence. Thus, every act of repetition becomes a regenerative re-enactment of experience. Jacques Derrida reminds us that "every literary work is a reference without a referent," (Chaouachi, & Montandon, 1994). suggesting that the text perpetually refers to a network of other signs rather than to a stable external reality.

In this light, the *spectral* in deconstructive thought emerges through trace rather than action, and through effect rather than cause. The *trace* represents an infinite journey within open semantics—even when it manifests through reformulations of preserved linguistic structures or stereotypical poetic patterns, familiar to generations of poets. Each expressive configuration, however subtle its modification, indicates a distinct semantic deviation, an

escape through which every poet reclaims individuality despite echoing shared aesthetics. These deviations are often marked by shifts in space, time, or the beloved's name, yet beneath these transformations, the specter of loss, alienation, and eternal longing continues to hover over the entrances to Arabic poetry.

The early Arab poet saw no contradiction in reusing established patterns that others had already explored. Nor did the listener perceive such recurrence as redundant; rather, it was experienced as a ritual aesthetic repetition, a collective performance resonating with the rhythm of cultural memory. Each reiteration offered new glimmers of meaning, distinguishing one poet's emotional landscape from another's: *a copy that reads another copy, leaving behind a wave that erases the original voice and speaker.*

Consider these recurrent openings:

Imru' al-Qays

Wuqūfan bihā ṣaḥbī 'alayya maṭiyyahum,
yaqūlūna lā tahlik asan wa-tajammalī.
My comrades halt their mounts beside me, saying:
"Do not perish of grief – endure, and show fair patience."

Ṭarafah ibn al-'Abd

Wuqūfan bihā ṣaḥbī 'alayya maṭiyyahum,
yaqūlūna lā tahlak asan wa-tajalladī.

My comrades stopped their camels by the ruins, saying:
"Do not die of sorrow – be steadfast and strong."

Imru' al-Qays

Tabṣur khalīlī hal tarā min ẓa'ā'inin,
sawālika naqban bayna ḥazmi Sha'shab?

Look, my friend – do you see any caravans of women,
traveling through the pass between the ridges of Sha'shab?

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Zuhayr ibn Abī Sulmā
Tabṣur khalīlī hal tarā min ẓa'ā'inin,
taḥammalna bi-l-'ulyā'i min fawqi Jartham?

Look, my friend – can you see the maidens' litters,
departing through the heights above Jartham?
Zuhayr ibn Abī Sulmā
Tabṣur khalīlī hal tarā min ẓa'ā'inin,
bi-mun'araji al-wādī fawqa Abān?
Look, my friend – can you see the travelers' train,
at the curve of the valley, above Mount Abān?

These openings, highly dissimilar in form but quite similar in their rhetoric, constitute what we might refer to as ritualized beginnings—a poetic chanting embedded very deeply in the collective unconscious. The ancients did not consider this repetition to be a creative constraint but rather an act of aesthetic conservation similar to religious chanting or magical calling that is inscribed into the communal psyche.

These formal echoes still persist in folk and popular Arabic poetry, where competing notions and archetypal imagery remain to linger across centuries. The poets—bound together by a shared aesthetic horizon—only perpetuate this ancient ceremony of repetition, ensuring collective memory to linger through incessant renewal.

The circularity of repetition—the continual circumvention of the original source and the aesthetic *parenchyma*—represents a legitimate feature of literary history. Every aesthetic era renews its departure from an initial spring, from the first creative flood, without ever escaping its gravitational field. This dynamic is vividly expressed in al-

Mutanabbī's famous defense of artistic borrowing: "*Poetry is earnest, and perhaps one hoof falls upon another*" (Al-Ḥamdānī, 2014).

In this assertion, al-Mutanabbī affirms that poetry is a serious, structured art bound by conventions and sanctified traditions established by earlier poets. Thus, there is no shame in one poet's "hoof" striking where another's once fell; such recurrence signifies participation in a polyphonic continuum, a chorus of harmonized voices whose echoes form an eternal field of spectral reincarnations. These aesthetic ghosts trace their lineage to an unknowable first origin—those "first men" who, as pure intellects, inscribed the earliest rhythms and codified the system of aesthetic values that have since faded into oblivion.

Abū al-'Alā' al-Ma'arrī captured this shared consciousness when he described these predecessors as "*minds of men whose tongues agreed*" (Al-Ḥamdānī, 2014).

In other words, the alignment of mental patterns within a generation naturally generates overlap, what Ibn Rashīq later called the *flow that passes over their tongues*, often without any deliberate imitation.

This repetition, however, differs fundamentally from plagiarism, imitation, or theft. Those acts presuppose a conscious engagement with a prior, authoritative text whose perfection is tested through replication. By contrast, *restitution* or *reappearance*, what Derrida (1994) would later conceptualize as *hauntology* or *spectrality*—operates without assuming the original's stable presence. The *original* remains concealed, its visibility effaced in what Derrida might call *simulacral phenomena*, where the poetic act continually regenerates traces of an absent source.

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In this process of semolaker, which is continuous simulation of beauty experience, the Arab poet is bound by inherited rhythmic, phonetic, and semantic frameworks. Although he is consciously or unconsciously endeavoring to transcend them, he is still clinging to their symbolic burden. Zuhayr ibn Abī Sulmā recognizes this requirement with disarmingly honest bluntness:

Mā arānā naqūlu illā muʻāran, aw muʻādan min qawlinā makrūran.

"I see us saying nothing but what is borrowed— A return to what we have already said." (Ibn al-Athīr al-Jazarī, 2020).

Here, Zuhayr concedes that no matter how fiercely creativity burns, poetic voice is magnetically drawn back into the collective cadence of tradition. Each poet thus stands upon ritualized grounds—the "shrines" of inherited form—through which the right to aesthetic legitimacy is granted.

This awareness of exhaustion echoes in the lament of ʻAntarah al-ʻAbsī, who cries:

Hal ghādara al-shuʻarāʼu min mutaraddamin, am ʻarafta al-dāra baʻda tawahhumin?

"Have the poets left a single dwelling unvisited, Or did you recognize the house only after illusion?"

This confession of belatedness embodies both despair and renewal. The poet's *taraddum* (repetition) becomes his *tarannum* (chant)—a voice trembling between reconstruction and elegy (Al-Zawzanī, 2002). Phonetically, the convergence between *taraddum* and *tarannum* mirrors Derrida's fascination with the anagrammatic play of meaning, where rearranging letters or substituting sounds alters semantic possibility without ever closing it. Just as Derrida refigures

the lyrique (lyric) by virtue of its reversal in Rilke—a move that continues to produce meaning by continuous deferral—the Arabic poet's interplay between chanting and rechanting again opens the text to limitless resonances (Surin 2023).

Therefore, within 'Antarah's poetry, we find two concurrent exits: the bodily leaving behind of location and the symbolic exit from blessed song. What remains in the reader's consciousness is the sense of a poet confronting illusion through recognition, knowing the house only after it has changed, just as one grasps meaning only in the act of its disappearance.

The constant lies in the effect within language, while the mutant resides in the transformations of time and space. It is the sweep of whatever once lived and its ghost that still haunts the present. It is these shadows of the past still casting their presence on the walls of the present; but the reality of that past has been lost, only leaving their traces and specters fluttering before the eyes of the bereaved poet on the ruins of a rotten site.

This is what brings us in our tracks as we approach the recurring notion of the mirage in Arabic poetry. It is an illusory, vanishing oasis, water to the thirsty, fruit to the starving, serving as an objective metaphor for the treachery of time, for the unpredictability of human hearts, and for the turning of circumstances from mastery to helplessness, from relatedness and familiarity to alienation and estrangement. The poet's eyes perceive before him an illusion of a sweet intimate life which vanishes when he goes near. As expressed in the verse of Imru' al-Qays:

Fa-shabbahthahum fī al-āli lammā takamashū,
ḥadā'ika dawmin aw safīnan muqayyaran;

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aw al-mukra'āti min nakhīli ibni Yāminin,
duwayna al-ṣafā allā'ī yalīna al-Mushaqqarā.

"So you likened them in the family when they retracted,
The gardens of Dom or Svenna, revered,
Or the scrapings of the palm trees of the son of Dawin al-Safa, who softens the blonde."

He bickers with loss itself until he can experience a semblance of human closeness in the fantasy of oasis, a temporary one that removes the brutish dimension of desert desiccation and isolation. But it vanishes at his contact, to demonstrate that what he saw was only the trace of a memory, the trace of what he once wished to perceive. The poet is thus comforted by linguistic effects and by the fantasies of his senses. What remains to him from the mirage is only the hesitant rhythm of language, a fragile echo that endures after his failure to transcend the decay of space, to restore the dwellings of loved ones, or to revive the bonds of intimacy now worn away.

He grows weary as well of the similarity among poets' openings, their recurrent turns around the same aesthetic rituals, beneath parallel and identical frameworks of discourse that gesture toward a forgotten origin, one whose first utterer remains unknown.

Conclusion

Effect is postponement, it is loss and absence, as Derrida (1993) affirms, when meaning remains displaced within the depths of language, and becomes unattainable in speech, much like the mirages of gardens, ships, and rivers that

recede the closer we come. The spectral nature of meaning confirms a structure of absence, an obliteration of the origin and the first speaker, toward a dismantling of the referential network and the erasure of its lines, culminating in the total exclusion of presence.

Here in these brief observations, we have witnessed the evocation of loss and deficiency in Arabic poetry, in which the poet is identified with the very modes of expression which are immune from being instruments of his domination. The rupture between signifiers and their functions puts meaning in the hands of the play of difference and deferral—its moment of discovery perpetually suspended, avoiding completion or fixity.

Arabic poetry enshrined the idea of the death of the authentic speaker by dissolving discourse into the resonant echoes of ancestral voices. It also transformed loss into an aesthetic drama, elevating *impact* and *echo*, the faint, worn traces left by loved ones, above the fact of their presence. This pattern aligns with the eclipse and concealment of meaning, for presence itself signals the suspension of poetic flow.

It seems that the brilliance of pre-Islamic and Umayyad poetry arises precisely from this pattern of absence, loss, and deferral that sustains its immortal human discourse. Indeed, the secret of its endurance may lie in its early detachment from the notion of originality, as the poet's voice merges within the polyphony of collective performance, consecrating a ritual of song that bears the fragrance of an ancient culture upon the brow of eternal human history.

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