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Manifestations of Rejection in Contemporary Arabic Poetry: Selected Models

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Abstract:

This study examines rejection as a significant component of contemporary Arabic poetry, not merely as an emotional reaction or a negative stance, but as an intellectual and aesthetic structure grounded in the poet's awareness of the contradiction between existing reality and the reality as it ought to be. The study begins by distinguishing rejection from rebellion and then traces the principal manifestations of rejection in the contemporary poem through selected examples from Amal Dunqul, Mahmoud Darwish, and Samih al-Qasim. It also draws on a number of critical approaches that have examined modern Arabic poetry and its poetics. The analysis demonstrates that rejection may be directed against political authority, defeat and surrender, occupation and the confiscation of place, and may also become a form of resistance to alienation, uprooting, and manifestations of social oppression. This intellectual dimension is inseparable from the artistic structure of the poem, since rejection is articulated through repetition, irony, symbolism, historical invocation, dialogue, rhetorical tone, and the shift



from the individual pronoun to the collective voice. The study concludes that rejection in contemporary Arabic poetry is not an end in itself, but rather a linguistic and visionary act that seeks to reshape consciousness and propose an alternative horizon.

Keywords:

rejection; contemporary Arabic poetry; Amal Dunqul; Mahmoud Darwish; Samih al-Qasim; resistance; poetics

Introduction:

Arabic poetry, throughout its various historical stages, has remained closely connected to major human questions and to humanity's struggle against what it perceives as injustice, deviation, or deficiency in reality. In contemporary Arabic poetry, however, rejection has acquired particular intensity because of the political, social, and intellectual transformations experienced by the Arab world during the twentieth century and beyond. The source material indicates that rejection is closely connected with contemporary poetry and that their association has become stronger as a result of the contradictions and concerns of the age, whereby anger and resentment are transformed into creative material taking the form of revolution, protest, and criticism.

Nevertheless, rejection should not be reduced to the mere utterance of "no." Poetic rejection is more complex than a direct linguistic position: it constitutes a stance toward the world, prevailing values, and modes of thought that the poet seeks to displace. Consequently, saying "no" implicitly presupposes another conception of what ought to be; rejection therefore contains, to varying degrees, an image of a possible alternative. This idea intersects with the supplied material, which distinguishes rejection from rebellion and connects rejection with strength of will and awareness of an alternative, rather than with mere emotional reaction.

I. The Concept of Rejection and Its Distinction from Rebellion:

Linguistically, rejection denotes abandonment, refusal, and non-acceptance; it may also carry connotations of repulsion, exclusion, and resistance. Drawing on classical Arabic dictionaries, the supplied material indicates that rejection is not merely a passing act of abandonment. It may result from the attainment of a particular purpose and may involve a deliberate act directed by anger and challenge. Rejection may therefore be understood as the refusal of a situation, value, or practice that the rejecting subject considers unacceptable. [1]

Terminologically, rejection in literature does not necessarily imply a complete rupture with reality. It may constitute a rejection of one part of reality with the aim of reconstructing it or correcting its course. It consequently differs from rebellion when rebellion becomes merely a protest movement that offers no alternative conception. [2] Productive poetic rejection derives its force from the tension between what exists and what the poet considers possible or worthy of realization. [3]

This duality reveals rejection as a positive act in terms of the energy it releases within the text. When the poet rejects surrender, for example, a discourse of will is established; when oppression is rejected, the value of freedom is invoked; and when the uprooting of human beings from their place is rejected, place is transformed into a value of identity. Rejection, therefore, is not merely negation; it becomes a productive negation of meaning. [4]

II. The Poetics of Rejection in the Contemporary Arabic Poem:

The movement of rejection from the level of ideas to the level of poetics is what makes the phenomenon worthy of literary study. A rejecting text does not merely state that reality is bad; rather, it reshapes language, imagery, and rhythm in ways that make the reader experience the tension between reality and the alternative. Among the most important manifestations of this poetics are repetition, irony, symbolism, historical intertextuality, collective pronouns, dialogic style, semantic condensation, and the transition from statement to scene. [5]

Contemporary rejection does not, moreover, proceed in a single direction. It may be political when the poet confronts authoritarianism or defeat; national when it is associated with resistance to occupation; existential when it expresses rejection of absurdity, death, or alienation; and social when it protests marginalization, poverty, or discrimination. This plurality explains the differences in the artistic structures of rejecting texts from one poet to another. [6]

III. Amal Dunqul: Rejection as an Ethical Position toward Defeat:

The poetic experience of Amal Dunqul is among the Arab poetic experiences most capable of transforming rejection into an ethical and historical position. His poetry is associated with questions of injustice and marginalized groups and with protest against forms of political surrender. One of the most celebrated manifestations of this stance is his poem "Do Not Reconcile," whose central phrase has become a cultural sign of rejecting a settlement that compromises memory and rights. [7]

The aesthetic value of the phrase "Do Not Reconcile" lies not only in its simplicity, but also in its transformation into a performative act. The poet does not merely describe rejection; he practices it linguistically. The imperative "Do not reconcile" turns the poem into something resembling a testament and places the addressee in a position where a stance must be adopted. Thus, the poem moves from expressing an individual position to constructing collective memory. [8]

Dunqul builds rejection through the invocation of history, particularly through the story of al-Zir Salem and the Basus War. History here is not cultural ornamentation; rather, it is a means of rereading the present. The past is summoned so that it can become a mirror of the present and so that rejection can acquire an ethical legitimacy extending beyond the immediate political moment. The poet does not simply state that the present is unacceptable; he reconstructs the present within a historical model charged with vengeance, blood, and memory. [9]

Stylistically, the imperative sentence, repetition, direct address, and the gradual enumeration of the grounds for rejection are prominent. This gives the poem an ascending structure: rejection begins with a condensed phrase and then expands to encompass memory, dignity, and blood. In this way, the argumentative structure intersects with the poetic structure, and rhythm becomes a means of consolidating the position. [10]

IV. Mahmoud Darwish: Rejection of Uprooting and the Reconstruction of Place:

Mahmoud Darwish's rejection differs in many texts from direct rejection characterized by a strongly rhetorical tone. It is often formed through the relationship between the human being and place, memory, and identity. In poems such as "On This Land Is What Deserves Life," place itself becomes a subject of resistance. The statement does not deny suffering, but refuses to allow suffering to become the only truth and opens a possibility for life within a besieged reality. [11]

Rejection here is twofold: a rejection of the logic of erasure on the one hand, and a rejection of turning the homeland into mere memory on the other. Consequently, land, home, language, and memory recur as elements of resistance. The poet reconstructs place poetically, so that the written place becomes an alternative to the place threatened with confiscation. This poetic strategy makes writing an act of affirming existence. [12]

Darwish's poetic experience is also characterized by its ability to transform rejection into a dialogue with the self, the other, and history. The poetic self does not always occupy a position of direct confrontation; rather, it reflects on the conditions of its existence and reformulates its relationship with the other. Rejection thus assumes a dialectical character: it is not based on shouting alone, but on redefining identity, place, and memory. [13]

V. Samih al-Qasim: Rejection between Identity and Resistance:

Samih al-Qasim represents another model of rejection in which the poetic experience is connected with adherence to identity and resistance to exclusion. His texts are marked by a tone of challenge and insistence on remaining, so that the individual self becomes a collective voice. Among the most prominent expressions in his poetry is "I Walk Upright," a brief phrase that carries a clear symbolic structure: standing in the face of bending, and dignity in the face of humiliation, with the body recovering its political and ethical meaning. [14]

The poetics of rejection in al-Qasim's poetry are based on recurring semantic oppositions: standing/falling, remaining/uprooting, memory/erasure, and voice/silence. These oppositions make meaning move within a network of contradictions. Rejection does not appear merely in an isolated sentence; rather, it is distributed throughout the architecture of the poem and creates a continuous rhythm of tension. [15]

The presence of the body in resistance poetry also performs a function that exceeds description. The standing, walking, or speaking body becomes a sign of the continuity of existence. Consequently, physical movement becomes a metaphor for rejection: walking is not merely a spatial transition, but an announcement of non-surrender. [16]

VI. From Rejecting Reality to Proposing an Alternative:

The preceding models reveal that poetic rejection is not complete through negation alone. When Dunqul rejects reconciliation, he relies on a conception of dignity and memory; when Darwish rejects uprooting, he establishes in its place a discourse of life and place; and when al-Qasim rejects erasure, he affirms the value of standing and persistence. This means that rejection contains a positive value, whether implicit or explicit. [17]

The deep structure of the poem of rejection can therefore be said to operate on three interconnected levels: the level of the rejected reality, the level of the rejecting self, and

the level of the desired alternative. The clearer the alternative, the more rejection moves from emotion toward vision. Artistically, the text realizes this structure through linguistic tension that places words, images, and rhythms at the service of the position. [18]

VII. Rejection and the Transformation of the Function of Poetry:

The presence of rejection in poetry does not mean that the poem becomes a political manifesto. The poem remains an artistic work, and its value is determined not solely by its subject but by the manner in which it transforms that subject into an aesthetic experience. The success of a poem of rejection therefore depends on its ability to transcend directness and transform a public issue into image, scene, rhythm, and symbol. [19]

Here the concept of contemporary poetics acquires particular importance. The development of the Arabic poem was not simply a transition from one form to another; it also involved a transformation in the ways of constructing vision. Studies by Izz al-Din Ismail and Salah Fadl addressed essential aspects of this transformation, thereby enabling rejection to be understood as part of a broader transformation in the relationship between poetry, reality, language, and the reader. [20]

Conclusion:

The study concludes that rejection represents one of the prominent components of contemporary Arabic poetry and that it cannot be understood as a purely negative stance. In the poetry of Amal Dunqul, Mahmoud Darwish, and Samih al-Qasim, rejection becomes an energy for constructing an alternative meaning: dignity in the face of defeat, life in the face of erasure, and existence in the face of annihilation.

It has also become clear that differences in the object of rejection lead to differences in its artistic instruments. In Dunqul's experience, the imperative, repetition, and invocation of history are prominent; in Darwish's experience, place, memory, and symbolism prevail; while in al-Qasim's experience, the body, standing, and semantic oppositions are central. Nevertheless, these experiences share a common structure based on moving from the rejection of reality toward reshaping consciousness of it.

Poetry thus becomes an act of symbolic resistance, not because it merely raises slogans, but because it gives language the capacity to name what is intended to be silenced, preserve what is intended to be erased, and recall what is intended to be forgotten. From this perspective, the manifestation of rejection in contemporary Arabic poetry is

not merely a thematic phenomenon; it is also a poetic phenomenon affecting the structure of discourse, its music, imagery, pronouns, and modes of producing meaning.

Footnotes and References:

1. Ibn Manzur, Muhammad ibn Mukarram. *Lisan al-Arab*. Edited by Ali Shirri. Beirut: Dar Ihya al-Turath al-Arabi, 1988, s.v. "r-f-d".
2. al-Zamakhshari, Mahmud ibn Umar. *Asas al-Balagha*. Edited by Abd al-Rahim Mahmud. Beirut: Dar al-Ma'rifa, s.v. "r-f-d"
3. Gaston Bachelard. *The Philosophy of No*. Translated by Khalil Ahmad Khalil. Beirut: Dar al-Hadatha, 1985, p. 153.
4. Muhammad Yahyaten. *The Concept of Rebellion in Albert Camus and His Position on the Algerian Liberation Revolution*. Algiers: Diwan al-Matbu'at al-Jami'iyya, 1984, pp. 20–24.
5. Izz al-Din Ismail. *Poetry within the Framework of the Revolutionary Age*. 2nd ed. Beirut: Dar al-Hadatha, 1985, p. 86.
6. Izz al-Din Ismail. "The Concept of Poetry in the Writings of Contemporary Poets." *Fusul*, vol. 1, no. 4 (July 1981), pp. 53–57.
7. Salah Fadl. *The Poetics of Contemporary Poetry*. Beirut: Dar al-Adab, 1995.
8. Muhammad Zaki al-Ashmawi. *Literature and the Values of Contemporary Life*. Beirut: Dar al-Nahda al-Arabiyya, 1980, p. 52.
9. Amal Dunqul. *Complete Works*. Cairo: Dar al-Shorouk, 2010, p. 321.
10. Muhammad Saeedi. "Rejection in Contemporary Arabic Poetry." *Al-Athar: Journal of Literature and Languages*, University of Kasdi Merbah Ouargla, no. 7 (May 2008), pp. 129–140.
11. For an analysis of the phrase "Do Not Reconcile," see: Amal Dunqul, *Complete Works*, "Do Not Reconcile," p. 112.
12. See also the use of history in Dunqul's experience: Salah Fadl, *The Poetics of Contemporary Poetry*, p. 39.

13. Mahmoud Darwish. *Eleven Stars*. Beirut: Dar al-Awda, 1992, especially "On This Land Is What Deserves Life," p. 301.
14. Izz al-Din Ismail. *Contemporary Arabic Poetry: Its Issues and Its Artistic and Semantic Phenomena*. Beirut: Dar al-Awda, various editions, p. 239.
15. See: Mahmoud Darwish, *Eleven Stars*, on constructing the relationship between the self, place, and memory, p. 185.
16. Samih al-Qasim. *Complete Poetic Works*. Beirut: Dar al-Awda, various editions, p. 22.
17. See: Salah Fadl, *The Poetics of Contemporary Poetry*; and Izz al-Din Ismail, *Poetry within the Framework of the Revolutionary Age*, p. 105.
18. On the presence of the body and standing as signs of resistance, see: Samih al-Qasim, *Complete Poetic Works*, p. 15.
19. Marwa Yahyaoui. *Contemporary Arabic Poetry: Its Issues and Its Artistic and Semantic Phenomena by Izz al-Din Ismail—A Critical Reading*. University of Mohamed Boudiaf of M'sila, 2017, p. 145.
20. See: the supplied discussion and the cited studies by Izz al-Din Ismail and Salah Fadl concerning the transformation of contemporary Arabic poetics.

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