

## Inspiration and Creativity in Poetic Competence and Symbolic Language: A Critical Study

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### **Abstract :**

This study investigates the relationship between symbolic language and poetic competence within poetic discourse, focusing on their interplay with inspiration and creativity. It argues that symbolic language operates as a dense semantic system that transcends direct expression through suggestive and multi-layered structures.

The paper further contends that poetic competence emerges from the interaction between intuitive inspiration and conscious linguistic construction, where creativity is shaped by both cognitive and aesthetic processes. Adopting a descriptive-analytical approach, the study examines how symbolic language restructures meaning through semantic openness, deviation, and intertextual references.

The findings highlight that poetic discourse constitutes a dynamic linguistic space that resists fixed interpretation and enables multiple readings, thereby enhancing its expressive and interpretive potential.

**Keywords :** Symbolic Poetic Language ; Poetic Competence ; Inspiration ; Poetic Creativity ; Linguistic-Critical Approach ; Poetic Discourse

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## **Introduction**

Terminological overlap and interpenetration frequently arise due to the proximity of meanings, a fact that has led scholars in the field of language to acknowledge the absence of fixed and stable boundaries for terminological signification. The term "inspiration", for instance, may initially be understood as the act of recalling, borrowing, or engaging intertextually with a given source and benefiting from it in one way or another. However, a deeper inquiry into the roots of this term reveals significant semantic variation across both classical and modern literary and linguistic dictionaries.

Classical lexicons, in particular, associate the concept of "inspiration" with revelation and the unseen. In "Lisān al-‘Arab", inspiration is defined as “that which God casts into the soul, prompting it toward action or restraint; it is a form of revelation granted by God to whom He wills among His servants”<sup>1</sup>. Closely related to this understanding is the notion of inspiration as “a light cast by God into the heart, and a form of knowledge attained through unveiling characteristic of prophets and the chosen constituting a divine effusion and a mode of revelation”<sup>2</sup>.

In light of these perspectives, inspiration emerges as a shared, underlying thread among those who produce unprecedented creative works that transcend sensory perception. At the same time, it remains deeply rooted in the spiritual domain, as it is intimately linked to the mysteries of revelation. This conception led Plato (427–348 BCE) to critique poets and reject poetry, considering it a form of inspiration bestowed by the Muse; during the act of inspiration, as he argues, poets’ senses are suspended and their rational faculties momentarily eclipsed.

Within this framework, the present study seeks to investigate the elusive domain at the intersection of inspiration and symbolic poetic language. It aims to define the concept of inspiration and to elucidate its relationship with poetic competence in its symbolic dimension. To this end, the study adopts a descriptive methodology grounded in analysis and induction, addressing a set of key research questions, most notably: What is inspiration? What is the nature of its relationship with poetic competence and symbolic language?

## **Concept of Inspiration :**

The notion of "inspiration" has long provoked intense debate among poets and thinkers. Some have approached creativity through this concept as an unexpected visitation akin to a guest who arrives unannounced or a passerby who appears without prior notice. In this regard, Nizar Qabbani (1932–1998) observes : “The poem comes to me suddenly; at times it enters while I am in a café, at other times it rides with me on a bus, and sometimes it pulls at my coat as I cross the street. It is, therefore, present before its arrival... awaiting only the right moment to open the door and enter”<sup>3</sup>.

Qabbani thus affirms that the poem, in his experience, is born of suddenness and unpredictability, with a clear suspension of temporal determination. At the same time, he appears to downplay the role of conscious thought in the emergence of poetry, equating reflection with its absence: "Of course, I think about it, but thinking about it neither hastens nor delays its moment of arrival. There are poems such as my poem *Pregnant* that I contemplated for ten years, yet they did not come into being until the eleventh"<sup>4</sup>.

It is evident that Qabbani's conception of poetic emergence remains somewhat elusive, as he describes the poem as appearing "in the form of an incomplete and unexplained sentence, striking like lightning and vanishing just as quickly. I do not attempt to seize the lightning; rather, I let it pass, content with the initial illumination it produces. I return to darkness and await its flash once more. My waiting may be long or short, but I never attempt to fabricate artificial lightning"<sup>5</sup>.

Qabbani thus insists that reflection neither accelerates nor delays the advent of the poem, which arrives in an incomplete form, leaving the poet in a state of receptive stillness, refraining from any deliberate intervention that might produce an artificial effect. This raises a fundamental question: when does the poem truly take shape, and at what point does its creation reach completion?

A similar perspective is articulated by the poet Abdel Wahab Al-Bayati (1926–1999), who maintains that "poetry comes unexpectedly, at least in my case. My condition with poetry resembles that of something that both comes and does not come. At the beginning of my poetic life, I expelled this obsession entirely and came to believe through my personal experience that the true poem is the one that comes to me. There is therefore no need for anxiety, as it leads to hastening the birth of the poem, rendering it unnatural"<sup>6</sup>. This view echoes Qabbani's earlier assertion that one should not attempt to produce "artificial lightning".

Yet, if sudden inspiration suffices for the emergence of a mature and authentic poem, what then of the phase of "perspiration," associated with the accumulation of temporal, intellectual, cognitive, and emotional experiences? Does this dimension not constitute a fundamental imprint in the formation of the poem?

Between these two poles, the thinker Eugène Delacroix (1798–1863) seeks to delimit the boundless and introduce a critical perspective to the notion of divine gift. "He contends that inspiration does indeed exist, yet it is insufficient on its own to explain creativity. The true distinction of the artist, he argues, lies not in passive submission to the influx of inspiration, but rather in the capacity to grasp these illuminations and reflect upon them."<sup>7</sup>

In a related vein, the philosopher Carl Gustav Jung (1875–1961) approaches inspiration from the standpoint of consciousness, defining it as "the act through which we discern the traces of conscious thought"<sup>8</sup>. From this perspective, inspiration entails unveiling the depths of experiential awareness and its interaction with the artist's intellectual reservoir. Consequently,

the moment of interaction and fusion becomes the moment of artistic emergence. Importantly, this emergence is not merely spontaneous; rather, it is grounded in the creative capacity of the artist's imagination and in their awareness of the techniques and mechanisms underlying the artistic process.

### **The Relationship of Poetry with Symbolic Language**

It can be stated with reasonable confidence that the contemporary Arab poet has mastered the process of drawing inspiration from both the Arab and global heritage as a cognitive resource and a human accomplishment. Through this mastery, the poet has succeeded in "breaking free from the isolation of cultural confinement"<sup>9</sup>, and achieving creative intellectual and aesthetic dimensions that have elevated contemporary Arab poetry to a transcendent entity, venturing into non-existent or metaphysical realms. The poet's vision thus becomes more idealized, revealing poetic imagery marked by wonder and paradox. The poet's language, in this process, abandons any mediating role, ascending to become an intrinsic element of the poetic fabric: "What speaks within poetic discourse are the sentences and structures that present themselves directly, charged with an additional specificity that bends the world to the individual"<sup>10</sup>. Consequently, language assumes an independent relationship with all the conditions and justifications that produced it, becoming a self-contained system in constant motion and open-ended.

This conception aligns with the view of André Breton (1896–1966), who asserted that "the role of poetry is to continuously advance, to explore the field of possibilities in every direction, and to always appear regardless of circumstances as a liberating and observational force."<sup>11</sup> However, one should not reduce this to the mere notion of "exploring possibilities," as Breton's conviction stems from the connection of poetry with creation and introspection rather than mere revelation. Beyond terminological accumulation, the function of poetry manifests in the liberation of words from the constraints of rational control, casting them into the arena of semantic struggle, where no definitive rules or hierarchies govern their circulation. This semantic contest has produced the nuclei of contemporary Arab poetry, which, in turn, have distanced themselves from the conventional function of direct communication between poet and audience.

Hence, the play of words imbued with sonic and suggestive qualities becomes far more significant than their lexical-semantic value, which may be translated as a unidimensional constraint on creativity. The contemporary Arab poet interacts with symbolic language as both goal and medium valued for itself employing all linguistic, artistic, and cognitive resources to pursue meanings that cannot be apprehended through superficial or immediate perception: "He wishes for it to articulate what it has not previously been accustomed to express, to manifest in a realm beyond the conventional world of meanings"<sup>12</sup>. Achieving this requires moving beyond the

dictionary meanings of words and juxtaposing contradictions and divergences that the language lexicon has not traditionally accommodated within a single context.

Whereas past audiences sought, by skimming the surface of words and structures, the hidden linguistic payload, today's readers are different. They engage with language as an entry point to metaphysical and transcendental realms, encountering a language that is encrypted, enigmatic, intriguing, and stimulating a language that challenges the reader to navigate its interpretive complexities. It is not difficult for the attentive reader of contemporary Arab poetry to perceive the coded symbolism, the layers of representation that permeate its texts to the point of obscurity, leading the reader into a foggy domain with unpaved paths, twists and turns without markers, and shores without guidance. From this phantasmagorical tide emerges the radiance of interpretation, and symbolic readings proliferate.

The poet Ali Ahmed Said (b. 1930) emphasizes that the obscurity enveloping the language of contemporary poetry stems from a technique of revelation related to the poetic vision charged with symbolic language. This poetic vision, he asserts, constitutes "a gaze that penetrates reality to what lies beyond it,"<sup>13</sup> and "the deeper the poet delves into the world, the more he creates new human and artistic dimensions."<sup>14</sup> Accordingly, the poetic vision necessitates a synthesis of artistic creation and symbolic language, which is tasked with reflecting aspects of reality in various forms. To achieve this, the poet must equip himself with a diverse array of tools that ensure his engagement with local and global events and issues political, social, and humanistic alike. Symbolism emerges as one of the most crucial instruments for the contemporary Arab poet, due to its ability to communicate across civilizations and to link the past with the present, thereby constructing a forward-looking vision that encompasses and transcends current events, allowing for reconciliation, unity, and resolution. Consequently, contemporary poetic texts often consist of interwoven layers, imbued with meanings that oscillate between concealment and revelation, akin to a mirage that recedes as one approaches it.

Such effects are attainable only if the poet knows how to exploit dimensions and leverage references, consolidating the fragmented elements of experience. As observed, "for the artist, the artistic work is a conscious intellectual process, not merely a matter of impulse or inspiration ; it culminates in the creation of a new representation of reality, reflecting it as understood and subject to human control"<sup>15</sup>. The poet's capacity for formulation and composition constitutes an artistic process that endows symbolic language with evocative power, enabling it to adapt to diverse contexts and issues. Nevertheless, the origin of the artistic work cannot always be reduced to conscious intellectual effort ; at times, the poet interacts with and responds to reality in ways that generate emotional impulses, prompting the poet to reinterpret and reshape that reality. This phenomenon is particularly evident among poets of the Occupied Territories, foremost among them Mahmoud Darwish (1941–2008), who articulated the existential anxiety

and intense emotionality that accompany the writing process: for Darwish, poetic composition “always begins with a destructive anxiety stemming from the existential condition”<sup>16</sup>.

Similarly, Abdel Wahab Al-Bayati insists that the revolution of poetry is an instrument for pioneering the future. In this pursuit, he embraces “the world and its entities, sometimes as a plow, a sword, spring, or the carpet of wind; the frost of knowledge in which we live. It is akin to the four seasons through which things are renewed, and also the return of July from the underworld to life”<sup>17</sup>. This conception reflects a dynamic oscillation between a transformed, renewed reality and a virtual universe saturated with cosmic myths and symbols, through which the poet breathes new life that enhances our perception of reality, the unreal, and existence beyond the merely given, all within an artistic framework. This is achieved by projecting tangible symbols and images into a symbolic form.

The fertile and fluid nature of symbolic language, characterized by semantic condensation and linguistic economy, prevents direct or immediate access to its world. Symbolism thus functions as a repository for unspoken texts and as an echo of paradoxes and divergences embedded in both national and global human heritage. Some scholars have summarized symbolism as “the recognition that one thing stands in for or represents another, establishing a relationship between the tangible or perceptible and the abstract, or between the particular and the general”<sup>18</sup>. Given that the structure of symbolic language is often closed, encoded, elevated, and obscure, the reader can access it only through a narrow window, akin to a small niche of light in the darkness of land and sea. Consequently, symbolic language takes on multiple forms, and scholarly opinions about it diverge, resulting in a constrained opportunity for it to articulate its significance outside its inherent opacity, which remains its defining characteristic. This motivates an inquiry into the mechanisms by which symbolic language takes shape and transforms into various types of symbols—mythical, historical, religious—and how these symbols are forged from cultural references. Some symbols are rooted in concrete existence and pre-established status, such as historical or religious symbols, while others emerge from metaphysical vision, as with mythical or mystical symbols.

Through a review of multiple studies on symbolism, it becomes evident that certain symbols arise from collective agreement on their meaning following standardization, whereas others emerge from individual, idiosyncratic experiences resistant to conventional comprehension. Particularly, if the audience lacks the requisite intellectual, historical, and mythical frameworks, a single symbol may acquire diverse references across different eras, evolving in each period toward divergence and innovation and breaking with previous conceptual molds. This reflects the semantic and artistic functions of references in each epoch, which complicates the task of identifying the original text, as the interpretive identity of the reading has traversed multiple

paths over time. Consequently, the symbolic structure is continually destabilized, as symbols are repeatedly reconfigured and reclassified.

Similarly, a survey of global heritage reveals it to be an endless network of symbols. By heritage symbols, we refer to those connected to the broad spectrum of cultural legacy, arising from accumulative temporal processes intertwined with history, religion, beliefs, rituals, and customs. Given their dynamic nature, symbols are subject to change and reshaping, and awareness of them becomes increasingly complex with each cycle of deconstruction and reconstruction. Although a symbol's temporal and existential precedence may make its subject relatively accessible through a stable, focused point in a text, the succession of historical periods, the circulation of storytelling practices, and the diverse ways poets engage with these symbols have eroded the indicative clues that originally defined them, transforming them into chameleon-like signifiers.<sup>19</sup> This metamorphosis often compels the symbol into a state of dispersion, where it may serve one poet to stage a theatrical representation and another to evoke a funerary scene.

In his effort to explore the depths of his inner world, uncover hidden dimensions, and examine their relation to the external world, the poet resorts to artistic symbols that facilitate communication and renewal of his engagement with the universe. The poet finds himself compelled to reinterpret symbols, as, according to Charles Dickens (1812–1870), “a symbol enables one to perceive both the poetic structure of things and the primary relationship between mind and matter”<sup>20</sup>. Examining this assertion requires recognizing two interrelated processes: the first involves drawing inspiration from the raw material of the symbol as a primary resource for the creative process; the second entails dissecting this raw material through semantic and structural deviation, transforming it into a chameleon-like entity. Consequently, the focus shifts to uncovering the symbolic shadows and analyzing the artistic compound that emerges from this linguistic-symbolic activity, rather than from pre-established external correspondences. In this sense, the poem operates through “evocative references, alerting signals, or symbols”<sup>21</sup> rather than as a mere replication of nature. The faculty that constructs images and symbols originates from the awareness of the essential realities of active things prior to attending to their superficial details an organic, holistic, interconnected, and influential presence, as opposed to the rational mind, which views the material world as divisible during cognitive engagement.

While Dickens approached the potential of symbols imaginatively, Abdallah Al-Ashi concretized this perspective by distinguishing between two realities of symbols: “the first is the pre-established reality, shaped by humans with defined forms, laws, and nomenclature; the second is the unformed, unestablished reality a raw domain whose symbols have not yet been named or codified”<sup>22</sup>. From this horizon, we may define an abstract concept of the symbol as a text that is simultaneously closed and open, structured and analyzed, raw and contextually linked to the poet's visions of the world, society, politics, and art. The poet does not derive aesthetic value

solely from the inherent nature of these symbols; rather, artistic creation arises through the exposure, sculpting, and refinement of their raw structure.

It is perhaps instructive to recall Auguste Rodin (1840–1917), who defined art as “a meditation, a pleasure of the mind that penetrates the essence of nature, explores the intelligence within it, and breathes life into it. It is the joy of human intellect as it penetrates the depths of the universe, to recreate it while illuminating it with the light of feeling”<sup>23</sup>.

Similarly, the French thinker Charles Lalo (1877–1953) maintains that “art is the creation of an imaginary world that differs from the one in which we live”<sup>24</sup>. Along the same line, another scholar delineates its framework by asserting: “art is the creation of symbolic forms of human feeling”<sup>25</sup>. In accordance with these perspectives, it becomes evident that artistic creation embodies a vision that rejects closure, rigidity, and finality, instead opening the doors to interpretation and allowing multiple horizons of possibility. Within this framework, symbolic language, when entering the domain of art, becomes a thread in the poetic fabric: it begins obscurely and ends mysteriously. The more attempts are made to unravel it, the more it deepens in opacity and cryptic meaning.

### **Conclusion**

The study and analysis reveal that inspiration and the symbolic poetic faculty are two sides of the same coin, each encompassing and informing the other within its creative momentum—whether this creativity is a divine gift or the product of sustained effort. Consequently, poets’ recourse to symbolic language reflects the limitations of the material world and its inability to satisfy humanity’s spiritual and existential demands.

Since human thought inhabits a vast and boundless realm, thriving more on abstraction than on materiality, poets were compelled to explore symbolic language for its imaginative potency and its capacity to render the visible in a transparent and evocative manner, allowing readers from diverse backgrounds and perspectives to find resonance within it. This impetus led poets to transcend the constraints of tradition and the habitual reliance on lexical and conventional references, embracing a broad spectrum of symbolic resources saturated with cosmic and existential imagery. This expansive engagement accounts for the remarkable semantic and epistemic richness of symbolic language, transforming it into an expressive and communicative network that transcends conventional boundaries and achieves universality.

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1- Ibn Manzur, *Lisan al-‘Arab*, 10th edition, Dar Sader, Beirut, Lebanon, 2008, p. 245.

2 - Ali Abdullah Khalifa, *Inspiration from Folk Heritage in Creative Works in the Gulf and Arabian Peninsula*, *Journal of Popular Culture*, Issue 4, *Archive of Popular Culture for Studies, Research, and Publishing*, Bahrain, Winter 2009, p. 14.

- 3 -Nizar Qabbani, *My Story with Poetry*, Nizar Qabbani Publications, Beirut, Lebanon, n.d., pp. 212–213.
- 4 - *Ibid.*, p. 212/213.
- 5 - *Ibid.*, p. 211.
- 6 - Abdullah Al-Ashi: *Questions of Poetry: A Study on the Mechanism of Poetic Creativity*, Al-Ikhtilaf Publications, 1st edition, Algeria, 2009, p. 35.
- 7-Ali Abdullah Khalifa:*Inspiration from Folk Heritage in Creative Works in the Gulf and Arabian Peninsula*, p. 14.
- 8 - *Ibid.*, p. 15.
- 9 - Awad Abu Zeina:*Voices from the Siege: The West Bank and Gaza Strip (Content and Structure)*, I-Kutub Publications, 1st edition, London, n.d., p. 125.
- 10 - Ali Qasim Al-Zubaidi:*The Drama of the Modern Poetic Text: A Study on the Poetry of Salah Abdel Sabour and Abdel Aziz Lemqalh*, Dar Al-Zaman for Printing, Publishing, and Distribution, 1st edition, Damascus, Syria, 2009, p. 72.
- 11 - Ihsan Abbas :*Trends in Contemporary Arabic Poetry*, Dar Alam Al-Ma'rifah, n.d., Kuwait, 1978, p. 7.
- 12- Ali Qasim Al-Zubaidi: *The Drama of the Modern Poetic Text*, p. 70.
- 13 - Abdullah Al-Ashi:*Questions of Poetry: A Study on the Mechanism of Poetic Creativity*, p. 116.
- 14 - *Ibid.*, p. 116.
- 15 - *Op. cit.*, p. 72.
- 16 - *Ibid.*, p. 26.
- 17 - Abdullah Al-Ashi:*Questions of Poetry: A Study on the Mechanism of Poetic Creativity*, p. 217.
- 18 - *Ibid.*, p. 200.
- 19 - See: *Ibid.*, p. 202.
- 20 - Othman Hachlaf:*Symbol and Signification in Contemporary Maghrebi Poetry (Post-Independence Period)*, Al-Tabyin / Al-Jahiziyya Publications, n.d., Algeria, 2000, p. 6.
- 21 - *Ibid.*, p. 208.
- 22- Abdullah Al-Ashi:*Questions of Poetry: A Study on the Mechanism of Poetic Creativity*, p. 168.
- 23 - Zakaria Ibrahim :*Philosophical Problems 3: The Problem of Art*, pp. 16–17.
- 24 - Abdallah Al-'Ushi: *Questions of Poetics: A Study on the Mechanism of Poetic Creativity*,p. 169.
- 25 - Othman Hashlaf: *Symbol and Signification in Contemporary Maghrebian Poetry (Post-Independence Period)*, p. 6.

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