

The Semantic and Phenomenological Function of Myth in Contemporary Arabic Poetry: A Discourse-Semiotic Approach

Dr. Amel MAY¹; Dr. Abdelkader MAKHLOUF²

¹*Moulay Tahar University, Saida, Algeria*

²*Nour Bachir University Center, Elbayadh, Algeria*

Human Sciences Research Unit for Philosophical, Social and Humanistic Studies at the University of Oran 2 Mohamed Ben Ahmed, Algeria

Email: ¹amel.may@univ-saida.dz; ²a.makhlouf@cu-elbayadh.dz

ORCID: ²<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6898-5975>

Abstract

The paper deals with an analysis of the semantic role of mythology in contemporary Arabic poetic texts in terms of their discursive nature, semiotics, and phenomenology. Despite being a subject of interest of literary criticism from the angle of narratives and culture, the semantic role of mythology in contemporary Arabic poetry in terms of being a discursive, semiotic and experiential device requires further investigation. In order to carry out the study, qualitative research methodology was adopted. In particular, Critical Discourse Analysis was combined with semiotics and stylistics to analyze selected poems of renowned contemporary Arab poets distinguishing the cases of aesthetic incorporation of myths from the decorative use of mythology in poetry. Accordingly, the results of the study suggest that the use of myths allows contemporary Arabic poets to create deeper and more complicated meanings in their poetry, and rebuild cultural memory by means of symbols and intertextuality. Most importantly, the study has found that the effectiveness of mythology as a literary device strongly depends on its degree of incorporation into poetic discourse: while the former is effective when it is completely incorporated into poetry, the latter fails to have a profound effect on its semantics and ideological message. In addition to that, the current study adopts the philosophical approach known as phenomenology, whereby mythology is considered not only in terms of language and semiotics but also as an existential poetic experience through which the poet experiences and recreates reality. On the basis of this approach, myth is a poetic consciousness that allows the portrayal of human

experience within the world. The main advantage of the current study is the multidisciplinary research, which combines such areas as literature, applied linguistics, discourse analysis, and phenomenology, as well as the study of poetic discourse as a means for transferring myths.

Keywords: myth, contemporary Arabic poetry, semiotics, discourse analysis, phenomenology

Received: 05.04.2025 **Accepted:** 04.02.2026 **Published:** 07.04.2026

1. Introduction

In recent years, academic interest in the interplay between myth and poetry has grown significantly. However, despite the number of insightful works in the literature, very little effort has been devoted to analyzing the myth as a discursive, semiotic, and phenomenal phenomenon. Thus, in this case, the myth is not perceived as decoration or as story material but rather as the instrument through which poets construct their consciousness and understanding of reality.

The current work falls under the category of Applied Linguistics, with a focus on such concepts as Discourse Analysis (DA), Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), and semiotics. In addition, a phenomenological approach will be used to explore the interplay between poetry and myth. The aforementioned methodologies presuppose that texts are treated as social and phenomenal practices, where language, culture, and ideology converge. This implies that poetic texts in contemporary times are understood as spaces for applying myths as artistic techniques and phenomena.

One of the main issues examined in the present research is the phenomenon of myth as a discourse mask. In contexts where expression may be restricted because of censorship or other political reasons, poets tend to make use of mythological symbols and legendary stories. It should be noted that this phenomenon is consistent with the principles of CDA since it shows how the use of myth allows the poet to encode socio-cultural and socio-political messages into poetry.

Intertextuality makes the phenomenon of myth even more effective for communication since it involves the reference to other texts, symbols, cultural knowledge and beliefs. For instance, modern Arab poets often refer to the names like Tammuz, Ishtar, Adonis, and Phoenix, referring their readers to the history of culture and literature. The use of mythology helps to establish a dialogue between different texts, periods, cultures, and realities making poetry rich from the semantic and phenomenological point of view.

Even though there is a lot of research done on myths in Arabic poetry, most of it is purely descriptive. There are numerous examples of how poets used mythological references in their poetry, but their function is rarely explored in depth. This research will address this gap through

investigating how mythology functions as a symbolic system and affects poetic discourse and the poet's and reader's phenomenology.

In order to accomplish this objective, the following research questions have to be answered:

1. In what ways do poets employ myths as discursive and phenomenological tactics in modern Arabic poetry?
2. What kinds of symbolism and ideologies are produced using myths in poetry?
3. How can myths be interpreted as a semiotic and intertextual device in poems?
4. How do poets use mythological discourse to convey socio-political and cultural messages indirectly and share individual and collective experience?

Thus, the purpose of this research is to interpret myth not only as a subject but also as a discursive, semiotic, and phenomenological process existing in contemporary Arabic poetry. The results show that myth is a dynamic mechanism with which poets generate complex meanings, deliver ideologies, and describe phenomenological experience. Finally, contemporary Arab poets see myth not only as a literary genre or content but as an active poetic process in which poets can recreate reality, interpret the past, and negotiate identity. Poets describe such myths of experience as exodus, oppression, resistance, death, and rebirth in poetry.

2. Theoretical Framework

The theoretical basis of the current research lies within the inter-disciplinary approach combining discourse analysis, critical discourse analysis, semiotics, stylistics, and mythology. The general goal of the proposed theoretical framework consists of examining the role of myths not only in the plot composition of poems but as a discursive, semiotic, and phenomenological phenomenon contributing to the meaning making process in modern Arabic poetry. In particular, using the phenomenological approach to the investigation of myth, the researcher aims at examining it as a poetic experience of poets that shapes their view of the world.

2. 1. Myth as Discourse

One of the most important approaches to myth is the semiotic approach developed by Roland Barthes. In line with the above argument, myth is not just a story or a fairy tale; rather, it is an ideology represented as discourse. In other words, not only does myth have the qualities of a story but is also a discourse whose function is to transmit meanings culturally. By using myth, people transform cultural and historical meanings into those that become natural to understand without any additional effort. Thus, myth is used as an ideological discourse in which cultural values and meanings are hidden. Consequently, myth as discourse in poetry can be viewed as a set of linguistic elements bearing ideological meanings.

It should be noted that the view that myth is not just a story but also a discourse fits well with the principles of discourse analysis. The theory of discourse analysis takes an idea of language as a social practice that creates meaning in society. According to Discourse Analysis, poetic language performs not only an aesthetic function but also a pragmatic one – it creates realities that are symbolic and places the reader in an interpretative position. The use of mythological elements in poetry performs the same function of interpretation, cultural referencing, and creating intertextuality between the poem and a larger cultural discourse.

2. 2. Myth, Ideology, and Critical Discourse Analysis

The association between myths and ideologies can also be explained using the theory of Critical Discourse Analysis. Such representatives of the theory as Norman Fairclough and Teun A. van Dijk study the language that reproduces, challenges, and supports power relations and ideological systems.

In modern poetry when the use of such mythological characters as Tammuz, Ishtar, Adonis or Phoenix, occurs, it should be pointed out that these symbols do not remain neutral and can convey various ideological messages which may involve the ideas of death and rebirth, oppression and resistance, exile and return or decline and renewal. As a result, by means of the use of mythological symbols poets are able to make their message encoded in symbolic terms, which enables them to discuss sensitive matters. Consequently, myth becomes a discursive mask which makes it possible to both conceal and reveal some hidden meaning at the same time.

2. 3. Semiotics of Myth as a Discursive and Phenomenological Practice

Semiotics deals with meanings produced by signs, symbols, and myths may be considered as one of such systems, where mythological characters, things, and stories work as signifiers and encode some concepts of philosophy and culture. Apart from encoding ideology, myths are multi-meaningful in the sense that they involve literal, symbolic, cultural, and ideological aspects of interpretation. Myths are also symbolic devices used by poets for making sense of their reality.

2. 4. Intertextuality and Myth in Poetic Discourse

Another concept that should be mentioned in relation to the employment of myths is intertextuality that refers to the concept introduced by Julia Kristeva and implies that any text consists of quotations and references other texts. Intertextuality is also a concept that is characteristic for mythology. Thus, poets use myths, such as biblical myths, in poetry works and thus myths become intertexts for their poems. If myths are used, then the poem becomes the discourse between the poem itself and all texts that use the myth.

With the help of intertextuality, a poet can create an interrelation between the past times and the present time through the interpretation of ancient myths in accordance with current reality. Intertextuality makes it possible for poets to discuss topical political, social, and cultural problems in connection with the old symbolic system. Intertextuality can enrich the poem through the creation of different levels of meanings and making participation of readers mandatory.

2. 5. Stylistics and the Poetic Use of Myth

As another approach to the analysis of the employment of myths in poems can be the approach based on Stylistics. Stylistics deals with the relation of linguistic form and literary effect. As for the poetic usage of myths, myth affects poetry in terms of tone and rhythm.

The stylistic features that can be examined in regard to the use of myth include such aspects as symbolism of the lexical units used, recurrent names of mythological heroes, narrative voice, and interaction of descriptive and symbolic discourse. All the above-mentioned features contribute to the formation of mythological discourse, where the role of language is not reduced to mere literal meanings, but encompasses symbolic and cultural significance as well.

2. 6. Myth, Discourse, and Cultural Identity

Lastly, the use of myth by poets can be regarded as cultural and identity discourse. As myths are an integral part of cultural tradition, the revival of myths entails the reconstruction of cultural memory. Poets revive old myths, thereby reaffirming the cultural past, or they revise the traditional content of myths so as to address identity crisis and other contemporary issues, e.g., political conflicts and social changes.

Using the tools of discourse analysis, one can say that the construction of cultural identity and historical memory relies on language. In terms of cultural discourse, poets build cultural and identity discourses by employing mythological symbols that define poets themselves or others as representatives of civilization, its decline, and renewal.

In light of this theoretical framework, myth emerges as a discourse, semiotic sign, style, and phenomenal mode in poetic language. Using concepts of discourse, critical discourse, semiotics, stylistics, intertextuality, and phenomenology, this research shows that the use of myths in contemporary Arabic poetry is a living process of meaning creation, ideological communication, and mediation of poetic experience. Myth, in this regard, turns into a symbolical system and an ideological mode of consciousness through which poets communicate personal and social experiences, reconceptualize reality and become participants of cultural and socio-political discourse.

3. Literature review

The association between myth and literature is well-researched in literary criticism, comparative literature, and cultural studies. In the initial theoretical treatments of myth, attention was paid mostly to its narrative nature, psychology, and cultural role. One of the most remarkable theoretical contributions to myth is the archetypal criticism developed by Northrop Frye in 1957. Archetypal criticism sees myth as an underlying structural element in literature. According to Frye, myth plays a pivotal role in literary works since most literary texts are based on myth. Myths provide literature with certain narrative patterns of death and resurrection, the quest, sacrifice, and regeneration. Despite being literary in its essence, Frye's theory is of great importance in comprehending the structural association between myths and poems (Al-Saif, 2009; Sarhan, 1451/2010).

The next important contribution made in the field of myth is the theory by Roland Barthes (1972). In his analysis of myth as a phenomenon, Barthes views it semiotically and sees it as a type of discourse and communication system. According to Barthes, the myth is not determined by its content but its mode of signification and therefore acts as a second-order semiological system. The significance of this approach for the current study consists in the opportunity to consider myth as an ideological discourse rather than an old story (Al-Bouamrani, 2006, p. 34).

Finally, one cannot forget about the important contribution to the relation of myth to modern poetry made by the modernist poet T.S. Eliot (1922). In particular, in his famous poem *The Waste Land*, he develops the so-called "mythical method" showing the use of myth as a structure and symbolic means of organization of contemporary experience. His influence was not confined to English literature but had a deep effect on the Arab poets like Badr Shukr Al-Sayyab, Abdul Wahab Al-Bayati, and Salah Abdul Sabour who utilized the mythical elements in their poetry to convey such concepts as death, revival, exile, and crisis of culture (Daoud, 1975, p. 41; Al-Toumi, 2013, p. 13).

From the phenomenological approach, one might conclude that myth in poetry is not simply a narrative and symbolic element of poetic language, but a poetic structure through which the poet understands and expresses his experience with being-in-the-world. As defined by Husserl, phenomenology is a philosophical methodology aimed at exploring the processes of meaning-making within consciousness. Therefore, myth in contemporary Arabic poetry may be treated as a structure through which the poet experiences and remembers something as well as creates his personal or collective identity. Poets do not use myth as a simple reference to the past, but as an opportunity to recreate their experience of reality and explore existential issues such as exile, death, identity, and rebirth.

With regard to literary criticism in Arabic, there are several critical studies that have analyzed the role of myths in modern Arabic poems. Some critics argue that modern poets used mythology to

signify their anxiety and despair through symbols. For instance, the Tammuz myth is used to indicate renewal and resurrection, and the Phoenix is used as a symbol of revival from ruin. The critics have proved that mythology has become an indispensable element in modern Arabic poetry as far as poets used mythology as a tool for articulating their anxieties, defeats, and hope (May, 2011, p. 80; Al-Bouamrani, 2006, p. 35).

According to discourse studies, some researchers including Norman Fairclough (1995) and Teun A. van Dijk (1998) have argued that discourse is not only a mirror image of reality, but also a social practice which creates reality via language. CDA investigates the connection between language, power, and ideology through encoding texts with ideological meanings and social relations. CDA can be used in various fields like political discourse, media discourse, and educational discourse. The employment of CDA in studying poetic discourse, especially the discourse of myth is rarely investigated (Makhlaf, 2012, p. 71).

In addition, the notion of intertextuality offered by Julia Kristeva (1980) is considered another approach to study the role of myth in poetry. According to the theory of intertextuality, every text can be associated with another text, as meaning is created by such relations. Mythological elements can be seen as one example of intertextuality, as myth makes allusion to other earlier narratives and texts and thus creates relations between past and present (Al-Bouamrani, 2006, p. 36).

Scholars who study myth in Arabic poetry consider it from the sociopolitical and aesthetic aspects. Indeed, the role of myths in modern Arabic poetry can be described in terms of cultural oppositions, expressions of identity, and poetic reminiscences. Mythical characters act not merely as symbolic devices but as means of making cultural and political statements. Likewise, Salah Abdel Sabour demonstrates the potential of myth for linking poetry back to human experiences and interdisciplinary human sciences (Abdel Sabour, 1977, p. 180; Al-Toumi, 2013, p. 144).

On this basis, one can conclude that the majority of scholarly research in the area of myths in poetry concentrates on the functions of myth as a thematic device, a narratological device, and a semiotic symbol. Meanwhile, the functions of myth as a discursive practice and as a semiotic system in poetic language have not been studied extensively. To be more precise, prior scholarly works were interested in the meaning of myth in poems rather than the mechanism of production of such meanings (Wimsatt & Brooks, 1976, p. 209).

This deficiency will be addressed by the current study, which attempts to investigate the phenomenon of myth from the perspective of applied linguistics, discourse analysis, and semiotics. Myth helps poets ideologically encode their works in terms of meanings, culture identities, and social and political realities. Here, the analysis of literature is blended with applied linguistics by focusing on myth's importance as a discursive and semiotic strategy used in the current poetics (Al-Bouamrani, 2006, p. 39; Al-Madi, 2015, p. 149).

To sum up, while existing research has successfully shown how myth serves as a symbolic and stylistic device in poetic works, this research pays more attention to the linguistic function and discourse analysis of myths in poems. The combination of literary, stylistic, semiotic and discursive analyses proves that myths serve as a powerful literary tool for constructing ideologies and expressing cultural identity in contemporary poetics (Al-Saif, 2009; Al-Bouamrani, 2006; Makhlaf, 2012).

3. 1. Phenomenology and Myth Interpretation

Since phenomenology is concerned with phenomena and experience, then it can be seen as an attempt to understand the process by which meaning emerges from the relationship between human consciousness and reality. Consequently, myths in poems can not only be considered semiotics but also human experiences expressed in poetic language.

As Heidegger (1971) observes, poems are one of the ways through which humans disclose their being and relationship with the world. In this context, myths in poems become a mode through which truths and human experiences are disclosed rather than retelling stories from ancient times. Likewise, Paul Ricoeur (1976) claims that symbols and myths produce greater meanings because they indirectly represent human experiences through symbolic language. Thus, myths can be seen as symbolic structures that facilitate the depiction by poets of complex existential and cultural experiences. Another kind of phenomenology, where the perception and imagination in human experiences is emphasized by Merleau-Ponty (1962), makes one view myths in poems as imaginative and perceptual structures. This means that myth in contemporary Arabic poetry is a matter of experience rather than a purely literary technique.

4. Methodology

This study uses an interpretative methodology to examine the semantic, discursive and phenomenological aspect of myth in contemporary Arabic poetry. This study will employ an interdisciplinary methodology, using approaches related to literary analysis, applied linguistics, semiotics, discourse analysis, and phenomenology, to examine myth as not only narrative but also linguistic, artistic, ideological, and phenomenal in modern Arabic poetry (Al-Sawah, 2009; Sarhan, 2010).

4.1. Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative and text-based approach involving the analysis of a selected group of poems that have been produced by well-known Arabic poets who employ myth in their work, such as Abdul Wahab Al-Bayati (Daoud, 1975, p. 41; Al-Toumi, 2013, p. 13), and Nizar Qabbani. Text-based analysis provides the opportunity for a holistic and comprehensive evaluation of

myths through an examination of their semantic, syntactic, pragmatic, discursive, intertextual, semiotic, and phenomenological characteristics.

The inclusion of phenomenological thinking in the process helps to identify how the use of myths is a living experience for the poet that mediates subjective perception and representation of reality. Phenomenology helps to investigate myths in poetry as instruments for meaning creation and communication of ideologies and ideas as well as tools for indirect interpretations of cultural, political, and social realities.

A further aspect of the methodology involves differentiating between integrated myths, which create additional semantic and pragmatic depth in poems, enhance their structure, and help to develop ideological unity, and superficial or weak myths, which only serve as decorations. With the help of textual and discourse analysis combined with semiotics, the role of myth as a meaning-creative and as a mode of poetic consciousness, reflect the poet's negotiation of identity, culture, and lived experience.

4.2. Data Selection

Poems selected for this research contain mythological references in particular. The criteria of selecting the poems are as follows:

1. The presence of allusions and references to myths and mythological characters.
2. Different modes of using myth in poetry (artistic vs. faint/superficial).
3. The influence of history, culture, or politics on the use of myth.
4. Recognised by literary scholars as an example of Arabic poetry of the contemporary period (Al-Bouamrani, 2006, pp. 34-36; May, 2011, p. 80).

Furthermore, from the point of view of phenomenology, the choice made includes those poems where myth appears to be part of lived experience, as lived through the poet's personal consciousness of reality rather than as something only mentioned in the poem. Particular focus will be on those texts where myth becomes a mediator for existential questions such as identity, exile, remembrance, and revival, therefore constituting the lived structure of poetic experience.

In this case, poems selected using the aforementioned approach will be relevant, allowing a study of myth use in poetry.

4.3. Analytical Approach

The suggested methods are outlined below:

1. Literary analysis (narrative, imagery, symbolic analyses) that will enable identifying the way myth functions within poetic texts. This method is concerned with discovering archetypal characters, recurring themes, and connections between texts of contemporary poets and those belonging to the ancient/classical tradition (Frye, 1957; Al-Rawi, 2005).

2. Discourse analysis, which uses CDA theories (Fairclough, 1995; van Dijk, 1998) in order to analyze mythological allusions. By employing the discourse analysis approach, we will be able to perceive myths as rhetorical discourses mediating socio-political power relations and cultural practices (Makhlaf, 2012, p. 71).

3. Semiotic Analysis: Based on Roland Barthes' semiotic theory, myths are viewed as a system of signs. Semiotic analysis emphasizes the denotative and connotative meaning produced by symbols, motifs, and mythological references within poetic contexts (Al-Bouamrani, 2006, pp. 34–36).

4. Phenomenological Approach: Apart from the previous methods, a phenomenological approach is utilized as well to study myth as a structure of lived experience within poetic language. This method is based on the examination of myth's role in constructing poetic consciousness and its reflection of the poet's own experience of being in the world. The analysis includes the discussion of myth's role in mediating experience of subjectivity, emotionality, and existential issues and the process of interpreting the poem in terms of lived experience by the poet and the reader.

4.4. Methods of Data Analysis

The process of data analysis involved four steps:

1. Text Reading and Annotation: Multiple readings of poems were conducted, and all mythical elements were noted. The notes focused on the role, frequency, and usage of myths in each particular poem (Al-Madi, 2015, p. 149).

In addition, in terms of phenomenology, it is important to pay attention to how the mythological components are involved in expressing the subjective nature of experience, including its mood, perception, and existential aspects inherent in the poetic voice.

2. Classification of Myth Usage: Based on the classification presented in the lecture, myth was classified into two categories: aesthetic (fully incorporated into poems) and faint (superficial or disconnected) (Abdel Sabour, 1977, p. 180; Al-Toumi, 2013, p. 144).

At the same time, it should be noted that this classification also takes into account the role of myth as an experiential structure and involves distinguishing between myth that helps to form the consciousness of a poet and myth that stays external to the experiential context of the poet.

3. Discourse and Semiotics: All identified myths underwent discourse and semiotic analysis to understand their functions. These functions could relate to ideology, culture, symbolism, etc. (Al-Bouamrani, 2006, pp. 35–36).

It should be noted that alongside this stage, a phenomenological interpretation of the poem was used in order to study the way in which these discursive and symbolic roles were perceived in poetry.

4. Comparative Analysis among Poets: It was necessary to compare usage of myth by different poets. Modernist movements like the use of mythical technique by T.S. Eliot have been considered in their influence on Arab poets (Daoud, 1975, p. 41; Al-Toumi, 2013, p. 13).

In terms of phenomenology, this comparative analysis also studies differences in the ways in which myth was appropriated by poets and was used to create their unique experiential world.

4.5. Validity and Reliability

The reliability of the research is ensured by using reliable data collection methods and maintaining systematic processes. Validity is guaranteed by using primary sources of information, namely original poetry, and supporting the analysis with interpretations that have already been analyzed in the literature (Al-Rawi, 2005; Abdel Sabour, 1978). Peer-reviewed articles and classical texts on literature (Frye, 1957; Barthes, 1972; Fairclough, 1995) were considered to validate interpretations based on the findings from the literature review.

4.6. Ethical Issues

This is a textual analysis; therefore, there is no need for informed consent, but there is a necessity for accurate citation and attribution of the source. All sources of poems and literary criticism are properly cited (Al-Bouamrani, 2006; Makhlaf, 2012).

In summary, this paper has adopted the textual analysis approach, supplemented with discursive and semiotic analysis techniques to understand how myth influences contemporary Arabic poetry. In addition to employing methods of discourse and semiotic analyses, the paper explores the role of myth within the poetic context through interpretive phenomenological method aimed at the study of myth as the structure of experience in poetry. Consequently, in accordance with the interpretive phenomenological method, the research is concerned not only with the language structure of myth in poetry but also with its experience and symbolic nature.

5. Analysis and Findings

Analysis of modern Arabic poetry shows that there is much complexity and multiplicity when it comes to the utilization of myth, both in terms of its aesthetical and discursive dimensions. This part focuses on the utilization of myths in the chosen poems by, Abdul Wahab Al-Bayati, Youssef Al-Khal, Nizar Qabbani using the classification developed in class: aesthetical, faint use of myths, symbolization, and different roles of myths (Al-Sawah, 2009; Daoud, 1975, p. 41).

5.1. Aesthetical Utilization of Myths

This section examines the aesthetic use of myth in poetry when mythology becomes fully incorporated into the structure and semantic structure of the poem. In other words, this is the

situation when myths are not mere decoration but rather the essential element of thematic substance and aesthetic construction of the poem. Myth as semiotic structure involves the usage of mythological characters, motifs and stories as multi-layered semiotically encoded material. Myths used in this way help poets establish intertextual links between poetry and literary tradition, historical and collective cultural memory, and construct a poem which has many meanings and layers of understanding.

Further, there is a strong phenomenological element in which the poet's relation with myth is considered as a poetic experience lived by him or her. Myths are more than literary elements – they are ways of seeing and interpreting reality. Thus, through the process of such integration, the myth becomes a powerful tool that helps the reader in comprehending deeper meanings behind the poem.

Myths that become fully integrated into the poem contribute to its structural and aesthetic unity, thus becoming an essential part of the poem's overall semantic and aesthetic value. This aspect makes aesthetic myths good examples of the organic relationship between myth and poetry, following the approach developed in modern literary criticism, which emphasizes structure over allusions (Wimsatt & Brooks, 1976).

Example 1: Nizar Qabbani

Arabic:

أرفضكم جميعكم
وأختم الحوار
لم يبق عندي لغة
أضربت في معاجمي
وفي ثيابي النار

Transliteration:

Arfaḍukum jamī'ukum
Wa akhtim al-ḥiwār
Lam yabqa 'indī lughah
Aḍramtu fī ma'ājimī
Wa fī thiyābī al-nār

Translation:

I reject all of you
And wrap up the dialogue
I have no language left
I set fire to my dictionaries
And to my clothes of fire

Analysis:

Here, myth is not merely an element mentioned but something that becomes an integral part of Qabbani's poetic self. Resurrecting gods or setting fire to dictionaries gives the poet's mythology new power, helping the poet to explore some important themes.

Example 2: Abdul Wahab Al-Bayati

Arabic:

يحلم في بعث رماد طائرا الخرافه
يروى جذور هذه الصفصافه
بدمه لعلها تولد أو تموت

Transliteration:

Yaḥlam fī ba'th ramād ṭā'ir al-khurāfah

Yarwī judhūr hādhihi al-ṣafṣāfah

B-damihi la'allahā tawlud aw tamūt

Translation:

Dreaming of resurrecting the ashes of two mythical birds

It irrigates the roots of this willow

With his blood, perhaps she will be born or die

Analysis:

The appeal to mythical birds made by Al-Bayati reflects the extent to which myth is embedded aesthetically in the poem. In other words, myth in this poem works as a generator of poetry that combines imagination of the poet with cultural heritage of the community.

Example 3: Youssef Al-Khal

Arabic:

وقبلما نهم بالرحيل ونذبح الحزاف
واحد لعشتروت واحد لأدونيس
واحد ليعل ثم نرفع المراسي
ونبدأ السفر

Transliteration:

Wa qablama nahm bil-rahil wa nadhbah al-hazaf.

Wahid li-'Ishtart, wahid li-Adunis

Wahid li-Ba'l thumma narfa' al-marasi

Wa nabda' al-safar

Translation:

Before they leave and we slaughter the party.

One for Astarte, one for Adonis.

One for Baal, and then we lift the anchors
and start traveling

Analysis:

Al-Khal exemplifies aesthetic deployment of myth in his poem because there is a fully formed interaction between the multiple mythical characters used in the poem. The multiple mythic characters play an important role in shaping the theme and rhythm of the poem.

In this case, the aesthetic application of myth refers to the way in which myth operates phenomenologically. It is about using myths as structures of meaning and experience for poets. When a poet refers to certain myths in his poem, he/she experiences those myths again and interprets them anew. In this case, myths become part of the poetic experience.

5.2. Faint or Superficial Employment of Myth

On the contrary, the faint usage of myth means that a poet makes use of certain mythical elements in his poem but the myths do not have much relevance to the structure and theme of the poem. As a result, the application of myth remains decorative in nature.

From a semiotics point of view, faint myths constitute isolated signifiers with restricted polysemic capacity. In this way, they are unable to establish intertextual resonance nor carry deeper cultural or ideological meaning. Therefore, the myth does not become an active element contributing to the formation of the discourse of the poem nor to its ideological value.

In terms of phenomenology, faint myths do not create an authentic lived poetic experience for the poet. He seems to have had only a superficial encounter with the myth, and the reader does not enjoy any significant interpretive experience beyond the mere recognition of cultural elements in the poem. To summarize, the myth lacks a deep relationship with the poet and the poem's inner structure.

It is important to distinguish between aesthetic and faint usage of myth since the former significantly enriches the poem's aesthetic and semantic composition while the latter remains merely ornamental. It serves as a cultural memory of sorts without integrating into the poetic discourse.

Example 1: Youssef Al-Khal

Arabic:

وقبلما نهم بالرحيل ونذبح الحزاف
واحد لعشثروت واحد لأدونيس
واحد لبعل ثم نرفع المراسي
ونبدأ السفر

Transliteration:

Wa qablama nahm bil-rahil wa nadhbah al-hazaf.

Wahid li-'Ishtart, wahid li-Adunis

Wahid li-Ba'l thumma narfa' al-marasi

Wa nabda' al-safar

Translation:

Before they leave and we slaughter the party.

One for Astarte, one for Adonis.

One for Baal, and then we lift the anchors

and start traveling

Analysis:

In this case, the myth is included in the poem faintly, which means that it doesn't integrate with the poem's deep aesthetics and themes. The mentioning of many gods here feels like a purely cultural element, it does not fuse with the poetic self or enhance the poem's structural cohesion.

Example 2: Abdul Wahab Al-Bayati

Arabic:

يحلم في بعث رماد طائرا الخرافه

يروى جذور هذه الصفصافة

بدمه لعلها تولد أو تموت

Transliteration:

Yaḥlam fī ba'th ramād ṭā'ir al-khurāfah

Yarwī judhūr hādhihi al-ṣafṣāfah

B-damihi la'allahā tawlud aw tamūt

Translation:

Dreaming of resurrecting the ashes of two mythical birds

It irrigates the roots of this willow

With his blood, perhaps she will be born or die

Analysis:

Here, the utilization of mythological birds seems to be superficial. They are brought in just to add some imagery to the poem, and yet there seems to be no deep connection between the mythological symbols and the poem itself. The aesthetic function, in other words, remains weak as the aesthetic effect of this reading has nothing to do with mythology per se.

Example 3: Nizar Qabbani

Arabic:

أرفضكم جميعكم

وأختم الحوار
لم يبق عندي لغة
أضرمت في معاجمي
وفي ثيابي النار

Transliteration:

Arfaḍukum jamī'ukum
Wa akhtim al-ḥiwār
Lam yabqa 'indī lughah
Aḍramtu fī ma'ājimī
Wa fī thiyābī al-nār

Translation:

I reject all of you
And wrap up the dialogue
I have no language left
I set fire to my dictionaries
And to my clothes of fire

Analysis :

Here, the author makes an allusion to the myth, but the utilization of the mythological dimension in this case should be considered rather as faint. The mythic dimension is not incorporated in the process of the poem's aesthetics construction. It is merely symbolic without merging with the thematic and formal structure of the poem.

Phenomenologically, the faint usage of the myth could be regarded as its use as an external dimension that refers to some aspects of life and yet fails to become a part of the poem and the poet's lived experience. In this case, the distinction between aesthetic myth and faint myth is not only one of semantics or structure but one of experience as well.

5.3. Discursive and Ideological Functions

Besides being an aesthetic feature, myth functions as a discursive strategy in modern Arabic poetry. Utilizing concepts offered by Fairclough (1995) and van Dijk (1998), we see how the use of myths allows poets to encode resistance and criticism and perform social commentaries when they face censorship (Fairclough, 1995; van Dijk, 1998; Makhlaf, 2012, p. 71). In Al-Bayati's poems, such use of myths becomes a strategy for criticizing oppression without the risk for the poet himself.

For instance, the recurring use of mythological figures in the context of exilic and repressive circumstances indicates that, in addition to being an aesthetic expression, the myth is also practical, facilitating the connection between the poet and socio-political facts (Al-Bouamrani,

2006, pp. 34-36; Al-Madi, 2015, p. 149). As a result of the application of mythology within the symbolization system of the poem, poets have managed to preserve both poetic depth and subtle ideological meaning.

5.4. Intertextuality and Culture

Kristeva (1980) has emphasized the importance of intertextuality in the analysis of the use of myth. Contemporary Arab poets resort to ancient myths and epics, as well as their predecessors' poems, to create layers of meaning. Through intertextuality, poets are able to refer to culture, history, and heritage. For example, references to the Mesopotamian, Phoenician, and Greek myths do not constitute mere historic references but rather the continuity of symbolic experiences, linking poetic discourse of today with the ancient traditions of yesteryear (Kristeva, 1980; Barthes, 1972; Al-Rawi, 2005).

5.5. Link with the Modernist Approach in Literature

The inclusion of myths within Arabic poetry may be seen as an approach that has been used by modernist poets, including T.S. Eliot (1922). The mythical approach helps Arab poets convey intricate stories, unite cultures, and convey existential experiences. This approach is evident in poems by Abdul Sabour and Al-Bayati who incorporate the myth within their poetic language without simply adding it at the surface level (Eliot, 1922; Abdel Sabour, 1978; Al-Toumi, 2013, p. 13).

5.6. Comparative Observations

From the corpus, it can be observed that:

1. Aesthetic incorporation is more likely to produce semantic coherence and symbolic resonance.
2. Faint utilization carries a risk of alienation from the readership and weakening the myth's cultural and poetic impact.
3. The myth acts as a semiotic and discursive device, allowing poets to convey ideological and identity messages.
4. Intertextuality enhances the understanding of culture in relation to the history and modernity of modern poetry.
5. Modernism contributes to the process of integrating myth into poems (Frye, 1957; Eliot, 1922; Fairclough, 1995).

This paper proves that myth in modern poetry in Arabic is not only culturally and aesthetically valuable but also serves as a means of communication of ideology and identity messages in the

semiotic sense. It can be concluded that distinguishing between aesthetic and faint use of myth helps in analyzing the poems (Al-Bouamrani, 2006; Makhlaf, 2012; Al-Madi, 2015).

6. Discussion

This current study highlights the fact that myth in contemporary Arabic poetry goes beyond the traditional role of being part of the story, because it is also a linguistic and semantic construct used to construct the meaning of poetry. According to the analysis, the concept of myth helps in expressing individual experience and collective memory as well as sociopolitical issues in society. Therefore, it has been shown that the study of myth must include both literary criticism and discourse analysis and semiotics (Barthes, 1972; Fairclough, 1995).

According to earlier studies on myth mentioned by Firas Al-Sawah, it has been proven that the fundamental function of myth is tied to the desire of humanity to make sense of life and the universe, thus, mythic language is rich in symbols and philosophical meanings as opposed to fictional accounts (Al-Sawah, 1995). Likewise, Omar bin Abdulaziz Al-Saif observes that the journey and myth patterns existed in pre-Islamic poetry, especially the poetic journey pattern with the symbolic transition from losing to gaining (Al-Saif, 2009). It reveals the presence of myth in Arabic poetry that was embedded in the classical pattern of Arabic poetry.

Modern literary criticism defines myth as a symbolic and structural literary phenomenon. Samir Sarhan maintains that myth should be symbolically analyzed rather than taken literally. In literature, myth functions to provide more meanings beyond those of literal meaning, which goes in line with archetypes put forward by Northrop Frye (1957), showing that literature relies on mythological patterns including death and rebirth, exile and return, sacrifice and renewal.

The role played by modern literary criticism, specifically the contribution of William K. Wimsatt and Cleanth Brooks, is based on analyzing literary works organically as texts, whereby meaning emerges from internal relations among symbols, images, and themes rather than historical accounts of external meanings. In such light, the myth in poems should be studied with regard to the poem's own structural makeup. Such assumption justifies the differentiation between integrated or aesthetic and superficial or faint myths, as the significance of the myth is dependent on its structural incorporation within the poem.

The research related to modern Arabic poetry, including the study conducted by Anas Daoud on the role of myth in modern Arabic poetry, reveals that Arab poets employed myth not in terms of imitation but as a symbolism representing modern realities in Arab society, such as exile, political engagement, and crisis of identity (Daoud, 1975). Similarly, Manjiya Al-Toumi claims that the connection between the myth and politics in the works of Abdul Wahab Al-Bayati implies that myth becomes a symbolism that lets the author voice his political opposition indirectly (Al-Toumi,

2013). Hence, the study confirms the findings from the discourse analysis as well as proves that language encodes ideologies (van Dijk, 1998).

Lastly, the research carried out by Mohammed Saleh Al-Bouamrani on the semantics of Adonis' poems indicates that the myth has a prominent role to play in the evolution of poetic language. According to Al-Bouamrani, the function of myth in Adonis' poetry occurs at the level of semantics by enriching the meanings through symbolic and intertextual references (Al-Bouamrani, 2006). The findings confirm the semiotics theory developed by Barthes (1972) suggesting that myth acts as a second-order signification system generating cultural and ideological meanings.

The presence of myths in contemporary Arab literature is not limited to the prominent poets of the Arab world like Adonis and Al-Bayati but also present in contemporary Algerian literature as can be seen in the research paper written by Amal May on the presence of myth in contemporary Algerian poetry (May, 2011). It should be concluded that myth is a popular phenomenon in the Arabic poetic language nowadays, and not just one particular stylistic device of poets.

The same applies to Qabbani who incorporates myth into his poetic language in the form of mythological characters. As Makhlaf (2012) and Al-Madi (2015) indicate in their works, the use of the mythical figure of Scheherazade represents certain political, social and cultural concerns. In the present case, the myth is employed as a symbol of politics in the poet's language.

From the findings of the current research, it is clear that myth serves various purposes in contemporary Arabic poetry. It first has the function of aesthetics that help in creating images and symbols in poetry. Second, it serves as a political tool of raising awareness about certain political problems. Third, it functions as an intertextual element. Fourth, it serves the cultural purpose by participating in the formation of cultural identity and memory.

The differentiation of the aesthetic and the faint myth usage made by the author makes it clear that myth works effectively only when it is structurally included in the poem. Mythological content becomes the source of deeper meaning and creates poetic unity when it is integrated in structural terms in a poetic work. Otherwise, the usage of myth is just decorative and lacks semiotic or symbolic sense. This once again proves the principles of modern literary criticism based on the idea of literary organic unity (Wimsatt & Brooks, 1976).

The results of this study may be seen from a phenomenological perspective as well, since the use of myth in contemporary Arabic poetry not only serves as a symbolic or a semiotic system, but also takes the shape of a poetic experience itself. Through the use of myths, the poet recreates reality and expresses his personal experiences of alienation, resistance, identity and cultural memory. Myth in this context thus operates as a link between personal experience and collective memory, as well as between the past and the present. Myth in poetry is therefore seen as a semiotic sign as well as a phenomenon that takes place in poetic language.

7. Conclusion

This research was carried out from an interdisciplinary perspective where literary criticism, semiotics, discourse analysis and phenomenology were all taken into account in the investigation of the role of myth in contemporary Arabic poetry. It was found that myths in poetry go beyond merely being narrative devices and operate as discourses, semiotic systems and poetic experiences as well.

From this research, it can be seen that the use of myths in Arabic poetry has many dimensions, which include aesthetic, symbolic, discursive, intertextual, cultural, and phenomenological dimensions. Myths in poetry are used by poets to deal with difficult themes in human experiences like identity, memory, exile, resistance, death, and rebirth. The ability of myth in poetry to achieve its goals depends on its level of integration in the structure of poetry because integrated myths enhance the meaning, symbolism, and unity of the poem, while superficial myths act just as decoration with little influence.

Myth as a concept is also a medium for poetic experience from the phenomenological angle. As such, myth helps poets to express their experiences in perceiving the world around them. Therefore, myth works not only at the semantic and discursive levels but also at the phenomenological level of experience as poetic consciousness. For this reason, there should be a need to analyze myths in poetry at the semiotic, discursive, and phenomenological levels.

7.1 Theoretical Contribution

The current work adds value to applied linguistics, literary criticism, and discourse studies by emphasizing the significance of studying myths not only thematically but discursively, semiotically, and phenomenologically as well. An interdisciplinary approach adopted throughout this analysis shows that the modern Arabic poetry makes use of the phenomenon under consideration for creating meanings, preserving cultural memory, and expressing human experience.

7.2 Implications and Recommendations

Further areas of study could include:

- The function of myths in modern poetry written in Arabic in Algeria and other regions of the Middle East.
- Linguistic, stylistic, and semiotic aspects of the use of myths in poetry.
- Comparison of myths in Arabic and Western poetry, their symbolic and discursive roles.
- Phenomenological analysis of experiences of a poet and a reader while perceiving mythic poetry.

To conclude, contemporary Arabic poetry is based on myth as a living symbolic system which links past to present, individuality to collectiveness, and literature to culture. Discursive, semiotic, and phenomenological techniques employed by poets enable them to create meanings, preserve cultural memory, and express existential experience using the phenomenon in question.

8. References

- Abdel Halim, (2012). *Violation: Manifestations of the legend in the poems of Nizar Qabbani*.
- Abdel Sabour, S. (1977). *My life in poetry within the Diwan of Salah Abdel Sabour* (2nd ed., 3rd printing). Beirut: Dar Al-Awda.
- Abdel Sabour, S. (1978). *Selected essays on poetry and myth*. Cairo: Dar Al-Maaref.
- Al-Bouamrani, M. S. (2006). *The impact of myth in the poetic language of Adonis: A research in semantics* (1st ed.). Aladdin Library, Sfax.
- Al-Khayal, Y. (1973). *Complete poetic works*. Beirut: Dar Al-Awda, 2nd Edition.
- Al-Madi, A. (2015). *The manifestations of Scheherazade in contemporary Algerian poetry*.
- Al-Rawi, A. (2005). *Modern Arabic poetry and myth*. Beirut: Dar Al-Nahda Al-Arabiya.
- Al-Saif, O. B. A. (2009). *The structure of the journey in the pre-Islamic poem: Myth and symbol* (1st ed.). Beirut: Al-Arab Spread.
- Al-Toumi, M. (2013). *The sedition of myth and the power of politics: Reading in the poetry of Abdul Wahab Al-Bayati*. Aladdin Library, Sfax, Tunisia.
- Barthes, R. (1972). *Mythologies* (A. Lavers, Trans.). London: Jonathan Cape.
- Cassirer, E. (1946). *Language and myth*. New York, NY: Dover Publications.
- Dāwūd, A. (1975). *Al-ustūrah fī al-shi'r al-'arabī al-ḥadīth*. Maktabat 'Ayn Shams.
- Eliade, M. (1963). *Myth and reality*. New York, NY: Harper & Row.
- Eliot, T. S. (1922). *The waste land*. London: Boni and Liveright.
- Fairclough, N. (1995). *Critical discourse analysis: The critical study of language*. London, UK: Longman.
- Frye, N. (1957). *Anatomy of criticism: Four essays*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Gadamer, H.-G. (1989). *Truth and method* (2nd ed.). New York, NY: Continuum.
- Husserl, E. (1970). *Logical investigations* (J. N. Findlay, Trans.). London, UK: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Husserl's landmark work establishing the foundations of phenomenology, particularly the study of meaning and consciousness. Merleau-Ponty, M. (1962). *Phenomenology of perception* (C. Smith, Trans.). London, UK: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Kristeva, J. (1980). *Desire in language: A semiotic approach to literature and art* (T. Gora, A. Jardine, & L. S. Roudiez, Trans.). New York, NY: Columbia University Press. *(Availability in library catalogs and academic databases)*

Makhlaf, A. H. (2012). *The manifestations of the legend in the poems of Nizar Qabbani*. Algeria.

May, M. (2011). *Manifestations of the month of Zad in contemporary Algerian poetry*.

Qabbani, N. (2000). *Full political works* (6th ed.). Beirut: Nizar Qabbani Publications.

Ricoeur, P. (1976). *Interpretation theory: Discourse and the surplus of meaning*. Fort Worth, TX:
Texas Christian University Press.

van Dijk, T. A. (1998). *Ideology: A multidisciplinary approach*. London, UK: Sage.

Weimis, W. K., & Brooks, C. (1976). *Literary criticism* (T. Hossam Al-Khatib & M. Subhi, Trans.).
Jordan: Publications of the Supreme Council for the Care of Arts and Letters.