

The Thresholds of Intertextuality in Contemporary Iraqi Poetry: A Study of Selected Poets

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Abstract

This research examines intertextuality in textual thresholds, specifically in the title's position and function, as a project capable of growth and enrichment. This study does not claim to encompass all the possibilities of the field it explores, as titling opens a series of meanings. Due to multiple readings and readers' tendency to treat the title as a passive intermediary in the creative process, this research seeks to challenge this misconception. It aims to reposition the title at its highest rank, as it contains a symbolic textual component interwoven with other elements of the modern poetic text. This effort represents an attempt to trace the influences on its production, stemming from cultural references and the reality in which the contemporary poet lives – one who conveys messages to the reader in an attempt to approach the meaning of the title, which can be studied within the broader process of meaning-making in texts. The effectiveness of titling arises from textual dominance, revealing its influences on the dynamic reading process. Therefore, it is an attempt to construct the poet's perspective and overarching ideology, reflecting their world's vision. This research seeks to heighten awareness of the significance of textual thresholds and their function. Since the title prompts the reader's response, it serves as a condensation of the poet's experience. The researchers have studied the titles of three of the most important contemporary Iraqi poets: Hussein Abdullatif, Abdulkarim Kasid, and Kadhim Al-Hajaj. In this study, the researchers examined some of the titles of their poetry collections, recognizing that the title reconfigures texts – whether they belong to the poet's own conceptual domain or are from earlier poetic or narrative traditions produced in the past eras.

Keywords: thresholds, intertextuality, contemporary, perspective, semiotic

عتبات التناص في الشعر العراقي المعاصر: دراسة على شعراء

المخلص

تتناول هذه الدراسة التناص في عتبات النص، وبخاصة موقع العنوان ووظيفته، باعتباره مشروعاً قابلاً للنماء والإثراء. ولا تدعي الدراسة الإحاطة بكل إمكانات الحقل الذي تستكشفه، إذ يفتح «التعنون» أبعاداً عديدة من المعنى. ونظراً لتعدد القراءات وميل القارئ إلى اعتبار العنوان وسيطاً سلبياً في العملية الإبداعية، تسعى هذه الدراسة إلى تحدي هذا التصور الخاطئ، وإعادة وضع العنوان في مركز الاهتمام باعتباره مكوناً نصياً رمزياً متداخلاً مع بقية عناصر النص الشعري الحديث.

ويمثل هذا الجهد محاولة لرصد التأثيرات التي تُقضي إلى إنتاج العنوان، انطلاقاً من المراجع الثقافية والواقع الذي يعيشه الشاعر المعاصر، وهو شاعرٌ يوجّه رسائله إلى القارئ في محاولةٍ للاقترب من دلالة العنوان التي يمكن دراستها ضمن العملية الأوسع لصنع المعنى في النصوص. وتنبع فعالية «التعنون» من هيمنته النصية، ما يكشف عن تأثيره في عملية القراءة الديناميكية؛ ومن ثم فإن ذلك محاولة لبناء منظور الشاعر وأيديولوجيته الجامعة، وعكس رؤيته للعالم.

وتسعى هذه الدراسة إلى رفع الوعي بأهمية عتبات النص ووظيفتها، إذ إن العنوان، لكونه يثير استجابة القارئ، يعمل كتكثيفٍ لتجربة الشاعر. وقد درس الباحثان عناوين دواوين ثلاثة من أهم الشعراء العراقيين المعاصرين: حسين عبد اللطيف، وعبد الكريم كسيد، وكاظم الحجاج، فأتضح لهما أن العنوان يعيد تشكيل النصوص سواء أكانت من ضمن المجال التصوري للشاعر نفسه أو من تراثٍ شعري وسرديٍّ سابق

1. Introduction

It has become certain that one of the primary tasks in studying a text is to analyze the signs of its formation and structure that distinguish it from other forms of communication. The two ends of the text can define the textual framework: the beginning and the end, which act as markers separating different literary texts. The beginning opens the scope of expectation, informing the reader about the literary genre and the text's referential content.

Since the title is an accomplishment of modernity, it represents the first threshold of the text, or the 'chandelier' that illuminates what lies beneath it, as the late writer Mahmoud Abdulwahab cites from Jacques Derrida (Abdulwahab,16). It represents a space of openness to the references of the literary genre and the point at which the text unfolds upon itself, granting it a sense of independence from other texts. Thus, Texts that announce their beginning explicitly and provocatively are advanced texts produced within cultures that view the threshold of the text as a gateway between the real world and the imagined one.

The placement of the title within the sphere of intertextuality, as a coded structure, requires a reading that decodes it by returning the text to its referential framework and initiating the production of its meanings. The threshold of the text resembles a generator that produces a series of meanings, extending across the space of the text.

Of course, critics and researchers understand that the forms of producing a text – any text – take on different shapes. Some originate from the poet's personal or artistic experiences in the case of creative works, others stem from previous texts (reading, interpretation, interaction between the

original text and the resulting one, etc.). In the latter case, this does not imply a replication of previous texts but rather a process of monitoring, organizing, and selecting through writing and engaging language with language. This brings us closer to the study's subject and invites an exploration of intertextuality in titles as an essential component of textual threshold, as explained in the following sections.

2. Hussein Abdullatif:

2.1 "On the streets, I watch The Passersby"

This title explicitly refers to its source in Alsuleek's saying (see Khuleif)

"I will wander on the road and complain saying I am oppressed, and you wronged me"

However, the poet Hussein Abdullatif simultaneously attempts to belong to the semantic field specific to the poet. He works with an external theme (the streets), then turns inward (I watch), completing his textual interactions by moving outward once more (the passerby). In doing so, he seeks to derive his internal reference from the poems within his collection. He writes:

I proceed

Like an arrow far away

*In my memory: where the trees are stones of sleep
And gazelles escape from a hunter*

This body – the boat

Was meant to carry me

To unknown borders

A black sun

And birds pass in hours ...

Will pass by me

And I will remain there severed (31)

And in his poem saying:

You have not left your place

Yesterday

Traveled ...

Did not leave

Did not stay

Did not bend your course

And did not sway the hands of the storm

Or his saying in the poem: ‘The person outside the circle’:

You have not moved, still as were.

You have journeyed far ..

And you did not depart

And you did not remain

And you did not turn your reins

Save the hands of the storm (45)

Then, in his poem, which bears the title of the collection, it is read:

I watched the wanderers on the streets

Coming and drifting away

None of them spared me a glance

Have you seen?

As I am tired, I will sleep tonight

And tomorrow, with (another game of patience
(53)

The movement in “Coming and drifting away” and “None of them spared me a glance” is triadically repeated in the text. This repetition signifies the monotony of life and the people who are indifferent, linking back to the title of the poetry collection, which conveys the poet’s melancholy. This melancholy is further revealed through the reference to the folk tale of “Game of Patience” in the final line. In this tale, deeply rooted in popular memory, a grieving person shares their burdens and sorrows with the “Game of Patience,” which listens attentively. Once the recounting reaches the climax of grief and despair, the game breaks apart in response to the anguish. The poet here assumes the role of the narrator, and the poem takes on the task of the “Game of Patience,” allowing the reader to grasp the wall of sorrow and frustration surrounding the poet, who is content with merely observing passerby due to

reasons that prevent them from interacting with others. Thus, the title opens a scope of anticipation for the reader, who will have access to what they are reading after the title presents an image of the poet’s semantic field. This leaves the discerning reader (the critic) to explore the elements that distinguish the text as literary, setting it apart from others. These elements of influence and being influenced take on mythical, spiritual, social, and historical manifestations. The researcher can rely on an external context, rich with connotations that reflect a particular phase of history, to identify these aspects of society, condensed in the poet’s experience during the act of writing and the reader’s perspective at the time of reinterpreting the text.

2.2 The Fire of Qutrub*

The title places the reader at a threshold that leads outward, as the meaning of “Qutrub” refers to that small creature that emits a glow at night, illuminating its surroundings and guiding travelers. The connection between light and fire suggests harmony at the level of imagery. Additionally, the title alludes to history, referencing the nickname of one of Basra’s grammarians, “Qutrub,” who diligently pursued grammatical and linguistic studies in the 12th century. Whatever the case is, the title appears, at first glance, to be somewhat imposed on a poetry collection. However, it ultimately establishes its belonging to the poet’s unique semantic field. In doing so, it deliberately misleads the reader, who later discovers the dominance of *night*, *fire*, *sea*, and *wind* in the textual landscapes. This, in turn, reinforces the significance of the title.

Qutrub is a small insect with a shiny shell that appears at night, constantly in motion and never still. It is said that the Basra grammarian Sibawayh used the term “Qutrub” to refer to one

of his energetic students Ali Mohammed Bin Almustaneer Bin Ahmed AlBasari, who would arrive early to lessons and remain active and engaged throughout the day. He later became known by his name, as people would say, "Qutrub narrated to us from his teacher (See Hasnaa Alqnayaeer: alarabiya-net/saudi-today/views/2021/09/09)

The poet says:

My body is a saddle I ride through the night
(07)

Or his words:

*Tonight, my friends,
I will lay open the wounds of my deceitful heart,
Unleash the reins of my tears,
And bid farewell ...
To my beloved.
Tonight, I depart,
I unravel the mooring rope and set off*
(27)

2.3 No Longer Does the Gaze Hold Meaning

(It is no longer worth the gaze)

The title embodies the poet's philosophy of existence more than it represents a poetic reality. It portrays an image of frustration and sadness that forms the essence of the poet's own experience. It can be said that the text is a recreation of the poet's earlier poetic and prose works, reflecting his view of what his life has come to. Additionally, the researcher may discern echoes of Abu al Ala Ma'arri's vision in his *Dalia*:

Both are not feasible in my sect and belief

The wailing of a weeper and the serenading of a chanter (see Abul Nasr)

The intertextuality is evident. We need not look far to uncover the internal poetic intertextuality within this title. Let us reflect on his words in the poem "*The Reason*."

*I asked for water And all I found was the desert
I fell, slain
While the trees in the Khabur blossomed*
(79)

And we continue with the poet in his second collection *The Fire of Qutrub*, where we read:

*What came to pass has passed ... so what meaning
does regret hold now
Even the blind may sense the edge of the abyss
And grow accustomed to dwelling there* (16)

Returning to the poet's internal (prose) intertextuality, it is observed that what he included in his letter to his friend, the poet, and researcher Hussein Abdulzahra, as he was doing his higher studies in India in 1980 (Net Kitabab). In the final lines of the letter, he alluded to the state his life had come to, conveying the essence of the following: "The life as a whole was no longer meaningful, and there was nothing left to inspire optimism."

However, "*No Longer Does the Gaze Hold Meaning*" deeply infiltrates the poet's inner world, becoming inseparable from it. It distills within itself a lifetime of experience spanning half a century and evokes a state of *total negation* – in Kristeva's terms. This is reflected in the title of his first poetry collection, "*On the Streets, I Watch the Passerby*" where observing the passersby has lost its efficiency in easing the profound sorrow and frustration raging within him. Thus, the title serves as a prime example of internal intertextuality.

3. Kadhim Al-Hajaj

3.1 At last, Shahriyar spoke

Since the act of reading is embedded in the opening of the text (the threshold), it must move into a linguistic space different from the reader's everyday space, as Abdulfattah Kilito (P.10) suggests. As the title is one of the components of

this threshold, it invites us to cross it and explore the relationship of intertextuality with its reference, *One Thousand and One Nights*, to identify the disruption caused by this *mini text* * to its source. In the original reference, *Shahriyar* merely listens to what *Shahrazad* narrates. However, in *Shahryar's* argumentation, he becomes a speaker who conveys his observations,

*O our mother, the desert
Where is the family?
Serve us your dark coffee
And let us repose
Within the first tent*

*O our mother, the desert
Enfold, shelter, embrace ... us
And let us lie down the carpet of Abdullah
Or let us spread out the carpet of Abdullat
For all that we want
O our mother, the desert -:
Is for the patient to know*

The name of the malady! (Al-Hajaj, 193-194)

**This term is one of the innovations of Dr. Malik Al-Muttalabi in The Mirror of Narrative (1999).*

4. Abdulkarim Kasid

4.1. The Luggage

The value attributed to the text is not necessarily inherent within it but rather lies primarily in the reader's response. The reader does not only perceive the tangible aesthetic statement but is also influenced by certain stimuli drawn from outside the text. This influence has become primarily psychological evaluation (see Boheiri).

The title of the first collection, *The Luggage*, by the poet Abdulkarim Kasid, critiques a lived reality, embodying an existence that embraces its latent yet forthcoming unfolding. The poet may reside in one place, yet he journeys to the paradises of beauty in his tormented imagination. After all, didn't the journey lead *Ulysses* to the underworld, and didn't he encounter any delights

memories, and visions, shaping a future tied to a novel past that is not without its strangeness. This strangeness aims to guide the reader toward a focal point that places them under a specific influence. This is contingent upon the emotional coloring that the title instills in the receiver's mind.

along the way? The poet himself mentions in an interview: "A poet does not necessarily have to be only a passerby and a traveler up to this moment ... divided between various places and times. Doesn't poetry reside in everything – in staying and in traveling?" (Al-Jamoosi, 247).

The title here refers to one of the essential elements of travel (luggage) employing synecdoche by mentioning the part to signify the whole. As the readers delve into the texts of the poetry collection, they encounter words such as *travel, departure, rooms, luggage, and revelations*, all of which contribute to reinforcing what the poet attempts to express: *crossing and journeying*. This allows the readers to confidently assert that the title alludes to the poet's semantic field his existential vision, which is no more than

a journey filled with enough apprehension to render the poet – marked by crossing and tinged with bitterness – into a subject that reveals a perspective through poetry.

The researchers observe a feature, echoing Al-Magwood's phrase through one of his theatrical characters: *"He changes his homeland as he changes his shoes."* (<https://www.facebook.com>, 2012). This becomes evident when the poet disrupts the conventional reference by connecting to the homeland and the enduring impressions of childhood – an unperishable past and ageless feature. The poet says

Why don't we stretch chains across thousands of kilometers?

Why do we find comfort in rooms where thousands have passed through?

*Why do we see our faces reflected in other faces
Only to move on ...*

*And, by evening, sweep away the dust that gas
gathered upon the suitcases?*
(Kasid,13)

4.2. Pause, Let Us Weep

The reader will notice that this title forms an apparent intertextuality with the famous Mu'allqa of Imru'al-Qais. The poet's experience with this type of titling is summarized in his statement: "My choice is rooted in the poem itself, which has become, unconsciously, part of our collective and individual culture ... an unconscious presence with its specific connotations in our dreams, reflections, and writings" (Al-Jamoosi, 176).

The poet Abdukarim Kasid, both in the collection title and in his rewriting of the Mu'allqa, engages with the original text through a play of appearance and disappearance. A presence and absence of both texts appear; when

one is present, the other disappears, and vice versa.

The researchers can discern a distance between the two texts, which leads the first – echoing the second – into another text that contains the voice of the first. What units them is style. The original text remains fixed within its context, which gained another text, yet there is an intertextual allusion to the original. The movement of the present text (the reworked text) breaks through the fixed, aiming to embody the scene not with words borrowed from the previous text, but with the poet's own words in the subsequent text. Here, the old and the new intersect to create something that transcends style. This occurs when the context gives way to meaning, transforming from a context to a semantic text. The latest scene's movement, rhythm, and present time absorb its past, casting distant shadows that others perceive only once they leave the present scene. This leads to the assertion that the poet's task seems more challenging when engaging with a style deeply ingrained in a culture that has experienced unprecedented stability, rather than dealing with a specific event. one that has become entrenched in a culture that experienced stability, unlike any other, not merely engaging with a certain event. This task requires embodying the absent text to become both present and absent in the realized text, grounded in a stance toward poetry and the world.

5. The Conclusion

In their attempt, the researchers affirm that the title reinterprets previous texts, whether they belong to the poet's own conceptual domain or are drawn from other previous texts. The title also distills the poet's experience and defines the literary genre in which it operates. Moreover, the

title ignites the reader's response, serving as the first semiotic threshold for entering the text.

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