



Textual Structures in Modern Maghrebi Poetry



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Received : 30/01/2026 ; Accepted : 15/02/2026 ; Published : 18/02/2026

Abstract:

Discussion of the modern Maghrebi poetic text necessitates an examination of two distinct paradigms : traditional Poetry, championed by the "Al-Ihya" (Renaissance) school to preserve the formal caractéristiques of classical (columnar) Poetry ; and a modern movement emerged Under Western influence, namely "Taf'ila" Poetry (free verse), which diverged from the structural fondations of the traditional Arabic poem.

This article seeks to analyze the structural components of the modern Maghrebi poetic text and explore the evolution of these structures within poetic discourse, tracing the transition from traditionalisme to "Taf'ila" verse.

Keywords: Classical Poetry (Columnar), Taf'ila Poetry, Free Verse, Modern Maghrebi Poetry.

1.Introduction:

Since the Pre-Islamic era (Jahiliyya), Poetry has occupied a preeminent position among Arabs, earning its title as "The Register of the Arabs" (Diwan al-Arab). It served as a medium for Artistic rivalry, where poets competed to produce the most sublime verses. However, Arabic Poetry has undergone profound thematic and structural evolutions, leading to a shift in modern poetic discourse from the classical "vertical" form (Amudi) to Taf'ila Poetry (free verse).

The discourse on the structure and evolution of Modern Maghrebi Poetry—including the accompanying innovations in textual frameworks and meanings pioneered by modernists—highlights how these poets transcended the traditional paradigms of the Arabic poem. By integrating direct influences from Western arts, they

significantly contributed to the diversification of poetic purposes and sought liberation from the constraints of classical prosody.

A scholar examining the trajectory of the modern Maghrebi poetic text will observe its continuous progression across lexical, figurative, and rhythmic dimensions. Modern Maghrebi Poetry has traversed distinct textual phases, characterized by transformative shifts in its various structures. Consequently, we posit the following research problematic : What are the primary stages through which modern Maghrebi Poetry has Evolved ? And What are the Fundamental structural transformations that have shaped the modern Maghrebi poetic text ?

To address this research problematic, we shall examine...

1.1 The Structure of the Traditionnel Maghrebi Poetic Text :

Classical Arabic literature stands as one of the most prolific tributaries that nourished modern Maghrebi Poetry at the dawn of the twentieth century, during the era known as the Literary Renaissance (Al-Nahda). Maghrebi Poetry emerged from an Arab-centric frame of reference, imbued with a revivalist ideology that looked to the golden ages of Arabic poetic prowess as its ultimate paradigm. Consequently, poets embarked on reviving and emulating ancient poetic heritage, striving to consolidate the conventions of Pre-Islamic (Jahili), Early Islamic, Umayyad, and Abbasid texts. This Endeavour significantly contributed to the richness and proliferation of the poetic text.

The Revivalist movement (Al-Haraka al-Ihyā'iyya) fervently advocated for the preservation of the traditional Arabic poem's structure, maintaining its classical meter (Wazn), rhyme (Qafiya), and thematic purposes (Aghrad). This is elucidated by Ramadan Mahmoud in his discourse on Maghrebi Poetry and the call for revival, stating : "The Algerian poets themselves were enthusiastic proponents of this trend, driven by the conviction that no cultural or national advancement could be achieved except through the advancement of the Arabic language."¹

This profound commitment to adhering to and maintaining the traditional poetic structure is clearly manifest in the poets' works. A prime example is found in the counsel of the Poet Mohammed al-Eid Al Khalifa to Othman Belhadj and Mohammed al-Akhdar al-Saihi, urging them toward classical Arabic literature, where he advises them :

*I see that the New Literature has draped you both In robes that shimmer with beauty
and fine raiments*

*So, cherish the ancient literature, for it is A sweeter companion and of a
sturdier constitution²*

¹Ramadan Hammoud, *Seeds of Life*, 1st ed., Tunis, 1928, p. 43.

²Here Algeria Magazine, Issue 17, October 1953, p. 11

It is noteworthy that modern Maghrebi Poetry derived its spirit from the religious and reformist renaissance of society, which advocated for a commitment to the legacy of the forefathers, rooted in the famous maxim : "The latter generations of this Ummah (nation) will not be reformed except by that which reformed its first generations."¹

The Revivalist School (Al-Ihyā') exerted a profound influence on Maghrebi poets, who drew from its ideologies and followed in its footsteps. This is pointed out by Muhammad al-Hadi al-Sanusi al-Zahiri : "Who among us, the Algerian men of letters, has not, since the end of the First Great War, opened his eyes to the continuous output of the school of Ismail Sabri, Hafiz, Shawqi, Taha Hussein, al-Aqqad, Ahmed Amin, al-Manfaluti, al-Zayyat, and others from the second vanguard of the Literary Renaissance in the Arab regions ?"²

1.2. The Linguistic Structure in Maghrebi Poetry :

Maghrebi poets drew extensively from the ancient Arabic lexicon, a fact manifested in the vocabulary and terminology they employed, which reflected their steadfast adherence to Eloquent Arabic (Al-Fusha). Their poetic language was rooted in ancient Arabic heritage, the Holy Quran, and the Prophetic Hadith. Muhammad al-Eid Al Khalifa says :

Journey with divine grace, your surest guide *The truth is manifest, and the path*
lies wide

Grant me joy, cup after cup, *Pour it forth, for it is a heavenly*
*spring.*³

It is Clear from these two verses that the poet used words derived from Islamic culture and ancient Arab heritage, due to the reformist current's adherence to its language and religion, and its fear of interacting with Western culture. The Tunisian poet Abu Al-Qasim Al-Shabi said :

You grew weary of life through dread of the end, *Yet had you lived*
forever, you would have tired of eternity."
"Upon this earth, you stood mountain-like *Majestic, estranged,*
and solitary."
"You never sipped from the honeyed lips of life, *Nor tasted the morning*
*draught of existence's nectar*⁴

The poet utilized vocabulary sourced from the classical Arabic lexicon ; for instance, the term 'al-rudhab' is employed, which in Arabic dictionaries denotes 'sweet nectar.'

¹ Dr. Muhammad Nasser, Modern Algerian Poetry : Its Trends and Artistic Caractéristiques (1925-1975), p. 40

² Muhammad Al-Hadi Al-Senussi Al-Zahiri, Poets of Algeria in the Modern Era, vol. 1, p. 39

³ Muhammad Al-Eid Al-Khalifa, The D'iwan, National Book Fondation, 3rd ed., Algiers, p. 129

⁴ Abu Al-Qasim Al-Shabi, D'iwan Abu Al-Qasim Al-Shabi - introduction by Najib Tarad, Dar Al-Kitab Al-Arabi, Beirut - Lebanon, 2nd ed., 1994, p. 72.

Furthermore, these poets adopt classical, simple, and direct syntactic and rhetorical structures to ensure their message remains accessible to the readers. As Muhammad al-Eid al-Khalifa says :

*O Night, you lack a star to pierce the gloom or clear the veil,
Save for bewildered stars, that never shone with any clarity to my sight.
I fear for my a doom that ravages and lays them waste,
From lanzing tongues that clothe the vile in eloquent, fluent grace.¹*

The poet employed straightforward phrasing, such as : 'I dread for the nation' and 'it did not become clear.' Furthermore, he utilized metaphors in the second verse following the mannerisms of ancient poets. This underscores a dominant traditionalist dimension, as the vocabulary is deeply rooted in the classical heritage lexicon—evidenced by terms such as *al-duja* (the gloom), *al-layl* (the night), *al-najm* (the star), and *al-kawakib* (the planets). On the level of syntactic structures, his compositions closely mirror those of classical Arabic.

1.3. Rhythmic Structure:

The traditional Maghrebi poem adhered to the classical Khalilite meters and a unified rhyme scheme (monorhyme), as these were considered the essential pillars and the very foundation of authentic Poetry. Consequently, the structural composition of the verse followed the ancient rhythmic tradition.

As Muhammad al-Eid al-Khalifa states :

*Knowledge is the ruler of existence, so corrupt it with whom you wish, or
abandon your realms and defend.*

*And take refuge in it instead of fortresses, for I see no fortress like a school that
has risen, or a factory²*

The poet employed the Kamil meter, which is built upon the foot 'Mutafa'ilun' repeated six times. This meter underwent the prosodic variation known as 'al-Khabn', transforming it into 'Mustaf'ilun', which further confirms the poet's strict adherence to traditional meter and rhyme. Regarding thematic content, classical subjects such as elegy (*ritha'*), panegyric (*madh*), and description (*wasf*) were prominently present in traditional Maghrebi Poetry. Thus, we conclude that the structure of the traditional poem emulated its classical counterpart in language, rhythm, and artistic imagery.

2. The Subjective (Sentimental) Trend:

Following World War I, the Maghrebi poetic movement witnessed the rise of a

¹ The previous référence, p. 180

² Saleh Kharfi, *Modern Algerian Poetry*, National Book Fondation, D.T., Algiers, 1984, p. 40

new direction : the Romantic-Subjective trend. Heavily influenced by Eastern Arab Romanticism, this movement inclined toward imagination and the subjective self. These poets innovated in their use of language, musicality¹, and imagery, fostering the growth of the modern Maghrebi poem. Post-WWI, Maghrebi Poetry shifted decisively toward expressing personal emotions and romanticism ; 'reflections of the subjective experience emerged after the poet's vision had long been dominated by collectivism (altruism) and occasional Poetry (shi'r al-munasabat).'²

Furthermore, we sense the Western influence on these poets following the intellectual influx that reshaped their emotions and sentiments. They turned romantic lexicon into an escape and a sanctuary for freedom, echoing European thought. In this regard, Nasib Nashawi remarked : 'For the European, Romanticism is a quest for freedom, spontaneity, and the allure of lyricism. It is the triumph of vague sensation over clear, well-defined ideas, and an expression of the crisis of thought and will, anxiety, pessimism, and the fragmentation caused by a sense of fatalism.'³

Among the pioneers influenced by this subjective character in Algeria was Ramdane Hammoud. Through his theories and poetic endeavors, he criticized the conservative traditionalist concept of Poetry ⁴and advocated for a renewal rooted in Romantic subjectivity, drawing inspiration from European poets. Ramdane Hammoud was distinguished by his unique poetic vision until his passing in 1929⁵. His path was later followed by other poets, including Mohamed al-Akhdar al-Saihi, Abdallah Chriet, and Abou al-Kassem Saâdallah, among others.

2.1 Linguistic Structure:

The subjective poet began to write in a language markedly different from the conventional, direct, and declarative style. We find the poet adopting an indirect path in depicting meanings, rendering abstract emotions into tangible sensations. This evokes an inner feeling that transcends the self in its pursuit of aesthetic beauty⁶.

For these poets, artistic sincerity is paramount in the construction of the poem ; indeed, it is held in higher regard than meter and rhyme. As Ahmed Sahnoun says :

*'How many a bleeding heart has kept vigil around you, Confiding the hidden depths
of its sorrows to you.'*⁷

¹ Abdallah Al-Rukaybi, *The Poet Jalwah, From Rébellion to Suicide*, National Book Fondation, 1986, p. 13

² Muhammad Nasser, *Modern Algerian Poetry : Its Trends and Artistic Caractéristiques*, Dar Al-Gharb Al-Islami, Beirut, Lebanon, 1st ed., 1985, pp. 93-94

³ Naseeb Nashawi, *Literary Schools in Modern Arabic Poetry*, University Publications Département, Algiers, 1984, p. 157

⁴ Muhammad Nasser, *Modern Algerian Poetry : Its Trends and Artistic Caractéristiques (1925-1975)*, p. 125

⁵ Muhammad Nasser, *Ramadan Hammoud, His Life and Works*, National Book Fondation, 2nd ed., Algiers, 1983, p. 25

⁶ Muhammad Nasser, *The previous référence*, p. 314.

⁷ Ahmed Sharaf Al-Rifai, *Algerian National Poetry from 1925 to 1945*, Dar Al-Huda, Algiers, D.T., 2010, p. 160

3. Taf'ila Poetry (Free Verse) :

This genre emerged with the publication of the first free verse text in the press: the poem 'Tariqi' (My Path) by Abou al-Kassem Saâdallah, Published on March 23, 1955, in the *Al-Basa'ir* newspaper¹. The following is an excerpt :

*"O my companion,
Reproach me not for my defiance,
For I have carved my own path,
And my path is like life itself—
Resounding with moans, wild with imagination."²*

"The emergence of this new poetic genre was an emulation of Eastern (Mashriqi) poets who were influenced by Western literature, which had undergone a clear modernization. Maghrebi poets had no choice but to embrace this experience, for it is a branch of the same tree and cannot be isolated from this poetic heritage. However³, imitation was not the sole catalyst for renewal ; rather, intrinsic needs and transformations on multiple levels compelled poets to seek a new mold that would allow them to express the abundance of their creative intuition.

3.1. The Structure of Poetic Language :

Language witnessed a shift in utilization across various levels, beginning with the lexicon and extending through syntax and the system of imagery. At the lexical level, poets employed a simple, accessible language close to everyday reality. Their language is characterized by fluidity and evocativeness, capable of interacting with the elements of nature and the poet's own subjectivity. Thus, we find the creator expressing emotions and impulses through words charged with subjective significance. Ezzeddine Mihoubi states in his collection *'The Globalization of Love, the Globalization of Fire'* :

*He said : 'What is past is dead...
Everything is over... we shall forget.'*

¹ Abdullah Al-Rukaybi, *Al-Auras in Arabic Poetry and Other Studies*, Dar Al-Kitab Al-Arabi, Algiers, 1983, D.T., p. 68

² Saâdallah, Abou al-Kassem. *Al-Zaman al-Akhdar* (The Green Time). National Book Fondation (ENAL), Algeria, p144. 1985

³ Abdullah Al-Rukaybi, previous référence, p. 67.

I replied : 'If you forget, and I forget...

And the others forget...'¹

The nature of the language in these verses is clear, direct, and realistic. The weight of tragedies left no room for rhetorical ornamentation ; instead, the poet seeks to convey his ideas with sincerity to the recipient, expressing the feelings and subjective emotions stirring within his soul. The choice of words evocative of psychological suffering ensures the recipient's engagement with the poem.

4. Conclusion :

In concluding this research, we have determined that modern Maghrebi Poetry, like other literary genres, was influenced by the calls for renewal from modernist schools. This led to the emergence of a new genre : Free Verse and Taf'ila Poetry, which began to rival Vertical (Classical) Poetry. Poets found in this new form a sanctuary and a liberation from the shackles of traditional meter and rhyme, allowing them to express their emotions, ideas, and perspectives, which were, in turn, shaped by modern developments."

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