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Analogy and Difference in Abdullah Al-Ghadhami's Reception of Classical Arabic Narrative

Driza FatihaDoctor
Université akli Mohand Oulhadj Bouira

Algeria

Email: fatihadriza8@gmail.com ; Orcid: 0001-0006-9832-2114

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Abstract

Reading is a fundamental activity for the existence of any "I," and since its emergence, reading has constituted a process of determining the destiny of the text. As Al-Ghadhami puts it: "Reading is a creative activity that wagers on the multiplicity of meanings, the richness of the text, and its escape from any final interpretation and from analogy, to use Al-Ghadhami's own term" (Abdullāh, 1985). Through his critical project, Al-Ghadhami sought to redirect the course of reading from the reading of texts to the reading of systems. His critical endeavor is nothing but a call to change modes of reading from reading the aesthetic and pleasurable aspects of the text as beautiful literature laden with delight and rapture, to reading it as a cultural discourse and a cultural sign. He thus drew a distinction between the cultural sign and the literary sign. What, then, is Abdullah Al-Ghadhami's reading project? What procedural critical tools did he employ in reading classical Arabic narrative, and what are the limits of this employment?

In order to answer these questions, we shall address the following axes

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The Analogous Text and the Different Text in Al-Ghadhami

Abdullah Al-Ghadhami's reading project departs from the premise of textual multiplicity and difference, since meaning is produced within a framework of divergences and distances. This is what Roland Barthes calls the "plural text," and what Al-Ghadhami terms the "different text." The different text, according to Al-Ghadhami, is: "that which establishes a problematic signification that opens onto absolute possibilities of interpretation and explanation... wherein the reader discovers that the text is a tightly interwoven semantic network in terms of structure, yet open in terms of its signifying possibilities" (Abdullāh, 1985). It is also the text that founds problematic significations opening onto limitless interpretive possibilities, excavating and provoking the reading mind, compelling it to enter into dialogue with the text in an arena of contemplation, where the reader discovers that the text is a coherent semantic network structurally, and open in terms of signification. By virtue of this openness, it becomes material for difference (Abdullāh, 1985)

As for the analogous text, as defined by Al-Ghadhami in his book Analogy and Difference, it is the text that seeks to turn creativity into a disciplinary system, wherein the text qua language corresponds analogically to things as a pre-determined reality, rendering the text secondary, derivative, and mimetic (Abdullāh, 1985, p. 6)

The analogous text, therefore, is the text that imitates external reality on the one hand thus dictating its conditions and circumstances or imitates the vertical structure of classical Arabic poetry without deviation. In its imitation of external reality, it fully absorbs the language of heritage in an act of veneration and exaltation, until the text comes to resemble a "positivist

document," as was prevalent for a long period in Arabic heritage with critics such as Al-Ānidī and Al-Marzūqī, and likewise dominant in the second half of the nineteenth century with European positivists. (Al-Ghadhami, 1994) In such a text, there exists a strong harmony between sender and receiver; the reader bears no burden of interpretation or hermeneutic effort, for meanings and significations lie exposed on the surface of the text, accessible to all readers. This text aligns with the inclinations of its reader and meets the horizon of expectation: what the reader hopes for, the text delivers.

By contrast, whenever the language of the text breaks with prevailing patterns of diction and usage, choosing instead a path of singularity and astonishment, and departing from the monotonous law of poetic composition according to the classical column, it disrupts readers' expectations and thereby achieves its literariness and aesthetic value. From this dynamic emerge the contours of the different text in Al-Ghadhami's theory, and likewise the plural text in Barthes's conception. Whereas the analogous text conforms to convention and reproduces the familiar model, the different text is the "anti-model," for "the text explains all that precedes it and dismantles all relations of convention and custom in order to establish new conventions and customs in their place. It does not substitute chaos for order, but rather proposes a new vision of order one that differs from text to text, and within the same text from reader to reader". (Abdullāh, 1985)

The text, in its continuous transformations, also opens itself to ever-renewed readings. Indeed, the same text, whenever we reread it, appears to say something we had not noticed before. This is what Al-Ghadhami expresses when he states: "With each renewed reading, one discovers that the text says something we had not noticed before, as though we were facing a new text different from the one we had previously known. This is the different text to which Al-Jurjānī's propositions (Al-Ghadhami, 1994)

Al-Ghadhami invokes Al-Jurjānī just as he invokes Barthes, in a functional synthesis grounded in a comprehensive referential framework. As an Arab intellectual open to other cultures, he has often been criticized for alleged contradictions between Arab heritage and Western modernity. Yet his response is lucid and straightforward: the righteous predecessors themselves practiced such openness and actively embraced it. He states: "Arab scholars experimented with various modes of engaging with these sources, just as our righteous predecessors had done when they engaged with the Greeks and their philosophies." Al-Ghadhami's intellectual framework rests on solid Arab and Western knowledge alike, including Saussurean linguistics, Barthesian semiotics, Derridean deconstruction, and structuralism. He articulates his position clearly when he says: "Although Al-Jurjānī's concept of difference precedes Derrida's, and despite the essential differences between them, I allowed Derrida to appear and disappear freely during my reflection on the term. Ultimately, I adopt Al-Jurjānī's concept of difference as a foundational basis for analysis and interpretation, rather than merely following Derrida in this regard". (al-Ghadhami A. , 1994)

Al-Ghadhami devotes considerable attention to Barthes's concept of the plural text, borrowing from him the term signification rather than meaning. For Barthes, signification is a continuously renewed production in which the author dies so that the recipient/reader may be born; with the birth of the reader, the plural text comes into being. From this perspective, Barthes inspired Al-Ghadhami's notion of analogy as the interaction of meaning with form, yet without signification. Difference, by contrast, entails the interrelation of meaning, form, and signification. The different text is thus a creative text that refuses subordination and instead pursues singularity, seeking an intelligent reader capable of producing a new, counter-text.

Difference Between Al-Ghadhami and Derrida

Although Al-Ghadhami was fascinated by Derridean deconstruction as Hatem Al-Sakr observes his deconstructive practice differs from Derrida's. His approach does not aim to undermine the logic of the studied work; rather, he finds himself "closer to Barthes's deconstruction, which relies on dismantling in order to reconstruct the text anew". (Abdullāh, 1985, p. 87)

From here, deconstruction emerges as an approach of great value, insofar as it grants the text a new life with each reading. Every reading constitutes a deconstructive operation upon the text, and every deconstruction is an attempt to explore the text's mode of existence. Thus, a single text becomes thousands of texts, yielding an inexhaustible proliferation of ever-open significations (Al-Ghadhami, 1994, p. 86)

Al-Ghadhami draws extensively on deconstructive principles and procedures, borrowing binaries such as absence/presence and opposition. He states: "The different stands opposite the analogous, the counter stands opposite the ready-made, and the incomplete stands opposite the complete". (Abdullāh, 1985, p. 86) He further notes: "We shall observe difference and opposition between the two experiences and between two models, one complete and closed, the other incomplete and open". (Al-Ghadhami, 1994, p. 81) Al-Ghadhami's pursuit of the open text is thus a pursuit of expanded horizons of reading, whereby poetic writing becomes "a kind of continuous conquest of language through its rhythms and contexts not in search of the complete text, but rather in search of a linguistic-textual opening that may well be incomplete". (al-Ghadhami, 1994, p. 166) The text, therefore, remains perpetually open to multiple readings, for as Barthes puts it it is "a galaxy of signifiers" . (Abdullāh, 1985, p. 73)

In his book *Analogy and Difference*, Al-Ghadhami offers a reading of Arabic critical theory, exploring similarity and difference. In this work, he examines Al-Marzūqī and Al-Ānidī in their treatment of the two Tā'īs; he also analyzes difference between Abū Tamimā and Al-Buhturī, between Al-Buhturī and Al-Mutanabbī, between the death of Al-Mutanabbī and a

poem by Fādīl Al-'Azzāwī, and finally between the maqāma of Badī' al-Zamān al-Hamadhānī and the Greek myth of Oedipus.

The Black Moon, or the Killer Text:

by Badī' al-Zamān al-Hamadhānī

Al-Ghadhami notes that this maqāma reveals striking dimensions of analogy and difference, and that it also contains fundamental questions related to theories of creativity and intertextuality. Al-Ghadhami summarizes its events as follows: 'Isā ibn Hishām narrates the story of the brigand-knight Bishr ibn 'Awāna, who raids a caravan in which there is a beautiful woman. Bishr captures her and marries her. In order to free herself from his cruelty, the woman being intelligent, perceptive, and skilled in poetry begins reciting verses in which she describes the beauty of Bishr's cousin, Fātima, who is said to be even more beautiful than herself. She reproaches Bishr for neglecting her and subtly inspires him to seek marriage with his cousin by asking for her hand from her father.

The story further relates that Bishr becomes passionately enamored of Fātima without ever having seen her. Al-Ghadhami notes that the maqāma weaves a bitter narrative of conflict between Bishr and his uncle, who refuses to marry his daughter to him. Bishr descends into madness, and his violence and rebellion increase: "His harms multiplied among the people, and his disgraces reached them, so the men of the quarter gathered around his uncle and said: restrain this madman of yours." The uncle then proposes an impossible condition meant to incapacitate Bishr, declaring: "I have sworn not to marry my daughter to anyone unless he drives to her a dowry of a thousand she-camels, and I will accept only camels from Khuza'a." The uncle's intention was that Bishr would take the perilous road leading to Khuza'a, a route avoided by the Arabs, where a lion named Dhādhā and a ferocious serpent lay in wait.

Despite the danger, Bishr's courage does not deter him from pursuing his desire. He confronts the lion and the serpent and slays them both. When he returns, the uncle tells him to go back so that he may marry him to his daughter. Bishr is filled with pride until there appears before him "a beardless youth, like a slice of the moon." The youth wrestles Bishr and proves stronger and more courageous, shattering the heroic image Bishr had long enjoyed and inflicting numerous wounds upon him, though without killing him. The youth then says: "O Bishr, spare your uncle and depart in safety." Bishr agrees, on the condition that the youth reveal his identity. The youth replies: "I am your son from that beautiful woman whom you abducted from the caravan." Bishr surrenders, realizing that "the serpent gives birth to a serpent," relinquishes his cousin, and marries her off to the youth.

The Maqāma as a Victory of Difference

In Al-Ghadhami's reading, this maqāma constitutes a different text, by virtue of its integration of creative strategies and singularity. It is fundamentally built upon event, narration, and storytelling, and is woven according to a continuous rhythmic system:

"It is as though the text conspires and coheres from within this composite structure (narrative/rhythmic) in order to ensnare the reader and dominate him through control and seduction, whereby the reader's sensations submit to the authority of successive rhythm and the allure of narration that guarantees the reader's alertness to the text so that rhythm warns while narration awakens, and the recipient becomes a plaything in the hands of the text". (al-Dīn, 1342)

When Badī' al-Zamān al-Hamadhānī composed his maqāmat, he combined the oral and the written, endowing them with a narrative character, a plotted storyline, and a continuous rhythm. Their heroes are imaginary and extraordinary figures. The Bishriyya Maqāma gives priority to narration, which constitutes its essence and foundation; upon it the maqāma is built. Consequently, rhythm recedes due to the absence of rhymed prose.

Al-Ghadhami identifies the locus of difference in the Bishriyya Maqāma. Conventionally, the maqāma is known among literary circles as a rhetorical genre an art of composition and persuasion in which the writer displays ingenuity through various rhetorical embellishments. It is also structured according to a narrative design composed of three axes: first, the narrator, who frames the discourse ("Isā ibn Hishām narrated to us"); second, the creative author who crafts the narrative or occupies the position of narration; and third, the hero who speaks within the text thus producing what al-Qalqashandī termed the uhdūtha, which generates pleasure and astonishment. Up to this point, the maqāma adheres to fixed conventions and traditions.

However, the Bishriyya Maqāma violates this horizon of convention, breaking the reader's expectations and frustrating anticipated norms. What was once foundational collapses: Rhymed prose, which had been its pillar and rhythmic guarantor, disappears. But does the structure collapse with the loss of this essential element?

The answer is no. The writer's ingenuity surpasses the authority of inherited tradition. He substitutes a new rhythm for the monotonous one and introduces a new artistic element in place of the old. Al-Ghadhami states:

"We saw that the Bishriyya Maqāma is founded upon the sovereignty of the text, wherein poetry becomes the sharpest, deadliest, and most eloquent force. The poem, as a text within a text, achieves miracles for its bearer and produces action on his behalf, to the extent that the poem itself becomes one of the text's protagonists since it is the active and performative voice. Every victory in the maqāma is necessarily linked to the poem, whereas defeats occur when the poem is absent" (al-Sammā, 1985)

The Bishriyya Maqāma thus succeeds in discarding an original artistic component and compensating for it with another that is more aesthetic, though of a different kind. Beauty emerges here from diversity and difference. This includes the employment of poetry within the maqāma as one of its most important elements. Moreover, the maqāma's stylistic singularity and its deviation from established rhetorical norms render it, in Al-Ghadhami's view, a paradigmatic text.

Al-Ghadhami rejects classical Arabic rhetoric, describing it as an idol fashioned by society admired and elevated as the supreme model of literary aesthetics. He argues that Arabic rhetoric suffered the same fate as many sciences during certain historical periods, becoming a normative discipline governed by fixed rules that precede the text itself (al-Ghadhami, *The Stance Toward Modernity*, 1992)

This maqāma thus attains a degree of uniqueness and distinction previously unknown, due to the dominance of narration and rhythm. Al-Ghadhami writes:

"Even if the maqāma is a distinct genre, this particular maqāma is more singular and distinctive than others not merely because it abandoned rhymed prose, but also because it contains semantic and artistic problematics that impose themselves upon us, just as they imposed themselves upon its creator, causing him to forget himself and his rhymes, and replacing formal display with the creative imperative". (al-Ghadhami, 1994, p. 153)

In his interpretation of the maqāma, Al-Ghadhami assigns a central role to the authority of poetry in transforming the text as a whole: "The poem saves its bearer Bishr is delivered from the lion and the serpent...". (al-Ghadhami, 1994, p. 158) He goes further, perhaps excessively, in his interpretation: "The poem triumphs as a sharp weapon and a performative text; the beautiful woman tested it and freed herself from captivity, and Bishr tested it and survived the beasts of the road". (al-Ghadhami, 1994, p. 158)

He adds: "When the poem appeared, the lion died and the serpent died, the uncle's heart softened, and the road opened for Bishr to proceed toward his cousin Fāṭima... but when poetry was forgotten upon his return and Bishr filled his mouth with pride though he should have filled it with poetry his fate was sealed". (al-Ghadhami, 1994, p. 159)

Hātim al-Šakkar criticizes Al-Ghadhami for excessive interpretation, particularly in the episode of Bishr's combat with the lion. This excess emerges when Al-Ghadhami claims that Bishr triumphed over the serpent due to the discipline, rhythm, and complete structure of poetry, but when he shifted from poetry to prose, he was stripped of the protective cover of strict order and thus killed by prose. (al-Sammā, 1985, p. 86)

'Abdullah Ibrāhīm attributes this excess to Al-Ghadhami's selective amplification of certain details, inflating them repeatedly in order to establish a controlling law that governs the conclusions he seeks to reach (al-Sammā, 1985, p. 133). Ironically, Al-Ghadhami himself criticizes readers for misinterpretation and excess in interpretation.

Context and Its Role in Determining Textual Significations

Al-Ghadhami believes that context plays a decisive role in interpreting textual signification, a view influenced by Roman Jakobson's treatment of context. He defines it as follows:

"Context is the civilizational reservoir of discourse; it is the substance that nourishes it with the fuel of life and continuity... A person who does not know Nabati poetry, for example, cannot understand a Nabati poem, because they do not possess its context" (al-Ghadhami, *Analogy and Difference: A Reading in Arabic Critical Theories, and a Study of the Similar and the Different*, 1994)

Every text possesses two contexts: a smaller and a larger one. Each poem has a general context constituted by the set of codes of its literary genre, and a specific context constituted by the totality of its author's production. These two contexts intersect and overlap continuously. It is therefore essential for the reader to know both contexts in order to effectively interpret any poem or literary text in general (Abdullāh, 1985, p. 77)

Accordingly, Al-Ghadhami emphasizes the necessity of the reader's awareness of the author's general context in order to interpret textual significations. He argues that when studying an author's corpus, the reader must probe the identity of the writer's principal context to determine how to interpret the texts and situate them within both their general inherited literary context and their specific context, namely the totality of the author's works texts that intersect in complex relations which cannot be understood or distinguished except through knowledge of their context and the identification of their code (Abdullāh, 1985, p. 14)

Al-Ghadhami also discusses the concept of the code, an operational tool that assists the reader in accessing, understanding, and interpreting the text. Borrowed from Jakobson, it signifies the language of context "that is, the distinctive style of the literary genre to which the text belongs." The code possesses a unique creative capacity, as it is subject to renewal, change, and transformation; each literary generation is capable of producing its own distinctive code (Abdullāh, 1985, p. 12)

Al-Ghadhami's reading project thus constitutes a call to transform modes of reading from reading the literary text as a purely aesthetic object charged with pleasure and rapture, to reading it as a cultural discourse and a cultural sign, thereby distinguishing between the cultural sign and the literary sign.

Al-Ghadhami rejects a purely aesthetic reading of the text; for him, the text is a system of culture and beauty alike. It is therefore necessary to uncover this system and reveal the variations of discourse embedded within it.

Ethical Considerations

This study is based on qualitative, analytical, and interpretive literary criticism of published texts and theoretical works related to Abdullah Al-Ghadhami's critical project and classical Arabic narrative. It does not involve human participants, interviews,

surveys, or experimental research. Consequently, no ethical approval was required. All primary and secondary sources have been cited in accordance with academic integrity standards, ensuring respect for intellectual property and faithful representation of original texts and critical viewpoints.

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Conflict of Interest

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest related to the publication of this article.

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