

The Aesthetics of the Poetic Image and Musical Structure in Jamal Assadi's *Wild Horses*

Eman Masarweh*

A Freelance Scholar and Writer.

***Corresponding Author**
Eman Masarweh

A Freelance Scholar
and Writer.

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Abstract: This study, titled "The Aesthetics of the Poetic Image and Musical Structure in the Collection, *Wild Horses*" by Jamal Assadi, examines the unique use of poetic imagery and its prominent aesthetic manifestations in his poetry. The aim is to explore Assadi's poetic craft and his skillful employment of language and imagery across multiple levels, reflecting both his human experiences and creative vision. Additionally, the study examines the effects of these elements on readers, emphasizing the role of phonetic and linguistic structures as foundational to the musical framework of his poetry, while also enhancing the poetic image and its functions within his work. The research highlights Assadi's ability to merge traditional and modern poetic forms, creating a distinctive voice within contemporary Arabic literature. Further, it reveals the artistic, linguistic, and semantic system that characterizes his poetic expression and artistic journey.

Keywords: Poetic image, musical structure, poetic language, semantic deviation.

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Introduction

The art of the poetic image stands as one of the core elements in Arabic poetry, integral to shaping both the structure of the text and the multifaceted meanings it conveys. Poetic imagery, through evocative scenes and symbolic representations, enables poets to craft a world that appeals to the imagination while reflecting complex emotional states. Such imagery goes beyond simple visual representation; it engages the reader's senses and emotions, translating abstract ideas into palpable experiences that resonate on intellectual and aesthetic levels. *The Comprehensive Anthology of Early 21st Century Arab Poets*, edited and translated by Jamal Assadi, illustrates this principle by presenting a collection of poems that highlight the varied approaches Arab poets employ in constructing imagery to convey their struggles, resistance, and aspirations for freedom and dignity. This anthology underscores how, through similes, metaphors, and symbolic language, poets express feelings of alienation and marginalization alongside their hopes for justice and human connection (Assadi, *Comprehensive Anthology*, 21, 28).

Assadi's personal contributions to Arabic poetry, as seen in his collection *Wild Horses*, embody this intricate weaving of imagery and symbolism. He combines classical Arabic poetic structures, based on 'Arūd, with free verse, creating a unique blend that remains grounded in tradition while exploring modern themes. His work's thematic consistency, marked by a strong social consciousness, aligns him with the rebellious spirit of the *shu'luk*

poets who historically challenged oppression in pursuit of justice. Assadi's poetry, in this sense, extends the legacy of these poets by addressing contemporary social issues and human rights, all while engaging readers in a reflective experience that reaches beyond surface meanings. This style of blending old and new is evident in *The Story of a People: An Anthology of Palestinian Poets within the Green-Lines*, where Assadi curates works that capture the diversity of Palestinian life and identity within Israel. This anthology draws attention to themes of resilience and cultural heritage, bridging past and present to reflect the ongoing struggle for dignity and self-expression in a complex socio-political context (Assadi, *Story of a People*, 1-4).

Moreover, in his article "Jamal Assadi: A Voice of Cultural Belonging in Modern Arab Poetry," Nassim Assadi studies the rich themes in Assadi's poetry, portraying it as a voice that goes beyond time and place, blending individual experience with shared struggles to express common ideals of justice, fairness, and perseverance (Assadi, 555). This insight sheds light on Assadi's ability to interweave cultural references and historical intertextuality, allowing his poetry to reach readers on multiple interpretive levels. Through references to religious and historical events, Assadi's poems resonate with cultural continuity, evoking symbols and images that link the struggles of past generations to contemporary issues. Such intertextuality adds an intellectual depth to his poetry, providing readers with opportunities to explore layered meanings, where words signify more than their literal

content, inviting interpretations that are both personal and philosophical.

Assadi's linguistic choices further enhance the evocative power of his poetry. His use of elevated diction, repetition, and rhythm introduces a musicality that captivates the reader, while his innovative application of caesura in free verse breaks traditional boundaries, imbuing his work with a distinctly modernist character. This approach aligns with Adnan Qasim's assertion that poetic language transcends the limitations of ordinary speech, offering an expressive flexibility that allows for a deeper range of human experience (Qasim, 16). In this way, Assadi's work exemplifies the transformative power of poetic language, which enables the poet to transcend the mundane and capture both the emotional and intellectual essence of the human experience.

Thematically, *Wild Horses* navigates between social and philosophical realms, addressing issues of injustice, corruption, and poverty, as well as meditative reflections on life, death, and existence. Assadi's poetry does not merely comment on social and political issues but engages readers in a dialogue on the meaning of justice, identity, and the human experience. This thematic versatility aligns his work with universal human concerns while remaining grounded in the socio-cultural nuances of Palestinian and Arab identity. His poems, infused with a balance of realism and idealism, serve as a bridge between personal sentiment and collective experience, resonating with readers across diverse backgrounds.

Viewed through the researcher's lens, *Wild Horses* represents a significant addition to both local and broader Arab literary landscapes. By combining authenticity with modern sensibilities, Assadi invites readers into a world rich with cultural significance, where the art of poetic imagery serves as both an aesthetic and a philosophical guide. His integration of visual and sensory details with profound thematic elements provides readers with a multidimensional experience, encouraging contemplation on universal truths of justice, resilience, and the beauty inherent in the poetic imagination. This collection, along with Assadi's editorial work in *The Comprehensive Anthology of Early 21st Century Arab Poets* and *The Story of a People*, solidifies his role as a pivotal figure in Arabic poetry, bridging traditional and contemporary perspectives and contributing a distinct voice to the broader narrative of Arab cultural and literary identity.

The Poetic Image and Language

The essence of poetry lies not solely in its content but in its mode of presentation. A text's poetic nature is achieved through its rhythmic, symbolic, and imagistic qualities, crafting an aesthetic experience that transcends mere expression. Poetry, thus, gains its strength from form, transforming language into a medium that engages the audience deeply. Al-Yousfi explains, "the creative poet, when he writes, penetrates the generative rules embedded in the core of the linguistic system, which allow him to innovate while transforming language into a nebulous medium reshaped according to these generative rules, achieving expressive heights. Thus, the poet becomes a creator of speech" (Al-Yousfi 28).

Modern poetry often relies on reshaping language to create novel images, contributing to the evolution of linguistic expression. The poetic image, fundamental in conveying both tangible and abstract experiences, becomes the central medium through which emotion and thought merge. As Hilal argues, "the image is part of

the experience, and it must cooperate with other parts to convey the experience faithfully, both artistically and realistically" (Hilal 417). Through these images, poets evoke beauty and complexity, drawing readers into a shared psychological and sensory experience, converting ideas into accessible forms. Poetic imagery is not mere embellishment; it is crucial for expressing and structuring thought within the text. Detached from the overall concept, the image loses its ability to communicate profound ideas and stimulate emotional responses. In this context, Ismail suggests, "Even though spatial and temporal elements in the image may not be logically connected, this connection must be subject to the logic of feeling and thought" (Ismail 109).

The image, whether partial or holistic, serves as an artistic device that faithfully represents experience, bridging the poet's internal state with the reader's perception. Al-Jāhīz characterized poetry as "a kind of weaving, and a form of painting" (Al-Jāhīz 132), capturing ideas in a sensory form. As Asfour notes, "the mental process creates poetry; poetry is akin to painting, and its goal is to present ideas in a sensory form through the artistic arrangement of words" (Asfour 256-57). Poets transform sensory elements into vehicles for inner consciousness, linking the visible world with emotional depth to reflect both thought and feeling. This inner portrayal, transferred through the poet's perspective, not only projects personal sentiment but encourages readers to internalize these ideas as their own.

The role of imagination in forming poetic images is significant, as it allows poets to manipulate reality, blurring boundaries between perception and conception. Al-Khalil ibn Ahmad Al-Farāhīdī first articulated this power of poetic license, granting poets the freedom "to release and restrict meanings, to bend and break words, to stretch the short and shorten the long, to combine languages and separate attributes, and to draw out what tongues have failed to describe and minds have failed to comprehend" (Al-Qartajanni 143-44). This artistic liberty enables poets to craft impactful images that evoke wonder and admiration, as these rhetorical devices allow poets to "bring the distant near and cast the near far" (Al-Qartajanni 144). Ibn Tabataba elaborates on this diversity, noting that similes, for instance, can compare elements in form, meaning, movement, and color, each serving to enhance the reader's emotional and intellectual engagement (Ibn Tabataba 25).

The poetic image serves as a conduit for both intellectual and emotional experiences, encapsulating moments of intense insight. Darien defines it as "one that presents an intellectual and emotional knot in a moment of time" (Darien 241). For Abu Asba', the image acts as a "linguistic formation that expresses a mental or emotional idea, linking two elements using various techniques such as analogy, personification, correspondence, or abstraction" (Abu Asba' 31). According to Dr. Ali Abbas Alwan, the poetic image is "the most important and influential tool available to the poet," with its effectiveness directly tied to the originality and depth of the ideas it conveys (Alwan 41). These images, created through a synthesis of reality and imagination, are central to the poetic experience, as they amplify the poet's inner voice, inviting the reader into a realm that balances familiarity and novelty.

The emotional power of the poetic image lies in its capacity to resonate with the audience, stimulating emotional responses aligned with the poet's vision. Lewis argues that the strength of the image depends on its alignment with the poet's thoughts and

experiences, as it “stirs our emotions and elicits our response to the poetic sentiment” (Lewis 44). When an image encapsulates an idea that has matured within the poet’s imagination, its aesthetic impact deepens, becoming a reflection of the poet’s personal struggles and insights. This interplay of imagination and reality enriches the image’s impact, blending concrete and abstract elements to form a harmonious expression. “Reality and metaphor form the foundation of poetic images, with imagination playing a pivotal role in their construction” (Lewis 73).

Poetic imagery is thus integral to the expression of the poetic experience. As Saadani explains, “the poetic image is one of the most important tools poets use to express their poetic experience. Through it, emotions are embodied, thoughts and ideas are given form, while it also reveals the poet’s distinctive vision of hidden relationships. In fact, the image is a means of understanding the self, discovering its mysterious depths, and its connection to the surrounding world” (Saadani 85). The rhetorical elements that shape these images—simile, metaphor, and metonymy—allow poets to capture the subtleties of human experience, projecting their personal vision through artistic language that resonates universally. As Ismail observes, the audience’s admiration for these images often stems from their “ability to touch the senses and evoke wonder” (Ismail 43).

In summary, the poetic image functions not only as a creative device but as an essential bridge between poet and reader, unifying artistic expression and thematic substance. Its presence enables the transformation of abstract emotions into vivid, sensory experiences, reflecting the poet’s psychological depth and fostering a shared space for understanding and introspection. Through the innovative manipulation of language and form, poets imbue their work with a distinct aesthetic and intellectual quality, making the poetic image indispensable to the artistic and emotional resonance of poetry.

Reinforcements of the Poetic Image:

A. Phonic and Linguistic Formations (Musical Structure)

The reinforcement of the poetic image through phonic and linguistic formations is a critical method poets use to deepen their text’s emotional impact and captivate their readers. Techniques like antithesis, paronomasia, repetition, parallelism, resonant words, and intertextuality create a cohesive text that harmonizes meaning with an internal musicality. These phonic and linguistic techniques establish a rhythm that is as compelling as the imagery itself. Salah Fadl notes that “the basic structure of the sentence plays a crucial role in forming the complete scene, giving the image its stillness or movement, making it closer to music than to painting” (Fadl 467). This statement underlines how internal sonic effects enrich rhythm, imparting a musical quality that enhances the emotional resonance of the text.

Poets often employ what is referred to as “verbal music”—a combination of sounds, rhythms, and echoes that forms a unique aesthetic. This verbal music is instrumental in creating a layered poetic experience, where the interplay of sounds supports the poem’s thematic and visual elements. Antithesis, paronomasia, and repetition, for instance, contribute to a dual harmony of sound and meaning, which reinforces the beauty of the poetic image, drawing readers further into the poet’s world.

Paronomasia (*Jinās*)

Paronomasia is one of the most important tools a poet uses to create a holistic poetic experience. By employing similar-sounding words, the poet constructs an appealing sonic fabric that enhances the text’s beauty. This rhetorical device is also used to produce complex poetic images and enrich meanings. Paronomasia serves as a bridge between sound and meaning, connecting the poet and their audience through its subtle harmonies.

A skilled poet seamlessly integrates this rhetorical art into their verses, affecting the reader’s aesthetic sensibilities and evoking emotions through a diverse rhythm. When used judiciously and intelligently, paronomasia can break the monotony of a poem’s rhythm, adding a new musical dimension. However, its arbitrary or excessive use may diminish its aesthetic value, leading to a loss of its poetic charm. The examples for *jinās* are plentiful and scattered everywhere in the book. In “The Fangs of Predators,” (*al-jawāriḥ*) the poet says, “The Fangs of Predators in the innermost parts (*al-jawāniḥ*) are black.” Here, the poet plays with the words *al-jawāriḥ* (predators) and *al-jawāniḥ* (inner parts or emotions).

Another example is witnessed in the poetic poem, “The Old Camel,” where the poet opens, his verse saying:

In the name of God, I choose the best of stories (*al-qaṣaṣ*),
In them are gifts, then reward in portions (*al-ḥiṣaṣ*)

The poet uses *jinās* between *al-qaṣaṣ* (stories) and *al-ḥiṣaṣ* (shares or portions).

You find him cheerful when he served (*khadam*) as an owner (*ba’lan*),

He never imposed conditions nor showed regret (*al-nadam*),
Years passed suddenly, revealing the past (*al-qidam*),
Bones weakened, and his foot (*al-qadam*) betrayed him.

In these lines, the poet employs *jinās* between *khadam* (served) and *al-nadam* (regret), *al-qidam* (antiquity) and *al-qadam* (foot), and *kḥārat* (collapsed or weakened) and *kḥānat* (betrayed).

Nassim Assadi’s analysis of such linguistic techniques in Jamal Assadi’s poetry highlights how these formations reflect a deeper emotional resonance. According to him, the careful integration of paronomasia and other phonic techniques serves to bridge gaps between thought and feeling, creating an aesthetic experience that speaks to the soul (N. Assadi, 2024, 563-5.). His examination underscores the importance of these tools in Arabic poetry as more than mere embellishments—they are vital in shaping and expressing the poet’s inner world and connecting it with the reader’s perception.

In conclusion, phonic and linguistic reinforcements like paronomasia amplify the poetic image, anchoring it within a structured musicality that complements its visual impact. By combining sound with meaning, poets such as Jamal Assadi create rich, multi-layered experiences that enhance the aesthetic and thematic depth of their work. The rhythmic, resonant qualities of these formations invite readers to immerse themselves in a text that speaks as much through its sound as through its imagery, reinforcing the poet’s message and allowing language itself to become a vehicle of profound expression.

Antithesis

Antithesis or *ṭibāq* is defined as “the juxtaposition of an idea and its opposite within the text” (Al-Hashimi, 303). Commonly employed in Arabic poetry, this rhetorical device enhances a poem’s rhythm and aesthetic appeal by combining contrasting concepts in a single line or verse. Antithesis may manifest through nouns, as in the Qur’anic verse, “you would think them awake, though they are asleep” (Surah Al-Kahf: 18), or through verbs, as seen in “And it is He who makes one laugh and weep” (Surah An-Najm: 43). The juxtaposition of opposites within the same line introduces a structural balance that draws attention to the emotional and conceptual tensions embedded in the poem. This duality enriches the poem’s internal rhythm, providing an oscillating quality that invites the reader to engage with contrasting ideas and emotions, creating a dynamic layer of resonance. By aligning opposing words or ideas side by side, **ṭibāq** sharpens the thematic complexity of the poetic message, allowing the poet to emphasize particular ideas while constructing an evocative rhythm that captivates the audience.

Additionally, antithesis functions as a bridge to deeper engagement, drawing readers into a layered interpretation of the text by framing its content within a balanced opposition. The equilibrium created by *ṭibāq* not only amplifies the poem’s rhythm but also mirrors the inherent contradictions of human experience, enhancing the text’s intensity and thematic depth. This balance invites the reader to explore the tension and harmony within contrasting elements, enriching the poetic structure and allowing a cohesive yet intricate interpretation to emerge. By stimulating both thought and emotion, antithesis contributes to a rich, immersive experience that leaves a lasting impact. Through this juxtaposition of opposites, the poet achieves an aesthetic harmony that elevates the reader’s engagement, ensuring the work’s resonance long after it is read.

Assadi frequently employs *ṭibāq* in his collection, crafting lines that capture contrasting elements to enhance the internal rhythm and deepen the emotional impact of his verse. For instance, Assadi writes:

Engrave! Here, the past was born and its present,
My horses became a millstone, distancing and drawing near,
Knowledge is ignorance if nourished by illusions,
Our secrecy and openness,
Our ease and hardship,
Our despair and patience,
Our fear and safety,
Our humiliation and pride.

In these lines, Assadi presents a series of opposing concepts—*yusr wa ‘usr* (ease and hardship), *jaza‘ wa ṣabr* (despair and patience), *khawf wa amn* (fear and safety), *dhul wa ‘izz* (humiliation and pride)—to create a dynamic interplay between conflicting states. This contrast not only enriches the imagery but also provides a harmonious cadence that underscores the poem’s meditative depth.

Repetition

Repetition, or *tikrār*, is a significant stylistic device in poetry that amplifies the text’s internal music, crafting a rhythmic allure that draws in the reader. Like other rhetorical devices such as *ṭibāq* (antithesis) and *jinās* (paronomasia), repetition goes beyond enhancing sound; it reinforces meaning and heightens emotions within the poem. When applied skillfully, it provides artistic

cohesion, creating a rhythmic space that enables readers to connect more deeply with the poetic image (Ibn Qutaybah 232–241).

Repetition involves reusing a word, phrase, or sentence within a specific context to emphasize meaning or spotlight an idea. This device is well-regarded in Arabic literature, particularly in the Qur’an, where it frequently serves interpretive and rhetorical functions. Muhammad Abdul Mutalib defines repetition as embodying the “deep structures” of a text, connecting meanings through layered rhetorical techniques (Mutalib 109). According to Mutalib, repetition of sounds, words, or phrases mirrors the poet’s emotional engagement, enhancing rhythm and revealing dedication to expressing experiences with precision. Rabay’ah highlights how this technique intensifies the reader’s experience, allowing them to share in the poet’s world (Rabay’ah 170).

In sum, *tikrār* in Assadi’s poetry resonates with readers by embedding a rhythmic structure that underscores his reflections on life’s dualities and intensifies the sensory engagement, leaving a lasting aesthetic impression. Among the instances of repetition in the poetry collection, we find in the poet’s verse:

And what happened, happened,
If only what happened, hadn’t happened.
Woe to a house without pillars,
Woe to a house without pillars,
This is how houses are built,
This is how houses are built,

Another example is observed in the following lines:

Beware of the era, for fate has its colors,
So where do you tread slowly, with pride?
Where are the sultans from ‘Ad and what they achieved?
Their edifices and their power endured as long as they did.
And where is Pharaoh, his pyramids are mere traces?
And where are Kisra, Nimrod, and Ghassan?

In the former excerpt, the repetition of phrases like “Woe to a house without pillars” (*waylun li-baytin bilā arkān*) and “This is how houses are built” (*hakadhā al-buyūt turfa’*) serves to emphasize the central idea of enduring structures and the fragility of human achievements. Similarly, the invocation of ancient figures and civilizations in the latter section—‘Ad, Pharaoh, Kisra, Nimrod—reinforces a sense of historical transience, drawing the reader’s attention to the fleeting nature of power and glory, no matter how solidly built they might appear.

Vibrant or Resonant Words

Vibrant or resonant words (*al-alfāz al-ihṭizāziyya*) are linguistic elements that enhance the rhythm and musicality of poetry, carrying an internal cadence that evokes sensory responses from the reader or listener. These words, known for their reverberating sounds, convey tension, movement, or emotion, enriching the poem’s auditory experience. Skillfully used, they add vitality and resonance, bridging meaning with sound to create an engaging and memorable experience. Resonant words breathe life into the text, drawing readers into a rhythmic flow that heightens the emotional impact of the poem, fostering a lasting connection with the audience.

The concept of vibrant words has been extensively studied by scholars. Ibn Jinni describes them as “words that give the reader or

listener a sense of force and resonance through the repetition of consecutive letters or the repetition of a powerful, reverberating word to signify events of utmost importance" (Salih 87). Similarly, Abd al-Sattar Mushan highlights how these words "evoke meaning and stimulate the imagination, drawing forth a chain of related ideas through the repetition of syllables, connecting sound and rhythm to the shades of meaning they carry" (Mushan 17). Through their auditory effects and associative power, resonant words deepen the reader's imaginative engagement, creating a layered experience that intensifies the poem's emotional and thematic resonance.

Our poet employs a series of vibrant words (*alfāz ihtizāziyya*) that resonate loudly within their context, filling the text with a ringing clamor that intensifies its rhythm. Such words create a jarring, musical effect, enriching the internal musical structure of the poetry in his volume. Examples of these vibrant words include: *la'la 'at* ("resounded"), *ma'ma'a* ("uproar"), *ṣamṣāmuḥu* ("sword"), *hudhud* ("hoopoe bird"), and *bulbula* ("trilling bird"). These words serve as powerful auditory symbols within the poem, contributing an emphatic internal rhythm that enhances the overall sonic experience, inviting readers to feel the pulsating energy of the text.

Parallelism

Parallelism serves as a prominent stylistic device that enriches both the linguistic and aesthetic structure of texts, relying on the repetition of similar syntactic patterns or words within sentences. This technique infuses the text with a harmonious rhythm and internal coherence, drawing the reader's attention and enhancing their aesthetic experience. Through parallelism, meanings are reinforced, and literary images are effectively highlighted, creating a balance between ideas and emotions that amplifies the text's artistic power and emotional impact. In her doctoral thesis describing parallelism as a foundational element of intellectual resonance in poetry Kholoud Termanini emphasizes this effect. She suggests it acts as a syntactic structure that divides poetic lines into segments of similar length and tone, forming a unified whole. These parallel structures, she argues, create interconnectedness across poetic segments, whereby syntactic similarities establish patterns that guide the rhythm and enhance the flow of the text (2004, 97). This layered structure is central to the rhythmic appeal in poetry, making parallelism a powerful tool in both poetic and prose compositions.

The poetic narratives in Assadi's volume, largely exemplify and bear witness to this stylistic and linguistic technique. Here, we observe consistency, parallelism, and phonetic symmetry through equal word counts in successive lines and the parallel use of verbs and their types. For example, in the first narrative poem, "Abu Saber Challenging Dangers," we read:

She marches, leading the valiant campaign
She rushes rightward, then veers to the left.

In this verse, the poet employs two present-tense verbs in the first line ("marches" (*tataqaddamu*) and "leading" (*tuhaddiru*)), a pattern mirrored precisely in the second line with two present-tense verbs ("rushes" (*tandafiu*) and "veers" (*tamtalu*)), creating a balanced structure that highlights the dynamic movement within the text.

In another example, the poet writes:
No debauchery, no dispute, no gloom,
No despair, no blame, and all unite as one.

Here, we find parallelism in the form of negations "no debauchery" (*lā fusūq*), "no dispute" (*lā khilāf*), "no gloom" (*lā kawāb*), "no despair" (*lā yabū*), and "no blame" (*lā malāmah*), which creates a compelling aesthetic effect. The rhythmic harmony of these synchronized lines amplifies the musicality of the text, supporting the argument that parallelism greatly enriches the text's musical structure.

Symbolism and Mythology

Symbolism and mythology are essential elements that shape poetry, allowing poets to convey complex ideas and emotions beyond literal language. Symbolism provides layered meanings and an enigmatic quality, encouraging readers to engage in reflection. Through symbols, poets evoke specific emotions indirectly, adding depth and aesthetic appeal to the text. Mythology, as a representation of collective cultural heritage, brings historical and cultural dimensions to poetry. By referencing shared stories and legends, poets can reinterpret events or values, connecting the present with humanity's enduring conflicts and challenges. Together, symbolism and mythology enable poetry to explore psychological and social themes, blending imagination with reality. This integration creates intricate worlds within poetry, inviting readers to uncover the profound meanings woven into the language.

In his works, Assadi consistently employs symbolism, frequently drawing on historical events and figures. This is exemplified in lines such as:

Here is a hand extended by Al-Farooq, the Conqueror bold,
Its light rose high, quelling heresy's fiery hold.

Take pride! Al-Mansur raised his state to grand heights,
With wisdom as mountains, enduring in might.

Then came Harun, with a passion to build and to lead,
Uplifted by knowledge—rejoice in his creed.

In this text, historical symbols are prominently featured, with the poet evoking figures and events that exemplify the strength and leadership of Islamic history. The first is Al-Farooq (Omar ibn al-Khattāb), who is invoked as a symbol of justice and Islamic conquests that spread Islam. This is symbolized by the "light overcoming the fire of heresy," underscoring strength and justice. Another figure is Al-Mansur, or the Abbasid Caliph Abu Ja'far al-Mansur portrayed as a symbol of wise governance and foundational state-building. The imagery of "mountain-like foundations" suggests strength and stability, reflecting the Abbasid era's lasting impact. And, Harun al-Rashid symbolizes scientific and architectural advancement. Known for his commitment to intellectual and cultural development, Harun is depicted here with "knowledge as his support," reflecting the cultural enrichment of the Islamic Golden Age.

In another instance, the poet writes:

"Behold the wise hoopoe, noble in flight,
Rising through knowledge, guiding with light.
So, too, the sage came without toil or strain,
With Balqis' throne, summoned from the void's domain."

Here, the poet utilizes symbols derived from Islamic religious and literary traditions: Firstly, "The Hoopoe" is introduced as a symbol of knowledge and wisdom, representing the hoopoe from the Quran who brought news of the kingdom of Sheba to the Prophet Solomon. Described as "revered in his path," the hoopoe

embodies virtues of truth and responsibility, celebrated for its role in conveying knowledge as it "rises through knowledge and guides." This portrayal elevates the hoopoe as a symbol of trustworthy knowledge transmission and guidance, with the phrase "guiding the Emperor of Nations" alluding to Solomon's stature as a great leader. And "The Wise One" refers to the Prophet Solomon, who, according to the Quran, brought the throne of the Queen of Sheba, Balqis, in an extraordinary act. The title "the wise one" encapsulates Solomon's renowned wisdom. Here, this feat is presented as a testament to divine wisdom and strength, with the phrase "from nonexistence" highlighting the miraculous and transcendent nature of his power.

In essence, the poet uses the symbols of "the hoopoe" and "Solomon" to reflect the values of knowledge, wisdom, and the miraculous. These symbols underscore the significance of enlightened leadership and the central role of knowledge in achieving monumental accomplishments.

B. Windows into Imagery, Style, and Musical Structure

From the very beginning, the reader encounters a fusion of poems imbued with profound impact. These works not only invite reflection and contemplation on the deep meanings they convey but also create a unique aesthetic experience that leads the reader to a state of wonder and release. These poems renew Arabic poetry, opening new horizons for poets and readers alike, as Assadi presents an innovative poetic vision that seamlessly combines the past and present within a distinct artistic and creative framework, especially evident in the final section of poetic narratives. In this section, Assadi's poetic approach stands out in how it merges modern expression with classical resonance. His verse resonates with a layered musicality, as rhythm, imagery, and symbolism work together to evoke vivid scenes and timeless themes. The unique style employed here enriches the reader's experience, drawing them into a reflective space that bridges traditional heritage with contemporary themes, establishing a new, resonant voice within the realm of Arabic poetry.

B.1. The Classical Poetry

The classical poems in this collection reflect a rich diversity of themes and ideas, embodying the essence of traditional Arabic poetry, which fuses deep emotion with elevated rhetoric. Each poem holds a distinctive character that captures the human struggle amid harsh realities. For instance, in "The Arrogance of Calamities," the harshness of nature is portrayed, while "The Farmer's Journey" celebrates labor and agricultural dedication. Similarly, "The Fair-Faced One" contemplates the paradox between appearance and essence, delving into reflections on time and its cruelty. In "A Tale of Baghdad's Love," the poet revives the city's glorious past, linking its historical grandeur with the contemporary state of the nation. "My Horses Arose" presents a symbolism of nobility and valor by depicting horses as emblems of courage and pride.

The language employed throughout these poems is distinguished by its grandeur, effectively utilizing rhetorical imagery and metaphors to underscore the existential and psychological conflicts that define human life. Taken as a whole, these poems explore profound existential themes, embracing pride, nostalgia, reflection, and wisdom. In this analysis, we will study the first five classical poems from the collection, as they epitomize

the poet's overarching style and linguistic choices across all classical poems within this volume.

B.1.A "The Arrogance of Calamities"

In this poem "The Arrogance of Calamities," to be more specific, Assadi writes:

The beasts howl, and flocks rage in the land,
And poles of power tighten their command.

Winds of misfortune now dwell within our walls,
Stripping our skins, tearing clothes as it falls.

Our flags have shattered, scattered wide,
In our very flesh, illness now resides.

They said, and I, "Is my garden in bloom?"
Do the vines sway in my orchard room?

I have lived claiming my night is bright,
Where comrades gather in its moonlit light.

I deceived myself; I thought my branch would last,
With a band of kin at my gate amassed.

This poem exemplifies the poet's vivid use of imagery to depict his confrontation with the hardships and tragedies that surround him. Assadi's images hinge on the tension between hope and despair, with beasts and storms symbolizing forces beyond human control, embodying an unending struggle that culminates in a tragic loss and challenge. The poet skillfully weaves metaphors, portraying scenes of deep-rooted conflict in the human soul's quest for salvation despite prevailing anguish. Moreover, the poem serves as a prime example of poetic imagery that reflects the poet's confrontation with surrounding hardships and tragedies. Assadi crafts his imagery by juxtaposing hope and despair, with symbols like beasts and storms representing forces beyond human control, underscoring the inevitability of a struggle that ends only in a tragic acceptance of loss and resilience. Here, the poem's images unfold as metaphors that vividly capture the deep-seated conflict within the human spirit, which, though burdened by pain, continues to seek deliverance. Phrases like "winds of misfortune dwell in our abode" and "the vines sway softly in my garden's heart" bring to life a sense of desolation and the stripping of personal strength. Assadi further describes a state where "my strength resigned" and "ancestors' roots crumbled," underscoring a relinquishing of honor and lineage in the face of relentless adversity. This imagery continues with expressions like "calamities bid welcome" and "despair took hold of a wavering mind," painting an intense picture of isolation and disillusionment. Through a traditional poetic style, the verses move fluidly, reflecting a state of defeat and the deep emotions of solitude, helplessness, and regret that pervade the poet's life and surroundings.

A close reading of the poem invites readers to explore the nuanced contrast between reality and illusion, uncovering layers of meaning that reveal the delicate boundary between the tangible and the imagined. The poem begins with imagery of "howling beasts" and "raging flocks," setting a tone of chaos and tension in the external world. The "dominant poles" taking control of the neighborhood may symbolize oppressive forces or enemies that have gained power over society, while the "winds of misfortune dwelling in our abode" evoke a sense of ongoing hardship and adversity that threatens life's stability. The poet's descriptions of torn garments and shattered banners serve as symbols of moral and

national collapse, as if the body itself has been ravaged by afflictions, deepening feelings of pain and vulnerability. Midway through, the poem reveals a stark contrast between the poet's perceptions and reality, highlighting a once-held hope that "my garden blossoms," and an illusion of strength, "my steadfastness unwavering." This optimism, however, is later exposed as mere illusion—a mirage in a world marked by turmoil. Through this juxtaposition, Assadi portrays the dissonance between hopeful illusions and harsh realities, capturing the emotional toll of recognizing hope as an illusion.

Reader will also notice the richness of poetic imagery and eloquence of language. The poem begins with imagery of "howling beasts" and "raging flocks," setting a tone of chaos and tension in the external world. The "dominant poles" taking control of the neighborhood may symbolize oppressive forces or enemies that have gained power over society, while the "winds of misfortune dwelling in our abode" evoke a sense of ongoing hardship and adversity that threatens life's stability. The poet's descriptions of torn garments and shattered banners serve as symbols of moral and national collapse, as if the body itself has been ravaged by afflictions, deepening feelings of pain and vulnerability. Midway through, the poem reveals a stark contrast between the poet's perceptions and reality, highlighting a once-held hope that "my garden blossoms," and an illusion of strength, "my steadfastness unwavering." This optimism, however, is later exposed as mere illusion—a mirage in a world marked by turmoil. Through this juxtaposition, Assadi portrays the dissonance between hopeful illusions and harsh realities, capturing the emotional toll of recognizing hope as an illusion. The poem's language is both direct and evocative, relying on strong verbs such as "howled," "raged," "shattered," and "torn" to inject a dramatic rhythm that mirrors the themes of destruction and disarray. This intensity of expression is further amplified by harmonious rhymes that link the lines, adding a distinct rhythmic flow and enhancing the musicality of the text.

Largely, the poem poignantly conveys feelings of helplessness, capturing the speaker's internal struggle against overwhelming hardships. While the poem deeply explores themes of despair and loss, it lacks a glimpse of hope or potential for change, leaning more toward a tone of resignation. Adding a contrasting perspective, perhaps by hinting at the possibility of overcoming this "arrogance" of hardships, could introduce a layer of depth and optimism, offering a balanced contemplation on the nature of adversity.

B.1.b. "The Farmer's Journey"

In this poem, Assadi presents a poetic tableau centered on the themes of cultivation and harvest, which symbolize life and perseverance. The figure of the farmer embodies the hardworking individual who faces adversity with determination and patience. Assadi uses vibrant natural imagery, as the farmer resists the wind and confronts obstacles with an optimistic vision, grounded in faith in giving and long-standing anticipation. This contrast between realistic and metaphorical imagery brings to life the dynamic interplay between human endeavor and nature, reflecting the inner struggle between the desire for success and the fear of failure. Assadi's lines emphasize this as he writes:

With hands I till the summit of the hill,
Grateful, my arm honed by patience and will.

I plant my crops and hopes deep in the soil,

Dreaming of harvests that poverty won't spoil.

My chest defies the wind when its teeth bare,
And when rain delays, my tears stream with care.
No rogue shall near the edges of my land,
Its guard unyielding, as tall oaks stand.

I shun my bed, leaving rest behind,
Through sleepless nights where embered coals remind.

I tend each shoot with lashes light and true,
With praise on my lips, for in praise, joy renews.

The farmer becomes a metaphor for resilience, pushing back against natural forces as he lets his chest defy the wind when its teeth are bare and when rain delays, his tears stream with become rivers. These images of dedication in the face of hardship paint the picture of a figure in harmony with the earth and committed to achieving his goals despite the odds.

What gives the poem a boost is its poetic images. The poem brims with powerful imagery that reflects the farmer's dedication and patience. In the first verse, the poet describes tilling the earth with his own hands, symbolizing his direct connection to the land and the endurance needed to overcome challenges. These images do more than depict the physical world; they embody an internal psychological state, representing both inner and external struggles. He says "I plant my crops and hopes deep in the soil." The line presents a blended image of planting and hope, showing the farmer's persistence in clinging to optimism despite hardships. Another example is observed in the line: "My chest defies the wind when its teeth bare." It is a metaphorical depiction of the farmer's resilience against nature's challenges, as if his very being serves as a barrier against fierce winds.

Themes and Symbolic Connotations

The poem centers on themes of labor and relentless effort, symbolizing humanity's struggle to reach its aspirations—a universal message that transcends time and place. The poet illustrates how the farmer relies not only on physical labor but also on faith and patience. This fusion of spiritual and physical work presents a holistic philosophy in facing hardships. The poet links land with dreams, sweat with hope, imbuing the poem with a deeper human significance. The farmer's challenges are not merely environmental but also social, as suggested by the line about "rogues" who keep away from his "paradise," symbolizing his defense of his land and harvest.

The poem contains several symbolic elements, such as: "Wind," which symbolizes the obstacles facing the farmer, be they natural or societal; "River" in the third verse serves as an outlet for emotions, a metaphor for tears that nourish the land, reflecting how personal sacrifice can sustain one's mission; and "Paradise" in the fourth verse alludes to the farmer's land, symbolizing wealth and the spiritual and practical value of land in human life. The poem's rich symbolism enhances the farmer's journey as a physical endeavor and elevates it to an existential struggle, where every tear and effort bears the potential to nurture life. Through these vivid metaphors and symbols, the poet captures the profound connection between the farmer and his land, reinforcing themes of resilience, dignity, and devotion in the face of adversity. The imagery and symbolism work together to evoke a sense of reverence for the farmer's enduring spirit, making this a tribute to human fortitude and the timeless relationship with the earth.

In its entirety, the poem is a testament to the hard work that brings forth sustenance, grounded in the soil yet reaching toward ideals, as every seed sown is filled with dreams as much as with potential. The land becomes not merely a livelihood but a sacred space, a guarded “paradise” sustained by sweat and fortified by resolve.

B.1.c. "The Handsome Face"

In this poem, Assadi writes:

You see his handsome face reveal a cheerful grace,
His fortress strong, unbowed by men or beast, no trace.

But should a loving eye take a moment's deeper view,
It would find behind his smile, hidden sorrows due.

How can one heal the wounds as life drifts by unseen,
Circling fast and grim, denying mercy's sheen?

He raises a hand skyward in fervent plea:
My life is grief; no taste of its sweetness for me.

I gathered roses that God adorned with grace,
Their fragrant scent, soft beauty, time could not efface.

But a hateful swarm attacked my field, concealed in guile,
A vile brood, keen to defy my spirit's mile.

On the wings of winds, they shrieked, then brought
Dread to my brave kin, who had once aimed high and fought.

This poem exemplifies classical Arabic poetry, utilizing rich symbolism and profound emotions to express the inner turmoil of its subject. The poet introduces us to a character who, while strong and cheerful outwardly, bears hidden burdens and sorrows within—a portrayal of the duality between appearance and internal struggle, a common theme in classical Arabic poetry. Below is a deeper analysis of the poem's key elements:

Themes and Ideas

In *Ṣabīḥ al-Wajh* (“The Handsome Face”), Assadi introduces a figure outwardly marked by charm and strength—someone with a *ṣabīḥ al-wajh*, a handsome and cheerful countenance. Yet, beneath this pleasing exterior lies an intricate web of concealed sorrow. This portrayal of hidden struggles beneath a polished exterior resonates deeply with classical Arabic poetry's themes of duality. The poet's choice to present a strong exterior hiding internal pain speaks to a universal human experience: individuals often present a composed or joyous exterior while privately bearing silent burdens. Through the character's hidden anguish, the poet highlights the tension between outward cheer and inward suffering, evoking a relatable inner battle faced by many. This contrast between the visible cheer and hidden sorrow not only captures a universal truth about human emotions but also underscores a broader philosophical reflection on life itself.

The poem's unfolding lines reveal an examination of life's fleeting nature. Here, Assadi expands beyond the individual's inner struggle, delving into a more profound contemplation on time's relentless passage. Phrasing like *'ajūl al-'umr* (a relentless cycle of life) invokes imagery of life as a ceaseless, sometimes indifferent journey, reflecting the poet's contemplation of the transient nature of existence. This unyielding march of time denies mercy and disregards human suffering, leaving little space to heal past wounds. The imagery and reflections in this part of the poem bring to light feelings of loss and disorientation, as time drifts by, leaving

individuals grappling with unresolved sorrows. This is a contemplation echoed in many lyrical and reflective works, where themes of impermanence, human vulnerability, and the pursuit of meaning amidst hardship emerge powerfully.

Imagery, Style, and Philosophical Reflection

The poem's style and imagery exhibit Assadi's skillful use of classical Arabic symbolism and rich metaphor. Natural symbols such as *ward* (roses) hold multiple layers of meaning; here, the roses may symbolize cherished dreams or hard-won achievements, graced by *shadhā* (fragrance) that implies beauty and fulfillment. However, these roses are besieged by a *surb ḥiqd mudallisen* (a deceitful swarm of hatred), a powerful metaphor for adversarial forces that threaten to unravel one's cherished accomplishments. This swarm, concealed in guile, embodies the unseen enemies or challenges that undermine one's efforts. Through such imagery, Assadi constructs a contrast between beauty and malevolence, goodness and deceit, illustrating the poet's meditation on human resilience against adversities that disrupt life's tranquility.

Assadi's choice of natural imagery, with symbols like *ḥuqūl* (fields) and *riyāḥ* (winds), infuses the poem with both serenity and threat, enhancing its dramatic tension. While the **ward** and *ḥuqūl* suggest harmony and pastoral beauty, the invading *riyāḥ* and *ḥiqd* represent chaotic forces, disrupting this peace. This use of natural duality—a clash between nurturing beauty and lurking destructiveness—reflects the soul's inner conflicts, where peace coexists with struggle. Structurally, Assadi's language reflects the elevated *ma'jam* (lexicon) of classical Arabic poetry, using evocative terms like *manī' al-ḥimā* (a resilient sanctuary), *maghawīr qawm* (brave warriors), and the verb *yafshī* (reveals), all of which infuse the text with weighty, dramatic language that resonates with traditional poetic forms. The vocabulary choices, alongside verbs such as *yamud* (extends) and *bāghat* (surprised), add dynamism to the imagery, immersing the reader in a poetic journey of emotional depth.

Philosophically, *Ṣabīḥ al-Wajh* draws readers into its profound contemplation of inner resilience amid outward adversity. The concluding lines—where the protagonist extends his hand skyward in a fervent plea—epitomize an existential reflection on human vulnerability and the search for solace amidst bitterness. Here, Assadi masterfully captures the human tendency to seek hope beyond life's injustices, as though reaching for a higher force to mitigate the struggles faced. This notion of reaching out, both literally and symbolically, encapsulates the essence of the poem's meditation on inner strength. The imagery, style, and philosophical depth of *Ṣabīḥ al-Wajh* reveal Assadi's ability to create a resonant, universal narrative where beauty, sorrow, resilience, and struggle intertwine, embodying the timeless message of classical Arabic poetry. Through the juxtaposition of outward charm and hidden grief, the poem reflects an authentic human experience, inviting readers to explore the eternal conflict between appearance and reality, peace and inner turmoil, harmony and betrayal.

B.1.d. “A Story of Baghdadi Love”

"A Story of Baghdadi Love" is yet another captivating poem by Assadi that can be read as:

I journeyed with the shadows of my poetry toward my glories,
And they descended in the house of Baghdad.

My spirit wandered in ecstasy through its gardens,
Covered in affection and wrapped in my song.

In my hand, I hold pages adorned with artistry,
On them, we shall inscribe memories since Akkadian times.

Inscribe here! Here the past and present were born,
Written on stone and in eternity.

Here, Al-Farooq extended his hand in conquest,
With its light, defeating the fires of heresy.

Take pride! Here, Al-Mansur founded his state,
Its foundation wisdom, rising like mountains.

Then came Harun, with construction his mission,
And knowledge his support—an honor to uphold.

Truth flourished in his emirate,
Like roses, spreading their fragrance in joy.

The poem is infused with nostalgia and pride in Baghdad's rich history, where the poet revives the city's glorious past and recalls symbols of strength, knowledge, and wisdom that form the city's identity. Through this poem, Assadi reflects a deep emotional connection with Baghdad, painting a vibrant picture of a city that was once the cradle of Islamic civilization, bridging past and present. The poem opens with the poet's spiritual journey into the glory of Baghdad, where the shadows of poetry are drawn into the city's historic gardens. Assadi conveys a profound pride in the scientific and cultural accomplishments that have shaped Baghdad across eras, tracing its achievements from ancient civilizations, like the Akkadian, to the Islamic conquests under Caliph Umar ibn al-Khattāb, who brought light and knowledge to the city. As the poem progresses, the poet highlights the role of Caliph Al-Mansur in establishing the Abbasid state and positioning Baghdad as a capital of wisdom and learning. This theme continues with the figure of Caliph Harun al-Rashid, whose commitment to development and knowledge made Baghdad a hub of intellectual and cultural radiance. Assadi's verses express deep gratitude and pride for a city that has long served as a beacon of truth and justice, depicting Baghdad as a continual source of goodness and joy.

The poem's majestic tone and rich language use a dignified style filled with complex imagery, establishing a connection between past and present. For instance, the line "*the spirit wanders in ecstasy through its gardens*" reflects the poet's deep love for Baghdad and its beauty. Other images, such as "roses spreading their fragrance," represent the city's generous contributions to civilization. The poet's use of historical symbols—Al-Farooq, Al-Mansur, Harun al-Rashid—imbues the poem with a historical and nationalistic dimension, amplifying the poet's sense of pride in Baghdad's legacy. These figures symbolize strength, knowledge, and enlightenment, establishing Baghdad as a pivotal city in Arab and Islamic history.

In its language and structure, the poem draws on a classic, grandiloquent style typical of classical Arabic poetry, underscoring themes of pride and heroism. Words like *ghālib* (conqueror), *nūr* (light), *bid'a* (heresy), and *jibāl* (mountains) contribute to the poem's epic quality, enhancing the poet's reverent view of Baghdad. Structurally, the poem is cohesive and carefully organized, with each line seamlessly building on the last. The journey into Baghdad's history transitions naturally into a tribute to its enduring values of *ādīl* (justice) and *ḥaqq* (truth). Each verse strengthens the depiction of Baghdad as a symbol of Islamic civilization, with a legacy that persists across the ages.

All in all, "A Story of Baghdadi Love" combines deep philosophical reflection with rich symbolism to depict Baghdad's role in history as both a historical and cultural cornerstone. Through concentrated imagery and eloquent language, Assadi captures a city emblematic of beauty, power, and intellectual influence, evoking a nostalgia that underscores Baghdad's lasting significance in the Arab and Islamic worlds.

B.1.e. "My Horses Rose"

That last poem to be discussed in this section is "My Horses Rose." It says:

My horses rose, their will aflame,
Unafraid of hardship, undulled by shame.

Necks arched like bows, their brows held high,
Eyes pure and bright, like honey's sigh.

Their legs are steely, taut and lean,
Each stride with pride, swift and keen.

Midribs slender, formed with grace,
Backs strong and straight, no curve to trace.

When summoned to war, they turn to lions bold,
Casting fire, their fierce wrath cold.

Until flames roar and battles rage,
My horses grind in a war-dance stage.

Their will unyielding, firm as stone,
Their strength undimmed, even when alone.

Above them, a rider shines with glee,
Like a moon that beams, then hides to flee.

When war is over, calm they keep,
Wary of foes, in memories deep.

These are my horses, wild and free,
Gentle when bred, a blessing to me.

"My Horses Rose" is a vivid celebration of horses as symbols of strength, determination, and heroism, unfolding with a progression that begins with the horses' powerful movements and advances to their fearless engagement in battle. This structural flow, moving from descriptions of physical attributes—such as "their necks arch like a bow" (*ka-annā' ḥhunūhā ka-qaws*) and "eyes pure and bright" (*'uyūnuhā kā'annahā shahr al-'asal*)—to depictions of inner courage, reflects a journey from outward form to inner strength. The culmination of the poem, where horses and riders merge as a unified heroic entity, portrays a sense of unity in bravery and purpose. Assadi's heroic style, with language that conveys grandeur and reverence, draws readers into a world where the horses embody grace, strength, and readiness for action. Strong verbs like "rose," "turned," and "cast" animate the scene, while variations in style accentuate both pride and reverence, immersing readers in some epic landscape rich with emotion.

The poem's imagery, rhythm, and musicality give it a grand, almost mythical tone. Assadi uses metaphors and similes to emphasize the horses' nobility and power. Comparisons like "necks arch like a bow" evoke restrained energy, while "eyes bright like honey" (*ka-ḥalāwat al-'asal*) suggest purity and resilience. Descriptions of the horses' physiques, such as "their midribs slim" (*kāsāt al-qulūb*) and "backs strong and straight" (*ḡuhūruhā qawwiyah mā' a' du l-'awaj*), balance beauty and strength, making them appear as embodiments of courage, akin to figures from

classical heroic poetry. Assadi's use of the *basīṭ* meter (*mufā' alatur fā'ilātun*) imparts an energetic cadence that complements themes of strength and bravery, with the rhyme scheme enhancing cohesion and musicality. Internal assonance adds further layers, creating a rhythmic flow that echoes the heroic style, with sounds reinforcing the dynamism of the horses' portrayal.

At its core, "My Horses Rose" explores themes of heroism, resilience, and heritage, as the horses symbolize unyielding resolve and bravery. Lines like "when well-bred, they are a blessing" (*thumma al-nasab*) reflect pride in the horses not only as physical beings but as icons of legacy and noble ancestry, blending themes of valor with traditional values. Assadi's use of classic images, such as "casting fire" or "lion-hearted," revitalizes traditional archetypes with fresh imagery and rhythmic intensity. Through this combination of expressive language, musicality, and cohesive structure, Assadi's poem celebrates resilience, courage, and legacy, presenting horses as enduring symbols of strength that resonate deeply within classical Arabic poetry.

C. Modern Poetry

This section of Assadi's poetry collection includes modern free-verse poems marked by a loose structure and an intense expression of personal experience. The poems lean toward symbolic poetry, relying on rich imagery and suggestive meanings to convey a personal, internal tension and contemplation of simple moments.

C.1. "The She-Nightingale"

In his modern free-verse poem "The She-Nightingale" (*al-bulbula*), Assadi studies the personal, symbolic, and transformative impact of beauty and inspiration on the human spirit. This section of Assadi's collection showcases his shift toward modern poetry, where loose structure and intense expressions of personal experience define the style. Assadi's free-verse form allows him to explore rich imagery and nuanced meanings that convey a sense of internal tension and contemplation of simple yet profound moments.

Assadi writes:

I sketched my childhood nightingale,
slender in figure,
bending like a stalk.
Each time I scratched on my page,
the scratch appeared on my face,
and when I recalled her colors,
I fell, consumed by chatter.
She is magic,
with the impact of a bomb.
Her song carries memory—
if you could hear it, how lovely it sounds!
Her flow, a command,
kissed my heart and bound it.
I don't know how she came,
to our neighborhood by choice,
but I saw her once,
on her throne, confused.
Her eye became a well
that quenched the thirsty.
Her neck borrowed redness from roses,
stretched without shrinking,
and she flew around me.
I lost my senses,
my touch faltered,
and my speech turned into whispers.
My day drifted toward my yesterday,
and I was disarrayed!

Structure, Style, and Symbolism

Assadi's poem unfolds with a fluid, loose structure that reflects the modern poetic style's emphasis on expressive freedom. Abandoning fixed rhyme and meter, the poem creates an intimate tone as though the speaker is recounting a deeply personal experience directly to the reader. The nightingale symbolizes more than a bird—it embodies an ethereal source of inspiration and beauty that suddenly disrupts the ordinary with profound impact. Assadi enhances this feeling of suddenness with words like "scratch" (*kharbasha*), "chatter" (*dardasha*), "magic" (*sihr*), and "impact of a bomb" (*athar al-qonbula*), all of which convey the bewildering and consuming nature of beauty and creativity. Through sensory imagery, Assadi uses the *bulbula* as a vehicle for describing both physical and emotional transformation. Her "slender figure like a stalk" captures grace and delicacy, while her song "kissed my heart and bound it" illustrates how beauty and inspiration can gently ensnare and captivate the soul. The image of her "eye [becoming] a well that quenched the thirsty" (*al-'ayn qad ghadat 'ayna tarwī al-'aṭāsh*) further symbolizes her as a source of emotional refreshment, suggesting an almost mythical force that revitalizes all who encounter her. The transformation the speaker undergoes—losing his senses, faltering touch, and whispered speech—intensifies the effect of beauty's mysterious and disruptive power.

Imagery, Rhythm, and Core Themes

Assadi's poem relies heavily on metaphorical imagery to convey the nightingale's profound impact. Describing her as "bending like a stalk" unites elegance with natural beauty, while her song that "kissed the heart and bound it" metaphorically captures how beauty stirs and binds the spirit. Similarly, her eye, likened to a well that quenches thirst, suggests a source of sustenance and inspiration, making the nightingale appear as an almost mystical figure capable of awakening the soul. These rich images turn the *bulbula* into a transformative symbol, embodying a beauty that refreshes and inspires. Despite its free verse, the poem achieves musicality through repetition and alliteration, which create a flowing cadence. Assadi uses phonetic pairings like *tārat* (flew) and *wakhtallat* (became confused), adding rhythm to the speaker's experience of wonder. Wordplay, with sounds echoing each other in *bulbula*, *dardasha* (chatter), and *kharbasha* (scratch), contributes to a dynamic, layered soundscape that mirrors the speaker's internal disarray and fascination. This musical layering enhances the poem's atmosphere, drawing the reader into the poet's sense of awe and emotional upheaval.

At its essence, "The She-Nightingale" reflects on the impact of beauty and inspiration, which arrives unexpectedly to transform the everyday into something transcendent. The nightingale represents inspiration that not only stirs but disrupts, with her beauty igniting emotional turbulence. Assadi's direct yet symbol-laden language evokes a strong emotional response, linking beauty to both freedom and restraint—expressed through flight and binding. This tension adds depth to the poem, underscoring how beauty can simultaneously liberate and confine the soul. While the poem's rhythmic and symbolic richness might hint at a more detailed relationship between poet and nightingale, its language and captivating imagery suffice to express a mystical transformation and inner disarray. Through "The She-Nightingale," Assadi offers a powerful meditation on the marvel and disruption that true beauty inspires, crafting a modern yet timeless verse.

C.2. “Um-mūna Will Certainly Come”

The second text, which concludes this part of modern poetry, is the poem “Um-mūna Will Certainly Come.” This is a lengthy poem in which Assadi says:

No harm, woman,
 No harm,
 I won't drink the cup of bitterness,
 Or the wine of lessons learned,
 Nor will I drive away the visitors,
 Or sell the palace,
 I won't pull out the flowers,
 Or tear up the scrolls,
 And what's it to me if I gaze at the stars,
 Or blame fate?
 I am a man with a bit of Jāhiliyah;
 The deserts and wastelands enchant me,
 And I am taken by hills and sands
 In virtual worlds.
 I pitch tents,
 Mount the forgotten horses,
 Stand upon the ruins,
 And search for the beloved
 In vertical verse.
 I never knew Aphrodite,
 Nor Venus and Greek civilization,
 Nor do I know Roman Athens;
 Forgive me, Romeo and Juliet,
 Gilgamesh and Siduri predate me,
 And Ishtar the Babylonian.
 Never will I
 Forsake my thoughts
 Or trim my romantic poems,
 No, I won't divert my gaze
 From gardens and beauty,
 Nor will I oppose the moons
 And all living things.
 I won't abandon the news,
 My friends,
 I'll replace my computer
 As always,
 And fight the virus
 And whoever commands it.

This poem, from which we excerpted 15 to 20 lines, features repeated words and phrases that convey a cycle of emotions and ideas, capturing themes of longing, introspection, and the search for meaning. Through style rich with questioning (e.g., “And when I made you all my trees, you withered? / When you became my whole news, you disappeared? / When you became all my thoughts, you flew? / When you became the soul of my poetry, you grew cold?”) and repetition (“When...,” “No harm...,” “I won't...”), Assadi creates an intimate tone that enhances the sense of personal longing and loss. Direct questions (e.g., “And what's it to me if I gaze at the stars or blame fate?”) make the speaker's voice direct and reflective, inviting readers to share in his experience.

The poem's emotional impact is strengthened by three stylistic elements: repetition, interrogation, and simplicity of language. The use of recurring phrases like “you were” and “you became” marks shifts in the speaker's relationship with Um-mūna, highlighting different phases in their dynamic and capturing the continual evolution of his inner world. Interrogative phrasing intensifies this feeling, with each question reflecting the poet's anxiety and sense of wonder, drawing readers into his search for answers amid feelings of love and longing. The simplicity of language, rooted in everyday expressions, directly connects the poet with the reader, making his journey universally resonant and relatable.

Assadi's free-verse form and loose structure allow for emotional fluidity, where narration and lyrical expression intertwine. His imagery transforms Um-mūna into a “*fasilah*” (sapling) near the poet's garden, symbolizing innocence and the potential for growth. This portrayal hints at a bond between poet and beloved, much like a garden that needs nurturing. Her presence, described as “a thought in the river of my mind,” emphasizes her centrality in his thoughts, shaping his inner life. Other vivid metaphors, such as “two eyes that quench the thirsty” and “the soul of my poetry,” encapsulate the poet's existential yearning for connection, with Um-mūna personifying his ideals of companionship and fulfillment. Through these images, the poem explores the tension between personal and universal themes, elevating the poet's journey as one of spiritual and emotional reconciliation.

Despite its lack of traditional meter, the poem has a strong musical rhythm enhanced by repetition and parallelism, making it readable and memorable. Emotionally charged words like “beauty,” “flowers,” and “happiness” connect readers to the powerful sentiments conveyed, while balanced structures in lines like “when I made you all my trees, when you became my whole news, when you became all my thoughts, when you became the soul of my poetry, and when you were the harbor of my sights” add a harmonious rhythm. This parallelism creates a nostalgic flow that supports the poem's themes of memory, loss, and longing.

The poem's central ideas center on Um-mūna as an irreplaceable presence whose absence creates a void. Yet, amidst this sorrow, the poet clings to hope, confident that Um-mūna will return. This thread of optimism underscores the enduring strength of memory and attachment, suggesting a longing to keep the past alive even amid present pain. Interwoven with these emotions is the poet's search for happiness in life's simple moments—like drinking coffee under the olive tree—revealing a resilience that finds joy despite loss. Through this blend of sorrow, hope, and a search for contentment, Assadi captures both the weight of separation and the light of memory.

The poet enriches this emotional landscape with rhetorical techniques and cultural references that add depth and broaden its appeal. Metaphors like “the harbor” and “the garden” anchor emotions to concrete places, while expressions such as “an idea in the river of my mind,” “you became the soul of my poetry,” and “the deserts and wastelands fascinated me” deepen the imagery. Comparisons between *Um-mūna* and elements like flowers and plants idealize her, accentuating her importance in the poet's life. Cultural allusions, including “the deserts and wastelands,” “Aphrodite,” “Romeo and Juliet,” and “Ishtar,” blend Arab heritage with Greek and Roman mythology, emphasizing the poet's connection to both tradition and modernity.

In “Um-mūna Will Surely Return,” Assadi successfully balances simplicity with profound expression, using accessible language and evocative imagery to craft a relatable, universal narrative of love and loss. The poem resonates with a delicate tension between sorrow and hope, encouraging reflection on human relationships and their impact on life. Through his unique blend of poetic style and heartfelt emotion, Assadi's work invites readers to explore the depths of memory, attachment, and resilience.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the poetry collection *The Wild Horses* by Jamal Assadi represents a valuable addition to the contemporary Arabic poetic landscape. Assadi successfully constructs distinctive and varied poetic images, employing a wide array of artistic techniques, such as simile, metaphor, and symbolism. These images contribute to a rich and complete poetic experience, enabling the poet to convey a vast range of emotions and ideas, while presenting his unique vision of the world.

An analysis of the imagery in this collection reveals Assadi's refined aesthetic sensibility and his skill in articulating his thoughts through inventive and creative imagery. It is evident that he places significant emphasis on language and imagery in his poetry, crafting his verses with a sophisticated and diverse poetic language. Through the use of rhythm and harmony, he constructs his imagery by employing a variety of linguistic and artistic techniques that enhance the musical structure of the text, including repetition, alliteration, antithesis, vibrational words, and parallelism.

The Wild Horses stands as a model of contemporary Arabic poetry that bridges tradition and modernity. Assadi draws on the legacy of Arabic poetry while simultaneously offering an innovative and fresh perspective, creating a unique blend of authenticity and originality in his work.

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