

# Speak Scheherazade Speak! A Dialectic Semiotic Reading in the Title: A Study of Rītā 'Odeh's Poem Şarkhat 'I' rāb as a Sample

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**Abstract**— Literary critics and scholars had not shown interest in the thresholds of the title of the text until modern semiotic studies appeared and started giving interest to everything that surrounds the text such as titles, prefaces, references, margins and alerts. Semiotic studies pointed out that these elements are significant keys that help to dive into the depths of the text to unravel its mysteries and enigmas. Consequently, such studies are rarely empty of references to the textual thresholds, especially the title, which is the main threshold that compels the researcher to inquire it before diving into the depths of the text.

**Keywords**— thresholds, semiology, tetralogy, trans-textuality, structuralism, semiotic, active imperative, para text.

## I. INTRODUCTION

The title is the first threshold of the text and it is impossible to jump over it or ignore it. It is an important step in the reading and receiving process and the key to the global indications of the text, which the critical reader relies on if he aspires to be scientific in his analysis and aspires to achieve accuracy in his interpretation. In short, the title is considered one of the most important signs that achieve the textuality of the text, which is integration that is based on the principle of intra-reference between the title and the tale.

## II. THE CONCEPT OF "TITLE" AND ITS PROBLEMATIC NATURE

The "title" has been ignored by many Arab and Western researchers in the classical and modern periods. They mostly dealt with it casually as they considered it as something marginal and invaluable. For them, it is merely an utterance that contributes nothing to the analysis of a literary text. Therefore, it is possible to bridge over it to the text like the other thresholds that surround the text. However, certain classical and modern researchers and scholars in the field of semiotics in both cultures noticed its importance and some of them specialized in it and as a result, a new field of study of its origins, theories, methodology emerged. This study has been known by the name of "Titrologie" (in French), which means: 'The Science of Titles'. It appeared in the West and developed in France. The most outstanding critic who fathomed the depths of this sea is

the French critic G. Génette, who devoted his book *Sueils* to the study of Trans-textuality.

The Arab writer noticed the importance of the title and realized its functions through the way of its production and taking into consideration the receivers of this art whose reading the title reflects, too. According to modern critical studies, the title plays the role the 'alarm' and 'instigator' because its domineering authority lends its shades on the text and thus, the body of the text turns into a body that falls under its authority.

Gradually, the title started to be included in every general theoretical and analytical context that is interested in pointing out the function of the thresholds in understanding the particularity and defining of a fundamental aspect of its semantic purposes. It is an interest that has become currently a source of coining delicate questions that regain privilege to these multi-typed textual aspects, deals with their characteristics and defines the ways of their function. Basically, the title is considered a type of *intertextuality* and a main link because it is a text - a subject and the whole body of the text is a predicate.

However, al-Ṭāhir Rawayniyeh maintains that the title is the first prominent printed phrase of the book or a text that opposes another text to substitute, support or define it and emphasizes its uniqueness through time; it is, first and foremost, a created sign that can be moderated and its interpretation allows to introduce a number of allusions and prophecies regarding the content of the text, its referential role, its associations and its symbolic meanings. Out of these characteristics, the title performs the functions of incitement and publicity.<sup>1</sup>

Muḥammad al-Hādī al-Matwī believes that the title is a linguistic message that tells about the identity of the text, defines its content, draws the reader to it and tempts him to read it.<sup>2</sup> Similarly, Bushrā al-Bustanī believes that the title is a linguistic message that tells about the identity of the text, defines its content, draws the reader to it and tempts him to read it and considers it as the external text that indicates the internal one

<sup>1</sup> Al-Ṭāhir Rawayniyeh (1995). Shi'riyyat al-Dāl fī Bunyat al-Istihlāl fī al-Sard al-'Arabī al-Qadīm dhimm al-Mashi'a wa al-Naş al-'Adabī. *Proceedings of: Forum of the Arabic Language and Literature Institute*. 'Annāba: Publications of University of Bājī Mukhtār, 17/15, May, 1995, p. 141.

<sup>2</sup> Al-Matwī, Muḥammad al-Hādī (1999). Shi'riyyat 'Unwān Kitāb al-Sāq 'alā al-Sāq fimā Huwa al-Faryāq. 'Alam al-Fikr Magazine. Kuwait: Published by al-Majlis al-Watanī li al-Thaqāfa wa al-Funūn wa al-'Adab. Vol. 28, N0. 1, July/ September, p. 457.

and its content." <sup>3</sup> However, the Spanish researcher Joseph Besa Comprubi openly admits that the title is multidimensional because it creates different links of signs that are connected with the literary work, the text and the reader.<sup>4</sup> Thus, the title is considered fundamental in any creative work. It is agreed by critics that the title is connected with the text in a natural way. It completes it without disagreeing with it and reflects it sincerely and accurately.

However, Muhammad Fikrī al-Jazzār maintains that, despite its brevity, the title constitutes the highest possible degree of economy by which the creator can draw the receiver's attention to his work. By choosing a title, the creator links the power of his product with the power or weakness of the title.<sup>5</sup>

### III. WHAT IS THE GOAL OF THIS STUDY<sup>6</sup> ?

After this exposition of the most important previous studies about the function of the 'title', it is time to introduce the most important aspects that characterize this study and distinguish it from other studies:

- The study deals mainly with the title of the poem, leaving other types of titles such as the title of a collection of poetry, title of any essay, title of a short story and title of a novel for other separate studies. Other previous studies focused on the types of poetic and fictional titles, except for the short study by 'Abd al-Rahmān 'Ismāel, whose study was limited to the title in the Arab poem/ qassida. Besides, I have not found any previous study that deals with the title in such a detailed and comprehensive way as this study does. Yet, it should be pointed out that the previous studies that are mentioned here and those that are not mentioned gave a large benefit to this study as they constitute its scientific components and sources.

- The study provides the best known tools and styles that connect between the title and the poem itself, which ultimately serves the comprehensive critical analysis of the poetic text.

### IV. THE POEM OF "ŞARKHAT 'I'RĀB/ A CRY OF PARSING" BY RĪTĀ 'ABDO 'ODEH

#### *Şarkhat 'I'rāb/ A Cry of Parsing*

*Till when*

*Will the true Man*

*Be a hidden pronoun*

*And the semi-verbal dwarfs*

*Raise and lower*

*What they want....*

*And when they want...!*

As for the position of poem *Şarkhat 'I'rāb/ A Cry of Parsing*, it is the eighteenth in the order of series of the poems. The title was separated from the text and did not appear in its body. It is typed in a larger size in bold so that it will take a directional, guiding and indicative value.

The title might be a predicate of an omitted subject. *Şarkhat 'I'rāb/ A Cry of Parsing* is a nominal sentence that consists of a subject and its predicate is omitted. What is omitted of the title is the predicate, the following information that is given in the body of the text and it serves as the predicate of the omitted subject. Therefore, it is a complementary title that includes within it the center of the poem. However, the reader might be able to understand the text and the central idea of the text of the poem without going back to it. This means that this title is different from the other complementary titles without which the text cannot be understood. Depending on that, it is possible to consider it a partially complementary title. Besides, the presence of the subject at the level of writing does not absolutely mean its presence at the level of thought and intellect and thus, the "Cry" will continue to be a deluge or, in short, merely a dream that will continue to escape from us as long as the condition is static and does not change.

Thus, the title of *Şarkhat 'I'rāb/ A Cry of Parsing* summarizes the content of the poem. However, the absence of the predicate or its omission in the title of *Şarkhat 'I'rāb* is likely to refer us to the absence of a fundamental issue in the life of the writer/ poem, which is in my view, the absence of 'change'. Under the section about the 'components of the title', Shu'ayb Hlefi, writes in his study about the 'main title' and subtitle or 'secondary title' and about the two features of 'ambiguity' and 'omission'. He writes about the structure of the title, saying: This is defined in five types: the nominal sentence, adverbs, adjectives, sentence type, and exclamatory type. He also sees that there are other components that look at the title in a free liberated and active way, which includes five components: the active component, the time component, the space component, the objective component, the event component, and the animate or inanimate components.<sup>7</sup>

If we focus on the two features of 'ambiguity' and 'omission', we can argue that the first feature is absent as there is no ambiguity in the title of the poem here, and if 'ambiguity' exists, the text soon removes it because it, i.e. the text, constitutes a reply and a clarification. What remains is the feature of 'omission'.

As said before, and in order to understand the indication of the title of the study here, it is necessary to connect

<sup>3</sup> Al-Bustānī, Bushrā (2002). *Qirā'āt fī al- Shi'r al-'Arabī al-Hadīth*. 1<sup>st</sup> ed., Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-'Arabī, p. 34.

<sup>4</sup> Comprubi, Joseph Besa (2002). *Les fonctions du titre nouveaux actes sémiotiques* 82, Pulim Université de Limoges, p.91.

<sup>5</sup> Al-Jazzār, Muḥammad Fikrī (1988). *Al-'Unwān wa Simiotiqa al-Tawāsul al-'Adabī*. Cairo: *al-Hay'ah al-Missriyya al-'amma li al-Kitāb*, p. 15.

<sup>6</sup> For information about the importance of the title, see Hamdāwī, Jamīl (1997). "Al-Simiotiqa wa al-'Anwana," *'Ālam al-Fikr*, 25/3, Kuwait, p. 107.

<sup>7</sup> Hlefi, Shu'ayb (1992). *'Istrātijjiyyat al-'Unwān: al-Nass al-Muwāzī li al-Riwāya. Al-Karmel*. Haifa: University of Haifa 81/46, p. 86.

it with the body of the poem as a whole and read the whole body attentively and insightfully. If we take the method of looking for the indication of the text in its title, starting from the top to understand the bottom, we may not achieve our goal. Therefore, we have to read the title and the text simultaneously in order to understand it and its purpose. Thus, the word "Cry" is connected organically with the body of the text through its indication. The 'Cry' is the best linguistic style that suits the form in which the poem is written. By doing so, the poem adopts a form through the tyranny of pain and the labyrinth of wondering. The best expression about this form is the 'impression' that we see in the form of the poem: "*Till when will the true human being stay like a 'hidden pronoun' and the dwarfs that are semi-verbal make this person 'a subject' and that person 'an object' when they like?*"

This means that the word "Cry" is used to express the essence and content of the poem and its form. The real life is neglected and the evidence is that the 'dwarfs', who are "semi-verbal", continue to make "nouns" (people) "objects or "subjects" as they like! The poet uses 'grammatical' terms to symbolize political and social deeds. Making someone a 'subject' means in colloquial Arabic 'putting him in a high position' and making someone an 'object' means 'putting him at a lower position'. This metaphorical comparison implies the idea that non-valuable small insignificant low people rule real life and they have the power to decide and to raise or lower the status of other valuable significant high people.

However, when we finish reading the poem, we are likely to reinforce one condition and discard other conditions but the body of the poem is the rest of the title, which appears through its reading, isolated from the text or an incomplete title that raises queries and the answer comes through the poem. Thus, the reader realizes that the 'Cry' is a cry of pain and moaning.

The title *Ṣarkhat 'I'rāb/ A Cry of Parsing* summarizes the poem and urges the reader to investigate, scrutinize and contemplate. So, he reads it twice: if there is a 'Cry', why is it connected to 'I'rāb/ parsing? This 'Cry' calls for a 'change' and if the 'Cry' stands for 'change', 'I'rāb, linguistically, implies the declension that takes place at the end of nouns and verbs to imply a change in their grammatical function. Thus, it implies the desire for change in social and political life. 'I'rāb is the change of fragmentation and breaking up of positions and statuses, which should take a final form. The case diacritics should be put in their right places and the words should take their right places despite the differences in the factors that are added to the "Cry" and cause a change in its pronunciation and indication and grammatical function. In this way, the utterance of "Cry" identifies and corresponds with "'I'rāb" in the structure of the title.

If the "Cry" is to express pain, sorrow and disappointment and its linkage to "'I'rāb" is to indicate the idea that change is desirable, though it did not and will not take place, then the name is separated from the named. When the reader reads the title after reading the poem, he will recall his

first reading and consolidates the second reading and will know that 'Cry' indicates the depth of pain that results from absence of change; there is pain in death, and there is rebirth in the 'Cry'. Injustice exists wherever semi-verbal dwarfs lower and promote whatever they like while the true human being remains a 'hidden pronoun'. This is what the query that opens the poem emphasizes. It asks: *Till when?*

Through this indication, the title has become a key for interpreting the text<sup>8</sup> which was able to draw a painting in which two realities are in conflict in which the 'dwarfs' beat the true human being; corruption overcomes goodness and righteousness; humiliation overcomes honor, and decline overcomes loftiness. There is no doubt that this interpretation would not work without our tight connection between the body of the text and its title. If the title is separated from the text, it will not convey the real indication and the poetic message that the text intends to convey to the readers. The title of this poem is indicative and effective as a linguistic sign and it works according to accurate tools that connect it with the text on the one hand, and guarantees its effect on the receiver, on the other. It is the "poetics" that characterizes a lot of Rīṭā Abdo's poems if not all of them. With these attributes, the title becomes the "real medium" of the text, according to Fortier.<sup>9</sup>

As mentioned above, the title *Ṣarkhat 'I'rāb/ A Cry of Parsing* is a nominal sentence/ phrase that consists of two connected words. Each of them is a *legal sign* (légisigne), informative and symbolical. The first sign "*Ṣarkha/ Cry*" is *legal* (légisigne) because it belongs to a linguistic process and system that has special grammatical rules (Standard Arabic), and *symbolical* because it is one of the words that can express meaning by itself (Les catégorématiques). Regarding the syntactic aspect, it consists of a subject (in the nominative case), with a 'governing' meaning according to the Basra Grammarians/ Syntacticians. Regarding its dictionary lexicological meaning, 'Ibn Manẓūr al-Masrī (711 H.) says: "*al-Ṣarkha/ the Cry*" is a strong shout at a moment of fear or disaster; *al-Ṣarkha* is al-Mustaghīth, the one who calls for help.<sup>10</sup>

The second sign '*I'rāb/ Parsing* is also a legal sign (légisigne). In my view, Rīṭā Abdo resorted to the word "*I'rāb*", which is in the view of many semioticians, an indexical sign (Les Syncatégorématiques) because it does not express any meaning on its own outside context; it gives meaning by its combination with other items. The word '*I'rāb* has the rhythm of the radical '*If 'āl* (أفعال).

<sup>8</sup> To study the title of any text, Muḥammad Muftāḥ suggests two paths: one starts from the title/ the top to understand the textual body, the base/ which he calls "al-Qim'ada (a combination of two Arabic words: *qimma/top* + *qā' iada/ base = qim'ada*); the second path starts from the studied text, which he calls *al-Qā'ima*, (which is a combination of two Arabic words: *al- qā' iada/ base + al-qimma/ top*); Muftāḥ, Muḥammad (1990). *Dināmiyyat al-Nass*. Beirut: al-Markiz al-Thaqāfi al-'Arabī, p. 72.

<sup>9</sup> *Al-'ilm al-Thaqāfi*. Al-Ribāt, S. 33, N0. 27/09/2002. p. 7.

<sup>10</sup> 'Ibn Manẓūr, 'Abu al-Faḍl Muḥammad bin Mukarram (1994). *Lisān al-'Arab*. 1<sup>st</sup> ed. Vol. 15. Part 1. Beirut: Dār Sādir, p. 85.

From the syntactical grammatical point of view, the word *'I'rāb* is governed (*muḍāf 'ilayhi*) by a noun to the governing word "*ṣarkha*" (*muḍāf*) and the predicate is omitted as we mentioned before.<sup>11</sup> 'Ibn Manzour says in al-Lisān: *'I'rāb* means changing the annotation signs of parsing at the end of the word as a result of the difference of explicit or implicit elements that enter it.

"*al-'I'rāb*", according to the definition of linguists, is: Expression and clarification of something. If you say to an Arab "*'A'rib lī*" you mean: express and clarify your words to me. Similarly, "*'A'raba al-kalām wa 'A'raba bihi*" means "showed and clarified it". "*'I'rāb*" was given this name because it shows and clarifies. Therefore, the person who is eloquent in his speech is described as "*'A'raba*", i.e. "He was eloquent".<sup>12</sup>

The question (*Till when?*) transfers the anxiety which is conveyed by the title due to its multiplicity of its indicative semantic tracks. Anxiety has extension through the disease of the question (*Till when?*) and it increases the reader's anxiety and puzzle when he enters the text, where he clashes with a bitter reality that is related by the poem. In this way, the title is connected with the text through a direct relationship that is revealed in its expansion into the introduced meanings within the body of the text.

The absence of the question mark at the end of the question "*'Ilā matā /Till when?*" implies that the poet does not want to ask about "till when will the true person stay *an implied hidden pronoun*". In fact, it is a kind of a 'rhetoric question, an exclamation and expression of denunciation of an unjust situation regarding the 'true' person.

In my view, only the poet knows when the answer to the question of "*Till when!*" She intends to keep the title's indication evasive and absent, and cannot be arrested. *Ṣarkhat 'I'rāb / A Cry of Parsing* as a title declares about itself as an initial sentence/ phrase in the text emphasizing that it has a following completion. The exclamatory rhetoric question (*Till when!*) as a first sentence is a logical completion to the title, which refers and tells about the theme of the poem. Perhaps the poet has some sympathy for the Arab reader and his condition and avoids him the great shock which comes in the text and avoids revealing it in the title.

<sup>11</sup> It is known in Arabic syntax that in the genitive construction (*'Idāfa*), the *'Idāfa* to a *Ma'arif* (definite) noun, adds 'definiteness to the *Muḍāf* noun. e.g. *ghulāmu Zaid / Zaid's lad*: "*Ghulām*" is *Nakira* (indefinite) before *'Idāfa*. By *'Idāfa* to the Proper noun *Zaid*, *Ghulām* becomes *Ma'arifa / definite*, too. However, the noun that is "*Muḍāf*" to *Nakira/ indefinite* noun, e.g. *Ghulām 'Imra'ah / a Woman's lad*. In this combination, the *'Idāfa* adds the meaning of "*Takhsīs*" / Specification, because (*Ghulām /lad*) before "*'Idāfa*" is *Nakira* (indefinite) and is not specified. When it was added to *Nakira/ Indefinite*, it became specified by a woman. (What is meant by *Takhsīs* is that the meaning does not become fully definite. Thus, "*Ghulām 'Imra'ah*" (a woman's lad) is more specific than (*Ghulām*) but it is not distinguished and specified like (*Ghulām Zaid/Zaid's lad*). See for example: Al-'Azharī, Khālid (2000). *Sharḥ al-Tasrīḥ 'alā al-Tawḥīd*. Edited by: Muḥammad Bāsīl Uyūn al-Sūd. 1<sup>st</sup> ed. Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'ilmiyya, p. 677.

<sup>12</sup> 'Ibn Manzour. *Lisān al-'Arab*. p. 589.

To sum up, we can say that, generally speaking, this study deals with two semantic fields: the political semantic field and the social semantic field<sup>13</sup>.

Rītā 'Odeh's political vision is derived from *Ṣarkhat 'I'rāb*, and from her relationship with her Palestinian society and certain events through which this people undergoes and their effect on her. Besides, this study limited the social lexicon of the poem through a number of indications that reflect the social life of the Palestinian Arab people of: faith, social types and behavior, injured psychological soul. The writer's language dominated the language of the poem here. There is no doubt that there is an ideological attitude that the writer reflects in her employment of such language<sup>14</sup>. Jamīl Hamdāwī, says in this regard that the title declares the writer's purpose and his ideological intentions. It is a reference that includes within itself the relationship, the symbol and the intensity of the meaning in which the writer tries to assert his intention in a full way.<sup>15</sup>

Irony is one of the most important techniques that are current in literary writing. In the first case, it is employed as a technique that requires wit and shrewdness. In the second case, it requires critical knowledge especially that it includes different types, styles and tools. The human being employs it to face serious conditions that he cannot face at the level of ordinary life. It is possible through irony to approximate the world and bring it into the familiar and the habitual. Thus, it is a dramatic instrument to face dramatic conditions, which might appear frightful and irresistible in daily life.<sup>16</sup>

## V. SUMMARY

The selection of the writer to the title of his work is often mixed with the writer's intentionality. Anyway, the writer does not choose a title arbitrarily; on the contrary, he intends to express through it many indications and enlightenments that contribute to decoding of the symbols of its text whether in its style and structure or its semantic indications and its interconnectivity with the following text. Selection of *Ṣarkhat 'I'rāb* suggests a lot of indications. When the reader finishes

<sup>13</sup> See for example: Al-Karakī, Khālid (1989). *Al-Rumūz al-Turāthiyya al-'Arabiyya fī al-Shi'r al-'Arabi al-Hadīth*. 1<sup>st</sup> ed. Beirut, 'Ammān. Dār al-Jil. Maktabat al-Rā'id al-'Ilmiyya, p. 21; Hamdāwī, Jamīl: *Sūrat Al-'Unwān fī al-Riwāya al-'Arabiyya*, p. 6; Suleiman, Nabīl (1985). *'As'ilat al-Wāqī'yya wa al-'Iltizām*. 1<sup>st</sup> ed. Syria: Dār al-Hiwār li al-Nashr wa al-Tawzī', p. 92, 93; 'Assī, Mīchāil (1970). *Al-'Adab wa al-Fann: Bahth Jamālī fī al-'Anwā' wa al-Madāris al-'Adabiyya wa al-Fanniyya*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Beirut: Manshūrāt al-Maktab al-Tijārī li al-Tibā'a wa al-Nashr wa al-Tawzī', p. 41, 43. In general, the social role of literature is revealed in developing its cognitive, intellectual and educational loads by the knowledge, experience and guidance with which it provides the receiver. See for example, Suleiman, Nabīl (1985). *'As'ilat al-Wāqī'yya wa al-'Iltizām*. p. 93.

<sup>14</sup> See for example: 'Affāya, Muḥammad Nūr al-Dīn (1985). *'Al-Mar'ah wa al-Kitāba.*" *Majallat al-Wiḥda*. 1<sup>st</sup> year. N0 9, June.

<sup>15</sup> Hamdāwī, Jamīl (1977). *Al-Simīotiqa wa al-'Anwān*. 'Alam al-Fikr. 3/25. Kuwait, p. 107.

<sup>16</sup> Bakhtin clarifies the term Parody by describing it as a kind of 'stylization' in which the purpose of the personifying language is opposite to the purposes of the personified language which makes the first capable of destroying the second. See for example: Bakhtin, Mikael (2009). *Al-Khitāb al-Riwā'i*. Translated by: Muḥammad Barrādīh. Cairo: Dār al-Fikr li al-Dirāsāt wa al-Nashr wa al-Tawzī'. p. 30-31.

reading the poem in a contextual way, he/ she will notice that the title is an independent discourse of text in itself.

The poem under study here focuses on the title because it is the center of the poem and anything else is just an environment. However, the relationship between them is a dialectic relationship that is reflected in the interaction of the text with the title through harmony and semantic indicative objectification or disappointing the reader's horizon of anticipation. The title *Şarkhat 'I'rāb/ A Cry of Parsing* constitutes a complicated symbolic image in which the retroactive flashback dimension identifies with the connotative one. In other words, the strings of the title naming intermingle and the lights of truth fade to be compensated by indications of the symbolical or, more accurately, the allegorical implication.

Artistically, it is possible to consider the title is an exciting phrase that draws the reader's attention because of the difference and contradiction between the words " *Şarkhat* " and " *'I'rāb* ". Socially, the title indicates the poet's criticism of the Arab society and Arab individual, who is living in a position in which the true man has become an unknown person while the dwarfs are appointed and raised. Thematically, it is a direct way that describes the subject of the text, which is done in a symbolical way.

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