

METRES OF ARABIC POETRY IN THE SEMIOTICS OF SPACE AND SPACE IN THE ARABIC POETRY METRES

Esad Duraković

In the ancient, or the so-called pre-Arabic poetry¹, space was important to an extent that one can see that literature of that period is particularly “susceptible” to that kind of research. Hence, the approach to the ancient Arabic poetry from the angle of semiotics of space disqualifies numerous incompetent, as well as pretentious, orientalist and self-orientalist studies representing this poetry as poetically incoherent and inconsistent, thus, inferior to the poetic tradition of the western cultural circle. I shall observe the notion of space in this poetry at several levels: as part of the artistic world, i.e. as textual space; as a text in space, especially spatial metaphors in the terminology of the Arabic metrical system, where even the orthographical representation of couplets suggests space, i.e. *horizontality*, since two couplets that consist an integral verse are written horizontally.

The old Arabic qasida is an imaginary voyage, thus the entire poem containing in average about a hundred couplets is a form of travel literature, which profoundly explains its poetics: The dominance of similes and other description devices, a polythematic character of the qasida, the fragmentation of space that significantly resembles film sequences, gradation of time, etc. From the very first *bayt* (couplet), space is transported in the poem (the beginning of the voyage and pausing at the remains of a camp site); the poem, in fact, entirely and diligently forms the space. Hence, space is the main protagonist of the old Arabic qasida.² From the angle of semiotics of space, it is particularly interesting that the coherency of this poetics is not realised in the domain of artistic production only – this, in the corpus of the seminal Arabic qasidas – rather, it is surprisingly well transferred to the literary-theoretical terminology, especially into versification, thus “extending” the coherency which becomes very “encompassing”: Space dominates not only in the ancient Arabic qasida, but also in its theory. In other words, the Arabic poetical tradition is completely

¹ I use the term *Arabic* entailing the pre-Islamic poetry in the Arabian Peninsula that for a long time remained a poetic norm in the Oriental-Islamic literature.

² I have published a paper on the issue which corresponds to this text: “Prostor kao junak u staroj arabljanskoj kasidi” [Space as a Protagonist in the Classical Arabic Qasida] in the journal *Novi Izraz*, No. 49-50, July-December 2010, pp. 133-142.

immersed in space, even the entire culture – from poetry to religion and (its) eschatology expresses full awareness of space. Let us now observe the way in which semiotics is recognised in the Arabic POETIC metre, i.e. in its terminology.

In the ancient Arabic qasida, a verse is written horizontally, in two “couplets”. In fact, that structural unit is more than a couplet because its two parts form a significantly stronger bond than that observed in our poetry, for example. The first Arabic couplet does not contain the degree of independence as does a couplet in our poetry: At the level of meaning/content, the sense of Arabic couplets is complete only within a verse (*bayt*) as a whole, and it is especially important that the rhyme appears predominantly at the end of the second couplet, which to a significant extent expresses the dependence of the first and the second couplet. In the horizontal writing in the form of two “couplets”, the classical Arabic verse has an emphasised completeness, a relative independence in the meaning and form from other verses of the qasida. That is the arabesque-like poetical principle of structural parcelling and a consistent introduction of segments into the arabesque-like sense of the whole. The European translations of classical Arabic poetry – including, thus, those in Bosnian – transpose that horizontal structure of couplets into a vertical, visualising the couplets by introducing the second couplet to the right, or by making a space after every second verse. Neither of those solutions is successful, since “stretching” changes both horizontal couplets into a vertical. That is an inadequate information on the manner the source text is structured. I have already explained the sense of the *horizontal* structure in the classical poetry, and in that culture in general, elsewhere,³ emphasising it is a poetical dominant of planography and transparency that is presented in the stylistic devices characterised as tropes of description. Finally, it is especially important to emphasise that western translations of the classical Arabic verses – especially the ancient verses – fail to express the poetical essence of the verse and the qasida: The highly important nuances in which the first “couplet” of the source text “owns” to the second “couplet” the poetic design are not transposed. Another important point – they both, in a whole, make their meaning independent from other verses, to the extent of self-sufficiency. Thus, a *verse* becomes a *house*: The Arabic term for a verse is *bayt*, and that also means a *house*. In other words,

³ Cf.: Esad Duraković, *The Poetics of Ancient and Classical Arabic Literature. Orientology*, Routledge, London and New York, 2005, especially the chapter “The simile in Old Arabic poetry: a world at a distance”.

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in the Arabic poem, the verse becomes a *house* in horizontal, planographic space (the world of the Bedouin was exceptionally horizontal, planographic), and that is important in the semantics of space. It is possible that the verse would not have been called that way if it did not consist of two, but one couplet. For those reasons the ancient and classical Arabic poetry is handicapped in translations into languages of other cultures.

Of course, a house is a sign of space, but that sign contains numerous other potentials that to a significant extent enrich the semiosis. In accordance to the principle of contrast or binary oppositions, a *house* strongly opposes the (Bedouin) open space and the nomadic lifestyle; a house is a Bedouin's ideal; it is, apart from oasis, the sum of all imaginable riches. Thus, heaven is presented as an oasis, and passing to the Other World is passing to the House of Eternity ('irtihal 'ila dar al-baqa'). Thus, in the system of values of an ancient Arab, a house/bayt is the value of the highest order, since it represents all that is on the "opposite pole" of his world, his troublesome reality. A house in a Bedouin's vast planographic space is almost a grotesque semiotic system whose stylistic potentials are significantly strengthened by that very planographic quality of space. At the same time, a house represents tranquillity, comfortableness, even a change in the way of life, while the content of the house – *the house within* – stands in a binary opposition against the eternally open outer space. The space inside the house, as a closed space, with a number of other internal signs of space, remains for a Bedouin a functional space, beyond his reach, since his poem represents an imaginary voyage, hence, the house he builds is also imaginary, it is in the verse, since only the *bayt* (verse) remains his house. Had the Bedouin truly built houses and settled, they would have ceased being the Bedouin and would have found themselves in a completely different position semiotically: They would have considerably experienced the *closed space, the space "in"* and that experience would have led them towards the drama which stems from the strong contrast between the open and closed space.⁴ However, the Bedouin have experienced the open space, the eternal movement, the voyage, and that is one of the reasons why their poetry is lyrical, without the dramatic and the epic literary forms. The house remains in the poem: The house is the verse.

⁴ Marina Katnić-Bakaršić wrote a valuable paper on the dramatic quality of leaving the closed and entering the open space: "Od stvarnih do imaginarnih prostora u romanu *Derviš i smrt* Meše Selimovića" [From real to imaginary space in the novel *Death and the Dervish* by Meša Selimović], *Novi izraz*, No. 49-50, juli-decembar, Sarajevo, 2010.

In such understanding of the semiotics of space, it is essential to keep in mind an important fact that the exemplary old Arabic poetry developed among the Bedouin, not in urban settlements. Even some significant poets – much later – in the Abbasid epoch – would leave Baghdad, a global cultural metropolis at the time – to “specialise” poetry among the Bedouin. Inertia had remained very strong.

It is interesting that the most famous Arabic monolingual dictionary, the *Lisan al-`Arab*, indicates that the term *bayt* primarily signified a kind of a “more comfortable” tent, hence, it can be assumed that the couplet was called *bayt*: In that way, it gained significance in the spirituality of the Arabs to whom poetry was the primary spiritual activity, and, by extension, the semiotics of space also gained greater importance. Further in the text, I will show the way in which such a sign (*bayt*) also adopted other meanings and that it performs complex tasks of the cognitive metaphor. But, before that, in order to emphasise that the *bayt* signified a greater, more comfortable tent, it is important to say that the Arabs used, in the heroic period, the word *al-kiba'* to denote a small tent made of cilice. That word never had a chance of becoming the term that would mean *verse*, although it is also part of the semiotics of space, because it does not contain the stylistic charge in space that the word *bayt* possesses, and it is not positioned the same in the value system of the Arabs, and those values are formed and brought into an order in the semiotics of space.

The expose has so far shown that binary oppositions *house/desert, open space/closed space* are presented as “spatial values”, transposed into the value system in general, even in the domain of ethics. It is interesting, in that sense, to briefly indicate the way in which the “positive semantics” of the root BYT from which the word *bayt* meaning *verse* and *house* derived had spread.

Some primary meanings of the root BYT include: *to spend the night, sleep over, etc.*, which, in the semiotics of space, certainly is an opposition to the *daily movement, daily activities*. In that sense, in the same semantic field, this root also means *serenity*, with an optimal positivity. That is what the *verse* was for an ancient Arab: the *bayt* was a place for him to settle; the *verse* was like a gastropod shell for him – he would always carry in/on him the *bayt/verse* in which he found serenity, a shelter, a feeling of safety. Simply, any other term for the *verse* would be inadequate to the Bedouin on the move; no other term would have as successfully expressed the content this term entails,

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although today we are unaware of all the nuances this word carries. A strong opposition of signs in the modelling of textual space should also be kept in mind. Namely, the *bayt* (as a structural unit of the *qasida*, as a couplet) signifies also a house as the “isolation of meaning”, as self-sufficiency of the couplet, as serenity of the poet in a *bayt* that resembles the serenity of a house, but all those *bayts*/houses (the grand “urbanisation of space”!) are simultaneously *mobile* in a special sense, since they are part of a large structure – in a *qasida* which, as a whole, represents an imaginary voyage. The contrast is significant, it is considerably defamiliarized, and, in that sense, the poem as a work of art and its metrical terminology cooperate the way that can barely be initially predicted. The ever-moving Bedouin is building a “house” for himself in a poem and by a poem, a house which is itself an imaginary voyage; a house to him is not only a poem, rather, each verse is a house. The semiotics of space is important at all levels. Immersion into space is complete. Poetry and its metrical terminology show that chaos and randomness dominate in that immersion since the goal is optimal organisation because poetics is establishment of a system, regardless of how broadly understood the system may be.

In the same semantic field, the *BYT* root is used for wedding also, but in that peculiar sense where the semanteme means *serenity* but not *inactivity*. It is the tranquillity of the night without sleep, in a peculiar state and due to specific reasons, until the dawn. Thus, this root is frequently used in Arabic in the sentence-phrase *Bata al-ra\ul*, which broadly means – *A man got married*. However, this translation is not completely satisfactory, since it neglects several complex meanings. This translation is, in fact, reductionist and, at the same time, interpretative, while an array of meanings the sentence originally carries should be expressed in the following way.

Since the very semantic field of the words *to spend the night* and find tranquillity in the night watch due to peculiar reasons, it follows that the subject of the verb *BYT* has settled and found peace – in the opposition to the arduous daily activities; in the night it finds the ultimate pleasure. *Bata al-ra\ul* means much more than *The man has spent the night* or *The man got married*: he let himself go – as to something that is supreme in his life – to a unique, immeasurable “experience of the night”, i.e., to the wake next to a woman.⁵ The place of waking and the reason for doing that, in fact, become his

⁵ “Nightly wisdom” and nightly activity are in that culture strongly and positively contrasted to the daily paradigm, which is lit to the point of paleness, without any signs of any form of a dream. In that culture, as we can see, all matters of an outstanding importance for spirituality take place at night: from the man’s

home/house, which, in his experience and in his world, is the sum of the ultimate fortunes. His manhood and masculinity, also his emotiveness, entwin in the lover's wake next to a woman – in a world which is a tiresome and endless plane in the daytime.⁶ Hence, in the semiotics of space and in the Arab system of values the house/verse and a wake next to a woman are placed in the same plane and in the same “semiotic frame”. All the said notions are part of the semiotics of space. That is obvious for the sign *house*, and, also, I believe that I managed to present the way in which the couplet is turned into the sign of the space, which is quite surprising, and the same applies to the phrase *get married*, keeping in mind the semantic outcomes of words and their abundant social “deposits”.

The verb stemming from this root is used in the Qur'an to denote utmost positivity: *And those who spend the night to their Lord prostrating and standing [in prayer]*⁷. Prophet Nuh also recited his dua to God, calling his vessel a *bayt/house* since it contained all that was necessary for the salvation of humanity: It was a refuge, a safe haven.⁸ My goal is not to deliver an exhaustive presentation of meanings that stem from the fact that the same name is used for Noah's Ark and the Bedouin's verse. In short, semiosis, in this case, remarkably presents itself in an entire culture; it is not only an effective metaphor, but also a magnificent “integration” of culture in the semiotics of space, its vast and evaluative connectedness from the hierohistory in which Noah's *bayt/vessel* saves humanity, God's word and Commission as highest values, all the way to the *bayt/verse* that is as lose to an Arab as is Noa's Ark. Both signs (*bayt/vessel* and *bayt/verse*) are part of the semiotics of space in which they are significantly enriched: in the semiotics of space, a *vessel* is an extraordinary styleme which transfers its vast semiotic and cognitive potentials to the Bedouin's *verse* as a *bayt*. Isn't it now clearer

wake next to a woman, to the highest instance of devotion – the night wake by falling to the ground before God and prostrating before Him (Qur'an, 25:64); the most important events took place in the night – from the cosmically important religious act to the planetary important literary narration. Namely, God delivered His Revelation from Heaven in the Night of Power (Laylat al-Qadr), and the Prophet ascended into Heaven at night, while also it was during the night that Scheherazade told her enchanting tales, always stopping at the bring of dawn. Let us try and imagine that work under some other title! Both fiction and passion are situated to the velvety lap of the night. That is why *bayt* is not only a house, but also a nightly tranquillity in passion. That is the *verse*.

⁶ The same kind of “activity” is described in our language by a sentence *spavao je sa ženom* [he slept with a woman], but it is, in fact, the opposite of what the Arabic phrase *Bata al-ra`ul* means (He spent the night with a woman).

⁷ Qur'an, 25:64.

⁸ Qur'an, 71:28. Cf. Ibn Manzur, *Lisan al-'Arab*, entry *bayt*, Dar al-ma`arif, al-Qahira, s. a.

why the Bedouin's poetry was most developed poetry (even when the khalifate was at the peak) and what the relation is that fact to the one that the verse was called *bayt*/house?! Had the cradle of the Arabic poetry been a metropolis, it is questionable whether the verse would have been called the *bayt*, but it is certain that even in that case, the *bayt* would not have been in the same position in the system of values, just as it would not have acquired the same meaning in the semiotics of space.

Etymologically speaking, *bayt* also denoted a *palace*, apart from the aforementioned sign a *large tent*, i.e., it denoted a house or a building of special value. Stylogeny of the *bayt* grew stronger to the metaphorical transfer in which it was a sign for honour and nobility, do that the syntagms AL AL-BAYT and AHL AL-BAYT are used for the noble family of Muhammed PBUH.

This analysis requires special attention to the largest of the Arab, and later also, Muslim shrine – the Kaaba – *Baytu-l-lah*, which literally translates as the House of Allah, i.e. *Allah's bayt*. It is understood that this is a figurative meaning. By calling the shrine that way (and also *Baytu-l-haram*), God “met” the Arab, and, generally, human, need to express through words the most supreme level of values that is *stabilised* in the house, since *bayt*, in the semiotics of space, especially in the Arab nomadic space, emphasised *stabilisation*; the house is opposite to the open space, instability, etc. The Kaaba is primarily a *bayt* with all the semantic content that I have already mentioned, bit it also surpasses them – after those contents are collected – and also advances them by transferring them to the sacral area (with a multitude of positive characteristics). In the semiotics of space, the Kaaba is optimally defamiliarized. Primarily, in the ancient period, it symbolised physical presence and spiritual stability; it was noticeable in the open space. Also, the optimal simplicity of Kaaba should be kept in mind, architectural humbleness stemming from its cubic shape. The Arabs who called their verse the *bayt* used the same noun to denote their shrine, most probably without ever imagining that, owing to Islam, the very complex meaning of the word *bayt* would spread throughout the world (i.e. the ummah). The *bayt* as a poetic construct (a couplet) and the *bayt* as the *House of God* strongly interacted and effectively exchanged their contents.⁹

⁹ The Kaaba was a dominant sign in its space, and not coincidentally: it is a shrine in every respect – not only a place of pilgrimage, but also a “concentration of tradition”, of the Prophet's Hegira and his triumphant return to his city of birth, it is the very source of the Arabic language and poetry... Buildings

At the dawn of the Arabic-Islamic culture that shone throughout the world, the remarkable cooperation between the Kaaba as the *bayt* and the shrine on the one hand, and the *bayt* as the verse and pride of the Arabic spirit on the other was noted. Namely, according to the dominant version of history of the Arabic literature, the corpus of the best preserved Arabic ancient poems (the seven golden odes) was named *al-mu`allaqat*, since the poems were written in golden letters on the Egyptian silk and were displayed on the walls of Kaaba for all pilgrims to admire. If we accept this dominant version – and it should have been invented even if it did not exist – we inevitably arrive at a conclusion about its significance from the point of view of history of literature and poetology, as well as on some other aspects of remarkable characteristics of the corpus. On this occasion, I would like to cast some light on the significance of the said version from the point of view of my expose on the semiotics of space, i.e., on the metric terminology in connection with the semiotics of space.¹⁰ The Kaaba as the *bayt*, i.e., as a house, a palace, honour, including all the nuances that have been mentioned so far, represented a peculiar semiotic styleme, the symbol of the highest virtue, the outcome and the container of both the faith and the religion. It was a BAYT. Hundreds of *bayts* were hanged on the walls of that House/Bayt, *bayts* in the sense of verses, i.e. verses in the sense of the *bayt*. Without a doubt, that was an extraordinary way to realise the cooperation between the textual space (the verse as a *bayt*) and the text in space (*bayts* hanged on the walls of the Kaaba). They are the synonymous part of an extraordinary defamiliarization, hence, in such an experience of the most significant corpus of the Oriental-Islamic culture in general, in such an association of the temple as a shrine and

that are nowadays being erected in the Kaaba vicinity have established a different relationship towards the space, destroying the integrity of semiotic, cultural, historical and religious meaning of the *bayt*.

¹⁰ The title *al-Mu`allaqat* of the corpus discussed is but one of many titles it has, this one being dominant. Some Arab philologists and other authorities (Ibn Rachik, Ibn Khaldun, Ibn `Abd Rabbih, etc.) state that the poems have such a title because they were hanged on the walls of the Kaaba (*`allaqa* means, among other, *to hang*), while some other Arab authorities, also from the classical period, denied such origin of the title (those include, among other, al-Jahiz, al-Mubarrad, al-Isfahani). From what I have been familiar with, the last author that offered an in-depth analysis of the title in the introductory section of his book, stating that as the alleged proof that the poems were hanged on the walls of Kaaba, is Suleiman al-Shatti. (See: Suleiman al-Shatti, PhD, *al-Mu`allaqat wa `uyun al-usur*, `Alam al-ma`rifa, al-Kuwayt, 2011. Cf.: Dīma al-Šukr, “Nahwa tarik li šuruh al-mu`allaqat al-sab”, *al-Hayat*, 1 January 2012). Such approaches frequently confuse two things. First, one can conduct research and discuss from the point of view of history as a science whether or not those poems were hanged on the walls of Kaaba. That is a non-literary, positivist approach. Second, it is a fact that the tradition has accepted that title as its exceptionally valuable determinant. Thus, even if the Arabs did hang these exceptional poems on the walls of Kaaba, the tradition has done it and gave them such a title. Each additional denial of the title bearing that meaning is without merit and is even nonsensical from the point of view of history of *literature* as a system of values.

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the *bayt* as a poetic temple, the priority of direction is “neutralised”: what is more important and what came first – space in the text or the text in space. In fact, simultaneity is achieved there – both are the realities of the same order. It is understood that the sacralisation is also interactive in that relationship, for, once hanged on the walls of the shrine, the *bayt/verse* triumphantly finishes its original desire: to be realised as a sign of supreme values in the space of an Arab, while the Kaaba *sanctifies* the poetic tradition, i.e., the best part of that tradition, which is all enshrined in gold and silver, in addition to being *stretched in the vertical*, along the walls of the Kaaba, and those walls are certainly very special in that space as compared to the cilice tents.

The previous interpretation of the sign *bayt* shows that it is an exceptional testimony of the integrity of a culture, a testimony of the poetics that is coherent to an extent that it not only encompassed the very poetic creativity, but also the shrine – live as a whole. The totality of poetry in that world, in that space of signs, becomes obvious in such an approach.

The Arabic name for metre is also part of the semiotics of space, hence, it well cooperates with the sign *bayt*, as I have interpreted it. Namely, metre in Arabic is *ilm al-`arud* = the science about arud. Among other meanings, the *`arud* is the tent bearing pole, i.e., the backbone of the tent (and we have seen that the *bayt* is a sign for the verse). That is the sign of space. What follows is a number of terms in the field of metrics, which also are signs of space. I will not mention them all, only a few – as a strong confirmation of the way in which the ancient Arabic poetry and its metrics were formed in the semiotics of space, which is also in use today.

A part of the metric foot is called *watad*, meaning *tent peg*; the second part of the metric foot is prone to change and irregularities, and it is called *sabab*, meaning *tent cord*. The peg is stabile, reliable – just as the mentioned part of the metric food *watad*, while the tent cord is unstable, just as the mentioned part of the metric foot. It would be redundant to point out that those are the signs of space, i.e. that the space is modelled not only in the very poem, but also in the terminology of the science of poetry. Names of many poetic metres are also part of the semiotics of space: *al-tawil* = long; *al-madid* – stretched out; *al-ramal* = later; *al-sari`* = fast, etc. The word for *couplet* is *misra`*, meaning *the door panel*. A *bayt* has two *misra`as*, i.e., two door panels.

The unswerving Arabic dictionary *Lisan al-`Arab* reads that the name *bayt* was taken to denote the couplet (as well as *tent*) because the *bayt* contains the speech just as the tent “contains” a family.¹¹ Such an etymology supports the previous interpretation of this sign in the domain of semiotics of space: the tent is a refuge and a peace for a Bedouin and his family, since they spent their lives moving; it is simultaneously an oasis of the intimate, of the closeness, it is *the place* for strengthening of a family that was most important to that society. The same dictionary reads that the couplet was called *bayt* because it “organises speech” (I would say: it is the home of the Word), hence, it resembles a house that “organises” its chambers and all other parts of its structure.¹² In the Arabic culture which has always favoured poetry over prose, the opposite terms are used for poetry and prose, terms which are, at the same time, valuable. The prose is *nalr* (meaning: *dispersed, distrait, scattered*), and the very name suggests that it is less valuable, since neither the writer nor the reader are demanded a suitable effort in the “eternal organising of the structure”. Opposite to that, *nazm* is synonymous with poetry, and it means *to knot* (the pearls) *in succession, to organise, etc.*

The Arabic poetic metre is quantitative. That means that a single metre consists of a fixed number of feet, while a foot consists of a fixed number of long and short vowels, i.e., consonants without vowels in a particular syllable. Whether a syllable is open or closed depends on the number of long and short vowels, i.e., consonants without vowels in that particular syllable. It is not my intention to provide a detailed explanation here, but I do believe that it should only be said that the process of the syllable formation crucially rests on the manner in which the “moved” (*mutaharrik*) and the “resting” (*sakin*) consonants are ordered. Hence, the Arabic metrical foot is formed by both the “moved” and the “resting” consonants. Those are explicitly binary oppositions in the Bedouin’s space, fully analogous to the signs *desert* (movement) and *tent* (resting). Lotman’s thought that we are “immersed in the space of the language” proves very functional in this context.¹³ In fact, the Arabic language is in a completely defamiliarizing manner immersed into space *also* by the principle of binary oppositions in it, oppositions that are presented by the “moving” and the “resting” consonants.

¹¹ Ibn Manzur, op.cit.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Jurij Lotman, *Kultura i eksplozija* [Culture and Explosion], Croat. transl. Sanja Veršić, Zagreb 1998, p. 137.

Namely, in the Arabic text in general, only consonants are written, while the consonants without vowels are the “resting” (sakin) consonants. The vowels are called *harekat*, which means *movements*. Of course, it is not possible to speak the language in which only consonants are accumulated, but that is exactly the case in the Arabic language. That is why the reader needs to be familiar with the language. That is the specificity and a grave difficulty in learning the Arabic language: in order for a reader to be able to read a text at all, they need to master the entire grammar of the language.

Thus, the Arabic text, outside the reader’s activity, is completely passivized, for it consists solely of a succession of consonants that are “resting”, given that they are without vowels. All potentials of the text are, in a certain way, dormant. Of course, it is known that in other languages also only the reader’s activity “brings the text into life”, but, in the Arabic language, it is by far more emphasised – expressed in a different manner; to illustrate, it would be as if a text in English contained only consonants, so a reader would “initiate” it by adding certain vowels. Thus, in the Arabic language, the text is, without the reader, completely dormant, and the reader must use *the knowledge of the language* to initiate it and, thus, to design it. In that sense – in the semiotic interpretation – reading of the Arabic text is, in fact, *moving* the text. Binary oppositions are this emphasised in the language to an enormous extent. The reader’s “driving force” is proportionate to the extent to which the text without a reader, or before the reader, is rested to the very limits of comprehension, for while the reader reads, i.e., while the reader comprehensively “moves” the sea of consonants, he/she engages *in the knowledge of the language*, its lexicon, morphology, phonetics. Reading of the Arabic text is much more than that – it is “moving” of the text by the knowledge of the language and the culture; it is, in fact, a complete immersion into its space that is conquered by *movement*. Hence, it comes as no surprise that book chapters are called *bab* in Arabic, a word meaning *gates*: the dynamics in that textual space is optimal, for “reading” of the text is based on the “movement” (mutaharrik) of the accumulated passivized consonants (sakin), and, then, by the extraordinarily dynamic movement of the text, completely conceived on the basis of the knowledge of the language, it transposes from one space (from a chapter as a “chamber”) into another space/chamber through the *gates*, i.e., through *bab*. Since the text/book comprises of *gates/ babs*, it follows that it has unexpectedly succeeded to model the space: the entire textual

universe is, in fact, a space that is discovered by transgressing from one “chamber” to another through the gates of the text. That also suggests a peculiar understanding of the perception, which requires a separate deliberation. However, let us go back to the desert. The Arabic poetry has always returned to the desert.

Spatial binary oppositions *moving/resting* (*mutaharrik/sakin* in the text) are introduced into the smallest structural units of the poem, i.e. of the metre – the metric feet, which gives full sense to the meaning of the word *bayt* as a house, or a bigger tent, for the notion tent always implies its opposite – space and the movement in space, just as the permanent movement and the open space mean occasional or temporary resting. Dynamicity in that poetry and in that language is immense – to the extent that the basic structural units of the text are “moved” by the vowels that give them sense. The sense is in the movement. With that in mind, it comes as no surprise that the Arabs in general have most successfully expressed their genius in such a language and in the poetry of that language.

Their *bayt* is a house/palace which is very carefully conceived in the language, and their endlessly open space is “inhabited” by *bayts*. Every verse is a *bayt*. Thus, space is conceived in an extraordinary syntagma of signs.

(Translated: Dr. sci. Selma Djuliman)