

Poetics of Invocation and the Persona of the City in Andalusian Poets: A Study of Selected Examples

شعرية المناجاة وشخصية المدينة عند شعراء الأندلس: قراءة في نماذج مختارة

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Received: 18/11/2024 Accepted: 14/01/2025 Published:01/02/2025

Abstract:

Arabic literature, encompassing both poetry and prose, serves as an eloquent reflection of the Arab milieu throughout various eras and locales, captivating audiences with its intricate structure and profound aesthetics. This body of work has emerged as an indispensable resource for Andalusian poets, furnishing them with a versatile array of literary tools for their poetic endeavors, which seamlessly blend tradition with innovation. These poets have adeptly showcased their creative prowess by composing evocative poetry and crafting nuanced meanings, thereby epitomizing the literary spirit and the unique character of the Andalusian city across diverse themes. Notably, the genre of invocation poetry holds a distinguished place within the annals of Andalusian literature, through which poets have articulated their deepest sorrows and crafted a legacy that resonates across generations. This study explores critical questions: How have Andalusian poets portrayed the city to their readers? What influence has the theme of invocation had on their poetic oeuvre? This paper aims to elucidate the distinctive features of invocation in Andalusian poetry and its role in depicting the city's persona, intertwining human emotions with the natural surroundings and the locales that poets called home. Through meticulous analysis, this study aims to illuminate how poets breathe life into the inanimate—the city—through profound introspection and authentic

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emotional expression, thereby conferring a sense of immortality upon their literary creations.

Keywords: Literary text, the city, Al-Andalus, writing, poetic purposes.

ملخص:

يعد الأدب العربي شعره و سرده مرآة البيئة العربية عبر العصور والأمكنة، ما جعله يثير الآخر ببنيته وجماليته حتى أصبح مرجعية عميقة للشاعر الأندلسي يغترف منها أدوات كتاباته ،ليؤسس بنية شعرية شاعرية تتراوح بين التقليد والتجديد، أظهر فيه الشعراء مقدرتهم الإبداعية في نظم الشعر و صناعة المعنى بجدارة و استحقاق، تعبر عن أدبية العصر وشخصية المدينة الأندلسية، وكان ذلك في شتى الأغراض، في مقدمتها شعر المناجاة الذي يُشكل حيزا كبيرا في تاريخ الشعر الأندلسي، أين عبروا عن ألامهم في مختلف كتاباتهم.حتى تُصبح ذاكرة جيلا بعد جيل، فارتأينا في ضوء الإشكالية المعرفية التالية : كيف صوّر الشاعر الأندلسي المدينة للآخر؟و ما أثر المناجاة في شعره؟

تسعى هذه الورقة البحثية إلى إظهار معالم المناجاة في الشعر الأندلسي، و كيف أسهمت في فتصوير شخصية المدينة، فتلوّنت أشعارهم بصبغة المناجاة، و تداخلت مشاعر الإنسان مع الطبيعة المحيطة به، إضافة إلى اندماجه مع المكان الذي ولد وعاش فيه، وعليه، استوجب في هذه الدراسة التحليلية إمطة اللّثام عن اتجاه حسيّ حديد يتمثّل في بثّ الحياة في الجماد، ألا وهو المدينة، ويتحقق كل ما سبق ، عبر الاستغراق في التفكير، والصدّق في الشعور، ممّا يُضفي الخلود على العمل الأدبي.

كلمات مفتاحية: النّص الأدبي ، المدينة، الأندلس، الكتابة، الأغراض الشعرية.

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Introduction

It is widely recognized that the poetic movement in Al-Andalus was intricately linked with the region's political dynamics and Islamic conquests, during which Arabs endeavored to culturally assimilate others by disseminating and promulgating their culture. This cultural mission profoundly influenced Andalusian poets, who were significantly shaped by

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the poetry of the East to such an extent that "Arab culture in Al-Andalus heavily relied on the East, and its literary identity did not become independent until much later."

Inspired by the venerable traditions of ancient Arab poets, they upheld these traditional forms as exemplary standards throughout their Andalusian-Eastern literary journeys. Their contributions significantly enhanced the urban and cultural fabric of cities, with a particular focus on the evolution of the Andalusian cultural act of the period. As focal points of civilization, cities emanated various facets of scientific advancement and development, thus establishing themselves as epicenters of scientific and cultural brilliance. (Al-Ma'atani, n.d., p. 1)

Through this paper, we aim to delve into poetic writings that portray the city and its pivotal role in fostering various civilizations. Poets, envisioning their environments through their verses, initiated a genuine literary movement in Al-Andalus. A cadre of poets emerged, advancing the legacy of literary expression through various stages of Andalusian civilization, reflecting deeply on how the city was shaped by—and shaped in return—the literary currents of Al-Andalus. The significance of Arab literature in Al-Andalus remains a focal point of interest for both Arab and non-Arab researchers and scholars, with a particular emphasis on its poetic contributions.

1- Arabic Poetics, Concepts, and Definitions:

Unquestionably, poetics forms the core of poetry, imbuing it with aesthetic value through the examination of technical elements that differentiate literary texts from other forms of writing. As noted by Tzvetan Todorov, "Poetics has resolved the longstanding dichotomy between interpretation and science within literary studies.

Unlike the interpretation of qualitative works, which aims not merely to discern meaning but to understand the overarching laws that dictate the creation of all works, poetics seeks these laws not in the realms of

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psychology or sociology, but within literature itself. It thus regards literature both as an 'abstract' and 'intrinsic' phenomenon." (Todorov, 1997)

In the Arabic tradition, poetics has evolved into a cultural norm among linguists, serving as a mechanism to rectify any deviations that might impair the quality of poetry. This perspective is echoed in their critiques, such as the observation that a poem should not be considered significant if it merely repeats a meaning across multiple stanzas. Ibn Tabataba elucidates this, stating, "When a poet sets out to compose a poem, he first processes the intended meaning in prose, then selects words, rhymes, and meters that best express this meaning." (Ibn Tabataba Al-Alawi, 1956, p. 5)

Ibn Tabataba's approach highlights the poet's meticulous care in refining his thoughts until the poem attains its desired form, clothed in precise and eloquent language, thus ensuring both coherence in meaning and structure. This attention to detail reflects the Arab poets' commitment to clarity in their poetic expressions. Ibn Tabataba further notes, "Arabs have endowed their poetry with descriptions, similes, and wisdom that encapsulate their knowledge," asserting that language is the fundamental medium through which poetry is conveyed, and is essential for any text intended to communicate effectively. (Abu Deeb, 1987, p. 15)

Kamal Abu Deeb further enhances this notion by asserting, "Language manifests physically on the page or in the auditory space, and thus, analyzing a text's poetics requires an understanding of the semantic sound material, the system of signs which forms its substance and essence, and which constitutes the condition of its existence." (Al-Jurjani, 1995, p. 228)

Moreover, some critics argue that poetics itself involves a displacement, a concept agreed upon when discussing the idea that language views poetry as an act of creation through linguistic constructs. Abdul Qahir al-Jurjani remarks on this dynamic, stating, "This kind of metaphor, sharp as it is, is a treasure of eloquence, the material from which the brilliant poet and eloquent writer crafts creativity, excellence, and an expansion in expression methods." (Collan, 1980, p. 61)

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Such displacement serves as a catalyst for the poet's imagination, provoking curiosity and engagement from the audience. Herein, we observe that poetics is fundamentally about deviations from conventional definitions found in language dictionaries, enabled through the poet's strategic use of metaphors and a judicious selection of words and meanings.

2- Poetry in the Andalusian Environment:

Al-Andalus currently encompasses both Spain and Portugal, after having included the Iberian Peninsula, where it "lies in southwestern Europe, forming a pentagonal landmass protruding into the sea, connected to the continent by the Pyrenees mountains, while the remaining sides are bordered by the waters of the Atlantic Ocean and the Mediterranean Sea." (Al-Ma'atani, n.d., p. 1)

The poetic conquests in Al-Andalus were linked to political life, where Arabs were defining their culture through their journeys to the other to express their identity, as Abdullah Salem Al-Ma'atani points out: "Arab culture in Al-Andalus depended entirely on the East, and did not achieve a cultural identity in literature until much later." (Abbas, 1969, p. 39)

Ihsan Abbas adds in his book *History of Andalusian Literature*, "It is certain that the scientific, cultural, and literary movement that emerged in Al-Andalus was strongly connected to the critical movement that appeared in the East since its inception, thus marking cultural life from the beginning with reliance on and imitation of the East." (Ibn Khaldun, 2004, vol. 3, p. 332)

This brings us, through the critic's views, to the fact that Andalusian poets were influenced in their poetry by the early Arab poets, becoming a reference in their poetic writing.

3- Factors of Setback in Al-Andalus:

Critics and scholars largely agree that several factors contributed to the downfall of Al-Andalus, with indulgence in luxury, worldly pleasures, following desires, and turning away from the path of God at the forefront.

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These factors led to a tragic end and the disintegration of the once robust structure and the diminishing of Muslim power. Consequently, the people of Andalusia became weak, unable to fend for themselves or defend their lands.

Abd al-Rahman ibn Khaldun diagnosed this, stating, "Their habits became costly, their expenditures increased, and their income could not cover their outgoings (Ibn al-Maqrizi, 1968, vol. 4, p. 352). Thus, the poor perished, and the indulgent drowned in their luxuries, worsening with each generation until their resources could no longer support their lavish lifestyles, leading to poverty. Their kings then demanded they restrict their expenditures to funding wars and conquests, finding no respite."

Moreover, the great betrayal by the Taifa kings, who sold their consciences for a meager worldly gain and collaborated with the enemy after wealth and status had clouded their minds, caused a retreat and collapse. The Andalusian cities fell like dominoes, and in this context, *Abdullah ibn al-Barr* pleaded for help from the Muslims:(Ibn al-Maqrizi, 1968, vol. 5, p. 261)

*"Rush your steeds for Andalus, the steeds of Allah***, for the paths to its supplication have faded."*

The political circumstances and unique environmental changes in Andalusia had a profound impact on the emergence and superiority of Andalusian literature over other literatures in various regions. This led to the distinctive emergence of what is known as the "lament for cities," starting from the fifth Hijri century.

Cities like Toledo and Valencia were among those that fell, bringing disaster upon the Andalusian society that could not resist the enemy, nor were they aided by the Taifa kings. The fall of Toledo marked the beginning of sorrow for the people of Andalusian cities, spreading grief among the literati and poets, stirring their nationalist sentiments and sense of belonging.

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4- The Impact of Poetry in Conveying the Message:

Poetry is considered the register of humanity, a repository of its history, civilization, and the presence of Al-Andalus and its sanctities were strongly ingrained in the poet's mind, where it played a significant role in depicting the image of the afflicted city and its experiences of slaughter and displacement.

Relying on the lament for cities, longing, and nostalgia for the illustrious past, which became a historical memory for generations, the fall of the city of Toledo had a significant impact on the poets' psyche. Their poetry was greatly influenced by these events, as *Ibn al-Assal*, who witnessed the fall of Toledo to the Christians and was exiled from it, says:(Ibn al-Maqrizi, 1968, vol. 4, p. 483)

*"O people of Andalus, quicken your mounts***for staying is but a mistake,
The garment frays from its edges***the garment of the peninsula frayed
from the center,*

*And we are between an enemy who never leaves us*** how can life coexist
with serpents in pit?"*

Ibn al-Assal's verses vividly depict the destruction and devastation that befell his city, and how the presence of Christians impacted its people and his kin in a state reflecting weakness and humiliation. The poet expressed with sincerity and deep emotion, putting the reader in the shoes of a lover who has lost a beloved with no hope of return. In all this, he established the pleasure of the text as expressed by *Barthes*, keeping the reader engaged in the lines of the poem, searching for and establishing meaning.

In his book, *Al-Maqri Al-Tilimsani* provides verses from another poem that convey the anguish and mourning of the people of Andalus over the fall of Toledo, saying:(Masarwah, 2008, p. 6)

*"Toledo, where disbelief violated its sanctity*** indeed this is a grave
matter,*

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*And die all of you, for death is preferable***to living in disgrace or
proximity,*

*A shaded place and the sound of water***there is neither coolness nor
heat,*

*They accepted bondage, oh God*** what was seen and what was advised
by the advisor,*

*And pray that God grants a victory over them***for He is indeed the best
of supporters."*

These verses describe the image of Toledo, invoking the poet's call to strive to expel the occupier and defend their city. The sentences are clear, filled with sensory images that positively impact the listener, employing the poetic image as the fundamental pillar in building the poem, as writer *Nader Masarwah* notes, "The poetic image is a fundamental pillar of the literary work, representing the essence of poetry and the most important means for the poet to convey his experience and express his reality..." (Subh, n.d., p. 170)

Poetics is considered a fundamental element in the artistic construction of the literary text. A crucial aspect of the poetic process is emotion, which we find highlighted by the writer *Ali Subh*. He remarks, "Literary imagery often relies on tangible images from reality, serving as a vivid representation of the poetic experience in the form of art. The poet describes his emotions and portrays them as he wishes, using language as his tool." (Ibn al-Hajj al-Numeri, n.d., p. 41)

5- The Persona of the Andalusian City in the Poetry of *Ibn al-Hajj al-Numeri*

Andalusian poets, prominently *Ibn al-Hajj al-Numeri*, personified what is sensory over what is material, reflecting the beauty of nature among the Andalusians and their quick wit. Nature became a central character, indeed the primary element addressed by poetic purposes. This is a characteristic known of the Arab poet, who was deeply influenced by his desert

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environment and its components. *Al-Numeri* describes nature, saying: (Ibn al-Hajj al-Numeri, n.d., p. 117)

*"And myriad suns in the wilderness do rise*** yet find their settings upon
the dunes,*

*It is the moon guarded by piercing stars*** and they are naught but biting,
cutting winds."*

We observe in the poet's work his precise personification of natural elements in human-like, expressive images that aim at a deep level of reception. The sun and the moon symbolize womanhood among other descriptions and symbols presented by the poet, known for his use of symbolism in the field of poetry. The poet blends descriptions of nature with praises of individuals, intermixing poetic genres, sometimes describing nature and the sea, and at other times personifying these descriptions to elevate their stature.

The poet soared in imagination and ventured into metaphor, where in another instance, he blended descriptions of nature with romantic expressions, saying: (Ibn al-Hajj al-Numeri, n.d.)

*"And on the cheeks of roses life has drawn tears*** wiped gently by the
breeze in darkness,*

*And the daisies, their mouths sewn shut***as if they never knew the
toothbrush."*

Al-Numeri speaks here about the cheek and its redness, likening it to red roses, and the daisies to a mouth, mixing characteristics of nature with those of a woman, displaying feelings of love and longing. This forms a poetic intertextuality with the poet *Abu Nuwas* who linked descriptions of nature to his odes on wine, saying: (Ibn al-Hajj al-Numeri, n.d., pp. 157–158)

*"I ask you, does the branch in the gardens, son, lean towards the wine in
relaxation?"*

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Al-Numeri refers to the land of Sabbat, a place known for gatherings around wine, thus blending the gardens with the state of wine, and likening the swaying of branches to the personality of *Abu Nuwas* and his penchant for wine.

The poet also expressed his admiration for the Andalusian nature and its beauty, influenced by its Levantine resources, describing the architecture and buildings, and what the Andalusians built from palaces and their grandeur and majesty, comparing them with nature, thus merging the beauty of nature and the Andalusian creative in construction, where he paints a complete picture of these elements in his poems, saying in description of the Alhambra Palace:

"And Granada has extended a wrist, decorated with a tattoo of fresh breeze

*And revealed from Alhambra the most beautiful parting, crowned by the
most splendid towers,*

*And never has an eye seen its like, which matches in scope the ambition of
the builder,*

*Hovering over all creations is its constructor, a youth of generosity and
nobility from the lineage of Kahlan,*

*Neither the descendants of Al-Abbas have pride in what they built, nor the
kings of the Marwanids." (Ibn al-Hajj al-Numeri, n.d., p. 206)*

The poet Ibn al-Hajj al-Numeri extolled the splendor of Granada, celebrating its breathtaking beauty and remarkable architecture. In his admiration, he proclaimed:

*"How many spots in Granada that have stirred *** the sons of Nasr,
moving its shoulder in wonder." (Ibn al-Hajj al-Numeri, n.d., p. 187)*

Through these verses, Ibn al-Hajj al-Numeri eloquently expressed his reverence for Granada, intertwining its physical allure with a sense of wonder and pride. His poetic exploration extended to the valor of

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Andalusians in defending their cities and homeland against the Crusader campaigns. He vividly recounts one such battle in Córdoba:

*"As if the armies for the land of Córdoba were *** like the seas stirred by a tempestuous wind,*

*And war is most beautiful when it comes *** in the cold, the blood splashed in victory."*¹

In these evocative lines, the poet likens the advancing armies to the majestic and turbulent waves of the sea, a literary motif often symbolizing chaos and fear. He further paints a vivid picture of the battlefield, where the dust raised by the armies mingles with the blood of the enemy, transforming the chaotic scene into one of poetic beauty.

This imagery underscores the poet's exceptional skill in weaving imagination and reality to evoke emotions and a deeper understanding of the narrative. His ability to "shake the soul" and provoke reflection within the poem's structure elevates his work, offering profound insights into the emotional and historical dimensions of Andalusian poetry.

6- Conclusion:

In conclusion, the findings derived from this research can be summarized as follows:

- The poetic movement in Al-Andalus was deeply intertwined with political life and Islamic conquests, influencing and being influenced in turn.
 - The poet is a seer of his environment, expressing it and being expressed by it in a coherent and harmonious union of the poet's self with the world.
 - The city serves as a cultural center for poets, radiating development, sophistication, and prosperity.
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- The poets of Al-Andalus were influenced by traditional Arabic poetics, which became a reference point for their poetic writings.
- The political circumstances and environmental changes in Andalusia significantly impacted the emergence and positioning of Andalusian literature alongside other literatures, marking it with the distinctive emergence of what is known as the lament for cities.
- Poetry and the city have an intimate, supportive, and collaborative relationship among the poets of Al-Andalus and their poems.

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