

The Construction of Critical and Semiotic Terminology in the Work of Abdelmalek Mortad: A Descriptive-comparative Study

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Abstract:

This study examines the contributions of the Algerian academic critic Abdelmalek Mortad to the development of critical discourse, focusing on his efforts to establish and enrich critical and semiotic terminology through linguistic means and a variety of key concepts. It also explores his distinctive critical perspective by examining the creative synthesis he established between authenticity, rooted in Arab heritage, and Western modernity, drawing on the latest developments in critical and semiotic studies. Within this context, the study undertakes a comparative examination of Mortad's critical perspective and those of selected Orientalist critics, highlighting the major points of convergence and divergence between their respective critical approaches. Particular attention is given to the mechanisms and methodological principles underlying their readings and interpretations of literary discourse. The study argues that Mortad's approach is characterized by a meticulous and productive reading that combines diverse intellectual and critical references, contributing to a renewed form of secondary writing that imbues the literary text with vitality and richness and lays the foundations for a contemporary and independent critical discourse.

Keywords: Critical terminology – Terminology – Semiotic sources – Semiotic terminology – Reading.

Introduction

Literary criticism in Algeria remains a subject of intense debate and scholarly contention, sparking extensive discourse regarding its genesis, roots, key figures, and various orientations. This sensitive and profoundly significant subject has invited a diverse range of scholarly perspectives, characterized by a constant exchange of ideas. This intellectual movement was precipitated by the transition of the field from general linguistics to linguistic semiotics—a shift facilitated by scholars who embraced and developed this critical discipline to propel it forward. Among these luminaries is the critic and researcher Abdelmalek Mortad, who assumed the responsibility of advancing the mission of contemporary criticism in Algeria. This study seeks to trace his critical efforts and epistemological contributions to the refinement of literary criticism and his endeavors to enrich the Arabic critical library.

I. Profile of Dr. Abdelmalek Mortad

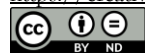
A. Biography

Abdelmalek Mortad is an Algerian novelist, critic, and academic. Born in M'Sereda, Tlemcen Province, on January 10, 1935, he was raised in the same region, where he memorized the Holy Qur'an at his father's school in M'ji'at al-Khams, an upbringing that facilitated his early exposure

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to classical heritage and foundational texts. Upon reaching adulthood, he migrated to France for work, joining the "L'Estory" factories specializing in zinc smelting. He returned to his village in 1954, but only briefly, before traveling to Constantine to enroll in the Imam Abdelhamid Ibn Badis Institute. There, he studied for five months under the tutelage of scholars such as Abderrahmane Chiban and Ahmed Bin Diab Ali Sassi, though he was forced to leave due to the circumstances of the War of Liberation. In 1955, he traveled to Fes, Morocco, to pursue studies at Al-Quaraouiyine University, but his tenure lasted only one week due to a life-threatening illness.

In 1956, he was appointed an Arabic language instructor at a primary school in Akhfir. He eventually obtained his baccalaureate in 1960, which enabled his enrollment at the University of Rabat in the Faculty of Arts. Concurrently with his formal studies, he attended the Higher Teacher Training School, graduating with a License in Arts in 1963. His professional career included teaching at the Moulay Youssef High School in Rabat, followed by a brief tenure as an educational consultant in Oran, Algeria, before joining the Ibn Badis High School, where he taught until 1970. On March 7, 1970, he earned his doctorate from the Faculty of Arts at the University of Algeria with a thesis titled "The Art of Maqamat in Arabic Literature", supervised by Ihsan al-Nass. In September of that same year, he was appointed Head of the Department of Arabic Language and Literature, and later became the Director of the Institute in 1974.

In June 1983, he obtained a State Doctorate in Arts from the Sorbonne University in Paris for his thesis, "The Arts of Literary Prose in Algeria", supervised by the French Orientalist André Miquel. In 1986, he was promoted to the rank of Professor.

B. Academic and Cultural Contributions

The scholar held numerous prestigious academic and cultural positions, including:

- * Member of the Advisory Body for Iraqi Folk Heritage (1986).
- * Chairman of the Scientific Council of the Institute of Arabic Language and Literature at the University of Oran.
- * Member of the Supreme Islamic Council (1997).
- * President of the Supreme Council for the Arabic Language (1998).
- * President of the Algerian Writers' Union branch in Western Algeria (1975).
- * Vice Dean of the University of Oran (1980).
- * National Secretary in charge of Algerian Writers' affairs (1984).
- * Director of Culture and Media for the Province of Oran (1983).

Furthermore, he participated in dozens of national and international literary symposiums and cultural festivals, publishing his studies in several prominent Arabic journals.

C. Works

Distinguished by a fertile imagination and superior analytical capabilities, Mortad's writing is characterized by prolificacy, an encyclopedic spirit, and sophisticated phrasing. His diverse body of work spans the novel, short story, poetry, criticism, history, and folklore, leading some to describe him as one of the most prolific and diverse authors in both classical and modern Algerian literature.

His most notable works, listed chronologically by first publication, include:

1. The Short Story in Ancient Arabic Literature* (1968).
2. The Renaissance of Contemporary Arabic Literature in Algeria* (1971).
3. The Art of

1. The term structuralisme:

The term structuralisme, coined by the linguist Roman Jakobson, serves as the unifying concept for the theoretical works of the Prague Linguistic School. This term has been rendered into approximately twenty Arabic translations, the most prevalent being "al-binyawiyya" (البنويّة), utilized by Abdelaziz Hammouda, Kamal Abu Deeb, Abdallah al-Adhami, and numerous other Arab critics whose contributions have enriched the corpus of Arabic criticism. Abdelmalek Mortad was among this cohort of critics in an earlier stage, yet he subsequently revised his position. His objection stems from the contention that Arab critics have perpetuated an erroneous term, "al-binyawiyya" (البنويّة), rather than employing the linguistically sound grammatical form "al-biniyya" (البنية) derived from the pattern of "fatiyya" (فتية) or "fatiyy" (فتي) or "binawi" (بنوي), which would be more phonetically efficient and linguistically economical. He asserts that the persistent use of "al-binyawiyya" attributes the doctrine to a non-existent root, as the term implies an original form of "binyawya" (بنوّة) that would allow for the conversion of the second ya into a waw. Furthermore, he argues that the conversion of the feminine ha into a waw reflects a fundamental ignorance of Arabic, as such a letter is not considered by grammarians when determining the morphological structures of words. Nevertheless, Mortad employed the term "al-binyawiyya" in his works, *Popular Proverbs in Algeria* and *The Literary Text: From Where to Where?*.

2. The term Espace:

The term Espace in French (and space in English) has been translated by most Arab critics as either "al-makan" (the place) or "al-fada'" (the space). However, Abdelmalek Mortad proposed an alternative translation, "al-hayyiz" (the precinct/domain), from which he derived new derivative terms such as "al-tahyiz" (spatialization) and "al-tahayuz" (spatial positioning) through semantic expansion. He adopted the concept of al-hayyiz in his applied critical study, *One Thousand and One Nights: A Deconstructive Semiotic Analysis of the Tale of the Baghdad Porter*, drawing specifically on the narrative achievements of Gérard Genette. He concluded that the tales of *One Thousand and One Nights* represent some of the richest human legacies regarding diversity in hayyiz, fada', and spatial strangeness, noting the proximity between these terms in his critical application.

Moreover, Mortad insists on using "al-hayyiz" instead of the more common terms like "place", "field", or "domain". He posits that "space" (al-fada') is synonymous with "the precinct" (al-hayyiz) due to its capacity to delineate the spatial dimensions of a text. He analyzed the precinct across several levels: geographic, quasi-geographic, aquatic, mobile, wandering, mythical, and the marvelous/strange. He did not restrict the term to these diverse frameworks but viewed it within a holistic narrative perspective as a form of movement relative to the central characters of the tale.

As previously noted, the term al-hayyiz gave rise to the terms al-tahyiz and al-tahayuz:

A. Al-tahyiz (Spatialization): This corresponds to the term spatialisation, referring to the production of a specific type of space or the adoption of a particular mode of interacting with it. This concept also gives rise to the semiotic concept of la proxémique (proxemics), which constitutes a fundamental pillar of the semiotic project, aiming to analyze the states of both subjects and objects through the lens of the precinct.

B. Al-tahayuz (Spatial Interplay/Positioning): Mortad formulated this term by analogy with "morphology", "contrast", and "similarity", describing it as the exchange of the precinct with its counterparts through functions of interaction, overlap, and interpenetration.

Mortad's objective in generating these terms was to prevent "al-hayyiz" from being a mere "mute semiotic appearance" or a neutral element in discourse. Rather, he intended for it to possess semantic significance and semiotic movement that defines its boundaries and regulates its function.

This moves beyond the traditional phase of viewing space as a static, pale backdrop toward a semiotic phase that utilizes the background of the precinct to grant discourse new semantic dimensions, leading to linguistic cohesion and the ability to penetrate the deepest and most subtle aspects of the text.

3. The term signe:

The term "sign" carries connotations that imply indirect meanings, casting an ambiguity upon the critic who must then decode its ciphers to reveal the role of these significations in uncovering the internal relationships of a literary text. While the term has become prevalent in Arabic criticism through the translation al-‘alāmah (the sign/mark) a convention agreed upon by most Arab critics and scholars Abdelmalek Mortad preferred the term al-simah (the trait/feature) as a more appropriate translation, offering several justifications for this choice.

First, al-‘alāmah has been employed in Arabic grammatical thought to denote a suffix attached to a verb or a noun (excluding particles) to facilitate a transition from one state to another to fulfill a semantic function required by the context. The application of this grammatical term to semiotic concepts may, in our current era, exacerbate confusion and ambiguity.

Second, based on intuitive perception, the meaning derived from the term al-simah appears to be closer to what Western semioticians refer to as a "sign" than the term al-‘alāmah, which may be relegated to a purely material or physical significance.

Third, applying al-simah to the concept of "sign" instead of al-‘alāmah resolves another terminological issue: it prevents the conflation of al-‘alāmah with a closely related concept, la marque in French. This difficulty was encountered when translating a study on the semiotic origins in the thought of Charles Peirce, where one confronted two distinct terms that, in their original Western usage, occupy the same conceptual space: le signe and la marque.

Furthermore, Mortad proposes a distinction between al-simah and al-‘alāmah as follows:

Al-simah refers to the science that addresses the significance of words, signs, sounds, movements, colors, natural phenomena, and other elements from a semiotic perspective.

Al-‘alāmah refers to grammatical markers, such as the feminine suffix in "ibn/ibnah" (son/daughter), which serves as a marker of femininity for a noun that would otherwise be masculine.

Thus, for Abdelmalek Mortad, the ‘alāmah constitutes a semantic unit that contributes to the construction of the contextual relationships within a text, organizing and interacting with one another to produce meaning without negating the plurality of interpretation.

C. The Semiotic Sources of Abdelmalek Mortad

I. The Semiotic Sources of Abdelmalek Mortad:

Through an examination of the numerous works of the critic Abdelmalek Mortad, and a tracing of his procedural readings and applied methodologies regarding the literary text, it can be concluded that Mortad is an Algerian-Arab critic whose scholarship rests upon two fundamental pillars: a deep-seated engagement with heritage (Turath), which he has assimilated since his formative years, and modern theories, which he has internalized—ranging from the adoption of original theorists' ideas to the specific sources he employs. This synthesis has enabled him to approach imported culture with both an enlightened insight and an authentic sensibility; he does not engage with Western methodologies through a blind, mechanical lens, but rather infuses them with a traditionalist aesthetic, bridging the gap between the Western and the Arab. This is evidenced by his comparative approaches, such as those linking Jean Cohen with Al-Jahiz, Jakobson with Ibn Khaldun, and Greimas with certain Arab rhetoricians.

A. Modernist Sources:

In several of his works, Mortad affirms the influence of Western modernist studies, noting his early engagement with New Criticism and its various currents. In his book **One Thousand and One Nights**, he posits that his study is a methodological attempt to examine Arabic narrative heritage, thereby prompting inquiry and fostering renewal to avoid the trap of traditionalism that plagues many theories he has encountered—both in their original languages and in translation. Elsewhere, he emphasizes his commitment to leveraging Western theories alongside certain traditionalist elements, ultimately synthesizing the two to approach the text through an independent, forward-looking perspective.

Evidence of his early engagement with New Criticism and its currents is found in his assertion: "Had it not been for a group of revolutionary critics who refused to allow criticism to remain confined to the foundations established by Taine, Lanson, and Beyle, and who instead embraced the text with a remarkable scientific rigor reconfiguring its various dimensions through the lenses of sociology, structuralism, deconstruction, anatomy, semiotics, and stylistics the study of the literary text would have remained a closed door, impenetrable to any key".

From this statement, it is evident that Mortad aligns himself with these revolutionary thinkers who strive for renewal and transcendence of the conventional, treating the literary text as a primary realm and an expansive field for procedural inquiry.

B. Traditionalist Sources:

Mortad's traditionalist influences are multifaceted, stemming from his dedication to heritage and his attempt to harmonize it with modernist paradigms. He has successfully utilized heritage to navigate one of the most significant obstacles hindering Arabic semiotic criticism: the conceptualization of terminology, particularly the distinction between "trait" (simah) and "semiotics" (simiya'iyya) a subject that will be addressed in our discussion of his semiotic terminology. In this regard, the researcher clearly relies on certain aspects of linguistics through its original lexical sources, such as the semiotic lexicons of Greimas and Courtes, and the linguistic lexicon of Jean Dubois, stating: "Regarding all these terms that the linguistic lexicon was teeming with prior to the emergence of semiotics, [Mortad] sought to develop and adapt these concepts rather than ignore them, imbuing them with novel meanings. It is observable that many of these concepts are subject to a tension between linguistics and semiotics, as well as between the linguistic and the anatomical".

In his work *Alif–Ya*, his influence by Derrida is clearly manifested through his analytical approach to the text of "Ayna Laylai?" by Mohammed al-Eid Al Khalifa. Furthermore, his engagement with philosophical currents is evident; he critiqued structuralism by demonstrating that the concept of "structure" belongs to philosophical traditions. Methodologically and procedurally, the researcher adopted this intellectual standpoint in an attempt to adapt and reconcile his ideas with the complexities of linguistic theory represented by the writings of Barthes and Todorov. However, this theoretical and intellectual utility in Mortad's work is relatively limited to the works of scholars such as Greimas and J. Bokon, serving as references that illuminate many of Jacques Derrida's ideas. From a procedural perspective, Mortad embodies Derridean deconstruction through his analysis of the language of the poem "Ayna Laylai?".

II. The Semiotic Terminology of Abdelmalek Mortad

In examining the modernist and textualist methodologies within the critical practice of Abdelmalek Mortad, it is evident that he adopted a semiotic approach. The defining features of this methodology emerged in his studies during the early 1980s, as he integrated a diverse range of scientific and humanistic disciplines. This perspective underwent further evolution alongside the

expansion of literary criticism in the 1990s, eventually becoming fully realized in his later works. This methodological framework is exemplified in several seminal references, as categorized by Dr. Moulay Ali Boukhatem:

1. One Thousand and One Nights: A Deconstructive Semiotic Analysis of the "Baghdad Beauty" Tale (1983).
2. A.Y.: A Deconstructive Semiotic Study of the Poem "Where is my Beloved?" by Mohammed Al-Eid Al Khalifa (1992).
3. The Poetics of the Poem: The Poem of Reading—A Composite Analysis of the Poem "Yemeni Loads" (1994).
4. Analysis of Narrative Discourse: A Composite Deconstructive-Semiotic Treatment of the Novel "Midaq Alley" (1995).
5. Maqamat al-Suyuti (1996).

These studies are unified by their semiotic character and their integrated utilization of various linguistic currents such as Structuralism and its various schools, Deconstruction, and Stylistics all of which are enriched by the semiotic paradigm. Through these and other works, Mortad developed several critical semiotic terms, some of which were appropriated from existing frameworks and others which he formulated independently. These studies are characterized by their semiotic nature and their synthesis of diverse linguistic currents. A summary of his key terminology is as follows:

1. The Term Simah (Sign/Feature/Signe)

This is one of the emerging semiotic terms currently undergoing a phase of reception and experimentation within contemporary discourse. It is a concept Mortad appropriated from Western scholarship. Derived from the Latin signum, it serves as a synonym for an indicator or mark such as dark clouds signaling imminent rain. Mortad posits that this is a sound Arabic term, noting its presence in the works of Ibn Manzur as *sima* and *sawma*. Mortad contends that all civilizations, since antiquity, have recognized the concept of the *simah* and utilized it through various phenomena, most notably through gesturing, the use of color, and the performance of rituals to express religious devotion, joy, or grief. Dr. Moulay Ali Boukhatem further asserts that the term *simah* is at the forefront of the critical semiotic terminology utilized by Mortad, who defines it across two axes: the traditional (heritage) axis and the modernist axis. This is based on the premise that the *simah* constitutes the fundamental component and primary unit of any semiotic system. Furthermore, Mortad believes the concept's origins are rooted in the Arab tradition, where sign-based systems and the use of color in ritualized social expressions have been employed since antiquity.

2. The Term Simaiya (Semiotics)

In one of his articles, Mortad notes that while the term is primarily rooted in linguistics, the concept of semiotics intersects with philosophy and logic in certain contexts, and with literary and narrative applications in others. He observes that semiotics began as a philosophical and medical discipline, transitioned into a linguistic one, and subsequently branched into literary studies while maintaining its linguistic foundations. This has garnered significant attention from contemporary scholars of literary texts, who have brought sophisticated intellectual and methodological capacities to the text to interpret it through various related, yet distinct, terminological frameworks found in lexicons, such as: *Sémiologie*, *sémiotique*, *sémanalyse*, *sémasiologie*, and *sémeiologie*.

Amidst the competition between these terms, Mortad initially employed the term *simaiya* but later receded from it, opting instead for the term *simai* (without the feminine suffix). He maintains that this is a linguistically sound Arabic term derived from *al-sima*, meaning "the sign" or "the mark,"

as referenced in the Quranic verse: "The criminals will be known by their marks (bisimahum)..." (68:46). In this conceptualization, Mortad diverges from Roland Barthes. While Barthes sought to elevate the concept of semiotics beyond its philosophical and linguistic dimensions toward a critical dimension—while still maintaining its linguistic essence—he defined semiotics as the "science of signs" derived from linguistics. Barthes viewed semiotics as a fundamental component of social structure and thus characterized it as an extension of linguistics.

3 – Icon: This term holds profound importance within semiotics, as the theory has established it as a significant signifier that directs scholars toward numerous implications and facilitates the displacement of meaning within literary texts. An icon refers to a subject expressed solely through the intrinsic nature of the sign; this nature persists whether the subject itself exists or not.

In his work *Alif-Ya*, Abdelmalek Mortad provides a definition of this term, clarifying its essence and denotation by proposing an alternative. In his analysis of the text *Ayn Li Layla* by Mohammed al-Eid, he states: "An icon is defined as a present feature or sign that signifies an absent feature. For over ten years, we have applied the semiotic concept used by most contemporary Arab critics—the term 'icon' borrowed from Western terminology without an Arabic semantic equivalent. However, we have now established an Arabic counterpart based on the original Western conceptual intent: a phenomenon where a perceived or visual feature signifies its absent counterpart."

By this, Mortad aligns himself with Umberto Eco's concept of the sign: "A sign or signifier is something that stands in place of a person or a thing within a certain relationship or under a certain heading, designed to address someone; that is, to create in that person's mind an equivalent sign, or perhaps a more expansive one." This sign is constructed by the recipient. For Eco, the icon transcends a mere physical relationship between an object and its likeness, evolving into a mental relationship rooted in thought and culture.

4 – Isomorphism (Tashakul): This is a Western term, originally a chemical concept in French, which was unknown to Arabic until its adoption by semioticians such as Greimas, despite the existence of similar concepts in Arabic rhetoric, such as *al-adul* (deviation). One definition describes it as a structural axis across a linguistic chain composed of *classemes* (class same) that ensures the homogeneity of spoken discourse.

In his book *The System of Quranic Discourse*, Abdelmalek Mortad employs the term *Tashakul* as a synonym for *Mushakala*, noting that both are linguistic terms that have not gained widespread use among general critics and text analysts. He asserts that the term *Tashakul* was only coined in the last twenty years in the Maghreb. From his perspective, the term is a branch of semiotics that permeates contemporary science and culture, representing the exchange of formal characteristics across all grammatical, morphological, and rhythmic aspects, whether individual or structural.

5 – Technicity (Taqayin): Following Mortad, he claims to be the first to introduce this term into Arabic. He modeled it after *Tashakul*, based on the premise that a text—particularly poetic texts—often provides iconic manifestations visible, audible, tactile, or olfactory. He states: "Regarding the matter of *Taqayin*, we may be the first to coin this semiotic term in this manner, following Western formulation, before finding a sound Arabic alternative. I propose '*Al-Tamathul*' (Similarity) as an equivalent. The common practice among modern critics is to use the term 'icon' as it appears in Western languages".

Mortad also utilized several other terms in his studies, such as *Space* (*Al-Hayz*), *Contrast* (*Al-Tabayun*), *Context* (*Al-Qarina*), and *Intertextuality* (*Al-Tannas*). *Al-Hayz* (Spatiality/Space) is modeled after *Tashakul* and *Tamathul*, involving the exchange of spatial functions through interaction and overlap, treating space as a neutral field. *Al-Tabayun* (Contrast/Divergence) relates to the displacement between two or more units and is a broad semiotic concept involving the

perception of the semantic relationship between subject and predicate. Al-Qarina (Context/Clue) is a term Mortad considers rooted in the Arabic cultural environment, which he employs to ensure his scientific endeavors represent continuity rather than rupture. Al-Tannas (Intertextuality) refers to the relationships between a text and the texts it incorporates, rewrites, or absorbs, a concept developed through Julia Kristeva.

Intertextuality is a modern semiotic term with operational efficacy in modern poetics and structural analysis, attracting many researchers in Europe and the Arab world. In Algeria, Abdelmalek Mortad is among the few who have mastered and applied this term to literary discourse analysis.

6 – Poetics (Al-Shi'riya): The term poetics belongs to the group of semiotic terms dedicated to structuralist studies. It was raised by the Formalists and revived in New Criticism. While Arab scholars do not deny their prior knowledge of this concept under various names such as al-shairi'ya (poetic quality) or al-qawl al-shi'ri (poetic utterance) Mortad has addressed

Discourse: Certain semiotic lexicons consider the term "discourse" to be synonymous with "text," insofar as both terms are employed to denote non-linguistic judgments. Abdelmalek Mortad posits that "discourse is one of the modern linguistic terms, serving as a counterpart to the foreign term discours in French; it is a term adopted by critics, appearing in the Holy Qur'an with various meanings, and was also formulated by certain Arab grammarians." He addressed the "terminological duality" between discourse and text, introducing a series of nuances, such as the notion that discourse represents the specificity of a text within a literary genre, and that text carries a more precise significance than discourse. This is because "the term 'text' applies to a single unit of literary speech, such as the text of a poem, whereas 'discourse' encompasses a collection of poetic writings." Thus, the text is narrower in scope than discourse, a distinction for which Mortad is credited due to his rigor in differentiating the two. Conversely, Roland Barthes established a direct link between language and discourse, stating: "I believe that language, from the perspective through which we are currently viewing it, is inseparable from discourse... because discourse, in its entirety, is subject to a network of rules, constraints, and pressures that are dense and nebulous at the rhetorical level, yet precise and acute at the grammatical level; there is an ebb and flow between language and discourse." Barthes' attempt to link language and discourse serves as an explicit acknowledgment that semiotic critical discourse is also an integral part of linguistics. He further suggests that semiology functions to "purify discourse," describing semiology as the process that filters language, refines linguistics, and purifies discourse of its extraneous elements.

8. Deconstruction: Deconstruction is defined as "a doctrine predicated on the analysis of an idea into its primary elements." Abdelmalek Mortad proposed an alternative definition of deconstruction as a methodological procedure, stating: "Jacques Derrida is among those who developed structuralism, in the Todorovian sense, gradually steering it toward the anatomical or the deconstructive; both terms are prevalent, as both are based on the deconstruction of the text as a linguistic practice." However, after engaging with these two terms, he proposed the term "subversion" (or "undermining"), which he defines as "the dismantling of a form, whether material or abstract, and subsequently establishing a new structure upon its ruins, inspired by it." From his perspective, subversion is more precise than deconstruction, which he believes fails to convey the true essence of the concept of Deconstruction. He viewed deconstruction through a more comprehensive and expansive lens than the narrow definition established by Jacques Derrida.

Thirdly: The Concept of Critical Reading according to Abdelmalek Mortad:

We have opted for the term "critical reading" because the author considers reading to be the foundation of every form of writing, given its multifaceted nature. Furthermore, criticism is inherently a secondary form of writing generated by the primary text. Reading, in its essence, is an act of writing, as he states: "In our perception, reading is writing, or at least a form of writing; it is as if writing and reading are two sides of the same coin. This is because writing, in its true essence, is also a form of reading. Reading serves as the primary key to knowledge: to write is to express

what you have read within your conscience and to translate what resides in your heart." Consequently, we conclude that for Abdelmalek Mortad, reading is a form of writing, and both reading and writing constitute the primary domain of critical activity, both theoretically and applied. Reading is a comprehensive intellectual activity that interacts with the requirements of decoding linguistic symbols, representing a holistic, interconnected act involving psychological, social, and linguistic factors.

From this perspective, Abdelmalek Mortad accords paramount importance to reading, viewing it as the foundation of a system of black markings whose rules and usage are established within a specific linguistic group. He posits that the act of writing is akin to a process of demolition and subversion of what has been previously constructed; without this transformative impulse, writing would be impossible, as subsequent writing serves to dismantle and undermine prior texts.

His thought aligns with that of Roland Barthes, Tzvetan Todorov, and others who have followed a similar trajectory by regarding reading as a methodological form a methodology that grants the subject maximum freedom when engaging with a literary text. Thus, it is unsurprising that the boundaries between methodology and reading are virtually non-existent for both the lay reader and the specialist. In Mortad's view, the text is fundamentally a field of reading, and no text escapes the scrutiny of various readers, whether they are ordinary or professional. This renders the concept of reading a linguistic, semiotic, and critical problematic. This leads to his definition of criticism: criticism is reading specifically, the reading of a literary text by a professional. The tools the critic employs to comprehend or read the text that is, to interpret it determine the parameters of the resulting literary analysis. Therefore, criticism is an interpretation of texts, dictated by the critic's intellect, affiliation, and vision, because the interpretation of any text begins the moment one commences reading; interpretation acts directly upon the general meaning of the text as it is being read. Ultimately, he concludes that criticism consists of two distinct branches: theoretical criticism and applied criticism.

Theoretical criticism involves investigating the origins of theories, the roots of epistemologies, and the philosophical underpinnings of each theory, tracing its genesis and evolution. In contrast, applied criticism is a fruit of theoretical criticism, which establishes the necessary foundations and provides the principles and procedures used when studying, dissecting, commenting upon, or interpreting a literary text. Thus, the ultimate aim of criticism in both instances remains the discovery of the text's truth or, to use the terminology of hermeneutics, the attainment of its understanding.

For Abdelmalek Mortad, criticism does not represent a purely intellectual or aesthetic phenomenon; rather, it occupies an intermediate position between philosophy, science, and art, situated on the periphery of these fields without being explicitly subsumed by any single one. Given that a literary text produces no response until it is read, the process must begin with reading, as it serves as the primary engine of study, relying on a text that constitutes a potential impact realized through the act of reading.

Mortad posits that reading is multifaceted, varying according to the diversity of inclinations, cultures, eras, and locales, as well as the distinctions between literary and artistic genres. Textual models represent only one dimension of an intersubjective communicative process, within which the reader themselves becomes an aesthetic object.

The concept of "reading" gained significant scholarly attention in the latter half of the twentieth century, as researchers sought to frame reading as a mode of mental activity essential for problem-solving, judgment, and critical thinking. This evolution moved from literal reading which relies on reading the lines and extracting direct meaning to interpretive reading, which involves reading between the lines and imbuing the text with new meanings through analysis, inference, and prediction. This progression culminates in creative and critical reading, a "reading beyond the

lines" achieved through the synthesis of reading, the formation of an opinion or stance, and the subsequent evaluation of the subject.

From this, Dr. Abdelmalek Mortad links reading and criticism through the vision that writing is, at its core, a communicative message conveyed through specific artistic terms and within a particular aesthetic framework. Its written significance remains incomplete until it is received by an audience (readers) who experience an aesthetic impact and sensation.

Consequently, it can be argued that reading is what imparts vitality to the written text, breathing life into its dimensions through a process of reciprocal exchange. Writing is a prerequisite for reading, yet its essence is embedded within it, and its being is sustained by its language and reality. Writing serves as an outlet for curiosity and a response to the ego, the ambitions of the self, the whims of desire, and the tremors of the body; in the act of writing, we express the internal through the external or the external through the internal, potentially blurring the boundaries between the tangible and the intangible, the possible and the impossible, or the black and the white.

Within the framework of writing, three inextricably linked and overlapping components exist: writing (or literature/the literary text), the act of writing in all its forms, and reading in all its varieties. These elements form a relationship characterized by both contradiction and harmony.

From the essence of reading, several literary-interpretative forms emerge, branching from its general meaning, namely:

1/ Consumptive Reading: This refers to the general reading of literature for the sake of aesthetic enjoyment or the acquisition of knowledge and ideas. It produces an unwritten text within the reader's memory, which remains latent until they are able to reproduce it, even if only orally.

2/ Professional Reading: This is a complex and multifaceted process governed by various experimental, exploratory, and inferential procedures. It inevitably generates a written text, as the literary text being read necessarily leads to another written literary text—a phenomenon referred to by some as "criticism."

3/ Productive Reading: A written literary text is generated through the process of "interpretation." Based on the theories of Umberto Eco, at least two forms of written text emerge: (a) the interpretation of the text and (b) the use of the text. In the act of reading, we consume the text, which enables us to attain a high level of professionalism by exploring its subtleties, decoding its ciphers, and reaching the anticipated horizon. This subsequently transforms into the production of another text, born from the reader through interpretive and analytical processes. Thus, it can be argued that we have produced a new and renewed piece of writing that engages with the primary text commenting upon, discussing, and evaluating its aesthetic or aesthetic qualities, its excellence or its flaws. As an inevitable outcome of this mode of reading, this process is termed "criticism" or "the second writing about the first".

In its essence, criticism is the expression of a holistic and integrated stance toward art in general and literature in particular. It begins with aesthetic appreciation and progresses through interpretation, analysis, and evaluation. These indispensable steps ensure that the critical stance is coherent and grounded in established principles. Literary criticism is a relatively recent term in the Arabic literary landscape; as Mohammed Karim Al-Kawaz emphasizes in his work, *Rhetoric and Criticism: Terminology, Origin, and Renewal*, the Arabic linguistic and literary spheres have only recently encountered the term following contact with the West. It is a literal translation of the Western term "literary criticism," which denotes the set of methodologies employed to examine the works of both classical and modern authors, aiming to unveil ambiguities and interpret the literary text by judging it through various methodological frameworks a definition largely agreed upon by theorists and scholars despite their diverse intellectual backgrounds.

Finally, we consider the inquiries posed by the critic Abdelmalek Mortad, which serve as profound and persuasive answers to the concept of reading and criticism and their relationship to literature, as presented in his work, *Issues of Poetics: A Follow-up and Analysis of Key Issues in Contemporary Poetry*:

Who claims that criticism is alien to literature, when it has always been nothing less than a literary genre itself? Literature is literature, and criticism is criticism. Furthermore, who claims that criticism is a science a feat the Russian Formalists attempted in vain? Who can deny that criticism is simply a creative act writing about another act of creation? And who can logically or empirically prove that the language of the critic cannot mirror the language of the original? Or is the intention for the language of criticism to be something fossilized, stagnant, and lifeless?

The text explores the distinctions between consumptive, professional, and productive reading and defines literary criticism as a creative and analytical discipline.

Fourth: The Methodological Approach of Abdelmalek Mortad

The issue of methodology constitutes one of the most prominent concerns that have occupied Abdelmalek Mortad throughout his critical practice and literary reading. He has established the "question of methodology" as a fundamental gateway in many of his works both in theory and application premised upon the ontological specificity of the literary text. Mortad poses multifaceted inquiries regarding the nature of the text and its governing principles, the mechanics of its analysis, and the feasibility of subjecting all texts to a singular methodological framework. He contends that the structural, conceptual, and stylistic diversity of texts necessitates that the critic select a methodology congruent with the specific nature of each individual work. Consequently, Mortad's critical trajectory underwent a methodological evolution, transitioning from impressionistic and historical criticism toward structuralism, stylistics, semiotics, and deconstruction. Thus, a distinction can be drawn within his oeuvre between an initial phase representing traditional criticism and a second phase characterized by modernist criticism, a distinction that has rendered him one of the most methodologically conscious critics and one of the most profound practitioners of the "methodological revolution".

Mortad does not view his work, *The Literary Text: From Where? To Where?*, as the sole demarcation between these two phases; rather, he posits that this transformation commenced during his engagement with folk literature. He notes: "I slipped into modern methodology through my engagement with folk texts; my first experimental undertaking in this regard was my books on Algerian proverbs and Algerian folk riddles." This shift was also inextricably linked to his scientific experience, which compelled him to navigate the dialectic between tradition and modernity while preserving his cultural identity. He reflects: "During my studies at the Sorbonne, it was inevitable that I undergo a transformation of my intellectual persona without altering my fundamental identity. The year 1976 became the decisive period in my academic life, positioned between the beauty, depth, and authenticity of tradition, and the ambiguity, formal elegance, and methodological rigor of modernity specifically the intellectual anxiety it entails".

Mortad sought to utilize modern Western methodologies to interpret Arabic texts, aiming "to produce new knowledge and advance critical practice upon the ruins of the deconstructed structures of old knowledge". However, he did not engage with these methodologies mechanically; instead, he selectively adopted elements deemed appropriate for the nature and specificities of the Arabic text. He worked to domesticate and adapt Western methodologies to the Arabic cultural milieu, simultaneously drawing upon the strengths of the Arabic critical heritage. Consequently, his critical project is predicated on a synthesis of traditional authenticity and Western modernity, achieving an integration between these two intellectual frameworks. This synthesis affords him the capacity to engage with modern methodologies through a sound critical consciousness, eschewing mere imitation or replication.

His early studies were characterized by a separation between the study of form and the study of idea or content a tendency that persisted in much of Arabic criticism for a long period. However, Mortad transcended this dichotomy, asserting that the literary text is a composition of form and content, signifier and signified, and exteriority and interiority. He posits that the relationship between form and content is organic and inseparable, analogous to the relationship between body and soul. Accordingly, he abandoned the treatment of texts through the binary of form and content in favor of what he termed the "م شتوياتي procedure" (al-ijra' al-mishtayati), which facilitates a multidimensional reading of the text. This procedure aims to construct a holistic perception of the text, rather than confining the analysis to a single dimension or level.

Despite Mortad's investigation into the various levels of a text, this does not imply a return to traditional textual segmentation, but rather serves a methodological purpose. His experience affirms that the text is an integrated unity whose levels and elements interact in a manner that precludes absolute fragmentation. Furthermore, his work reveals a plurality of methodologies and readings, as he does not impose a singular method upon all literary texts. For Mortad, methodology is an operational tool that adapts to the nature and specificities of the text, rather than a fixed mold imposed upon it from the outside. Thus, his critical vision synthesizes an openness to modern methodologies with the preservation of Arabic specificity, positioning his work as a model for the synthesis of tradition and modernity. Ultimately, Mortad has contributed to the development of modern Arabic criticism through his methodological awareness, the plurality of his readings, and his endeavor to construct a critical practice capable of apprehending the text in its totality.

In conclusion:

Having traversed the depths of this research and attempted to deconstruct its various components, we have arrived at several findings which can be summarized in the following points:

- Abdelmalek Mortad has synthesized tradition and modernity within the framework of his critical trajectory.
- For him, criticism constitutes a secondary form of writing derived from intensive reading; it is a creative and aesthetic literary genre that is no distinct from literature itself.
- He posits that the text possesses an autonomous legitimacy, existing independently of its author, with its internal world accessible through the act of reading. Throughout his career, the critic has adhered to the concept of methodology, evolving from traditional approaches toward modern linguistic frameworks.
- His methodological approach is embodied in the concept of "non-methodology" (la méthode non-méthodique), which entails selecting specific elements from various methodologies as they suit the requirements of the text.
- His semiotic methodology is multifaceted, influenced by Western scholarship while simultaneously exerting an influence upon it through its recourse to classical Arabic heritage.
- The critic utilizes established semiotic critical terminology, occasionally proposing equivalent terms or alternative frameworks.
- The work under study, Alif-Ya, exemplifies the predominant characteristics of contemporary Algerian criticism in both its thematic approach and methodological rigor.

Ultimately, it must be affirmed that Abdelmalek Mortad remains a preeminent figure in the realm of contemporary Arabic literary criticism, a scholar who has transmitted his expertise to subsequent generations and remains a staunch defender of his literature, and by extension, his identity and authenticity. He is truly a worthy successor to a distinguished lineage. Regardless of the accolades received, his contributions are difficult to fully encapsulate, as scholarly engagement with our literature and intellectuals remains critically insufficient.

Consequently, there is an urgent need for renewed intellectual vigor and a sense of responsibility toward our Arabic literary heritage. This necessitates a concerted effort to revisit and study our literary legacy, thereby drawing attention to its significance. Such efforts should be intensified through the organization of symposia and seminars, and by encouraging researchers and specialists to produce scholarly monographs and conduct rigorous investigations into the depths of our literary history.

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