

THE POWER OF THE TITLE  
*WHY HAVE YOU LEFT THE HORSE ALONE*  
BY MAḤMŪD DARWĪSH

*Ibrahim Taha*

HAIFA

This article deals with various functions of the title of Darwīsh's collection *Why Have You Left the Horse Alone* in three different contexts: as an independent and separate text; in relation to the poem in which it originally appeared; and in relation to all the poems in the collection. Our case discussion shows that the interpretation of the title means in fact a discussion of the entire text, or rather of all these texts. It also shows that the question/title has equally informative, rhetorical, provocative, and communicative facets, and as such our discussion grants it great *summarizing* and *representational* power. When all this power is given to the title as pre-text, it in essence also makes the title a post-text.

The literary title fills numerous and varied functions resulting from diverse considerations. One function is identification. Beyond this, any literary title has a dimension of focusing, summarizing, and representing.<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Owing to the multi-functional power of the literary title, Levin treats the topic using the generic term "titology." See Harry Levin, "The Title as a Literary Genre," *Modern Language Review* 72 (1977): xxiii–xxxv. Genette, following the works of Ch. Grivel and L. Hoek, distinguishes three major functions of the title: designation, indication of the content, and seduction of the public. See Gérard Genette, "Structure and Functions of the Title in Literature," *Critical Inquiry* 14 (1988): 708. According to Fisher, titles "are names for a purpose, but not merely for the purpose of identification and designation, in spite of the important practical role which indexical names play in the designative process. The unique purpose of titling is hermeneutical: titles are names which function as guides to interpretation." In sum "a title is not only a name, it is a name for a purpose." John Fisher, "Entitling," *Critical Inquiry* 11 (1984): 288, 289. Like Fisher, Adams believes that "titles are *never* merely proper names." Hazard Adams, "Titles, Titling, and Entitlement To," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 46 (1987): 17. One of the major functions of the literary title is "focusing." "What a focusing title does is select from among the main elements of core content one theme to stand as the leading one of the work. . . . What a focusing title does then is suggest which of the contending themes should be given center place in interpreting the work and organizing one's appreciation of it." Jerrold Levinson, "Titles," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 44 (1985): 35.

Any specific object that plays a special part in our lives carries important meaning, and as such it merits a certain title that will somehow represent it.<sup>2</sup> This basic assumption is important when we stress, on the one hand, the complex relation between the title and the literary text it represents and, on the other, the relation between the title, the text, and the reader. The title itself compels us to discuss such relationships; moreover, the idiosyncrasy that it grants to its text allows us to examine it and its text as against other titles and texts either by the same author or by other authors. The true-title, the original one chosen by the author himself,<sup>3</sup> was presumably chosen after serious consideration, or more precisely the choice was made after various elements and components had been pondered. This assumption relies on the fact that the literary title is chosen by the author only after completing the process of writing the text. In being chosen, the title is subject to the same reflection as the text in the writing process.<sup>4</sup> But the title demands additional considerations.<sup>5</sup> If we may treat the text as a private statement or one with the potential for some sort of specification, the title constitutes a summarized, representative, and concise statement.<sup>6</sup> And if the literary title is capable of representing any text, or perhaps all the texts in the collection (as in our case, as discussed later on), this obliges the reader to perform the arduous labor of referring to a variety of data both within and outside the text. The reader accordingly has to be highly informed and possess a wealth of experience, knowledge, and analytical ability.

Every literary title has some kind of reference potential. Three types of reference are discussed in the following: (a) the title as a system of self-reference, namely, a certain reference to the biography of the author; (b) the title as a system of external reference, namely, some sort of reference to general history; (c) the title as a system of internal reference, namely, some sort

---

<sup>2</sup> See Fisher, 298–99.

<sup>3</sup> See Adams, 9; Levinson, 33.

<sup>4</sup> Like the body of the text, titles “say something about the work as well as the alleged sitter or the intention of the artist.” Fisher, 292.

<sup>5</sup> Derrida believes that “presumably by a real author, the title still is part of a so-called literary fiction; but it does not play a role in the same fashion as what is found inside the same fiction.” Jacques Derrida, “Title (to be specified),” *Sub-Stance* 31 (1981): 14.

<sup>6</sup> Robert Ricatte believes that “a title is needed, because the title is a sort of flag toward which one directs oneself. The goal is then to explain the title.” Quoted in Genette, 701.

of reference to the body of the text itself.<sup>7</sup> The first two types of reference may well be interrelated, as in our case. Self-reference can be manifested in the intertextual relations between the title and details from the personal biography of the author. When this biography is also the biography of an entire people somehow represented by the author, we are dealing with external reference, which may be discussed in general historical terms. In such a case the reader must be informed and well versed in the extratextual data, whether they refer to the personal biography of the author or to general history or both. The title can constitute a bridge between the text and the reality outside it. It does not matter whether the reader crosses this bridge from reality to the text, or the reverse, from the text to the exterior, as in our case. Such a title strengthens the relation between literature and history. It is generally thought that in every case the literary text includes certain details from the biography of the author, but this does not automatically make it an autobiography. A title with a potential of self- and external reference, like the one we have here, is demanding, and the reader cannot easily ignore the historical and biographical details to which the title refers in the process of text interpretation.

In the case of every literary title we may speak of some sort of inner reference. No title of a literary text fails to refer in some way to the data of the text itself. Nor is any literary text completely objective or neutral. The literary title is generally a concentration and focusing of the author's system of intentions, so it may be discussed through the terminology of motif or leitmotiv, as will be specified later on. The literary title is thus a kind of subtext that encompasses the overall meaning of the text by various means of title design: addition, summary, focusing, representation, irony, parody, opposition, interpretation, metaphors, and so on. This encompassing by the literary title is multi-directional. As the literary title can encompass central motifs appearing in the body of the text, the text may also encompass the title, and the reader may discern title elements scattered throughout it. The literary title may also encompass various extratextual elements, from the author's biography and from history. Any profound discussion of the literary title therefore bears a significant informative or hermeneutic character. Discussing the title of a literary text means discussing the entire text, including all

---

<sup>7</sup> According to Hollander "a title designates or at least directs certain forms of behavior toward its holder." John Hollander, *Vision and Resonance: Two Senses of Poetic Form* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975), 214. "Like any other title of a work of art, the title of a poem provides us with a means of referring to the poem." E. A. Levenston, "The Significance of the Title in Lyric Poetry," *Hebrew University Studies in Literature* 6 (1978): 63.

aspects that may aid in the process of interpretation.<sup>8</sup> Since we may always speak of a bi-directional relation between the title and the extratextual reality, we may also speak of a simultaneous reading of two separate texts.

While dealing with the title of a literary text, the reader should first be equipped with pre-textual knowledge and information in diverse areas, and be capable of employing this accumulated material. Secondly, he should possess the analytical ability to move between the title and the body of the text in accordance with the demands of the reading and interpretation process. Thirdly, he should be versed in the general work of the author, to be able to draw general conclusions. In the following sections of this article I shall try to demonstrate the function of these three faculties, while introducing elements from various domains. Anne Ferry suggested discussing the title of a poem in three stages: the title as an independent, grammatical unit; the title in the context of the text; the title in context or relationship with other texts. This model certainly suits the discussion of assumptions and objectives set out in this article.<sup>9</sup>

*The title as an independent text: First reading*

In opening the discussion of the dynamics of the title of a collection of poems, *Li-mādhā tarakta l-ḥiṣān waḥīdan* (Why have you left the horse alone) by Maḥmūd Darwīsh,<sup>10</sup> we shall refer to the semantic status of each word composing the title.

*li-mādhā*. The Arabic expression is an interrogative that inquires about cause (for what reason). Important, namely, in this case is the reason behind the act embodied in the question, and not the act itself or whether it has been completed or is going to occur in the future. A question is usually a sentence referring to a hidden or absent meaning. By definition, the hidden/absent is important to the asker. The question *li-mādhā* refers to the act as a known and familiar fact, whether it has actually happened or is about to happen, and

---

<sup>8</sup> According to Fisher (292), “titles do affect interpretation. They tell us how to look at a work, how to listen.” Genette (719) accepts Eco’s assumption that the title “is a key for interpretation.” See also Steven Kellman, “Dropping Names: The Poetics of Titles,” *Criticism* 17 (1975): 154; Levinson, 30.

<sup>9</sup> See Anne Ferry, *The Title to the Poem* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1996), 1. For a general examination of titling in modern Arabic poetry based on these faculties, see Rashīd Yaḥyāwī, *al-Shi‘r al-‘arabī al-ḥadīth: Dirāsa fī l-munjaz al-naṣṣī* (al-Dār al-Bayḍā‘: Ifrīqiyā al-Sharq, 1998), 107–71.

<sup>10</sup> Maḥmūd Darwīsh, *Li-mādhā tarakta l-ḥiṣān waḥīdan (Why Have You Left the Horse Alone)* (London: Riyāḍ al-Rayyis li-l-Kutub wa-l-Nashr, 1995).

what matters is the cause. This may be found in various places: it may lie with the performer of the act (the father, whose identity is not known at this stage of reading), or with the horse that experienced the leaving act (the object referred to in the question), or it may be found in neither, but in some external factors. Whether the cause lies with the father, the horse, or external factors, the father is the one supposed to answer.

*tarakta*. Leaving is an act that carries an obvious spatial meaning. We may claim that any verb/occurrence in language acquires some sort of spatial meaning, but here the verb refers directly to a certain space. The meaning of such an act seems to draw directly upon the type, characteristics, and significance of the space. Leaving is the action of transition from one space to the other. This transition may stem from various desirable and undesirable, inner or outer, important or insignificant reasons. Whatever the reasons for leaving, it is important for the reader to know what is the first space left and what is the second space the characters have moved to. Namely, the spaces related to the act of leaving are important to the asker, even if they are not highlighted in the question itself, as will be discussed later. The word *tarakta* according to various dictionaries and sources and in everyday usage may have the connotation of abandonment. One of its derivatives, *tarīka*, means a young girl who has been forsaken unmarried in her parents' house. There is also the meaning of a garden neglected without care and tending. Accordingly, the reference to leaving as presented in the title may be understood as an expression of protest. The asker sounds as if he does not accept the leaving or approve of this act. The leaving here is perceived as desertion. The question asked is not neutral; it is not the question of one who is objective and whose only wish is to know the reasons as they stand. This feeling is strengthened when we pass on to the subsequent words in the sequence of the question (title).

*al-ḥiṣān*. The horse has special significance in the history of many peoples, and in the history of the Arabs in particular. The horse in Arab culture fills two functions, one spiritual and one practical. Without going into excessive detail, I wish to emphasize that the horse here seems to fulfill both these functions even if only potentially, as we shall see. I have mentioned the act of desertion in spatial terminology, although what has been deserted is the horse and not the space itself. More precisely, the act of leaving is principally connected to one object in the entire space left, which is the horse. Thus the horse appears here as a spatial sign, and this spatial sign maintains a deep relationship with the space in which it is found and which it represents, as will be clarified later on. If we ask why the horse was chosen to represent the general space, and not any other object, it turns out that the

horse is the only thing in this space that requires some reference or treatment from the asker's viewpoint, as will also be explained later on.

*waḥīdan*. Our assumptions regarding the concern for the horse are further reinforced when it emerges that the horse is left on its own. In principle, leaving a horse alone, with no one to see to its food, drink, or safety, is a matter for real concern: the concern felt in the tone of the asker is entirely understandable. The word *waḥīdan* appearing in the body of the title focuses and delimits the question. There is a disparity between the question *li-mādhā tarakta l-ḥisān?* and *li-mādhā tarakta l-ḥisān waḥīdan?* It is as if the emphasis is shifted from the "horse" in the first question to the word "alone" in the second question. Were we to penetrate deeper into the consciousness of the asker we might find that from the asker's viewpoint it is permissible to leave the horse, but absolutely forbidden to leave it alone. The word "alone" shows that the leaving act was inclusive, namely the leaver took with him everything except the horse. The asker's question thus becomes understandable and convincing. Why the horse and nothing else? Why not leave with it something else, some object or some other living creature?

At this stage of reading, the reader's first encounter with the text—the stage of expectations, guesses, sensations, and presumptions—the reader cannot answer many of the questions triggered by the title. The title, as presented here, sparks numerous questions, reflections, sensations, expectations, and guesses which can find a consensual answer only in the body of the text, or more precisely with the help of the body of the text. The title is full of gaps that are a function of the lack of basic information, vital for the reader in order to interpret the text. This information is not exactly missing but is delayed or postponed till later, namely, to the body of the text (the single text from which the title was taken, and the inclusive text of all the poems in the collection). The title, in the first reading, provides a certain direction of interpretation by means of various codes included in it. These codes are extremely concise, so the title as presented at this stage constitutes a focus or concentration of textual data or outlines that demands a shift to the body of the text to search for, or to create, the full details and to fill in the various gaps opened as a result of the focal character of the title.

In order to move to the next stage of reading, the stage of examining the title in the context of the entire text, we should first define what exists and what is missing in the title. On the one hand, the first encounter with this title leaves many questions. For instance, we have no details regarding the identity of the asker and the one asked. Missing too are details of the act of leaving, the mode, the reasons for it, and its significance. We do not have

details about the horse itself and the importance of these for the act of leaving. Nor do we have details about leaving the horse alone. On the other hand, the title gives the feeling that something “serious” is going on. The feeling is that the asker does not just ask for objective, dry information but that he somehow protests against the act of leaving the horse alone. In other words, he cannot understand or vindicate this act.

Some may ask, quite justifiably, whether the emotions aroused in the reader by the title are based on the text. The answer can be given only after contact with the body of the text has been made. Then a more fundamental question arises: Are not these emotions of mine, as a reader, affected by my reading of the text? As I write these pages I know the entire text over which this title appears, and I also know the poet, so I may have been affected by this acquaintance when referring to the title as an independent text. Theoretically, this is true, even if these are my own emotions as experienced in my first contact with the title, before reading the entire poem or other poems in the compilation. First of all, recall that we are dealing here with emotions and not with information, facts, or opinions. Second, the emotions were created on the basis of both the linguistic sequence of the title and of the educational load invested in reading. I have been careful not to mix knowledge amassed through my reading of the body of the poem and the entire compilation of poems in the discussion of the title at this stage. The title is like a half-truth that determines the reading strategy and interpretation; it is the direction and the guide. Generally speaking the title is stingy on first contact, it has everything but gives little.<sup>11</sup> There are stingy persons who have nothing and therefore give nothing, who even if they did have something would give nothing. These are people who are stingy by nature. And there are persons who are stingy in practice, who have something to give, but who out of care for what they have and wishing to keep it give nothing. The title is a stingy text both by its nature and in fact. By its nature as a limited textual datum, semantically and quantitatively, it cannot provide the reader with much information. By its definition and role, to direct, guide, focus, and the like, it is at this stage of reading restricted to providing limited data in order to encourage the reader to search for the full and complete details in the body of the text.

*The title in the context of the poem: Second reading*

The question that became the title of the entire collection is in fact one line taken from the fifth poem, “Abad al-ṣubbār,” in the first part, “Īqūnāt min billawr al-makān.” This poem contains a dialogue between a father and

---

<sup>11</sup> For more details, see Ferry, 2–3.

his son. This title is a question the son asks his father. It is phrased in the second person, which shows that the communication between the asker and the respondent is direct.

In the opening of the poem the son asks his father his first question: “Where are you taking me, father?” His father replies immediately: “In the direction of the wind, son . . .” (32). So already at the opening of the poem we are dealing with an act of leaving in which the first (deserted) space is defined regarding the asker and the asked, as well as the reader, while the space headed to is unknown. The space abandoned is a house in one of the Arab villages located east of Acre (32). If we connect these textual data to the extratextual ones from the biography of the poet, we may assume that we are dealing with Darwīsh’s birthplace, al-Birwa, which was destroyed by the Israeli army in 1948, and from which all the residents were evacuated. We are dealing here with a poem (and with the entire compilation of poems) of a distinctly autobiographical character, although the third person is used.<sup>12</sup> The space where they are compelled to move is somewhere in the north, and at the time of leaving it seemed to them merely a place of temporary settlement. The poem clearly shows that the father firmly believed in the possibility of returning home to his village the moment the Jewish soldiers went back to their countries of birth, far from that village (33).

Thus, in reply to the son’s second question at the time of leaving, “And who will live in our home, in our place, father?” the father replies: “The house will remain as it is, son!” (33). The father’s powerful belief that they

---

<sup>12</sup> For more details on the autobiographic nature of *Why Have You Left the Horse Alone*, see Subḥī al-Ḥadīdī, “Khiyār al-sīra wa-istrāṭijiyāt al-ta‘bīr,” *al-Qāhira* 151 (1995): 26–36. For a similar discussion on the autobiographic nature of Darwīsh’s *Memory for Forgetfulness*, see Yves Gonzalez-Quijano, “The Territory of Autobiography: Maḥmūd Darwīsh’s Memory for Forgetfulness,” in Robin Ostle, Ed De Moor, and Stefan Wild, eds., *Writing the Self: Autobiographical Writing in Modern Arabic Literature* (London: Saqi Books, 1998), 183–91. Use of the third person does not detract from this collection’s autobiographic nature. Darwīsh shows an obvious talent for mixing different persons (first, second, third; singular and plural) in his writing. For more details see Terri DeYoung, “Nasser and the Death of Elegy in Modern Arabic Poetry,” in Issa Boullata and Terri DeYoung, eds., *Tradition and Modernity in Arabic Literature* (Fayetteville: The University of Arkansas Press, 1997), 75–81. One of the major features of the autobiography is the obvious use of explicit and direct persons with no mask. For more details on the employment of the mask in Darwīsh’s poetry, see Ali al-Allaq, “Tradition as a Factor of Arabic Modernism: Darwīsh’s Application of a Mask,” in J. R. Smart, ed., *Tradition and Modernity in Arabic Language and Literature* (Surrey, UK: Curzon Press, 1996), 18–26.



will return home is backed in the text by two major data. First, he keeps the key to the house and protects it with all its might, as one guards one's most precious possession. Second, he withstands great pressures, and nothing can change his stance or his will, not even torture by the British, who crucified him for two nights for something of which he was innocent (33). These two data constitute two important messages, the first of which is transmitted to the son by demonstration and the second by narration. This is more or less the general summary of the text in the first part, before the son asks his father the third question, which is also the most important and decisive in this discussion: "Why have you left the horse alone?" (33), which, as we know, became the title of the entire collection.

Towards the end of the poem, the father asks his son to be strong and withstand difficulties for the sake of returning home. Now the son poses his fourth and last question: "When, father?" (34). Here as well, as in the two previous questions, the son receives an immediate answer from his father, and to a certain extent it is also safe and clear-cut: "Tomorrow, maybe in two days, my son" (34). In the last stanza of the poem he reminds his son of the destruction of the fortresses built by the Crusaders when they conquered the country (35), and the inference is clear. In this part of the poem the father asks his son always to be mindful of the future, that is to say, not to despair as a result of what he has undergone and what they have suffered. The fourth question addressed by the son to his father primarily means that the son has not accommodated himself to his father's reassuring answers, and so he cannot remain calm and quiet.

I found it important to present all these details in order to provide the overall context in which the question/title appears in the text. It is essential to mention that the son in this poem appears primarily as the addressee, while the father is the addresser, who tries to teach his son a clear lesson by various means. This lesson is mainly taught to the son as a result of the questions addressed by the son to his father. Namely, the son here appears as a consumer of information provided by the father that the father believes in with all his heart. We are dealing here with a father who loves to give and a son who loves to receive. The questions addressed by the son to the father evince the strength of the communication between them. This communication stresses both the connection and sequence between generations. It is vital for the son to know and express a position/sensation, just as it is important for the father to inculcate various values to his son that will assure inner strength, power, belief, and optimism. This suggests that the poet's choice of the son to play the role of the asker shows his own craving that the younger generation will continue the protest and will cling to his will to

return home.

The four questions in the poem relate to the following elements in this order: space, man, reason (occurrence or event), time. These constitute the a priori conditions for any human existence. And what is existence from the viewpoint of a human being? Existence, for the purposes of our argument, can be defined as a specific *act* that he performs in time and space. The four questions asked by the son refer to the existence of the son. Naturally, the first thing a child of this age cares about is his own physical existence, whether consciously or not. The son, as a result of the acts of leaving that he and his family were compelled to perform, feels threatened; he is conscious of a certain danger that threatens his physical existence. His dislocation from his home and its being abandoned to the whims of cruel destiny constitute a true threat. The father strives to provide a life for his son, or to establish some sense of a life, by means of strong belief, encouragement, reinforcement, and optimism. These are in fact the only means available to the father for achieving this purpose. The father cannot actually prevent the dislocation, and what remains is to believe with all his heart that he will return home.

The third question, which is also the focus of our discussion, attains a special position with respect to the three other questions. Before discussing this position I would like to consider the significance of this question and its relationship to the reply following it. The answer to this question is made up of two clear and defined lines:

To keep the home alive, son,  
Homes die if their inhabitants leave. . . . (34)<sup>13</sup>

This answer demands an explanation. It implies that the home requires care to keep away the feeling of emptiness; and emptiness means death. According to this answer, the horse was left alone in the house to keep it alive. In the condition of war, expulsion, destruction, and killing, which prevails in the background of the text and the entire collection, humans cannot be left behind, so they have left the horse, which functions as the most vital sign of life capable of replacing man. The choice of the horse—and not any other animal—shows that it has been given a special status both for the father/respondent and for the son/asker, as mentioned in the previous section. In addition, the choice of the horse, which possesses this special status, points to the ultimate importance of the house itself. The very importance of

---

<sup>13</sup> Translation mine.

the house made it essential to choose the horse, with its particular status, to keep the house alive. Because of this identification, the asker is not referring only to the horse but also to the house, perhaps mainly to the house, even if indirectly. The child most probably asked directly about the horse since by the child's logic it is a living creature with which one can communicate and which requires direct and daily care. The father's answer fills the gap, or more precisely, stresses what is indirectly implied by the question.

Despite the great importance accorded to the horse, and despite the essentiality accorded to the house, based on the answer above man remains the most important being, through which things like the horse and the house acquire their significance: "Homes die if their inhabitants leave. . . ." The basic assumption is that guarding the house is a duty based on human needs. The immediate need both of the asker and the asked is to go back to the house as soon as possible. In order to go home to a living and intact home they have to leave in it or near it a sign of life (the horse). Leaving the horse near the home is an indication of their expectation and of their belief that they will go back home one day. Viewed from this perspective, leaving the horse at the house, in accordance with the father's answer, is not to be interpreted as forsaking or desertion, but quite the opposite. This act of forsaking was performed in response to a powerful wish to live. By this logic, leaving the horse at the house means leaving there something from one's life, from one's heritage and memory, and from one's identity, that will necessitate going back. Leaving the horse at the house fulfills two functions simultaneously. It expresses the wish to go back to the house, and it spurs and catalyzes the return, that is, it ensures that this wish will come true. The first function acquires a direct and explicit expression in the text itself in a way that does not demand additional explanation. The second function, which is more implied or embedded, is related to the choice of the horse to represent life and the return home, and not any other animal that used to be bred in Arab villages in that period (1948). In addition to the familiar role of the horse as helper in agriculture, the animal was also a means of transport, particularly in those times and conditions. If the horse had not been left at the house, that is, if they had taken the horse with them, this might have had two explanations: either that they had left on a long journey that required using the horse or that this was a final desertion, with no option of returning, which meant taking all their possessions, thus also requiring the work of the horse. These two explanations are mutually related to highlight in effect one statement, namely, that the act of leaving is only temporary and that they will return home sooner or later.

Considering the father's reply, how are we to interpret the protest, previ-

ously mentioned, underlying the question asked by the son? First, in reference to the question on the informative level, recall that the question precedes the answer. The son wants to protest to his father because of his lack of knowledge before he gets all the “convincing” explanations from his father. Otherwise the answer might take the punch out of the question and neutralize it, the answer eliminating the question. Second, if we treat this question as rhetorical, no explanation, convincing as it may be, can eliminate the protest. The son’s question protests against the act of leaving both the house and the horse, even if this is a temporary departure and even if the return is assured. Taken in this sense the question remains pertinent even after the answer is given. In both explanations the fundamental protest is retained, even if the departure, as explained by the father, is temporary. The son is allowed to protest whether he knows these explanations or not, whether he accepts them or not. The son’s protest is a function of a primary-sensory awareness of a certain danger in the act of leaving.

*The title in the context of the collection: Third reading*

Since the question asked by the son in the poem “Abad al-ṣubbār” serves as the title of the entire collection, it needs to be discussed in this context. In the title three main words appear that constitute central motifs throughout the poems in the compilation: leaving, the horse, and loneliness. Forms of the verb *taraka*, to leave, appear thirty-two times in the collection, to which we should add synonyms with identical or similar meaning. Synonyms such as *khallafa*, to leave behind, *na’ā*, to go far away, *sāfara*, to travel, *haraba*, to run away, *hajara*, to desert, *ghāba*, to be absent, disappear, *ba’uda*, to go far off, *ghādara*, to abandon, appear in the collection more than twenty times. Verbs indicating the act of leaving thus appear more than fifty times, a large number. As indicated in the previous section, these verbs point to a historical fact in the private and collective biography of the Palestinian poet.<sup>14</sup> The act of leaving is a personal trauma that has been imprinted deep in the memory of the poet since childhood. The retention of this trauma in the memory of the poet as it is reflected in this collection stresses the past and the history that is part of the poet’s mental and physical being. Carrying the pain of the displacement caused by the act of leaving means (a) to remember and remind, (b) to look for a “remedy.” In this collection the poet, instead of weeping, seems to use the pain of the events as a cure. He does not just maintain the

---

<sup>14</sup> For more details on the themes of “departure and strangeness” in *Why Have You Left the Horse Alone*, see Ḥusayn Ḥammūda, “Masār al-na’y, madār al-ghiyāb,” *al-Qāhira* 151 (1995): 44–53.

memory of the trauma and the feeling of incessant pain but uses the memory and the pain in order to search for some kind of answer or remedy. The remedy he seeks is to return to his home from which he has been driven away.

This leads us to consider the motifs that point to the craving of the poet to return. I have examined all the poems and I have found that two verbs, *raja'a* and *'āda*, both meaning to come back, to return, appear about forty times, approaching the number of occurrences of the verbs indicating leaving. The coming back motif is extremely powerful and conspicuous in all the poems in the collection. The poet presents the problem and makes explicit the solution required. The text poses a question and answers it. The near parity of the act of coming back home and the act of leaving represents the author's outlook, based on expectation and longing. Still, verbs indicating the act of leaving appear about fifteen times more often than those denoting a return.

This difference, in my opinion, stems from the intensity of the pain and trauma created by the act of leaving as compared with cautious optimism concerning the possibility of going home. The pain of the poet in the extra-textual reality seems to surpass the possibility of finding a suitable cure, and he expresses this clearly in all the poems of the collection. These two opposites, leaving versus coming back, pain versus relief, are the factors which feed the essence of the poet as reflected in this collection, and in others as well. These contrasts, which seem to tear the poet's identity into two, require some sort of inner reconciliation and adjustment. The employment of the verbs that indicate the act of going back home is meant to balance the pain, or at least diminish its power, not to end it and overcome it, because this is not practical and not possible. Thus the longing to go home, and not the act of returning, becomes the medicine. "The dream as a substitute for reality" is an expression that can well represent this assumption. Note that there is no literature that does not deal in one way or another with the condition of absence. Only a condition of absence, lack, and insufficiency can impel the author to search for and aspire to "perfection." This paradoxical situation sounds absurd, but the strong attachment of contrasts and oppositions is well known, and it emerges in almost any field of life. One who follows the work of Darwīsh has probably noticed not only the poet's awareness of the fact that he cannot attain his goal (go back to his horse and home) but also the fact that he tries to build his life out of this state of lack or want. Darwīsh, like any great writer, knows how to use this condition of lack optimally, and he harnesses language to his need to "feel whole."<sup>15</sup>

---

<sup>15</sup> See Fakhri Sāliḥ, "Li-mādhā tarakta l-ḥiṣān waḥīdan: °An al-laḥza al-

The second motif in the collection is the horse, which appears about thirty times. It appears in the earlier poems more than in the later. This may be explained by the fact that the horse is still fresh in the consciousness and recollection expressed in the earlier poems, which refer more often to the trauma of leaving. The farther the poet gets, in terms of time, from the events of leaving the house and the horse, the farther back the horse is pushed in memory and consciousness, making room for new things. In the last poem in the collection he goes back to the horse, which was abandoned at the opening of the collection, with the words "Don't forget the horse's fear of airplanes" (165). If the horse had been left there, by the house, to watch it and keep it alive, it would not have been able to cope with the planes and fulfill what was expected of it. This testifies to a more rational than to a romantic and dreamy outlook.

The third motif is loneliness, and it appears about fifteen times in the collection. Loneliness is associated with exile, alienation, and estrangement. All these meanings are a function of the trauma of leaving, so the poet thinks about going back home, where he will feel lonely and alienated, as if he were a stranger. These meanings are probably based on the extratextual reality in the poet's individual biography (he is unmarried and has no children or family to assuage the exile). The exile, the loneliness, the alienation, and the estrangement exist not just on the collective Palestinian level but also on the personal level of the individual poet.

Moving a question from its original place in the sequence of the text and attaching it as a title to the entire collection means depriving this sentence of its local meaning and granting it, in exchange, new or additional meanings, as will be clarified later on. After reading all the poems in the collection I go back to the title and observe that it is in fact a question with a question mark, while the title on the cover of the collection appears without a question mark. This change from being a specific and local question in one of the poems to being the title of the entire collection no doubt stresses the poet's wish to give this question a deeper and additional meaning beyond the immediate meaning of the naive question uttered by a child. Does the choice of this question as the title of the entire collection mean that the answer that the child has received from his father to his question is insufficient, so that it has to be asked yet again in the most conspicuous place in the collection, namely in the title? If the title was originally a naive question posed by a naive child, in the title it appears as a philosophical problem of a mature

person. This assumption can hardly be justified without reading the title as an independent text and without reading the poem, the immediate context in which this title originally appeared. But only a profound reading of all the poems in the collection can lead to such an assumption.

Whether the question of the child—as it appears originally—is an actual question or a rhetorical question of fundamental protest, it acquires a new meaning. Understood as a naive practical question, the reply the child received from his father regarding their return home is found not to be true forty years later. Therefore reading the poems in the collection shows that in his development from childhood to maturity the poet moves from the stage of belief, security, and optimism to the stage of realistic and rational thinking, from the stage of belief in deeds to the stage of belief in words, words as a substitute for reality. Even as a statement of protest the question goes through a certain transformation, and the protest in the title differs from the protest in the original question in the poem in which it appears. While the protest in the question was childlike, somewhat impulsive, localized, and focused, the protest in the title has become more rational and philosophical, and broader in scope. Whoever reads the last poem in the collection, “*Indamā yabta‘id*” (As he goes farther and farther away) (164–68), feels a “retreat” from the poet’s clear-cut demand to go back and live in the house. All that is left for him—in this poem, in which he addresses “enemies and strangers,” referring to all those who replaced him and settled on the ruins of his home and village<sup>16</sup>—is to hope to visit his home (167). The protest here is more general.

While it is true that the child’s question has undergone certain changes in its path to a new identity as a title chosen by the adult, this adult is the same person as the child who asked the question. This child is the persona of the entire collection, the poet himself, and the question accompanies him even when he has become an adult, although it has undergone significant changes. Thus he keeps the father’s testament to cling to his dream and his wish to go back home. He goes on asking, expressing now his mature, rational, and philosophical outlook. Choosing the question for the title shows the poet’s intention to be both a child and an adult. He maintains his childhood in his consciousness as a grown-up. It is as if the reader hears two voices, the voice of the child and the voice of the mature poet. This duality means connecting the past to the present, that is to say, to make an attempt to connect what used to be to what is. And what is or will be cannot ignore what used to be,

---

<sup>16</sup> For more details on the interrelations between the “self” and the “other” in Darwish’s poetry, see Kamāl Abū Deeb, “Conflicts, Oppositions, Negations: Modern Arabic Poetry and the Fragmentation of Self/Text,” in Boullata and DeYoung, 108–10, 121–24.

in the poet's view, even if we are dealing with a dream or words. The poet cannot be otherwise; to retain both his identities is a function of the hard reality that is forced on him. The child's aspiration to go back to his horse, his house, and his village has diminished in the course of time, but it has not disappeared. It has acquired a new character of expectation, the expectation of getting back potentially, either in a dream or in words, as mentioned before. Every one of us has had his own childhood dreams and expectations that have disappeared in the course of time, but this childhood expectation will probably never go away. It may change its identity and character, since we are dealing here—as can be seen from all the poems in the collection—with a question of life and existence on both the physical and the spiritual level of the poet and the people he represents.<sup>17</sup>

### Conclusion

In the preceding pages the title of Darwīsh's collection has been discussed in three different contexts: as an independent and separate text; in relation to the poem in which it originally appeared; and in relation to all the poems in the collection. The direction goes from the narrow and specific to the open and general. Each subsequent section of this study reinforces the theses of the previous one and adds new data to it and updates it. Our case discussion shows that the interpretation of the title means an interpretation of the single text and the interpretation of all the poems in the collection. A discussion of the title is in fact a discussion of the entire text.

The basic assumption is that when the poet chooses a certain sentence from the text to be the title, this choice is not arbitrary or random but the result of various considerations, which we have attempted to identify in this article. The question—or perhaps it should be called a statement—was chosen to represent the entire collection, and this is not a simple role.<sup>18</sup> This shift from the body of the text, from the local context of the question, to the cover of the entire collection imparts to the question a representative role in many respects—esthetically, stylistically, and formally, as well as in relation to various aspects of the content and the messages conveyed by the text. Formally and stylistically, we are dealing with a deep question asked in two

---

<sup>17</sup> See Wā'īl Ghālī, "al-Hiṣān yaqtaḥim al-ashbāḥ," *al-Qāhira* 151 (1995): 154–64.

<sup>18</sup> This statement reminds us of Ferry's distinction between "title of the poem" and "title about the poem." Darwīsh's title is both of the text and about it; see Ferry, 211. Presumably, owing to its being an integral part of the text, it greatly affects the interpretation process of the whole collection.



voices, one that of the child and the other that of the man. Any question demands an answer, and we are therefore addressing a communicative title that demands the participation of two people, the asker and the respondent. They are both characters acting within the text itself, but the respondent may be an external addressee, including the reader. In addition, the title, in Arabic grammatical analysis, is a verbal sentence and not a nominal sentence. As such, it is full of action and arouses numerous questions, as detailed in the body of the article. Regarding content and message, the title both summarizes and represents. Its summarizing and representative power urges the reader to search for complete details, both in the single poem in which the title originally appears and in all the poems in the collection, and maybe even in the extratextual reality. The title, as it were, wishes to document a certain historical reality, both to ponder it and to protest against it.

Various considerations, then, must have led to the choice of this question as the title of the collection and as representative of all the poems in it. These can be arranged in the following five points.<sup>19</sup>

1. The title represents a difficult historical fact from the poet's viewpoint: the uprooting of the poet and of a large portion of his people from their land of birth in 1948. Historical documentation is some sort of quest to imprint this fact deep in the collective memory of the Palestinians. From this point of view the question in the title is considered on the technical and immediate level, as an actual question about a real happening.

2. Awareness of history means awareness of the threats inherent in it, which will lead the one to whom the question is directed to a condition of readiness to protest in principle. That is, the question is not content to request information but aspires to translating the information into some sort of protest. The question in the title is perceived here as a rhetorical question that is intended to give a clear and unambiguous message.

3. If the question arouses protest on the level of principle, this protest will stimulate a search for the remedy or a substitute, the latter being to find an alternative to a belief in "amending history," which would imply going back to the land of birth. The question/title appears here as a potential cause for defiance if we accept that we cannot interpret it as a textual datum detached from the answer given to it, since the answer stresses that the act of leaving is only temporary and that history will be amended.

---

<sup>19</sup> When titles are questions "all are attempts at arranging language in order to arrive at an overview, and all direct us to think along certain lines. Titles in interrogatory form are like those 'questions for study' that scholars and teachers are fond of employing in order to call attention to important elements of a work of art." Kellman, 156.

4. The poet's choice of a question to serve as title indicates his longing for the title to fulfill a communicative function. This communication between the asker and the respondent is a communication between son and father, a communication between generations. It is very important for preserving the belief in amending history. The father imprints this belief on his son. As observed in the body of the article, the reader is confronted with a father who loves to give and a son who loves to receive. Since the son brought up the question, the issue seems to concern a generation that wants to receive the legacy that the father wishes to pass on.

5. The third question out of the four in the poem "Abad al-ṣubbār" was chosen as title because of the force with which it sums up and represents the general meaning of its verbal components, and because it includes the three main motifs recurring constantly throughout the collection. In addition, this question includes elements relating to the basic conditions of all human existence: space, time, person, and event.

All these five functions fulfilled by Darwīsh's title—namely, historical documentation, translating historical knowledge into potential protest, stimulating the search for an alternative remedy, reinforcing communication between generations and the preservation of the belief in amending history, and the inclusion of the three main motifs of the collection—grant this title great summarizing and representational power. When all this power is given to the title as pre-text, the part which is the first to welcome the reader and is separated from the body of the text, it in essence also makes the title a post-text, namely, the last station to which the reader returns after his contact with the body of the text. The title is what opens the reading and interpretation process, and it is also what closes it. Thus the title, as such, becomes the focus and thereby demands a bi-directional movement from itself to the body of the text and the reverse. The high concentration of information and meaning within Darwīsh's title takes it beyond the minimal role of every title, which is identification. This title is the first interpretative statement given by the poet to his collection of poems, and it demonstrates clearly that the literary title can be a highly important tool of textual self-interpretation.