

***Photopoetry as You Have Never Read/Seen Before:
A Study of ‘Alā’ ‘Abd al-Hādī’s Shagin [Sympathetici] (2003)***

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Abstract

Pairings of poetry and photographs date back to the nineteenth century. However, the name photopoetry, was first used in *Photopoems: A Group of Interpretations through Photographs* (1936), photographed and compiled by Constance Phillips. Michael Nott (2022) defines photopoetry as “a form of photo-text that takes, for its primary components, poetry and photography” (p. 1). Rather than using photos to illustrate poems or poems to describe photos, however, the poet-cum-artist ‘Alā’ ‘Abd al-Hādī inextricably mixes photos and written texts to create a gap in signification that only the contemplating recipient can fill out. In *Shagin [Sympathetici]*, the *homo ludens* ‘Abd al-Hādī mixes one text with more than one photo, and one photo with more than one text; in addition, his volume lacks pagination, and a table of contents, thus inviting the reader/ viewer to play his/ her own game, making connections between, and creating meaning from, text and image. The present study shows how different this volume, best described in Umberto Eco’s terms as an *opera aperta* that affords multiple interpretations, is from extant examples of photopoetry in terms of both form and content.

Keywords: *Homo Ludens* Poet, Photopoetry, *Opera Aperta*, *Shagin [Sympathetici]*

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Introduction

Pairings of poetry and photographs date back to the nineteenth century. However, the name photopoetry, first appeared in *Photopoems: A Group of Interpretations through Photographs* (1936), photographed and compiled by Constance Phillips. Michael Nott (2022) defines photopoetry as “a form of photo-text that takes, for its primary components, poetry and photography” (p. 1). Accordingly, Nott regards photopoetry as a new genre that traverses the two genres of poetry and photography.

Literature Review

One of the early examples of photopoetry is surrealist *Pro Eto (About that)* (1923), which uses photographs and collages by Alexander Rodchenko in combination with the poetry of Russian Futurist poet, Vladimir Mayakovsky. The work is centered on the tumultuous relationship between Mayakovsky and his lover Lilya Brik, a writer, actor, artist and the wife of his publisher, Osip Brik. The photo of the telephone which features throughout the work can be interpreted as a metaphor for their separation. The work can also be viewed as “a reflection on life in conditions of revolutionary transformation” (Day, 2004, p. 328).



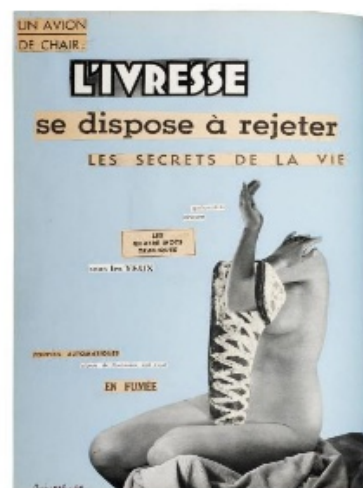
Picture 1. Mayakovsky & Rodchenko, 1923

Another famous example is the avant-garde work, *Facile* (1935), by American artist, Man Ray, and French poet, Paul Éluard. In *Facile*, Man Ray plays with photos of the nude body of Nusch, Ray's professional model and Éluard's second wife, using such techniques as cropping, negative printing, overexposure, multiple exposure, and solarization. Juxtaposed with Éluard's poems, Ray's photos create “a metaphoric or metamorphic space of running water, fertile landscapes, avalanches, and mountains. Moreover, Éluard evokes the creative power of woman in metaphors that link her to movements of unfolding, germination, and multiplication in the natural world and expand to cosmic dimensions” (Adamowicz, 2009, pp. 282-3).



Picture 2. Ray & Éluard, 1935

An example of early photopoetic works that use photomontage is George Hugnet's *La septième face du dé* (*The seventh face of the die*) (1936), which surrealistically juxtaposes poems and photcollaged images to create an erotic work. The title reminds one of Andre Mallarme's *Un Coup de Des N'Abolira Jamais le hazard* (1895), and the poems on the left-hand pages have the same unusual spacing and the various typefaces and sizes reminiscent of Mallarme's work, while the collages on the right-hand pages, feature nude images cut out of *Paris Magazine* and present typical surrealist themes.



Picture 3. Hugnet, 1936

Positives (1966) by two brothers: poet Thom, and photographer Ander Gunn is an example of modernist photopoetry “in which poetry and visual imagery are used to counterpoint and reinforce each other; and to produce between them an effect more powerful and moving than either would on its own” (Cover flap). Both poems and photographs are centered on an unnamed, archetypal, working class woman's life from birth to old age. Number nine features a tightly framed photograph of a young woman, laughing and smoking. The poet compares her to a confident swimmer who is relaxed on the surface of the water but whose impact is great on the water around. Like the swimmer, the woman's relaxed posture and hearty laugh have a great impact on her surroundings.

Poem 9

*She rests on and in
the laugh with her whole body,
like an expert swimmer who
lies back in the water
playing relaxed with
her full uncrippled strength
in a sort of hearty surprise
or the laugh is like a prelude:
the ripples go outward
over cool water, losing
force, but continue
to be born at the centre,
wrinkling the water around it*



Picture 4. Gunn & Gunn, 1966

Photopoetry

Rather than viewing photopoetry as a new genre resulting from the combination of two different disciplines, photography and poetry, ‘Alā’ ‘Abd al-Hādī regards it as an *Isotope* of poetry. According to ‘Abd al-Hādī, *Isotopes* are “the historically aesthetic characteristics that differ from one place to another and from one culture to another” (2022, p. 66). There is an infinite number of isotopes of a literary or artistic genre. These isotopes differ only in their aesthetic characteristics but they all share the same common structural elements ‘Abd al-Hādī calls *Isomers*. From the perspective of ‘Abd al-Hādī’s *Nucleo-genre Paradigm*, photopoetry is only one of the infinite aesthetic manifestations of poetry that have language as their *Homogeneous Medium*, “the nucleus without which the artistic work does not ontologically exist” (p. 40). Treating visual and verbal signs on an equal footing as language, ‘Abd al-Hādī uses visual signs verbally and verbal signs visually.

‘Alā’ ‘Abd al-Hādī’s *Shagin* [*Sympathetici*] (2003)

Instead of using photos to illustrate poems or poems to describe photos, as is the case in the previously mentioned works, the poet-cum-artist ‘Abd al-Hādī chose to inextricably mix verbal and visual signs to create an *opera aperta*, in Umberto Eco’s terms, that affords multiple interpretations. The volume thus goes beyond *ekphrasis*, ‘the verbal representation of visual representation’ (Heffernan, 1993, p. 3), and “mixes the photographic image with the written text creating a gap in signification that arises from the tense relationship between the visual world and the verbal one ... None of the two texts, visual or verbal, is parasitic on the other, or dominating it. Rather, they form together the space of the poetic text, and the key to its possible interpretations” (‘Abd al-Hādī, 2009, p. 182). Through this *avant garde* work,

‘Abd al-Hādī invites recipients to reflect: “what is latent in the image which celebrates silence, and what escapes the scope of vision, the realm of sight, which requires visual listening” (p. 184). Significance thus lies in the gap between visual and verbal signs: what escapes the visual realm is supplied by the verbal sign; what cannot be expressed verbally is silently evoked by the visual sign.

The present volume is dedicated to the poet himself whose photo as a child establishes the female persona as a motherly figure. The caption beneath the photo describes the poet as “a negligent signified by a shadow,” a direct reference to the poet's volume by the same name. In the Arabic title, however, the poet changes the verb *tastadellūn* into *tastadellīn*, thus addressing the female persona whom he chooses to unsettle orthodoxy. The word *dhell*, shadow, is both literally and figuratively apt. Although light is the basis of photography, shadow plays a very significant role in any composition: it directs attention to certain features that might go unnoticed and highlights features that might be left unseen. In his illuminating *Camera Lucida*, Barthes notes “the air is the luminous shadow which accompanies the body; and if the photograph fails to show this air, then the body moves without a shadow, and once this shadow is severed, as in the myth of the Woman without a Shadow, there remains no more than a sterile body” (1981, p. 110). On the level of the visual sign, the hidden identity of the poet is recognized only through the shadow of this photo that features him as a child. The present work is the outcome of mere child’s play with photos and words. Despite his lack of voice, the poet's presence is signified by his shadow cast over the whole work.

Though reduced to child’s play, nothing can be farther from the truth than describing this volume as a simple one. ‘Abd al-Hādī notes: “This volume has a triadic structure, the product of the interrelationship between the poetic style of haiku, the dominance of the voice of yin over yang, as well as the mixture of the visual and written texts” (2009, p. 186). A clue to its complex underlying structure is to be found in the title. Among its shades of meaning, *Shagin* refers to the intertwined twigs of a tree. In this volume, photos and texts are intertwined in a way that is hard to untangle without affecting the whole meaning. They both resemble Japanese haiku: like the haiku, the texts are characterized by their paucity of figurative language; like the haiku, in a photo “everything is given, without provoking the desire for or even the possibility of a rhetorical expansion” (p. 49). In conjunction, texts and photos evoke, reinforce, and complement each other, thus opening up the work for multiple interpretations. To allow recipients the freedom to establish their own connections between photos and texts, the work is free of pagination, titles of poems and table of contents. To guide the recipient to the kind of games that can be played, the same photo is sometimes combined with more than one poem, and the same poem is used with more than one photo.

The voice of yin is clear from the very beginning; she advises the poet-cum-artist:

Color your alphabet
dip a brush into it:
A pinch of light .. floured ..
with a dark tone from this pit.
Then open your text
and pass over alone
as they transit. (‘Abd al-Hādī, 2003)

Following her advice, the poet paints with words evocative images that stimulate readers' imagination and uses photos as an integral part of the composition. The result is a work of art which mixes different media and genres into one whole. Such unity of image and words parallels the unity of man and woman. Traditionally, woman stands for the visual image while man stands for the spoken word. The title, *Shagin*, describes the poet's feeling of distress at the injustice done to women. Hence, he retreats to the background in a sincere attempt to let the voice of yin, traditionally symbolizing darkness and passivity, speak up and express her innermost feelings. By giving woman voice and mixing visual and verbal signs, the poet-cum-artist thus attains a status unrivaled by his peers of Arab poets.

The first image which establishes the theme and points to the technique of this volume is that of a painting by Rene Magritte, a surrealist Belgian artist whose works feature familiar objects in unfamiliar contexts, thus emphasizing that one can never catch the object itself no matter how naturalistically one attempts to depict it. The choice of Magritte is apt as the poet attempts to do with photos and words what Magritte did with painting. Magritte described the act of painting as "the art of putting colors side by side in such a way that their real aspect is effaced, so that familiar objects—the sky, people, trees, mountains, furniture, the stars, solid structures, graffiti—become united in a single poetically disciplined image. The poetry of this image dispenses with any symbolic significance, old or new" (Qtd. in Frasnay, 1969, pp. 99-107). This is what the *homo ludens* poet exactly does: he puts photos side by side with words in such a way that their real aspect is effaced and a new poetic meaning emerges out of their unity. This meaning is further elucidated by the title of the photo, "*Assheghār*," which refers to a type of marriage partnering that was common in the pre-Islamic era where a man married his female guardian to another on the condition that the latter married him his female guardian without a dowry for any. The partnering in this volume is between verbal and nonverbal signs. Rather than using photos to comment on poems, the poet-cum-artist chooses to freely intermingle them, thus creating new meanings and inviting readers to create theirs by participating in the same game of free play.



Picture 5. 'Abd al-Hādī, 2003

The photo refers to the age-old struggle between man and woman although they form together, just like photos and words in this volume, one whole unity. The man's colossal hands on the intentionally deformed nude thighs of the female figure together with the hard shadow of the man absorbed into her light form all contribute to viewers' outrageous feelings at this violent act of rape. However, the woman's face seems to reflect man's features just as the features of oneself is reflected in a mirror. Thus she is nothing more than a projection of

masculinity as theorist Luce Irigaray notes in *This Sex Which Is Not One* (1985). Having established himself as the universal ideal, man swamped feminine subjectivity and turned it into simply another version of himself. In other words, woman is the unrepresented, fragmented self while man represents wholeness and the non-sexed or universal. In contradiction to the Chinese symbol representing yin as dark and yang as light, the female nude figure, which traditionally stands for nature, is made of light, while man's dressed up figure, which traditionally stands for culture and civilization, is dark.

The photos on the front and back covers stand as a reminder of the active role women play in society. On the front, they figure carrying water, the source of life. On the back, they are reaping the fruits of their toil and hard work. In both images, women carry out their role with love as is evident from their happiness, and with sincerity as appears from their pose; they are focusing on their work rather than facing the camera. Despite the indispensable role of women in every society, notwithstanding rural ones, they often go unnoticed. They are regarded collectively as women rather than as individuals who have their own needs. This denotational meaning is clearly conveyed by the effaced features of the women in the photos. Although their work is very hard, these women never lose their femininity; they all have curvy silhouettes and look naturally sexy without meaning to. They are almost covered from head to toe because they go out to work not to attract men as some people claim. However, the parts of their bodies that accidentally appear seem more attractive than the figures of famous stars. The photos thus convey a plethora of meanings that would have required books to elaborate on. Indeed, as the poet declares on the back cover,

Even the dictionary
cannot deconstruct my house
full of photos,
of simple treasures. ('Abd al-Hādī, 2003)

'Abd al- Hādī's work cannot be deconstructed because it is an open work that is rife with parallel, contextual, and metaphorical relationships. An example of a parallel relation that exists on the bitextual level; that is, between the visual and the verbal text, is the image of light kept in a dark room that is mixed with the photo of women covered in heavy, dark clothes that constrict their movement. The literal meaning is that the fair complexion of these women is kept inside these dark, shapeless clothes. The metaphoric meaning is constructed from both texts: the visual and the verbal. Women's inner soul is the light that is preserved inside their dark covers. The irony, however, is that light can only be kept inside a dark room; that is, the dark cover preserves women's chastity and modesty as much as it constrains their freedom. On the intratextual level, two parallel relations are established: on the level of the visual text, women's heavy and dark clothes that restrict their movement is set in sharp contrast with the light and white feathers that allow doves to fly freely; on the level of the verbal text, light that is essential for taking photos is contrasted to the dark room or the camera that is used to take photos. The image calls to mind Barthes' objection to the traditional metaphor of the dark room and establishment of a new one, *La chambre claire* or *Camera Lucida* based on his understanding of photography as a window to the soul.

On the intertextual level, the image of light locked in a dark room that is mixed with the photo of women covered in heavy, dark clothes runs parallel to the image of light locked in

the painting that is mixed with the photo of women covered in white clothes. On the level of the verbal texts, the dark room is parallel to the night; the light kept in the dark room is parallel to the light locked in the painting; the wall is present in both texts but while it is mentioned plainly in the text on the locked light, it is only suggested in the text on the light kept in a dark room. On the level of the visual texts, the image of women walking heavily in dark clothes parallels the image of the women sitting and waiting hopelessly in their white covers.



She stood before the painting
and asked him:
why did you keep the light,
as the dumb did,
in a dark room? (‘Abd al-Hādī, 2003)



At night
the light locked in the painting
was overwhelming him,
so he turned the painting
towards his wall
and slept. (‘Abd al-Hādī, 2003)

Another parallelism is established on the intertextual level between the photo of the women covered in dark clothes and that of the poor, malnourished African girl; both are mixed with the same written text that draws an image of changing clothes everyday using one color set: both the girl and the women are black, although the former is naked and the latter are covered; both are deprived of their basic human rights, the right of sustenance and freedom to live in the case of the African girl, and the right of freedom to move and express oneself in the case of covered women. Ironically, the poetic persona emphasizes, both the black, naked girl and the women covered in black can change clothes every day with one color set. In other words, art can change the bleak reality and create liveliness, happiness and abundance. These are just a few games the *homo ludens* poet plays in the hope of finding the right kind of recipient who is sensitive and attentive enough to unravel the multiple meanings of his verbal and visual signs and revel at their discovery.



Did they believe
this is her nature?
Or did they know
she can,
with one color set,
change her clothes
every day. ('Abd al-Hādī, 2003)



Did they believe
this is her nature?
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An example of a dialectical relation on the bitextual level is the text on the husband's death mixed with the photo of the hands of the mother and child. Without the photo, the text about the husband's death would be a banal, straightforward comment on the unfaithful woman who is trying to keep the appearance of a grief-stricken widow to hide her happiness now that the barrier between her and her lover is gone. With the photo, however, the text assumes a deep though seemingly contradictory meaning. The widow is happy because she will live only for her child. No one else will demand her attention from now on but him. To avoid social criticism, however, she puts on a sad face: cries on her lips and tears in her eyes. In other words, she tries to maintain appearances in front of people for fear of being misjudged as an unfaithful woman if she shows any signs of happiness. Thus the photo does not only convey the meaning that motherly feelings are stronger than any marital relation, but also criticizes the society which exercises unjust power over individuals that drives them to curb even their noble emotions for fear of being misunderstood.



When her husband died,
she put cries on her lips
as the lover was there
while she was
inviting heavy rains,
to hide her happiness. (‘Abd al-Hādī, 2003)

Combined with another text, the photo of the hands of the mother and the child transforms the text from a superficial one about the different dreams of men on earth to an open one that affords multiple interpretations: one interpretation contrasts the dreams of the mother to the dreams of her child; another contrasts the dreams of the children of the same mother. According to the first interpretation, the child dreams of his mother's nipples that will feed him milk and love but the mother dreams of a bright future for her child and wishes to see him a successful man and a caring son. According to the second interpretation, the children of the same mother may differ in their dreams: one may dream of fame, another of wealth and a third of social status, etc. It is the photo that gives rise to these multiple interpretations.



Although we sleep
on the same bed,
our dreams
are different. (‘Abd al-Hādī, 2003)

An example of contextual and metaphorical relations is the image of the crowd mixed with the text on the empty window. The window here is a metaphor for the eye which can see many people but not the comrade whose memory still lingers in the mind's eye. What disturbs in this photo is the sad look on people's faces for the loss of their leader whose presence is very strong despite his absence from the scene. There is parallelism between the verbal and visual texts: they are both empty of the leader but stuffed with people. When asked about this photopoem, 'Abd al-Hādī explained that it describes how Egyptians felt toward the loss of 'Abd al-Nāssir whom they regarded as a comrade.



The window of the house is empty this morning.

It did not feel ashamed

when it got stuffed,

while searching for a comrade,

for a seeable nostalgia. ('Abd al-Hādī, 2003)

Upon examining the seemingly haphazardly arranged photos, coherence emerges at the macro level of the whole work. Thus, Magritte's painting shows woman as a mirror reflecting man; that is, as having no separate identity due to a long history of male violation of woman's rights, exploitation of her body, eradication of her identity and silencing of her voice. However, soon the voice of the female poetic persona emerges and expresses her innermost feelings. She says:



In my mirror, there is frantic clamor.

In my mirror, there is a procuress and two teams:

eleven men and eleven screams!

In my mirror, there is a burning woman and a drowned man!

.....

In my mirror, there is a soul playing

with a bag of human skin! ('Abd al-Hādī, 2003)

The repetition of the phrase "in my mirror" in this poem together with the photo emphasize the "thereness," or presence, of the mental images drawn. Through these images, the female persona expresses the state of disorder inside her soul. This is not a peaceful world where men and women live happily together and complement each other. Rather it looks much like a frantic football match full of clamor, violence and screams. Though equal in number, the two teams are far from being equal: the physically powerful men exercise so much violence on women that they wipe them out completely. Thus the female team is identifiable only by their screams. The procuress that makes all arrangements for these unjust encounters is life itself. It drives man and woman to their natural end, drowning the former and burning the latter. The soul here is in control of the body playing with it as one might play football. The spirit is free, playing, but the body is confined like a leather bag. The spirit of the poem, i.e., its meaning, is hidden, free, and open, but it is detected by a shadow, the body of verbal and visual signs, which constitute the body of the poem. Again the image of the football match recurs pointing to the unfair competition between the two teams. The photo too points to this inequality: the three men occupy center stage and their upper position signifies their power over the woman who is falling to the ground and trying to drive them away from her.

The mirror figures again, though subtly, in the following photo that features the image of swans reflected on the water surface. The poem accompanying the photo again comments on the unfair treatment women receive even from their lovers who find it hard to remain faithful and switch women immediately after making love to them. The photo however ironically displays the romantic figures of the two swans forming a heart shape and displaying much affection and love.



After making love
he left her wet and stretched
immersed so she was reassured!
But when she went out
she caught him washing his heart
with another cloud. ('Abd al-Hādī, 2003)

One more time the mirror subtly appears but this time in the form of an eye whose pupil reflects the images of fierce strangers who seem to be multiplying. The concrete image of fierce strangers multiplying in the pupil of the eye is paralleled by a mental image of aggression and invasion of privacy. The only way to protect herself from this aggression, the poetic persona thinks, is by shutting her eyes.



Shut the windows!
There are bruises in the city air,
and fierce strangers
multiplying
under my cushion. ('Abd al-Hādī, 2003)

The mirror proper appears in the middle of the volume reflecting the image of a young girl who is seen as double while the text equates the murderer with the murdered. Thanks to the photo, an extremely condensed text turns into a philosophical treatise on identity. The duality

in the photo between the back of the young lady and the image of a child in the mirror matches the ambiguity of the text. One wonders: is childhood murderer or murdered? Has it succeeded in killing femininity and emerging triumphant despite the young lady's keenness on maintaining the appearance of an adult woman? Or has childhood been killed in reality and now it can only take shape in the young lady's imagination? The text ends this debate emphasizing that it makes no difference whether murderer or murdered. Without the photo, the text would still make sense, albeit a different one. In a fight, nothing is certain: the murderer does not have any clue whether he will be murdered or not; the murdered too seeks to be a murderer, but his end is brought about by the murderer. In other words, the murderer and murdered are similar and their status is interchangeable. With the photo, however, the meaning is more abstract and complex.



It is all the same.

There is no difference between the two:

The R sought after by the murdered,
and the D concluded by the murderer!

(‘Abd al-Hādī, 2003)

‘Abd al-Hādī’s use of the mirror does not stop here. The volume is replete with verbal & visual images that mirror one another. Some images are even repeated many times to convey different meanings. Thus the image of falling is used to describe the following: the woman who materializes only when she falls morally, the lover who falls from woman’s heart, the birds that fall from the sky, and the butterfly that falls upwards, symbolizing the martyr’s fall that makes him ascend heavens. The image of the window too is repeated many times: first, it appears as a metaphor for the eyelid; second, it figures as a real window; third, it ironically refers to the sewer; fourth, it figures in the photo of the woman sitting with her legs stretched; fifth, it is used both literally and metaphorically in the poem accompanying Nelson Mandela to stand for escape; finally, it is evoked in the text describing how Adam threw her on the street for selling half her soul only. As for the image of the garden, it is repeated both verbally and visually: first, it is described as deserted after the city chased it away like a trained dog; second, it is present by virtue of its absence in the text accompanying the photo of the child sitting in the dry land; third, it appears in the photo accompanying the text about the spring that opened its doors and colored the black earth; fourth, it figures in the photo accompanying the text about the river that flows briskly and pours into clean lungs; finally, it

constitutes the theme of the text accompanying the photo of the smiling girl. Significantly, the image of the dark room, which stands for the camera and calls to mind Roland Barthes' *Camera Lucida*, is a constant reminder of the significance of photos for deciphering meaning. The dark room is the setting of many photos: the photo of the young woman looking at the mirror, the photo of the young woman reading a book, the photo of the little girl sitting on a chair, the photo of the woman holding a cooking pot, and the photo of the flirtatious woman with sad eyes. In the texts too, the image of the dark room figures again and again: first, it is used as a metaphor for vagina in the text accompanying the photo of the female foot; second, it is used as a metaphor for dark clothes that constrain women's freedom; third, it is used both literally and metaphorically in the text accompanying the Photo of the boat; fourth, it appears in the form of the shooting room in the text describing life as a mere script for a failing actress; finally, it appears metaphorically in the form of the mysterious spot in the eyes of the lost from which the horizon emerges.

The mirror figures again at the end of the volume as a verbal sign in the title of a poem. The poetic persona protests: "I am not a Mirror!" Unaccompanied by a photo, the poem reflects on the dilemma that most mothers face; namely, having no existence apart from their family. A typical mother effaces herself and sacrifices her time, money and effort for the sake of her children. However, they tend to take her for granted and show her no signs of gratitude. For twenty years, the female persona notes, they have never brought her a single gift. Even her daughter whom she considered her close friend never greeted her in the morning. The mirror thus has an allegorical meaning in this volume. The poet-cum-artist uses it skillfully to discuss the very complex notion of identity: first as a shadow in the form of the woman's face reflecting man's features in Magritte's painting, then as a real object reflecting the image of a young lady, and finally as a verbal sign in the title of the last text that is not accompanied by an image.

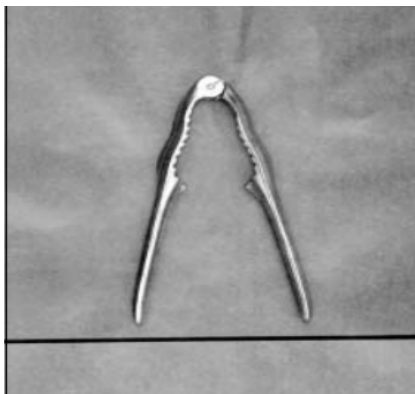
I am not a Mirror!

I shut my door on them,
so the eyes,
that stood long in front of me, vanished.
For twenty years, the place owners
have entered and left without my permission.
Twenty years without a single gift!
Even the child I carried a lot,
who once disclosed her secrets to me,
never greeted me
in the morning! ('Abd al-Hādī, 2003)

In *Camera Lucida*, Roland Barthes writes: "the Photograph always carries its referent with itself, both affected by the same amorous or funereal immobility, at the very heart of the moving world: they are glued together, limb by limb, like the condemned man and the corpse in certain tortures" (1981, pp. 5-6). In "The Rhetoric of the Image," Barthes notes that "it is a

message without a code;" that is, "the relation between the thing signified and image signifying ... is not arbitrary (as it is in language)" (1977, pp. 35-36). In other words, a photograph has a denotative function because it has a quasi-identical relationship with its referent. However, Barthes also remarks that photography "aspires, perhaps, to become as crude, as certain, as noble as a sign, which would afford it access to the dignity of a language" (1981, p. 6).

At the hands of ‘Abd al-Hādī, however, photos in this avant-garde volume, *Shagin* [*Sympathetici*], attain the status of words and acquire a code of connotation similar to the language code. Thus, the image of the nutcracker is used as a metaphor for the city that crushes green fields. The image of the garden, which is compared to a garbage bag even during spring, represents the earth. The similarity between the girl and her reflection in the mirror is compared to the similar position of the murderer and the murdered.



The deserted garden
is blooming
after befriending its hedges.
The city is eager running
like a trained dog. (‘Abd al-Hādī, 2003)



The garbage bag is black.
It was colorful this morning
after spring opened its doors.
(‘Abd al-Hādī, 2003)

On the other hand, verbal signs are used in a way that calls for visual listening. Thus, the dedication and the first verbal text are typed using an artistic font. Ellipsis is often used to stir the reader's imagination and engage him/ her actively with the text; for example,



After wearing
perfume,
.....
he left his pulse in the place
and was gone. ('Abd al-Hādī, 2003)

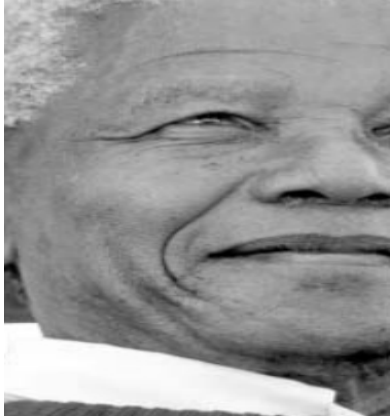
Is it a summary of man's life on earth that elapses in a few seconds, the time necessary to wear perfume? Is it a description of this worldly life that alludes to the Quranic verse: "Know that the life of this world is but amusement and diversion and adornment world" (*The Holy Qur'an* 57:20). Is it a reflection on man's preoccupation with materialistic things and neglect of the spiritual side? These are just a few possible meanings that one can construct from such a short text thanks to the use of ellipsis.

Other stylistic devices that call for visual listening include: oxymoron such as "a mushy stone," "silent talk" and "locked eyesight," repetition such as "in my mirror," and "painting," antonyms such as "inhaled-exhaled," "empty-stuffed," "dark-light," using different parts of speech of the same root like "murderer-murdered" to create parallelism, using pun as in "hot-mail," borrowing the sign @ from the email register, dispersing the letters of a word to create an opposite meaning as in the following text about martyrs:



Suddenly ..
a butterfly ..
l
l
e
F
so white wishes flew
and their murmuring filled my
lungs.
(‘Abd al-Hādī, 2003)

In *The Prose Poem and Genre Apostrophe*, ‘Abd al-Hādī stresses that he “took care in *Shagin* to prevent the recipient from receiving the text doctrinally” (2009, p. 185). Thus he selected very old photos that readers could not have encountered before to avoid calling to mind any historical or cultural references outside the text. To create space identity for these photos and help recipients experience the punctum of a photograph, which Barthes defines as “that accident which pricks me (but also bruises me, is poignant to me)” (1981, p. 27), and distinguishes it from the *studium* which denotes a historical and cultural approach to photography that is not different from approaching other art forms, ‘Abd al-Hādī made several edits using Photoshop including cropping, dimming, changing the size and color, so as to ensure that the photos are received in their poetic context. Cropping photos helps create the punctum Barthes regards as the special impact of photography. The cropped image of Mandela is an example of punctum: what disturbs in the photo is the optimistic look in Mandela's eye. Mandela carefully planned for a rich life full of resistance against apartheid and left no window for escape from his destiny of suffering and imprisonment. The photo thus has a contextual relation with the verbal text: each depends for its meaning on the other. Crunching photos too helps create the punctum Barthes describes. The crunching of the photo of Dracula, for instance, establishes a link between the visual sign and the written text that draws an image of the night as it gets broken by rays of light. Therefore, it has this poignant impact on the recipient.



He planned well for a rich life
full of costly stuff,
and left no window
for escape. (‘Abd al-Hādī, 2003)



Elegant night
is shedding its garments like an onion!
A daily celebration starts with a treacherous stab
pierced by a stray beam
So why is the night shouting as such:
and bargaining with cognizant women!
(‘Abd al-Hādī, 2003)

Conclusion

To conclude, the present study shows that the relation between photos and written texts in this volume, *Shagin [Sympathetici]*, is one of mixture rather than combination. Instead of commenting on or illustrating the written text, as is the case in the above mentioned examples of photopoetry, the photo is part and parcel of the poetic text; without the photo the whole significance of the poetic text will be affected. To untangle the intertwined visual and verbal signs is to distort the triadic structure of this unique volume of poetry. Although photopoetry appeared in the thirties of the past century, the present volume, first published in 2003, differs in its ability to create a gap in signification that only the contemplating recipient can fill out. Among the dialectic relations established by the mixture of visual and verbal signs are the relations between: shadow and light, yin and yang, woman and man, photo and written text, mirror and what is commonly viewed as origin. To regard this avant-garde volume as a mere example of photopoetry, therefore, is to do this original contribution to the genre of poetry grave injustice.

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