

The Linguistic Motion of Love: Cognitive Transformation in Mediterranean Poetics

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Abstract

This paper examines the concept of love within Mediterranean culture, a notion deeply associated with the philosophical idea of descent—a movement that entails falling and the potential loss or transformation of individual identity. Some thinkers interpret this descent as a state of vulnerability in which love robs the self of its autonomy, while others perceive love as a path to knowledge—an ascent of consciousness that cannot be achieved without first experiencing descent. Through a close reading of Mediterranean poetry and philosophical writings, ranging from Mahmoud Darwish's poetry to the works of Veronica Franco and culminating in the poetry of C. P. Cavafy, the study explores the shared linguistic metaphors of falling and rising that articulate the tension between vulnerability and transcendence. Drawing on Lucien Goldmann's genetic structuralism, it argues that this dual movement reveals the cognitive structures underlying Mediterranean thought, whether pragmatic and rooted in social experience or mystical and grounded in transcendence. Within this framework, the paper contends that love functions as a linguistic medium for cognitive transformation, offering a renewed understanding of identity within the evolving Mediterranean consciousness. It contributes to Mediterranean literary philosophy by reframing love not merely as an emotional phenomenon but as a cyclical epistemological process in which descent becomes the necessary condition for ascent and the transformation of identity.

Keywords: love, descent, ascent, Mediterranean poetics, cognitive transformation, identity

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Introduction

The idea for this research stems from the concern that the new generation is increasingly unable to experience noble emotions or fully comprehend the concept of mercy, as the Qur'an states: "And He placed between you affection and mercy" (Qur'an 30:21). This loss is largely attributable to the accelerating pace of modern life. Love requires time for reflection and a flexible mind capable of transcendence. It also demands individuals who possess the courage to resist the obstacles they encounter without retreating in fear. Otherwise, emotion descends into lower forms of love, causing the self to abandon its search for identity, rather than undergoing the mature and transformative experience of genuine love. This paper, entitled "The Linguistic Motion of Love: Cognitive Transformation in Mediterranean Poetics," examines love as both a pathway of descent and a pathway of ascent, exploring the cognitive and existential transformations that emerge from these two opposing movements.

Paper Methodology

This research is grounded in Lucien Goldmann's theory of genetic structuralism, which provides the critical framework for uncovering the intellectual structures underlying Mediterranean poetics of love and for interpreting the mechanisms through which these structures are expressed. This approach seeks to contribute to contemporary scholarship by redefining the linguistic motion of love within the Mediterranean tradition. By establishing a dialogue among social transformation, self-awareness, and political thought, the study uncovers the epistemological foundations of Mediterranean poetics through a close analysis of poetic and narrative language across Mediterranean literary traditions.

Love as a Pathway of Descent

Love resides within courageous hearts, for only the brave are willing to venture into its uncertain depths without fully considering the consequences. Emotional longing and physical desire often lead lovers along the pathway of descent before they can attain the elevated truth of love.

In this sense, Al-Jurjani defines love as: "Love is an inclination of human nature toward that which is most pleasurable" (Al-Jurjani, *Al-Ta'rifāt*, s.v. "al-ḥubb"). Thus, the descending motion of love begins with attraction, attachment, and desire before transforming into a deeper state of awareness capable of reshaping the self and redefining identity.

In Veronica Franco's poetry, love appears as a force that drives the individual toward emotional exposure and vulnerability, where desire becomes both a risk and a transformative experience. As Franco (1998) writes:

If there is in you a spark of love for me,
do not hide it beneath cold speech;
let your words be equal to your heart.
I shall reveal to you my inmost thoughts,
and openly uncover what I feel within.

Veronica Franco expresses the consciousness of women constrained by patriarchal Renaissance society. As scholars have noted, "Veronica Franco's poetry embodies early feminist concerns regarding women's voice, identity, and social autonomy" (Jones & Rosenthal, 1998). This

social and historical context enabled the poet to blur the distinction between bravery and emotional descent. She adopts equality as an essential principle of love by framing the relationship through a woman's right to hear the truth from her beloved.

The speaker implicitly reveals her loss of confidence in the beloved, as reflected in words such as "hide" and "cold." Although she repeatedly urges him to express his feelings openly, she receives no genuine response. Consequently, the poem may be interpreted as an advocacy of women's rights and a reconstruction of female identity, presenting love as a mediating force through which women reclaim both voice and agency.

Franco further emphasizes the importance of language and sincerity in emotional relationships. Yet, as Lucien Goldmann suggests, "we say words that we do not truly mean at all" (Goldmann, 1964).

The power of descent emerges when an individual becomes subjected to the emotional absence or loss of the beloved, creating an inward sense of falling. Simultaneously, this experience compels the self to construct an illusory mode of symbolic survival—much like a placebo—in order to preserve existence and reconstruct identity after emotional disintegration.

While Cavafy presents a different perspective on the power of descent in love, his vision is constrained by remembrance as an ultimate confession of an unrepeatable experience, leading to a profound sense of powerlessness that causes identity to erode gradually and eventually disappear (Cavafy, 1992):

Come back often and take me, beloved sensation,
come back and take me—
when the memory of the body awakens,
and old desire again passes through the blood;
when the lips and the skin remember,
and the hands feel as though they touch again.
Come back often and take me at night,
when the lips and the skin remember...

Sensual desire dominates the poetic passage without regard for the present moment, as suggested by the repeated plea, "Come back." The poet expresses the descending movement of love through emotional helplessness, revealed in the phrase "take me," which reflects passivity and vulnerability. Love transforms the speaker into a powerless individual who depends upon the beloved for emotional survival.

The passage further reveals the significance of the beloved figure within Greek society while simultaneously emphasizing the suffering of the individual within modern social reality. Through this emotional fragmentation, Cavafy expresses alienation and the gradual erosion of identity under the conditions of modern historical experience.

Rita was the pseudonym used by the renowned Palestinian poet Mahmoud Darwish for his Jewish Israeli beloved, as he attempted to transcend the boundaries of identity through an act of falling in love, declaring: "I love you despite the anger of my tribe, my city, and the chains of tradition."

Darwish later composed his epic poem *The Long Winter of Rita* (Darwish, 2009):

Rita will depart in a few hours and leave her shadow as a white prison cell. Where will we meet?
 Her hands asked, but I turned toward the distant.
 The sea is behind the door, the desert's behind the sea, kiss me on my lips—she said. I said: Rita, why should I depart anew as long as I have grapes and memory, and the seasons still leave me anxious between gesture and phrase?
 —What are you saying?
 —Nothing, I mimic a horseman in a song about the curse of a love besieged by mirrors...
 —About me?
 —And about two dreams on the pillow; they intersect and escape, so one draws out a dagger and another entrusts the commandments to the flute.
 —I don't get the meaning.
 —Nor do I. My language is shrapnel, like a woman's absence from meaning, and the horses are in suicide at the edge of the field...

Darwish reconstructs the destructive power of love as a force of abandoned identity, portraying love as “an act of falling,” symbolized through the image of the “white cell.” This symbolic image reflects the collective destiny of the Palestinian people while exposing the Israeli attempt to erase Palestinian identity through displacement and ideological domination, seeking to reshape Palestinian consciousness according to imposed notions of coexistence under Israeli authority.

The reader stands before the duality of love and curse, witnessing the destructive emotions generated by falling in love. Love imprisons the lover within mirrors of self-reflection, stripping away every possibility of survival, the merciful grace of forgetting, and the hope that sustains endurance. The poet implicitly reveals the impossibility of normalization between Palestine and Israel: “But I fear that if I abandon everyone for you, you may abandon me, and I will return carrying only disappointment.”

Mahmoud Darwish's love story ultimately ended because of Rita's connection to the Israeli military establishment. “Today, I felt as though my homeland had been occupied for the second time.” Through this experience, Darwish presents love not merely as an emotional condition but as a cognitive and existential struggle between belonging and dissolution.

Love as a Pathway of Ascent

There are profound differences between acquisition and comprehension, just as there is a profound difference between making love and living in love, according to love's various stages—from *al-hawā* to *al-'ishq*, ultimately culminating in *al-hiyām*.

Love is a form of belonging and an act of ascent that compels individuals to discover their identity and become aware of how it may be redefined in order to resist its corrosion. Absolute stability leads to stagnation—a condition from which love itself cannot escape.

Mahmoud Darwish expresses the ascending movement of love through his tragic relationship with his Jewish beloved, Rita, transforming personal love into a symbolic representation of political and existential consciousness. In *Rita's Winter*, he writes (Darwish, 2009):

Will you take me with you?
 Then let me be the seal upon your freedom's ring—
 take me with you.
 Let me be your strength
 in the land of your beloved enemy...
 your fortress.
 And let me become a prophecy born of mint,
 carrying your citadel within it,
 living and dead at once.
 Rita's laughter—
 the proof.
 And love, like death,
 neither returns nor fades...

Through his Jewish beloved, Darwish presents impossible love as a symbolic representation of the impossibility of collective normalization. The relationship is driven toward symbolic death, reflected in images of exile, separation, and emotional annihilation. Such imagery reveals a transformation in the meaning of love, shifting from emotional descent toward political and cognitive awakening.

Darwish implies that the Palestinian people must reconstruct their identity beyond both death and occupation. Thus, he declares: "Today, I felt as though my homeland had been occupied for the second time."

This statement serves as significant evidence that love guides the individual toward truth and knowledge through a process of spiritual and intellectual ascent, as articulated in both Platonic philosophy and the thought of Abu Hamid al-Ghazali. Plato describes love as a spiritual movement toward ultimate beauty, asserting that "the true order of going... is to use the beauties of earth as steps along which one mounts upward" (Plato, 2008). Similarly, al-Ghazali views love as a path toward divine truth, stating that "Love of God is the final station and the highest degree" (Al-Ghazali, 1991).

Similarly, Veronica Franco's *Terza Rima XIX* presents love as a transcendent force capable of elevating human consciousness:

You will not merely fly, but soar heavenward,
 rising far beyond the common crowd;
 desire itself will lift your spirit upward.
 What first seemed earthly pleasure to the senses
 becomes a sweetness greater than the body. (Franco, 1998)

The ascending power of love is manifested here as a path toward transcendence through the imagery of "flying" and "soaring," symbols that evoke a sacred realm in which ultimate truth and spiritual meaning are attained. The poet establishes a contrast between physical desire and the elevated emotional state that follows it, implying that love expands human consciousness by unveiling a world enriched with hope, wisdom, and self-knowledge.

This transcendence is reinforced through expressions such as "greater" and "beyond the common crowd," suggesting an elevated state accessible only to those who experience love in its highest forms. According to Ibn Hazm, love progresses through successive emotional and

spiritual stages, beginning with *al-hawā* (inclination), developing into *al-‘ishq* (passionate love), and culminating in *al-hiyām* (complete devotion and spiritual bewilderment), in which the lover becomes entirely consumed by love (Ibn Hazm, 1953).

Conclusion

Mediterranean poets articulate the linguistic motion of love in accordance with the collective vision shaped by their social and political realities. Their works demonstrate that mature love is never merely an act of falling, despite the dominance of the expression *falling in love* within linguistic and cultural discourse. Rather, the descending motion of love is represented through attachment, attraction, emotional vulnerability, and the dissolution of the self. Yet this very descent often becomes the essential condition from which mature love emerges as an act of ascent. Mediterranean poets portray the descending motion of love as a force capable of erasing identity, whereas the ascending motion of love enables individuals to redefine their identities and transcend reality through the influence of collective consciousness—and, at times, to transcend that collective consciousness itself. This paper argues that scholars of language and literature should reconsider the conventional collocation *falling in love* and instead conceptualize love as a form of ascent or soaring, through which the self transcends reality by living in love rather than merely falling into it. In this sense, love resembles the divine in its omnipresence, existing across places, identities, and human experiences. Like the divine, love transcends boundaries, inhabits both the visible and the invisible, and continually reshapes human consciousness through its enduring presence.

Declaration of Generative AI and AI-Assisted Technologies in the Writing Process

The author declares that no AI or AI-assisted technologies have been used to generate, refine, or correct the content in the manuscript. The ideas, design, procedures, findings, analyses, and discussion are originally written and derived from careful and systematic conduct of the research.

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