

The Aesthetics of Inter-Genre Interplay between the Poetic Creative Experience and the Art of Theatre

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Received: 13/03/2026

Accepted: 02/07/2026

Published: 28/08/2026

Abstract

Poetry has long been the sole outlet of creative expression — the deepest of all arts, uniquely capable of accompanying the individual through the full range of human experience. In order to render this poetic form more expansive and capacious, the poet began to draw upon the structural elements of theatre and to pour them into his poetic output, according to the demands of the creative experience. Opera and theatre accordingly opened their arms to poetry and welcomed it with the welcome it deserves — giving rise to a beautiful dialogue between poetry and theatre that took the shape of a new artistic canvas, astonishing the reader in its novelty. Through this dialogue, the contemporary poet became simultaneously artist and actor, drawing upon the techniques of scenic visualisation. This interpenetration came to be regarded as a sign of a new aesthetic consciousness on the part of the playwright, who no longer relied solely on the classical formula for constructing the text, but began to invest in all the tools, media, and expressive patterns available in the artistic field — in order to produce a text open to difference, experimentation, and interpenetration.

Keywords: Creative Experience; The Recipient; Theatrical Art; Interpenetration; Poetic Creativity.

Introduction

The solid walls of separation between the arts have been crumbling, and the points of contact and interaction among them have widened. Literature, as an expressive art, stands on equal footing with all other arts — it is a composite construction, harmonious in its elements and integrated across all its dimensions and angles — yet it alone is capable of performing the role of all the arts simultaneously, fashioning for itself an integrated unity whose elements are interwoven and whose constituent dimensions are interpenetrating: colours and shadows, spaces and masses, melodies and successive images, borrowing from the other arts supernatural powers that allow it to enrich and theatricalise its creative experience, as well as to confound the reader's horizon of expectation.

Literary genres have accordingly come to be deployed as artistic and semantic instruments for highlighting cultural interplay and the multiplicity of affiliations. In the wake of this development, Algerian theatrical art has drawn upon elements of popular heritage, poetry, and song, and has engaged with the techniques of Western theatre — fashioning texts that carry a composite cultural imprint and express social issues through a creative vision that transcends

traditional boundaries. The contemporary poet no longer confines himself to reciting the poem; he goes beyond it to embrace dialogue and movement on the theatre stage, with a view to foregrounding the aesthetic, dramatic, and artistic dimension.

A theatrical scene may thus begin with a poetic passage, then evolve into a philosophical monologue, then shift to a dance or song sequence — or even to a satirical televisual simulation — without losing its internal coherence. This 'aesthetic disorder' is precisely what endows the text with its contemporary expressive energy. The present study seeks to understand the mechanisms of interpenetration among languages and cultures, and to trace the effect of this interpenetration on the dramatic structure and the intellectual significance of theatrical texts.

From this point of departure, the following questions present themselves:

- What are the most important values and aesthetics that the contemporary poetic text has acquired through its deployment of artistic techniques outside its own boundaries?
- What is the effect of this interpenetration on the two artistic forms — contemporary poetry and theatre?
- To what extent does contemporary theatre reflect the interaction of contemporary poetry in constructing its language, themes, and artistic forms?

The motivations for pursuing this subject are clear: a desire to attend to Algerian theatre and to deepen the study thereof — given that it represents a literary genre that has been marginalised in comparison with other literary forms such as the novel and poetry — and to grant it the scholarly attention it deserves in academic research. It is the author's hope that this modest study may have touched upon one of the tributaries of literature, and that it may have earned the distinction of revealing one of its facets. It is enough that this work should constitute a simple attempt to explore its exquisite, half-hidden aesthetics.

I. The Interpenetration of Theatre and Poetry

"Give me bread and a theatre and I will give you an educated people."

This maxim has long resonated in our ears and taken root in the minds of many. Theatre carries within it all the arts, customs, and traditions of a nation, its spirit and soul — it springs from thought and from engagement with what takes place in society and within the human being, and it cannot breathe outside the circle of expression. Theatre is, first and last, the art most intimately bound to society.¹

"Perhaps the play is the most closely related of all literary arts to poetry. Poetry began as dramatic, or theatre began as poetic — as is well known. The term 'poetry' in the Greek heritage was confined to the domain of the play and the epic, and it remained so until the lyric poem began to contest the play's territory. The link between poetry and theatre was never severed: the play continued to be written, in many of its models, as verse, while the poem in turn began to borrow from the play certain of its techniques and artistic means — in order to express through them the dramatic nature of the modern poetic vision."

¹Mustafa 'Abd al-Ghani, *Al-Masrah al-Shi'ri al-'Arabi: al-Azma wa-l-Mustaqbal* [Arabic Poetic Theatre: Crisis and Future], 'Alam al-Ma'rifa, 2013, p. 65.

From the earliest beginnings of theatre, it has been in a state of contention with the other arts — music, poetry, and the rest — all seeking to displace theatre from its position in order to occupy it themselves, while theatre refuses to remain anything other than theatre, pure and simple.²

Theatre

In general terms, theatre begins first as a literary text, resting on the technique of dialogue among conflicting characters who simulate or present a subject that may be imaginary or possible in reality, for many purposes — including artistic or intellectual pleasure — and this text may be embodied on stage.³

Theatre has been called 'the father of the arts' because it contains all of them, and the word 'play' means 'the reproduction of events, through an imaginative–pictorial perspective.'⁴

Some consider the very essence of theatre to be conflict: theatre without conflict is meaningless. William Archer expresses this by saying:

"A play is the representation of the human will in conflict with the mysterious forces of the natural elements that surround us and make light of us. It is one of us, hurled alive upon the stages to wrestle with fate — against social law, against one of our fellow human beings, against ourselves if necessary, against the ambitions of those who surround him, against their desires and follies, and against their rancour."⁵

Others hold that a play is 'a literary composition in dramatic form, intended to be performed on stage by means of actors who play the roles of characters, engage in dialogue with one another, and perform actions devised by the author.'⁶

Poetry

Poetry is a beautiful, magical world in which the movement of horses, dreams, and metres surges. It is a world that pierces the rational and transcends boundaries and logic — 'a aesthetic formulation of the hidden artistic rhythm that governs our comprehensive human experience, and is as such a practice of vision in its depths, seeking to summon the absent through language, relying on imagination... which excels in bearing the real meaning of language as it was originally placed, charging it with new meanings and unfamiliar connotations.'⁷

The theatre director presents his production in a creative manner that captivates the spectator and enables him to enjoy the spectacle. Direction is the foundation of the theatrical work: the

²Ali 'Ashri Zayid, 'An Bina' al-Qasidah al-'Arabiyyah al-Hadithah [On the Structure of the Modern Arabic Poem], 4th ed., Cairo: Kulliyyat al-'Ulum, 2002, p. 191.

³Izz al-Din Jalawji, Binyat al-Masrahiyyah al-Shi'riyyah fi al-Adab al-Magharibi al-Mu'asir [The Structure of the Poetic Play in Contemporary Maghrebi Literature], Master's thesis, University of M'sila, 2008–2009, p. 9.

⁴Sa'id 'Allush, Mu'jam al-Mustalahat al-Adabiyyah al-Mu'asirah [Dictionary of Contemporary Literary Terms], Beirut: Dar al-Kitab al-Lubnani, 1985/1405 AH, p. 204.

⁵Walid Ikhlas, Lawhat al-Masrah al-Naqisah: Abhath wa Maqalat fi al-Masrah [The Incomplete Stage Set: Studies and Articles on Theatre], Damascus, Syria: Publications of the Ministry of Culture, 1997, p. 187.

⁶Ahmad Muhammad Abu Mustafa, Tadakhul al-Ajnas al-Adabiyyah fi al-Qasidah al-'Iraqiyyah [The Interpenetration of Literary Genres in the Iraqi Poem], Palestine: The Islamic University, 2015, p. 53.

⁷Nu'aymah Murad Muhammad, Al-Masrah al-Shi'ri 'inda Salah 'Abd al-Sabur [Poetic Theatre in the Work of Salah 'Abd al-Sabur], Egypt: The Egyptian General Book Organisation, 1995, p. 5.

director sketches the broad outlines of the production and distributes roles to the actors through rehearsals and preparations — 'It is not a rehearsal or an audition in a competitive elimination process, nor is it a solo performance in a monodrama; it is the revelation of a method that interprets the personal preparedness of the theatrical artist.'⁸

In the context of this interaction and convergence among literary genres, the aesthetics of the text are realised and its distinction is achieved — fulfilling the aim of communication and openness. A growing awareness of the literary arts has emerged, making it imperative to grasp their aesthetics, to move beyond stagnation, and to achieve vitality in creativity.

In parallel, Arab theatre has been searching for a specificity that does not isolate it from the world, yet preserves for it a distinctive imprint and identity. Poetic theatre is the correct step toward an Arab theatre with its own imprint and identity — for the Arab human being is, by nature, formation, history, and civilisation, a poet, and poetry remains closer to his heart and spirit than any other art. This, on the one hand; and on the other — and this is of greater importance — lies the capacity of Arabic poetic expression to affect its author, something that distances it from the transformation confronting Arab theatre today.

There is a significant difference between the arts of cinema, theatre, and the novel, which becomes particularly apparent when one form is shaped into another.

"Acting in cinema becomes a reductionist art that depends on concentration, concision, and suggestion — a glance in cinematic theatre signifies many lines in a novel and a lengthy dialogue in a play."

As for poetry, it possesses an expansiveness capable of accommodating the other arts — and this is the character of the modern poem.⁹ The poem is the world that the reader invents in the image of the creator's own fashioning of it: 'What captivates us in the new poems is not merely the identification of their intellectual meaning or their ultimate conceptual aim, but our tracing of the ways in which the poet arrives at that meaning or that idea.'¹⁰

The phenomenon of the interpenetration of genres has become highly prevalent in contemporary literature, and discussion of it has become widespread in the critical arena. As the research and studies available from reading the texts confirm, no literary genre has escaped this phenomenon — it is present in lyric poetry, the short story, the novel, the play, the essay, autobiography, and other old and modern genres that not only interpenetrate with one another, but also with the other fine arts such as painting, music, and cinema.¹¹

II. Manifestations of Theatrical Art in Contemporary Poetry

Theatre has a profound relationship with poetry, and their union since antiquity has produced one of the noblest and most important of all arts — namely 'poetic theatre.' Theatre, at its

⁸Patrice Pavis, *Dictionnaire du théâtre* [Dictionary of Theatre], translated by Michel Khattar, 1st ed., Beirut, Lebanon: Centre for Arab Unity Studies, 2015, p. 166.

⁹Muhammad 'Ajur, *Al-Taḥniyyat al-Diramiyyah wa al-Sinima'iyyah fi al-Bina' al-Shi'ri al-Mu'asir*: Dirasah Naqdiyyah [Dramatic and Cinematic Techniques in Contemporary Poetic Construction: A Critical Study], 1st ed., Sharjah: Dar al-Thaqafah wa al-I'lam, 2010, p. 26.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, p. 29.

¹¹Fayruz Rasham, *Shi'riyyat al-Ajnas al-Adabiyyah fi al-Adab al-'Arabi*: Dirasah Ajnasiyyah li-Adab Nizar Qabbani [The Poetics of Literary Genres in Arabic Literature: A Genre Study of the Works of Nizar Qabbani], 1st ed., Amman, Jordan: Dar Fada'at for Publishing, 2017, p. 73.

emergence, was born as poetry — this was the case in the ancient Greek era — and this close relationship has preoccupied those concerned with theatrical studies and researchers since the earliest times.

Victor Hugo accordingly observed:

"Poetry in the theatre is not an end in itself; rather, it is a tool that adapts itself, as far as possible, to the language of ordinary discourse, and causes the theatrical art to occupy the highest and most elevated of positions." ¹²

Poetry has made a creative aesthetic crossing into artistic worlds — particularly the theatre — and a complex interweaving of poetry and theatre has come about, in the course of which theatre has witnessed varied forms employed in poetry, such as poetic theatre and operatic theatre. This was described as the process of 'theatricalising poetry' — or what is known as the 'dramatic dimension': after the poem was lyrical, it was deconstructed and reformulated into the dramatic world. The entry of poetry into the world of theatre is a phenomenon that has existed since time immemorial; nevertheless, poetic discourse occupies the primary place among literary genres in terms of prominence, and genres have interpenetrated in poetry without prior arrangement until the purity of genre has become an impossibility. The contemplative and careful observer of the history of poetry and theatre recognises that their history is long and deep.

Theatrical art manifested itself in contemporary poetry in all its artistic characteristics — particularly characters, which constitute its primary pillar alongside dialogue. Contemporary poets have adopted these characters as a path for conveying their ideas and expressing their particular visions:

"Their turn toward theatre was perhaps motivated by the discovery, in its positions and multiple characters and capacious structure, of an aid toward further development and renewal, and toward extracting all the flexibility and capacity for closeness to the reality of life that free verse contains." ¹³

The interpenetration of theatre with poetry increased the latter's attractiveness, the force of its impact, and its vitality:

"Theatre granted an important property to the other genres — and perhaps the one that benefited most from it is poetry — namely, the dramatic quality, which migrated toward poetry, so that the voices within the poetic text came to rely on characterisation in their structure, taking the form of dialogues among characters, or assuming the shape of an internal monologue." ¹⁴

In order for the creator to endow his text with the richness of literary genres and to draw upon their characteristic features and distinctions — thereby creating a literary aesthetic and offering the reader something new that compels him toward exploration and enjoyment — we find in

¹²Umar al-Dusuqi, *Al-Masrahiyyah: Nash'atuha wa Tarikhuha wa Usuluha* [The Play: Its Origins, History, and Foundations], Cairo: Dar al-Fikr al-'Arabi, 2002, p. 5.

¹³Abd al-Qadir al-Qatt, *Min Funun al-Adab: al-Masrahiyyah* [Forms of Literary Art: Drama], Beirut: Dar al-Nahdah al-'Arabiyyah, 1978, p. 128.

¹⁴Haydar 'Ali al-Asadi, *Tadakhul al-Ajnas wa Atharuha al-Jamali fi al-Nass al-Masrahi al-'Arabi* [The Interpenetration of Genres and Its Aesthetic Effect on the Arabic Dramatic Text], 1st ed., Jordan: Dar al-Majd for Publishing and Distribution, 2019, p. 133.

this example Nizar Qabbani bringing together poetry and autobiography in a captivating and distinctive creativity. He says:¹⁵

I want to write my story with poetry
before anyone else writes it for me
I want to draw my own face with my own hand,
since no one is able
to draw my face better than I can
I want to draw back the curtains from myself, by myself, before
the critics deliver their verdict and cut me to their measure,
before they invent me anew

Through analysis, we will show how this interpenetration does not constitute a disturbance of the theatrical structure; on the contrary, it serves as an instrument for enriching and revitalising the structure's intellectual and aesthetic function.

III. Techniques and Mechanisms of Theatrical Art in Contemporary Poetry

Poetry is one of the gateways to theatre — a threshold that none may cross except the inspired poet, possessed of an additional quality: mastery of theatrical tools and mechanisms. The poet who 'invents a new theatrical language directed toward a wide audience, through the poetics embodied in the multiple, poetic use of props, as well as through the artistic embodiment of popular ritual games, and through the unification of the verbal element with the melodic and kinetic elements across an exceptional theatrical poetics.'¹⁶

What follows is a discussion of the most important mechanisms, forms, and modern techniques that have distinguished and marked poetic theatre as a prominent and decisive sign:

1. Dialogue

Poetry returns in dramatic dialogue to the poetic quality of the dramatic situation and the poetic quality of the characters, in addition to the poetic quality of the moment of emotion in response to the situation and the character. Poetic expression is what imposes the form of the dialogue by the emotional impulse of the character, while prosaic expression imposes the form of the dialogue by the logical-causal impulse of the character — and both are influenced by the emotional cohabitation between the writer and his characters in their dramatic situations. The Dialogue is the ordinary conversation between characters, and it is the main body of the drama: if conflict is the essence of the drama, and action is its skeleton, then dialogue is its tissue and fabric.¹⁷

"The designation 'poetic theatre' is intended to refer to the play written in verse, or in a prosaic language of a poetic character. It is used today to distinguish

¹⁵Nizar Qabbani, *Qissati ma'a al-Shi'r [My Story with Poetry]*, 9th ed., Beirut, Lebanon: Nizar Qabbani Publications, 2000, p. 9.

¹⁶Hasan al-Muni'i, *Al-Masrah al-Maghribi: min al-Ta'sis ila Sina'at al-Furjah [Moroccan Theatre: From Foundation to the Making of Spectacle]*, 2nd ed., Rabat: Dar al-Aman for Publishing and Distribution, 2002, p. 12.

¹⁷Su'ad Butaybah, *Al-Bina' al-Dirami fi al-Masrahiyyah al-Shi'riyyah al-'Arabiyyah: Ma'sat al-Hallaj Unmudhujan [The Dramatic Structure in the Arabic Poetic Play: The Tragedy of al-Hallaj as a Model]*, Master's thesis, University of Oran, 2011, p. 93.

between theatre written in verse and theatre written in prose, and the relationship between poetry and prose is close — for theatre in its origins was called 'dramatic poetry,' and the playwright was called 'the poet.'"¹⁸

As an example of this, we may point to the playwright's deployment of poetic verses spoken by certain characters in the play 'The Sound of Weary Shoes' (Waq' al-Adhdhiya al-Mut'aba) by Slim Batqa. This lent the text a musical rhythm and a hermeneutic interpretive value. His reliance on poetry in the structure of the dialogue created a new language for expressing feelings and ideas, and the space thus shifted toward the poetic quality — which is a demand and a goal of theatre. This is what appears in the words of Hammadi at the end of the play:¹⁹

Proceed from one movement to the next let not exhaustion of the movement concern you
And place your trust in the One who clothed you with such majesty as He bestowed upon you
And kindle a fire within your breast for the heart has watered you from its blood
These are promises you have made will you fulfil them — will you?

2. Conflict

It has been said that conflict is the essence of the dramatic-poetic work, because it holds together the contradictions and encompasses what is called the space of persons or forces upon which action in the drama depends. 'Dramatic conflict is the conflict that grows from the interaction of opposing forces'²⁰

in pursuit of dominance and influence.

In most cases, dramatic conflict 'is built upon paradox... a paradox not of the difference between one person and another, one value and another, or one principle and another, but of difference within agreement, of ignorance within knowledge, of non-participation within participation.'²¹ Conflict in theatre has been linked to the presence of the hero, whose type is determined by the nature of the obstacle — that is, the anti-hero in the play who stands against the protagonist, preventing him and impeding his fulfilment of his desires.

3. Characters

As an example to illustrate how poetry benefits from theatre, we may examine the poem 'Something of the Biography of the Mischievous Child' (Shay' min Sirat al-Tifl al-Mishaghib) by the poet 'Izz al-Din Mihoubi. It is a poem whose dramatic quality is embodied in its human dimension, depicting the fate of a child who shook the world with his death — Muhammad al-Durrah, the Palestinian child who became a symbol of Palestinian existence under Israeli occupation. The poet excelled in deploying theatrical techniques within his poetic lines,

¹⁸Marie Elias and Hanan Qassab, *Al-Mu'jam al-Masrahi: Mafahim wa Mustalahat al-Masrah wa Funun al-'Ard* [The Theatrical Dictionary: Concepts and Terms of Theatre and Performing Arts], Beirut: Librairie du Liban Publishers, 1997, p. 281.

¹⁹Salim Batqa, *Waq' al-Adhdhiyah al-Mut'abah* [The Sound of Weary Shoes], Setif, Algeria: Dar al-Mujaddid for Printing, Publishing and Distribution, 2020, p. 105.

²⁰Ibrahim Fathi, *Mu'jam al-Mustalahat al-Adabiyyah* [Dictionary of Literary Terms], Sfax, Tunisian Republic: Arab Foundation for United Publishers, 1986, p. 222.

²¹Rashad Rushdi, *Fann Kitabat al-Masrahiyyah* [The Art of Playwriting], 1st ed., Cairo: The Egyptian General Book Organisation, 1998, p. 30.

achieving a dramatic construction that prepares the reader and binds him to the space of narration, weaving an intimacy with it that imposes upon him the question of whether the child realised his dream, or whether the world will be transformed by a genius — within an artistic composition of the utmost creative mastery, constituted by the narration of the story of a child who asks his father to accompany him to the market to buy him sweets and toys. The temporal space is the night preceding the tragic event, while the characters engaged in external dialogue are the father and his son.²²

Father — take me to the market tomorrow
for tomorrow is our day of rest
and I love sweets
and I do not have enough toys in the yard
and I do not have a notebook of anthems
and I do not have a lighter
and my mother wants money and a mirror and an apple
— We shall go to the market, my son
Then... your eyes are reddened

Conclusion

As this study reaches its intended destination, the following key points may be placed before the reader:

- The intersection of contemporary poetry with theatre has produced a dramatic poetic poem that is predominantly characterised by the features and techniques of the poetic form in both structure and content, rhythm and metre — studded with the techniques of the theatrical form through characterisation, dialogue, conflict, and plot. All of this has combined to confer upon the Algerian poetic poem a greater capacity and possibility for encompassing all poetic experiences in their diverse natures.
- The harmonisation of literary genres with one another has demonstrated the capacity of the poetic creative experience to absorb all the arts and prosaic literary forms without losing its position or having its image shaken in the literary arena.
- Contemporary poetry has added a contemporary semantic touch that rises to the level of the contemporary reader's aspirations, and the contemporary Algerian poet has had a share of this distinction and creativity.
- The poetic experience delivered on the theatre stage has pressed beyond the frontiers of creativity and the partitions of consciousness, succeeding in giving voice to all surrounding elements in a way that generated a dynamic poetic meaning.

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²² Izz al-Din Mihoubi, *Qarabin al-Milad: al-Fajr* [Birth Offerings: Dawn], Algeria: Asala Publications, 2003, p. 3.

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