

**The Equivocation of the Real and the Contemplative in Taher Riad's Collection  
*The Book of the Unseen (Kitab al-ghayb)***

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**Abstract**

This paper examines how contemplative visions of existence and humanity are portrayed in Taher Riad's poetry collection *The Book of the Unseen* (Kitab al-ghayb). It explores how Riad transforms everyday elements into embodiments of his mental perceptions, detaching objects and their names from their real-life references and linking them to his contemplative experience. The study also connects Riad's contemplations to mythical and symbolic narratives—such as Christ, Narcissus, Prometheus, and Oedipus— to illustrate his reflections on human existence, both in relation to the fate predestined in the unseen and to humanity's perception of its own nature. The paper reveals the vision and poetic style of the collection, which combines the details of ordinary life with the relationship of humans to the world and their shared being with it. This fusion of the real and imaginary through language creates a distinctive experience in modern Arabic poetry.

**Keywords:** contemplation, existence, poetics of modernity, poetry of details, Taher Riad, Sufism.

**Introduction**

The transformations in the paths of contemporary Arabic poetics herald various approaches in the modern poet's stance towards language. Language is considered a fundamental pillar in achieving poetic value and the poet's vision. This vision is an expansive and extended one that imposes a specific system on the poetic style, leading to variations in poetic styles in terms of linguistic formation methods. It persistently emphasizes the importance of perceiving the word through its poetic framework rather than merely adhering to its denotative definition, allowing for a richer connotative depth. The realization of modernist thought emerged through linking contemplation of existence and the human perception of it to language itself. Language, which reveals being and is contemplated through thought, is regarded as an intrinsic dimension of poetry itself—implying that philosophical inquiry into existence constitutes a sophisticated form of artistic expression. (Heidegger 1993, 196-7).

Accordingly, modernist poetry has become inherently linked to a philosophical inclination realized through language. This connection was recognized by Arab critics in their theoretical discourse on the modernist poetic movement. Since the early theoretical discussions on modernism in Arabic poetry in the past century, critical writings have consistently emphasized that the most significant feature of the Arabic

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modernist poetic movement lies in language, with its capacity to convey knowledge of the world. Ezz El-Din Ismail states: "Language is the primary phenomenon in any artistic work that employs words as a medium of expression... Humanity first came to know the world, or attempted to understand it for the first time, when it discovered language." (1966, 173). In his view, poetry is "a continuous exploration of the world of words and an ongoing discovery of existence through language. Hence, poetry serves as the sole means for enriching both language and life. Poetry that fails to achieve this vital purpose cannot truly be called poetry." He then adds that "within this framework, it is worth contemplating the stance of the new poetic experience. It has become evident that the poetry of this experience engages with language in a distinctive and innovative manner, just as it approaches the phenomena of life itself in the same manner." (Ismail 1966, 174).

The most prominent themes of modernist Arabic poetry have become evident in the intense human consciousness as it contemplates its fate and existence. The existential sense of time and space takes shape through the individual's self-awareness and personal experiences, reinterpreting them in a way that diverges from the perspective of the old world to the point that "death in it is regarded as an essential part of life" (Ihsan 1978, 69).

This foundation was laid upon the call of Arab modernist poets to consider poetry as a vision of the world. Adonis defined modernist poetry in his essay "An Attempt to Define Modern Poetry" (1959) as "a vision. And vision, by its nature, is a leap beyond prevailing concepts. It is, therefore, a transformation in the order of things and in the way they are perceived. This is how new poetry appears." (Adonis, 1986, 8).

The association of the concept of poetry with vision has led poets to engage with metaphysical themes, even when addressing aspects of everyday life. As a result, modernist Arabic poetry has been deeply rooted in a contemplative philosophical inclination toward existence. Thus, the poem has become burdened with the weight of a sharp and deep philosophical vision, as seen in poems such as "Blackout" by Badr Shakir al-Sayyab, "Singular in Plural Form" by Adonis and "The Seven Days of Love" by Mahmoud Darwish. This tendency became almost consistent in the style of Arabic poetics starting from the 1960s. This was accompanied by an increasing sense of doubt and uncertainty, which in turn generated a corresponding sense that elevated the apparent, the everyday, and the details of life starting from the 1980s. This emerged at the hands of several poets such as Saadi Youssef and Rif'at Sallam, who excessively focused on this dimension in what became known as the poetry of details.

Saadi Youssef's translation of Ritsos' poetry had a significant impact in pushing towards this trend. However, it is noteworthy that Saadi Youssef, in advance, specified in his introduction to the translation what aspects of Ritsos' poetry would influence Arabic poetry. This was due to

Saadi's own sensitivity to the nature of Arabic poetry in the 1970s, and the stirrings that were occurring within the body of this poetry during that period, which made it gravitate towards the nature of Ritsos' poetic writing. In Ritsos' poetry, there is an absence of the subjective tone and a dominance of the neutral tone, where the event or others and objects are the protagonists of the poetic scene (Saleh 2009, 21).

The Equivocation of the Real and the Contemplative in Taher Riad's Collection  
*The Book of the Unseen* (Kitab al-ghayb)

This was followed by the revelation of the deep disparities in poetic style and the poetics of the modernist poem, between the philosophical inclination, with its obscurity and ambiguity, and the inclination towards the everyday and the details, highlighting things as they are. This made the poetic verses appear clear, simple, and exposed, replacing "the physical with the metaphysical" (Asfur 2017, 188). However, they still harbor a depth of vision that parallels the vision of modernist poetry with its philosophical inclination. Adonis affirms the purpose of modernist poetry as "seeing in the universe what familiarity and habit conceal from us, uncovering the hidden face of the world, discovering hidden connections, and employing a language, emotions, and associations suitable for expressing all of this." (Adonis, "The Time of Poetry", 9).

At this point, modernist poetry came under the influence of Western Surrealism. Adonis recognized the stylistic harmony between the Surrealists' perception of the world and that of the Sufis, stating:

The fundamental claim of Surrealism is that it is a movement to express what has not been said or what cannot be said. The essence of Sufism, as I understand it, revolves around the unsaid, the unseen, and the unknown. The ultimate goal that the Sufi seeks is to merge with this unseen realm, that is, with the absolute. The Surrealist seeks to achieve the same thing. (Adonis "Sufism and Surrealism", 11).

This modernist poetic trend, which became dominant in the 1960s and 1970s, demonstrated a clear openness and diversity in poetic style. The use of the everyday, the immediate, and the detailed emerged, as Rifaat Salam points out, as a means of "rediscovering the daily, the immediate, and the detailed (negating the abstract, the mental, or the ideological), considering them as the vital substance of life, and reclaiming the human body (the self...) from the clutches of oblivion" (Rifaat 1998, 20). Thus, the contexts of modernist poetry took shape with their diverse styles and directions, encompassing the experiences of poets from the 1970s and 1980s, as previously mentioned. This was followed by attempts to highlight the uniqueness of poetic style among certain poets, as seen in the case of Taher Riad, who refined his distinctive approach by drawing on the Sufi tradition of metaphysical contemplation of objects and the world, as well as the surrealist-influenced modernist poetic style, evident in his poetry collections such as: *Yantiq An al-hawa* and *Hallaj al-waqt*.

In this context, Taher Riad's collection *Book of the Unseen* evokes an exceptional state in modernist poetry and its poetics. It draws upon his experience in poetic writing and his modernist style, which benefits from a contemplative and interpretative approach to existence. This style surpasses the direct method and approaches a mystical vision of things. Alongside this, the collection highlights an exceptional state by relying on the details of simple life, presenting things as they are without displaying that contemplative and interpretative tendency. However, at the same time, it incites a state of debate about what the poetic style highlights and alludes to in terms of signs of the unseen. This exceptional state constitutes the subject of this research and the problem it aims to explain.

To this end, the paper aims to uncover the overall vision in the poems of *The Book of the Unseen* and connect it to the transformations of Arabic poetics at the height of the modernist tendency in Arabic poetry. Additionally, the paper aims to elucidate the poetic style, diagnose its foundations, and its

connection to modernist poetics by reading the poetic texts in the collection. This contributes to establishing a method of reading modernist poems in Arabic poetics. From this standpoint, the research idea is divided as follows:

### **The Poetic Vision in the Collection**

The collection consists of three chapters, each sequentially numbered "Unseen 1," "Unseen 2," and "Unseen 3." Additionally, there is a long prose text titled "The Body of the Absent: Songs for Lamatharas," which carries the overall theme of the collection. This theme involves contemplation of one of the most fundamental issues in existence: absence from existence and what presence essentially means for a human being who is bound by absence and disappearance.

Taher Riad opens the first chapter of the book with a quote from Al-Tha'alibi's *Fiqh al-Lughah*, which defines the unseen as "everything hidden from the eyes but present in the hearts" (Riad 2017, 13) [The quoted texts in the study were translated by the researchers themselves]. He opens "Unseen 2" with a definition of "the unseen" according to *Lisan al-Arab*, which states that "the unseen is any place where what it contains is unknown, and similarly, a place where what lies beyond is unknown. The unseen of the earth is what conceals you" (Riad 2017, 51). For the chapter "Unseen 3," he references *Al-Muhit* Dictionary, which describes the unseen as "And we have sought to reach the heaven: we struggled with its unseen and sought to pry a glimpse of it" (Riad 2017, 100). As for the prose text, the poet introduces it with a quote from Mahmoud Darwish: "There must be an absence to alleviate the burden of the place" (Riad 2017, 121).

What is striking is that the sequence of chapters (Ghayb 1), (Ghayb 2), and (Ghayb 3), reveals a progression in deepening the vision and intensifying the poetic style. It is observed that (Ghayb 1) and (Ghayb 2) are dominated by objects, details of real life, and states of emotions, time, and place, and these two chapters contain the largest number of poems. However, the chapter titled (Ghayb 3) moves beyond these details and states to the boundaries of symbolism and myths, reaffirming or emphasizing the inherited narratives about the problematic existential relationship of humans and their initial creation. In the poem "My Father," the poet returns to the idea of divinity in Christianity, followed by the poem "The Image of Narcissus," which addresses the formation of perception and consciousness of self and its relationship with the beings of the universe and life through the "narcissus" plant. Next is the poem "Prometheus," which forms one of the themes highlighting human existence in contrast to the divine, as represented by Greek mythology. This myth has come to represent, in modern times, one of the themes of the humanistic trend of Western modernity (Ohana 2019, 6). Finally, the poem "Oedipus Blind" focuses on the end of Oedipus, questioning the myth about the secret of this blindness, suggesting that it stems from Oedipus' access into the unseen.

The establishment of the vision in this collection of poems appears to be ambiguous between the worlds of the witnessed and the unseen, presence and absence, reality and imagination—as appears in linguistic signs. The first sign is the title of the poetry collection "The Book of the Unseen." If the term "unseen" refers to what is hidden and has not appeared, as the texts that set the threshold for each chapter

The Equivocation of the Real and the Contemplative in Taher Riad's Collection  
*The Book of the Unseen* (Kitab al-ghayb)

of the book suggest, then what undermines these connotations is the existence of a book for the unseen. It seems that the explanation for this ambiguous state lies in the substitutions the poet employs. The expression "Book of the Unseen" somehow implies what is written and predestined for humans; in other words, "The Book of Fate," which surrounds and directs human existence without being fully revealed. It is an ambiguous state between the unseen and the visible. The poet reveals this on the temporal level in the poem "Isn't it Time?":

We are not angels to see that what is coming has already passed,  
nor are we devils to know that what will pass has already come (Riad 2017, 35)

The entire collection appears as a contemplation in the face of a tragic sense of disappearance and end. It is a disappearance that the human being—as manifested through the poet's voice—cannot fully comprehend in a way that leads to reassurance. Although absence manifests on multiple levels, such as the absence of the body, times, and places, it is the absence of the body—which evokes a strong feeling of its impending departure—that unites all forms and conditions of absence. This begins with the first unseen, questioning creation and existence, and what the human being knows only as an abstract idea in the heart:

What have you not seen?  
You were a child of the air and still are, when the air passes over everything  
and messes with everything, creating from clay what appears to be a bird... (Riad  
2017, 13)

After creation, the story of existence is written: "He fills the memory of the cypress with *Nahawand*" (Riad 2017, 14). Throughout the journey of existence, everything that passes is shown to be heading toward its end, just like humans: "Did you not know that the mountains, like you, think of running freely toward their destinies?" (Riad 2017, 15). On this journey, all the fundamental questions about existence and its fate also emerge: "What question embarrassed the seasoned questioner? What does the wave want from the shore?" (Riad 2017, 16). Thus, the questions and linguistic formations continue to stir the movement of existence until the story concludes with the undesired thing: death. "And the story might have continued, had you not completely dusted off your hands and declared it was over! And said: 'Here death begins, if it wills, where you ended'" (Riad 2017, 17).

Through this vision and its ramifications, states of emotion and existence unfold, as the poet exploits the power of words in poetry, utilizing the rich human experience embedded in language. He reaffirms his intense feeling of life's association with death from the very first moment of existence, according to inherited narratives. Interestingly, Taher Riad exploits simple details and aspects of life to illustrate this with exceptional sensitivity. He evokes the story of creation with a simple detail that merges elements of daily life with the state of being. He says in the poem "After Fifty":

At a little past fifty-eight,  
what does God expect of me  
and what does my wife expect? (Riad 2017, 22)

This simple human question, which embodies a common human feeling, is used by the poet to establish a deep existential sense. He continues with this simple detail to talk about love for the two entities mentioned in the previous sentence: God and his wife. It becomes apparent that this juxtaposition parallels the contrast between the afterlife/unseen and life/seen from the perspective of the lover. He directs this, exploiting religious narratives:

It was neither words about love  
nor about Joseph in the well (Riad 2017, 22)

The poetic value of the words does not stem from the mere exploitation of the paronomasia between "love" (ḥubb) and "well" (jubbb). Instead, the poet weaves this paronomasia and sound harmony to highlight an exceptional state between love and death, with love having its ambiguous relationship with life and the well having a similar ambiguous relationship with the death and survival of the prophet Joseph. Through this evocation of Joseph, who was known for interpreting visions and revealing the unseen by explaining dreams (Tottoli 2021, 89-90), the poet aims to present his abstract vision of existence based on tangible signs. When this combination of the abstract and the tangible is lost, it is challenging to consider it a vision, even for the visions of prophets (Carver 2021, 372).

Through all these relationships, the poet strives to affirm that they can only be understood within the comprehensive vision of the concept of the unseen. Therefore, in his statement "(It was not a word about love)," he denies that it is merely a single state or a simple detail. He repeats the phrase again by using the indefinite article for the word "my woman" to become "a woman" and "the shadow of a woman," as if to transform his personal experience with his wife, along with the historical experience encapsulated in the story of Joseph and its evocation of complex relationships—whether with the wife of Potiphar or the interpretation of visions—into a desired vision through the use of indefinite nouns and the following phrases to link it to the story of creation and existence. He says:

My words are about a woman and the shadow of a woman,  
between them, a death they unite through  
so that between them the Book of Genesis is born (Riad 2017, 23)

The poetic phrase starts from an ordinary human condition related to the woman. However, his insistence on the simple detail with the phrase "and the shadow of a woman" seems to push the reader towards the dialectic he built between the unseen and the presence. Speaking about a woman leads to presence, while speaking about the shadow of a woman destabilizes the relationship of presence and does not leave it merely in absence. This forms an ambiguous relationship between appearance and the unseen. Then, death—which is essentially unseen—is given the role of this ambiguous intermediary between the unseen and the presence. Through these details and experiences observed by humans in their existence, he establishes the story of creation when he ends the phrase with the birth of the "Book of Genesis."

This theme recurs throughout numerous passages in the poetry collection. The poet's vision unfolds across multiple spaces, intertwining religious and worldly perspectives, merging them with mythology, and carefully reshaping these elements from his distinct viewpoint. Alongside his evocation of the story of Joseph, the poet revisits the crucifixion of Christ from a deeply personal lens in his poem "My Father"

The Equivocation of the Real and the Contemplative in Taher Riad's Collection  
*The Book of the Unseen* (Kitab al-ghayb)

(Riad 2017, 103). Additionally, he draws upon the myths of Narcissus, Prometheus, and Oedipus, all of which are imbued with modernist themes. Taher Riad reinterprets these narratives, either by engaging with them through linguistic construction or by exploring various thematic dimensions. For instance, while the myth of Narcissus traditionally revolves around his inability to recognize his reflection in the water, Riad subverts this motif, suggesting instead that the narcissus flower itself remains unaware that Narcissus was its shadow. This transformation of the myth reinforces the ambiguous interplay between the unseen and the present, between image and reflection. Such reconfigurations align with the overarching vision of the poetry collection. He does the same with the myth of Oedipus, showing that changing places ("You would not escape the curse of your gods / even if you knew man / as an answer to the question of your youth / and chose a land other than your own / changed the air that your lungs are not accustomed to") (Riad 2017, 115), will not change fate. Changing places and relationships is a change of the apparent, an escape from the unseen that Oedipus was foretold, but the unseen has its eternal dominance and authority.

The interests in things and the details of daily life in this poetry collection stems from an effort to present a vision of human existence with a contemplative approach that goes beyond things to view the world as it is, not as it should be. This perspective involves seeing humans as being in complete unity with nature and existence. This has been achieved by the poet through his use of the symbol of the "mirror," as will be explained. Thus, the presence of things and their emphasis on themselves, along with the association of states with them, is a realization of the poet's belief in the idea of the unity of existence and the sharing of the moment of being. This allows objects in his poetry to transcend their form, acquiring meanings that align with his perception of existence. Taher Riyad states: "I try to grasp the essence of things by immersing myself in their very bodies." (Qtd in. Khadr 2013).

This poetry collection calls for a reevaluation of ways of thinking about the universe and existence, a reassessment of the everyday and the simple, and a deepening of vision to uncover what lies behind them and what they represent in touching the essence of being and existence. It seeks to restore to humanity the eternal return to its existence and its connections in the event of being. The collection reveals, behind the details of simple life, daily situations, and the prevalent patterns of thought in the human world—whether religious, worldly, or mythical—the secret of existence and its eternity. With this poetic approach, Taher Riyad develops the uniqueness of his style within the context of Arabic modernist poetry by linking his poetry to themes of everyday life and deepening the contemplation of objects in themselves to embody a metaphysical vision that closely aligns with mysticism and Sufism. The poet Mahmoud Darwish describes this characteristic in Riad's poetry, stating that he takes "the imitation of the Sufi experience to its utmost limit. However, he is not a Sufi, as some might perceive. Rather, his deep engagement with Sufi literature enticed him into a state of rapture, leading him to discover in Sufism a poetic essence—one in which the self unites with existence, inclining toward detachment from the apparent and contemplation of the unknown depths." (Darwish 2006). This, in turn, results in an ambiguity that necessitates careful reading.

### **The Real (Everyday) and the Poetics of the Poem**

The language of poetry in Taher Riad's collection immerses itself in simple details through a descriptive language that takes the external reality as a framework upon which the poetic expression is constructed. However, it highlights, through instances of focalization, the depth of vision that opens up a vast space, making things stand out as a state of existence and being. More precisely, it reveals the detailed, underlying aspects of things with a metaphysical perspective, such that the world of witness unveils what lies hidden within it. This is evident in the poem "The Houses," in which the house is not just a collection of things; it also represents thoughts, as Norris states that "if home provides a structure for objects, it can do the same for thoughts" (Norris 2023, 169). Taher Riad says:

Houses, then, are a stone dressing a stone,  
With a stone resting upon it.  
The houses are an opaque space,  
where curtains roam drawn,  
where beds sweat,  
while the sheets are dry,  
and the pillows lie on their couches,  
and the chairs,  
close to the tables,  
pulling one emptiness to another,  
shaking off the face of this and that  
which stories have covered  
... until they vanished (Riad 2017, 18-19).

It is noticeable that the presentation of the extended descriptive imagery clearly adheres to the spatial context that the poet illuminates to reveal the entities within this space. He meticulously describes these entities in a customary sequence, as if presenting an ordinary scene that a person observes daily. However, what is intriguing about all this are the linguistic signals that link the objects and reveal that they are presented mentally as imagined by the mind, rather than as they are in reality. This imparts a poetic value to the words. From the very beginning of the poem (specifically the second word), the poet breaks the sequence of reality and sensory data with the word "then," which invades the descriptive poetic phrase, as if to say that everything that follows is a deduction—an outcome of a mental process. This emphasizes the dialectical relationship between the sensory and the mental, in multiple departures from the sensory and the real. For example, he describes houses with stones, but the relationship between them is "dressing" and "resting." This mental relationship is not limited to the metaphors derived from the presence of these two words but also to what they suggest on the level of imagination and thought. For one stone to "dress" another means it hides it, and the mind (what happens inside a person) is what reveals the hidden and unveils the unseen within it. This justifies the interruption with the word "then," as if he is uncovering a complete mystery. Then the word "resting" suggests a state of stillness and lack of movement, implying a lack of activity or a negative state that aligns with absence rather than presence.

The Equivocation of the Real and the Contemplative in Taher Riad's Collection  
*The Book of the Unseen* (Kitab al-ghayb)

This allows the poet to return once again to the houses, emphasizing that they are a space he describes as opaque. While the primary meaning of space typically implies openness, presence, and expansiveness, describing the space as opaque highlights the dialectical relationship between the seen and the unseen. Opacity implies the absence of sound, concealment, and the unseen.

By constructing the descriptive imagery in this manner, the poet enables the emergence of the activity and presence of things, overshadowing the houses. The drawn curtains roam through the houses, the beds sweat, and the pillows harbor secrets. Through these details, he lays the groundwork to transcend the apparent aspects of things to their inner essence and what they conceal. It's as if he is witnessing an existential manifestation of things in themselves.

Then comes the description of the chairs, highlighting their reciprocal relationship between closeness and distance. This emphasizes how their stillness defines and brings spaces closer together, as if revealing that the silent is indeed active and expressive. The act of revealing this is akin to shaking off (unveiling) what has been hidden (the face of this and that which stories have shrouded). In other words, it reveals what was hidden and absent, bringing its identity to light through the implications of the face. Thus emptiness reveals (shakes off), whereas the stories have always focused on present and prominent things, neglecting "emptiness" and what was hidden, thus falling into the "unseen." When expressing that the act of storytelling ultimately led to the demise of all this, it is as if he transcended all these details to narrate the story of what the tales had concealed.

Thus, Taher Riad's experience highlights the latent presence of the unseen in the visible world, and vice versa, by transcending the ordinary view of things and bringing back what was absent and hidden. At this point, the deep sense of the unseen becomes evident. The "houses" in the third movement of the poem appear as "clothed" wardrobes that clothe people, but at the same time, they are "naked." Indeed, they encapsulate his complete contradictory imagery. The poet does not simply juxtapose two states of the houses described as wardrobes; rather, these wardrobes, in which clothes are stored to clothe people, remain naked.

All these present things indicate what is absent from them: the human who placed stone upon stone and arranged the contents of the houses. The human is both absent and present through their impact. Thus, the presence of the houses and their contents becomes a sign of the absent human. Through these details, the poet affirms the existence of the human through their influence on the things that shared the state of being with them. He returns once again to assert that the presence of things was mental, insisting on the mental deduction through the word "then." He says:

Houses, then, are containers  
for what we will eat.. then eat us,  
and the things we wear.. then undress us,  
for details we gather piece by piece;  
for walls whose thoughts about us frighten us  
and we fear their collapse upon us  
so we prop them up with charms..

and some pictures.

This is how all houses are,  
caves whose windows never stop spinning,  
and whose doors glance between entry and exit,  
inhabited by frightened people  
visited by fearful people...

The houses, then, are pits

..and I used to think houses were trees! (Riad 2017, 20-21)

In the final section, the human voice emerges to express this interplay between the external and internal; the physical, sensory existence of things in reality, and their mental representation. Thus, the state of being oscillates between the present and the absent, the internal and the external, and so on. Actions and thoughts alternate between humans and things, as seen in phrases such as: “for what we will eat... then eat us, and the things we wear... then undress us,” “for walls whose thoughts about us frighten us.”

The apparent simplicity, at first glance, of simple details of things transforms into complexity and ambiguity. Although the language does not include any symbols or themes typically used by poets, it is built on the tangible, sensory objects of the place with simple details, in a daily life scene. This can blur the reader's imagination, making them question whether they are reading poetry or ordinary descriptive prose. However, the act of making the familiar strange—what Shklovsky defines as defamiliarization, which breaks the automatic reception of art (Shklovsky 1990, 6)—by placing things in a linguistic context that invites contemplation and stimulates the imagination about the human activity and presence behind them without explicitly mentioning it, grants the language its imaginative effectiveness. This makes the text a poem rich in its unique poetic qualities, highlighting the modern poetic element inherent in the breaking of words in poetry to reveal the state of being shared by humans and things. The modernist text does not regard reality as stable and fixed but as an attempt to understand it, making it an "epistemological form" (McCracken 2023, 28).

The poetic style upon which the poems in this collection are built oscillates between the imaginary and the real in many of its texts. However, what is astonishing about the potential of its poetics is its ability to transcend this oscillation to a state of dialectic. This ensures that the poem incorporates a simple daily experience of the details of everyday events, then subtly reveals the depth that uncovers hidden mysteries. In the poem "No Yesterday for Him," this dialectic is established between two temporal boundaries: yesterday and tomorrow. It conceals a debate that generates certainty from confusion and progress from regression. At the beginning of the poem, a definitive and conclusive statement is established: "No yesterday for him," followed by:

He stands in front of the door,  
staring at it  
and asks, puzzled, whether to open it  
to leave,

The Equivocation of the Real and the Contemplative in Taher Riad's Collection  
*The Book of the Unseen* (Kitab al-ghayb)

or open it to enter (Riad 2017, 63)

His statement "No yesterday for him" gives a sense of certainty while also highlighting the anxiety and confusion it represents. The first sentence presents a usual real event of standing in front of a door, but coupling this with staring, questioning, and bewilderment undermines the sense of certainty. The speaker does not know what opening the door will lead to—whether he will go out of it or into it. The first sentence imposes an ambiguous state, and any established certainty is quickly contradicted by its opposite. He questions in confusion whether to open it to go out or in. This ambiguous state places the speaker before two parallel choices, and within this parallelism, the larger image in the collection is confirmed: the latent absence within presence. Within this dialectical state of duality in meaning, Taher Riad envisions the components of existence as transitioning stages toward absence. Houses become coffins and graves, even though he once thought houses were trees. The womb is a casket, and so on.

What confirms the depth of vision and the poetic nature of the poem is the poet's phrase, which reveals how he forgot the truth of his existence that extends within the human existence and the existence of things:

Perhaps you have forgotten,  
I am that child,  
that old man, that woman pregnant with a jinn;  
I am the crack in the pomegranate's skin,  
the crack in the fig honey,  
and I am your cup.  
Pour into me whatever you wish  
and throw me away when I am empty,  
Intoxicate me.. do not be intoxicated (Riad 2017, 28-29)

Then he counteracts forgetting with that which contradicts oblivion, where the poem began with the implication of the verb "forgot," and responds to forgetting with the implication of the word "remember":

Remember,  
we are the children of a pleasure we had given birth to,  
kneading clay with the sun,  
slipping a heedless day into night,  
a heedless night into day;  
we sought refuge in mountains that did not protect us,  
and we destroyed our ark before reaching the water,  
and chose inamoratas of salt  
to preserve us after we're gone (Riad 2017, 29)

In this extended image, he establishes the revelation of his essence and being, that existence which is intertwined with pleasure. Accordingly, he reintroduces things as they conceal and imply through their connection: pomegranates with reproduction, figs with pleasure, perhaps even with the original sin. Humanity's essence and continuity merge with matter and its elements—clay, sun, water, salt—to ensure

the existential continuity of humanity. Thus, the poems of this collection reveal through sensations and things what they affirm and obscure of cosmic existential value. This comes within the poet's sense of his own self rooted in the universe and its entities, sharing a single existential moment with them. The appearance of things and beings points to what this appearance conceals of shared conditions and consciousness.

### **The Philosophical Contemplative Tendency**

There is no doubt that the attempt to identify the most prominent stylistic feature in Taher Riad's collection has begun to unfold in the overall vision of the collection and in the connection of his poems with the approach and methods of modern Arabic poetry. This is done by abandoning the presentation of high-minded contents and purposes such as national or social issues and shifting towards a unique presentation of a subjective perspective that re-poses existential questions by evoking simple details and things. If one wishes to clarify the relationship of this with modern poetic styles, it becomes evident that they rely on a fundamental stylistic feature, which lies in establishing a dialectical relationship between the borders of reality and imagination. This enables the poet to reveal the unseen that things hide in their appearance and affirms this deep interpretive tendency in existence, which transcends the apparent and leans towards what is hidden. It is an attempt to alienate things and restore their significance.

This poetic style has been regarded, through what is known as breaking the word in poetry, as if the breaking of language that occurs in poetry leads us to the very things themselves (Vattimo 1995, 65-66). Thus, poetry becomes capable of encompassing the state of representing the universe and its entities to reach the essence and core of things despite the transcendence of this essence. The poet seeks "to interpret the world in terms of the Being of those entities which are present-at-hand within-the-world" (Heidegger 1962, 93). To affirm his connection with modern poetry, and perhaps to direct the reader to the necessity of paying attention to this vision, Taher Riad has shown in some of his poems elements that compel the reader to search for a philosophical reflective tendency that transcends appearances. In the poem "Under the Rain," he begins by provoking a problematic state of self-reflection, surpassing his apparent existence at the level of the image, the boundaries of his existence at the material level, and then the temporal level, as he says:

I was no one under this rain  
I was nothing but an old carving  
from which the walnut wood grew,  
obscured by long abandonment  
and long nights of sleeplessness (Riad 2017, 40).

He begins by denying that his existence is confined to the indication of "I was not" as a sign of singularity and human oneness, asserting instead that what appears of him is merely an image or inscription of a primal substance capable of taking multiple forms. In this feeling of his being, he equates himself with walnut wood, and he has vanished due to time where abandonment, distance, and absence, or sleeplessness, vigilance, and presence, prevail. This sharp sense of being thus deepens the poet's

The Equivocation of the Real and the Contemplative in Taher Riad's Collection  
*The Book of the Unseen* (Kitab al-ghayb)

cosmic vision, as he realizes that being is an event and a state that transcends the apparent image and inscription. Expressing a state of journeying and forming in the eternal cycle of existence, he concludes his poem with the realization of the transformations and migration of matter, and its instability in (singularity/oneness) of self:

And I was nobody,  
Nobody I was  
but a gravedigger  
who removed the dirt  
from the chosen pit that buried it,  
watching it sink  
smiling... trembling  
... and waiting (Riad 2017, 42)

Perhaps highlighting this vision within this contemplative style required expanding it through abstract mental states or mythical symbolic representations in the idea of appearance, and in the myths that narrate the story of existence and human conditions. In the poem "Her Mirror," the idea of the mirror stands out with what it reflects as an illusory and ambiguous image on the plane of existence. The image in the mirror is visible but not real. When this state of the mirror is expanded to pose the problem of the visible and the invisible in existence, it means going beyond the apparent and the image to the idea of essence. This is what the poem "Her Mirror" reveals:

When no one sees me,  
nothing sees me,  
as if I were nothing (Riad 2017, 31)

The poetic phrase indicates linking its existence to vision, and that things have stances like selves. If it is invisible to someone, then things will not see it either. He then elaborates on this:

When the things I am familiar with do not see me  
like the pillow, the door, the blank paper ready to be stained,  
like my spoon, like my cups, like my shoes,  
like the ashtrays, like the television, like the two steps  
that, when taken, bring me before her mirror... (Riad 2017, 32)

Objects such as: the pillow, the door, the paper, the spoon, the glasses, the shoes... have become the poet's self-mirror. What does this mean? The existence of these objects is a reflection of the stance of the self; the human self is what conjures, creates, and uses these things. Therefore, their reality lies in the existence of the human self, and they are a representation and extension of this self, manifesting its actions. If they no longer have a relationship with it and it no longer uses them, they lose their essence, leaving only a reflection of an image and a static impression. Thus, the reality of its non-existence at that moment is revealed; as he said in the poem, it is as if it were nothing. He ends his poem with these striking phrases, where not falling into the image makes both humans and objects lose their selves, as if they no longer exist:

Perhaps I was nothing, or no one  
for I see nothing but her mirror undressing before me  
and her mirror does not see me... (Riad 2017, 32)

Thus, he deepens his existential vision through the objects and details of life that he presents and highlights to reach their essence and what they conceal, where the apparent reveals the unseen and the inner. There is no doubt that this indicates a contemplative tendency that goes beyond the surface of things, breaking their silence to reveal the emergence of the unseen, and the essence of existence for the self, objects, and the world.

Taher Riad does not hesitate to formulate this vision with a level of abstraction that aligns with its philosophical and contemplative inclination. In the poem "Now," the short sentences with their sharp tone, combining the thing and its opposite through a method of affirmation and negation at the same time, push towards the necessity of abandoning sensuality and realism. The immediacy that excessively combines contradictions drives one to follow the poet's intense inclination towards contemplation in the moment of his existence, where this inclination touches everything:

From now on, I possess nothing,  
Or I am a sovereign with boundless kingdom;  
From now on, I have no body left;  
Or all the earth has become my body (Riad 2017, 66)

This state of immediacy can only be interpreted through an abstract view of oneself, where one no longer sees oneself as a tangible sensory entity nor as an essence transcending sensuality. Rather, with this all-encompassing, excessive feeling of seeing oneself in one's earthly world, one becomes as much nothingness as one becomes totality and universality, being an individual or being diffused and extended throughout the entire earth. The choice of the word "Now" as the title of the poem aligns with the ambiguity that Taher Riad establishes in his poetic experience, adding this stylistic dimension to modern Arabic poetry, giving uniqueness and value to his poetic experience. Looking at the current time ("Now"), it is neither past nor future; the present is an ambiguous moment between what has passed and what is to come. In this abstract mode of expression, the vision previously evoked through sensory expression is stimulated again. In a previous poem, he expressed his standing before the door in the poem "No Yesterday for Him," but here the vision deepens and becomes more abstract than before.

It may be possible to refer to the unseen that Taher Riad invokes in *The Book of the Unseen* as a present and visible absence in contrast to a forcibly concealed and hidden absence. In the world of witnessing, there is a significant maneuver between two types of the unseen, as this is clearly evident in *The Book of the Unseen*:

- The First Unseen: A present and visible unseen, where Taher Riad makes adjustments to the existing structure of the world; specifically, the structure that forcibly concealed humanity and rendered it blind in sight and insight, causing humanity to pay a high price for this concealment in the form of pain and alienation in life.

The Equivocation of the Real and the Contemplative in Taher Riad's Collection  
*The Book of the Unseen* (Kitab al-ghayb)

- The Second Unseen: A forcibly hidden unseen, where the pen of fate has acted, leaving humans prey to a vast epistemological void that led to great hardships: Why was man born amid immense suffering? Why was Christ crucified? Why did we accuse Narcissus of narcissism? What was Prometheus' crime that warranted his torment in the Alps? Why did Oedipus kill his father and marry his mother? And why did he gouge out his eyes?

Between these two types of the unseen and concealment, a maneuver takes place in which the poet narrates, on the first level, a number of major visions contained within some historical narratives, such as: the incident of Christ's crucifixion in the poem (My Father), or the tragedy of Oedipus and gouging out his eyes because he married his mother and killed his father in the poem (Blind Oedipus)... etc.

At this level, the unseen appears as a forcibly hidden unseen due to the subsequent tragedies that will befall humanity. For Christ, who was sent as a mercy to people, will have the hidden aspect of his fate encompass a devastating tragedy, which will manifest in the event of his crucifixion without receiving any assistance from the hand that works in secrecy or the unseen.

And that I bear alone  
The burden of life and its children  
Upon this cross  
Until dust gathers dust? (Riad 2017, 107)

In this poem, after narrating the tragedy of Christ's crucifixion, Taher Riad remarks:

Eli, Eli,  
Perhaps you have your glory in the highest,  
But on earth,  
This close to our faltering steps,  
Glory is scattered by the daughter of Magdala, the female of sin,  
As bread and oil,  
Barley we ferment,  
And vineyards we age..  
So now lift from us your hands that are without hands, (Riad 2017, 108)

In an attempt to make the unseen witnessed in time and place, and within reach of the human condition, rather than a perplexing mystery that will suddenly and unexpectedly devastate humanity, even if after a while.

Within this level of the unseen, the hidden and forcible unseen, comes the poem "The Image of Narcissus." While this myth has had a wide presence in the experience of modern Arab poets, such as Adonis in his collection "Theater and Mirrors," or Mahmoud Darwish in "Why Did You Leave the Horse Alone?" and "The Bed of the Stranger" in particular, its presence in Taher Riad's work is distinguished by his focus on the other side of the myth. The poem centers on the narcissus, which is the image of Narcissus, and Narcissus is nothing but the shadow of the narcissus:

The narcissus did not know that I was its shadow  
When it saw me in the water

Bare except for love;  
Water mirrors do not lie like the sound that  
Lies like it.  
If the narcissus had known,  
It would not have given me my reflection,  
But would have left me on the water  
Without a face  
So that I could consume all this water (Riad 2017, 110-111)

It is evident that Taher Riad utilizes the theme for which modern poets have valued this myth. The theme is not in self-love but in the lack of understanding of the true self and the deception by the image. Thus, the focus in the poem is on "knowledge": "he did not know," "if he knew." Once again, this usage reveals one of the consequences of the unseen being revealed to Narcissus. What would happen then? Those who access the unseen will realize that they were immersed in the image, far from the essence. This bitter truth, which oscillates between the philosophical inclination of image and essence, drives humanity to delve deeply into understanding to a degree that might be unattainable.

On the second level of the conception of the unseen, the poet also goes beyond the historical narrative of these terrifying stories and tries to peel back the unseen, making it within the reach of presence and witnessing, while considering the condition of human weakness. It is an attempt to humanize the frightening fate and alleviate its pains. For this reason, the evocation of Prometheus, with all the defiance the myth carries against the decrees of the gods, serves to leave the determination of destiny to humans, as if unshackling humanity from what has been written in the unseen in the realm of the gods in *The Book of the Unseen* (fate):

O, ye angry gods  
I only stole the fire  
I did not steal the books of fate,  
And I did not reveal to any human or jinn  
The secrets you concealed.

What distinguishes this presence in Taher Riad's poetry is that he strips it of its philosophical transcendence and embodies the matter to connect it with the details of everyday life, denying that humans have been granted liberation from the power of the gods. Instead, he straightforwardly links the theme of the myth to the details of human life: warming the night, lighting the darkness if the beloved is absent, and cooking for the hungry. These are Prometheus' justifications and his defense before the gods for stealing fire:

My sins are clear  
And my faults are exposed:  
To warm a cold night  
That spends its night without a lover,  
And to cook stones for the hungry

The Equivocation of the Real and the Contemplative in Taher Riad's Collection  
*The Book of the Unseen* (Kitab al-ghayb)

.. I stole the fire! (Riad 2017, 112-13)

By directing and focusing on retelling the stories of myths, Taher Riad's poetry in this collection encourages a reevaluation of the themes and motifs of modern poetry, connecting them with the details of life and the diversity of human conditions as they manifest in the things and entities created by humans.

When Oedipus gouges out his eyes as a form of atonement for a sin orchestrated by the hand of fate, what was hidden became terrifying when it materialized in reality, when the unseen was revealed to him. This deepening of understanding and knowledge placed the human being in a state of confusion, caught between connecting with his existence in the world and being cut off from it simultaneously:

Oedipus, why your eyes?  
Is it because they see what is forbidden,  
Or are they witnesses  
To the arbitrary turning of fate  
And the dizziness of the celestial spheres? (Riad 2017, 114)

Focusing on the last part of the "Oedipus" myth raises a question that places humanity in a state of impending terror. By concentrating on the final part of the story after Oedipus has become blind, Taher Riad confronts humanity with an extremely difficult question: What will happen to humans if the unseen is revealed to them? The answer has undoubtedly been implied in various ways previously, perhaps most notably in what he said in the poem "Her Mirror"; as if the human being is nothing!

In this poem "Blind Oedipus", Taher Riad remarks:

So why your eyes?  
Would it not have been better to cut off your murderous hands  
And sever the parts that made your mother give birth to your daughters  
Who are your sisters? (Riad 2017, 116)

This commentary serves as a way to address the Oedipal crime appropriately within the human condition. The punishment that fate inflicted on Oedipus was an unjust punishment for a crime in which Oedipus had no hand; rather, fate crafted its terrifying plan from the outset and rejoiced in its realization in reality. Within the human condition, such punishment could be deemed unnecessary, given that there was no heinous crime to this extent. These rhetorical questions raised by Taher Riad about Oedipus's punishment—why the eyes and not the hands or any other body part that was the tool of the sin—align with his overall vision and idea in the poetry collection:

Would it not have been better to lose your two mothers  
And forget your two fathers  
To save yourself?  
To open your eyes wide  
And stare into the eye of the curse  
To expose who elevated you  
To mess with you, and who brought you down, and to know which homeland  
Became your exile? (Riad 2017, 116)

The notion of the revelation of the unseen, knowledge, awareness of fate, and transcending the image and the apparent, all reflect a sense of the human predicament in existence. He is everything and nothing, has no body, or the entire earth is his body.

## Conclusion

This study aimed to explore Taher Riad's *The Book of the Unseen* to uncover its underlying vision and elucidate its manifestation in poetic style, and its connection to the experience of modern Arabic poetry. The obscured vision between the details of everyday life and the interpretation of the human self's relationship with the world and its entities reveals a sharp sense of participation in the moment of existence. The poetic style employed focuses on integrating the real with the imaginary in a nuanced dialectical manner. It transcends mere comparison of the imaginary to the real, instead creating a unique exception in Taher Riad's poetry in this collection, where the realistic converges with the submerged in the imaginary, forming what can be described as a state of contrast. The poetic style does not merely juxtapose reality and imagination or compare them but rather integrates them to achieve a vision that moves seamlessly from reality to imagination without transition or separation. Thus, language, referencing reality and the sensory, embodies the abstract mental in the present moment. This heightens poetic sensibility to a distinctive level, oscillating between the sensory and its implications, and between the unseen and its revelations. This ability enables the description of uniqueness in vision and poetic style within this collection.

## التباس الواقعي والتأملي في مجموعة طاهر رياض (كتاب الغيب)

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## الملخص

يتناول هذا البحث كيفية تصوير الرؤى التأملية للوجود والإنسانية في مجموعة طاهر رياض الشعرية (كتاب الغيب). ويبين كيف يحول طاهر رياض العناصر اليومية إلى تجسيدات لتصوراته الذهنية، مفصلاً الأشياء وأسماءها عن مرجعياتها الحياتية ويربطها بتجربته التأملية. كما يربط البحث تأملات (رياض) بالسرديات الأسطورية والرمزية، مثل المسيح ونرسييس وبروميثيوس وأوديب لتمثيل تأملاته في تشكيل الإنسان فيما يتعلق بالمصير المرسوم في الغيب، وفيما يتعلق بإدراك الإنسان لطبيعة وجوده، ويكشف البحث عن الرؤية والأسلوب الشعري للمجموعة، الذي يمزج بين تفاصيل الحياة العادية وعلاقة الإنسان بالعالم واشتراكه معه في الكينونة، ويخلق هذا الدمج بين الواقعي والخيالي من خلال اللغة تجربة مميزة في الشعر العربي الحديث.

الكلمات المفتاحية: شعر التفاصيل، التأمل، الوجود، شعرية الحداثة، طاهر رياض، الصوفية.

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