

Language and style of the contemporary poet El Rass: a peculiar artist in the Lebanese musical scenario

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Abstract. This research focuses on the linguistic analysis of texts taken from the production of the Lebanese rapper El Rass. After an *excursus* on the underground musical scenario in Lebanon, the work focuses on the language, themes and style of El Rass, the artist who gave birth to a new type of rap. His songs are characterized not only by rhyme, but also by a refined language, by cultural and social references and by a strong link with the Arab cultural tradition. The author favors Arabic, to the detriment of French or English, drawing on both the high register (Standard Arabic) and the low register (Lebanese Arabic) of the language. El Rass stands out, in style and language, from most of the Lebanese rappers and constitutes a particularly interesting case study.

Keywords: El Rass, Lebanese rap, Standard Arabic, Lebanese Arabic, Linguistics.

[es] Lenguaje y estilo del poeta contemporáneo El Rass: un artista singular en el escenario musical libanés

Resumen. Esta investigación se centra en el análisis lingüístico de textos tomados de la producción del rapero libanés El Rass. Después de un recorrido por el escenario musical underground del Líbano, la obra se centra en el lenguaje, la temática y el estilo de El Rass, el autor que dio origen a un nuevo tipo de rap. Sus canciones se caracterizan no solo por la rima, sino también por un lenguaje refinado, por referencias culturales y sociales y por un fuerte vínculo con la tradición cultural árabe. El autor prefiere el árabe, en detrimento del francés o el inglés, basándose tanto en el registro alto (árabe estándar) como en el registro bajo (árabe libanés) del idioma. El Rass se distingue, en estilo y lenguaje, de la mayoría de los raperos libaneses y constituye un caso de estudio particularmente interesante.

Palabras clave: El Rass, Rap libanés, Árabe estándar, Árabe libanés, Lingüística.

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Introduction

Although art manifests itself in various forms, it has found in oral productions a much appreciated channel of expression in the Arab world; a striking example of a literary genre spread initially through an oral tradition is represented by poetry, which has always played a fundamental role in Arabic literature and has been considered the greatest artistic expression. Although writing is a fundamental tool for

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the conservation of literary production, orality has been the natural means through which this production has often expressed itself.

Among the artistic productions of an oral nature, the musical genre of rap is included, as it is based on the profusion of the word: Krims² emphasizes that rap is traditionally linked to orality and has its roots in an entertainment culture that has its origins in an oral literary art, called *toasting*, developed within the African American culture; toasts are rhyming poems, recited by a single individual at a time in order to entertain the public.

Rap has often been considered a form of poetry for the peculiarity of the use of rhymes, for the style, for the rhetorical figures: this thought is shared across the board by different personalities, such as the American literary critic Bradley³ who carries out an in-depth analysis of rap through parallels with poetry.

Even the Lebanese rapper El Rass, argues that there is a linguistic *continuum* between the rhymes of Arab rappers and classical Arabic poetry. The artist has a conception of rap based on the rejection of the idea that this is a simple western import, considering it rather as a source of inspiration for the rediscovery of Arab cultural, artistic and literary heritage. His lyrics are teeming with references to classical and contemporary Arabic history and literature; another interesting aspect of this author's texts is constituted by the references to religion, with images and expressions taken from the Koran but above all from Islamic mysticism.

El Rass is part of the Lebanese music scene which is characterized by a rap with multiple musical and linguistic components: oriental rhythms mixed with elements of electronic music, samples (parts of a song that are recorded and used to create a new piece of music), experimental sound effects, multilingualism; a phenomenon, the latter, which reflects the Lebanese linguistic reality. All these components make Lebanese rap a varied musical genre, rich in nuances, which make it a powerful means of communication and an effective example of fusion between East and West⁴.

The language and style employed by El Rass, which stands out from most Lebanese rappers, represent an interesting case study both culturally and linguistically. This research focuses on the linguistic analysis of a *corpus* taken from the artistic production of El Rass and analyzes content and linguistic elements, rhetorical figures, puns, rhymes, cultural references, figurative expressions of the selected lyrics.

Overview of the underground musical situation in Lebanon

Although rap music initially had greater fortune and spread in the Maghreb⁵, the Middle East has witnessed in the last twenty years an ever greater expansion of this musi-

² KRIMS, Adam, *Rap music and the poetics of identity*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, MA, 2000.

³ BRADLEY, Adam, *Book of Rhymes - The Poetics of hip hop*, Basic Civitas, New York, 2009.

⁴ RACHED, Nayla, *Min Beyrouth : Le Rap Libanais*, 11/05/08, <http://minbeyrouth.blogspot.it/2008/05/le-rap-libanais.html>.

⁵ Literature offers many studies about Maghrebi rap: GUERRERO, Jairo, "Zanka Flow: rap en *árabe* marroquí", in *Romano-Arabica* 12, University of Bucharest, Center of Arabe Studies, Bucharest (2012) 125-57; MEOUAK, Mohamed, AGUADÉ, Jordi, "La Rhorhomanie et les beurs: l'exemple de deux langues en contact", in *Estudios de dialectología norteafricana y andalusí* 1 (1996) 157-66; CAUBET, "Génération darija!", in *Estudios de dialectología norteafricana y andalusí* 9 (2006) 233-43; LANGONE, Angela Daiana, "Facteur D (Darija) et nouvelle generation marocaine: la musique entre innovation et tradition", in *Between the Atlantic and Indian*

cal genre⁶, which has now reached the same popularity as elsewhere and has become so well established that it has achieved visibility and success also with the western public. Among the countries of the Mashreq area, Lebanon is certainly one of those in which the alternative music scene is most developed, varied and dynamic⁷.

In Beirut a vibrant underground music scene generates the most innovative sounds of electronics, punk and rap from all over the Arab world; rap in particular is a genre increasingly rooted in the Lebanese music scene. This musical genre has developed in Lebanon since the Nineties and is characterized above all by its heterogeneity, not only from a musical point of view but also from a linguistic point of view, in fact we can observe the phenomenon of trilingualism that characterizes the Lebanese rap musical production: Arabic, French and English, languages which in many cases also appear together in the same song. The exclusive use of English and French was widespread especially in the early development phase of rap in Lebanon. Subsequently, some artists began to rap in their native language and therefore gradually abandoned foreign languages. Currently, most Lebanese rappers have chosen Arabic (mostly in the dialectal variant) as the preferred language of expression in their songs.

The first to introduce alternative music to Lebanon were the members of the duo known as Soap Kills (in Arabic “*Aṣ-Ṣābūn yaqtol*”), Yasmine e Zeid Hamdan; the group formed in 1997 is considered among the pioneers of the Lebanese alternative music movement⁸. Soap Kills, quite well known both in Lebanon and in France, have now become the symbol of the Lebanese underground music scene, first of all for their eclecticism: in their tracks they combine electronic music and traditional Arabic melodies, adding elements of rock and a fusion of rhythms hip hop. Starting from this sonic eclecticism, the Soap Kills duo have launched a new musical wave in Lebanon towards the end of the nineties whose effects are still visible today. In

Oceans, Association Internationale de Dialectologie Arabe, S. Procházka, V. Ritt-Benmimoun (eds.), Lit-Verlag, Wien (2008) 273-85.

⁶ Many authors have turned their attention to rap in Palestine: McDONALD, David A., *My voice is my weapon: music nationalism and the poetics of Palestinian resistance*. University of Illinois Press, IL, 2006; LOVATT, Hugh, *Palestinian Hip Hop Culture and Rap Music: Cultural Resistance as an Alternative to Armed Struggle*, Institute of Arabic and Islamic Studies, Exeter University, London 2009; MAIRA, Sunaina, MAGID, Shihade, *Hip hop from '48 Palestine, youth music and present absent*, University Press, Fairfax VA 2012; ORR, Yuval, *Legitimizing Narratives in Rhyme: Hip-Hop and National Identity in Israel and Palestine*, University of Pennsylvania, Pennsylvania, 2011; Massad, Joseph, “Liberating Songs: Palestine Put to Music” in *Palestine, Israel and politics of popular culture*, L.R. Stein, T. Swedenburg (eds.) Duke University Press, Durham NC, 2005. The issue published in the winter of 2012 by the online magazine *Shahādāt*, edited by Rayya El Zein, takes into consideration the lyrics of sixteen rapper artists from Egypt, Lebanon, Palestine and the Arab diaspora (<http://issuu.com/arteeast/docs/shahadatwint2012>).

The following studies are some researches emerged in recent years on hip hop during the Arab revolutions: FILIU, Jean Paul, “Hip hop arabe et contestation démocratique”, in *Hip hop du Bronx aux rues arabes*, Institut Du Monde Arabe, Snoeck, Paris, (2015) 99-108; HALASA, Malu, OMAREEN, Zaher, MAHFOUD, Nawara, *Syria Speaks. Art and Culture from the frontline*, Saqi Books, London, 2014; GUERRERO, Jairo, “Rap y Revolución en el Mundo Árabe, transcripción y traducción de tres canciones de rap árabe”, in *Al-Andalus Magreb*, n. 19, (2012) 455-477; PROCHÁZKA, Stephan, “Traditional Boatbuilding. Two texts in the Arabic dialect of the island of Arwād (Syria)”, in *Nicht nur mit Engelszungen: Beiträge zur semitischen Dialektologie. Festschrift für Werner Arnold zum 60. R. Kutny, U. Seeger, S. Talay* (eds.), *Geburtstag*, Harrasowitz Verlag, Wiesbaden (2013) 275-88.

⁷ For further information on Lebanese rap: FISCHIONE, Fernanda “A Critique of Religious Sectarianism through Satire: A Case Study of Lebanese Rap” in Sabine Damir-Geilsdorf, Stephan Milich (eds) *Creative Resistance*, (2020).

⁸ LEVINE, Mark, *Rock the Casbah!*, Isbn Edizioni, Milano, 2010.

this innovative musical wave, hip hop music actually made its first appearance in Lebanon in the mid-eighties, thanks to Dj Lethal Skillz, the first Lebanese DJ, considered by experts of the genre “Dj Kool Herc⁹ of the Lebanon”¹⁰. However, rap was successful for the first time in 1997, introduced by the pioneer of Lebanese rap, Wael Koudaih, stage name Rayess Bek, who founded the group in that year ‘*Aks əs-sēr*’ (“Countercurrent”), one of the first Lebanese rap groups, in collaboration with Housam Fathallah, *alias* Eben Foulen.

A fundamental event, which determined the evolution of Lebanese rap towards greater political awareness, was the outbreak of the war against Israel in July 2006: rap has become even more a tool for expressing social and political issues and spreading messages of protest. For these topics most of the rap production in Lebanon can be considered as belonging to the sub-genre of the so-called “conscious rap” that focuses on social issues (*The Message* released in 1982 by Grandmaster Flash was the first “conscious” song, in which the text dealt with the themes of poverty, violence and the problems of black youth).

The role of social criticism in Lebanon is therefore assumed by rap and no longer by the traditional nationalist song. Rap musicians and singers can be considered “alternative” to the mainstream commercial pop scene. Because of the political approach of Lebanese rap, this musical genre remains mostly underground and is the victim of censorship from society, politics, religion and the media; the major Lebanese media support very little rap music and instead prefer to promote local pop, a commercial music characterized mostly by light and banal themes.

The lack of access to institutional media channels and the censorship of the most delicate issues, considered taboo, constitute a major obstacle for the spread of rap music, which is however partially circumvented, as also happens in other Arab countries, through the use of Internet, with the publication of the songs on the various music platforms and on social networks. In addition to dissemination via the Internet, there are also some tricks used by Lebanese rappers to avoid censorship, such as self-censorship on certain topics or the use of French or English for more explicit or vulgar expressions, the employment of slang words, abbreviations, metaphors and morpho-semantic procedures not always easily decipherable (such as *verlan*¹¹ in the case of French). An example of the use of these procedures is represented by Ashekman, another rap duo among the best known in Lebanon, who, after being censored on stage during concerts and recalled by the police for their harsh and aggressive tone, began to resort to *verlan* and to use French and English for vulgar expressions; in fact, as one of the two members of the group declares: «les gens ont tendance à croire que les insultes passent plus facilement en français et en anglais qu’en arabe»¹².

Beyond the message of protest, the Lebanese rappers have become professionals of sound manipulated through experimental techniques, such as the use of samples, through which the artists insert within the musical bases noises from the surrounding

⁹ DJ Kool Herc is considered one of the pioneers of the hip hop culture of the seventies.

¹⁰ GHANDOUR, Maya, *Rap, graffs et smurf: histoire(s) du hip-hop beyrouthin*, 12/04/17, <https://www.lorientlejour.com/article/1046361/rap-graffs-et-smurf-histoires-du-hip-hop-beyrouthin.html>.

¹¹ A particular form of slang language used in France, characterized by new words obtained mainly by syllabic inversion. The word “*verlan*” (ver’lã) is in code and means “à l’envers” (a lã’veR), that is, “on the contrary”.

¹² RACHED, Nayla, *Min Beyrouth: Le Rap Libanais*, 11/05/08, <http://minbeyrouth.blogspot.it/2008/05/le-rap-libanais.html>.

environment (usually the noises are those characteristic of the urban environment) or noises taken from the war, popular motifs, parts of songs belonging to the Arabic musical tradition (especially those of Umm Kulthum and Fayrouz) or excerpts from political speeches.

An example of one of the most original musicians of the Lebanese alternative music scene is Jawad Nawfal, also known as Munma, who draws on oriental melodies and rhythms and mixes them with street noises and with radio excerpts, thus creating musical tracks totally innovative and producing an effective fusion of oriental and electronic music; these backing tracks are very often used by other rappers as bases for their songs, like El Rass in the album *Kašf al-maḥğūb*, entirely made in collaboration with Munma.

The eclecticism of Lebanese rap can also be found in the variety of artists and rap groups that are very different from each other. In addition to those already mentioned, among the main Lebanese rappers it is worth mentioning: the group of Fareeq el Atrash, who, like others, have deliberately chosen to rap in Lebanese dialect to emphasize the concept of identity, express the feeling of national pride and keep alive the link with tradition; rapper Malikah (from Arabic *malika* “queen”), one of the most appreciated representatives of Arab female rap and whose songs have become international hits throughout the Arab world and beyond; rapper Mazen al Sayyed, better known as El Rass, a completely unique example, both for the content of his lyrics and for the language used, in fact he is one of the few Arab rappers to use Standard Arabic.

A separate case is represented by the rappers of the Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon. In this case the criticism targets everyone: political leaders, humanitarian organizations, the Lebanese themselves, presumed brothers of the Palestinians. Among the best known groups, we remember the I-Voice and the Katibe 5, both from the refugee camp of Burj el Barajneh, on the outskirts of Beirut. The rap that develops in the Palestinian refugee camps of Lebanon first takes into consideration the aspects of the life of the inhabitants of the camps: the frustrations and the desire to let off steam to alleviate the suffering caused by the situation of injustice and oppression suffered. Young people from refugee camps find in this musical genre an expressive channel that allows them to express their living conditions, obviously without forgetting the Palestinian cause, which continues to be a recurring subject among these rappers¹³. However, the rap produced in refugee camps is not only a tool that allows singers to express anger and frustrations, on the contrary, through rap, these artists send out a message of hope and they try to convince the Palestinian people that ignorance is an evil that must be fought through education and information, in line with the didactic-pedagogical purpose of rap. Finally, an even more singular case is that of rap belonging to the so-called “homo-hop”. It is a musical sub-genre, whose main exponents are artists from the LGBT community (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender community). NaR, the first Arab gay rap group, originally from Lebanon, is made up of two members: Mazen, born in Lebanon and moved to the United States as a political refugee at the age of five, fleeing the Israeli invasion and Tru Bloo, a girl of Syro-Lebanese origin who moved to Las Vegas. The name NaR, (in Arabic *nār* “fire”), reflects the “ardent” spirit that animates their texts, in fact the

¹³ *Le hip-hop arabe*, Last Night in Orient, 13/04/10, <http://musique.arabe.over-blog.com/article-le-hip-hop-arabe-48538966.html>.

lyrics describe their deep passion for change and social revolution. The members of the NaR duo proclaim in their lyrics first of all their trust in humanity and in the liberation of all oppressed peoples. Although they are the pioneers of the “homo-hop” genre in the Arab world, their music is not only characterized as gay identity rap; alongside the theme of the elimination of homophobia in Arab society, their texts also touch upon political issues. Beyond the affirmation and vindication of a gay identity, their main commitment is to produce music that creates cultural and social bridges, through which to carry out a revolution that has as its sole purpose access to justice for a whole society¹⁴. The fact that the first gay rap group in the Arab world comes from Lebanon further confirms the heterogeneity of the rap genre in this country and gives an additional demonstration of how the Lebanese alternative music scene is among the most avant-garde in the whole Arab world.

El Rass: style of an original rapper

An entirely original exponent in the Lebanese panorama both for his career and for the contents and the language of his songs is Māzin as-Sayyid (born in 1984) from Tripoli, known as El Rass (from the Arabic *ar-ra's* “the head”). The singer, after a life of studies and an early career as a banker, decides to follow his passion for writing and music and therefore to devote himself completely to rap. In 1999, at the age of fifteen, he began to compose rhyming poems using the Lebanese variety. The discovery of rap music takes place thanks to a teacher who gives him a music cassette containing songs by some French rappers of Arab origin.

Nowadays El Rass is one of the most popular and appreciated rappers of the Lebanese hip hop scene; El Rass’s discography currently includes four albums: *Kašf al-mahğūb* “Unveiling the hidden”, the debut album, released in 2012 and made for the independent Lebanese record label “Ruptured”; *'Ādam, Darwin wa l-baṭrīq* “Adam, Darwin and the penguin” in 2014; *'Idārat at-tawaḥḥuṣ* “Management of barbarism” in 2016 and finally *Ar-riyāda wa l-'adab*, “Sport and literature” in 2017. El Rass uses ancient and contemporary material, both for its melodies and for its lyrics, moving, on a thematic level, between the spiritual and the mundane. His texts focus on very heterogeneous themes: radical Islamists, Iran, Turkey, Arab regimes, the United States and the West, social injustices, corruption, unemployment, civil liberties and the Lebanese customs; in his tracks the author also expresses his vision of religion and his idea of revolution dissociated from any political ideology.

El Rass, arguing that there is a linguistic thread between the rhymes of Arab rappers and classical Arabic poetry, claims to call his music *Ta'liq* (in Arabic “comment”), which connects to the root of the term *Mu'allaqāt*, the *corpus* of pre-Islamic poetry¹⁵. El Rass gives life to a very elaborate production in terms of form and con-

¹⁴ *Le homo-hop, le rap identitaire gay*, Last Night in Orient, 22/08/10, <http://musique.arabe.over-blog.com/article-homo-hop-55768725.html>. From the research carried out on this and other sites and blogs dedicated to the Arab homo-hop genre, there are currently no other known rap artists who are openly homosexual in the Arab hip hop scene. Furthermore, from the existing music platforms it was not possible to find the songs of the NaR group, probably subjected to censorship.

¹⁵ Interview by Rima Marrouch with El Rass, Los Angeles Times, March 30, 2013, from which the article by LASAGNA, Paolo, *Il banchiere diventato rapper poeta*, 09/05/2014, <http://nena-news.it/musica-il-banchiere-diventato-un-rapper-poeta>.

tent: his texts are constructed like poems, full of literary and historical references, rhymes, assonances and alliterations. The author uses certain tools and strategies to create linguistic deviations within the text, in order to arouse the listener's attention by causing him a psychological effect; as Short¹⁶ illustrates: «If a part of a text is deviant, it becomes especially noticeable, or perceptually prominent. We call this psychological effect foregrounding». The rap text therefore presents different ways of foregrounding: this term refers to the various techniques with which it is possible to cause a linguistic deviation; among them, one of the most immediate is the violation or breaking of a linguistic rule¹⁷.

The texts of El Rass present peculiarities that make it not always decipherable: linguistic deformations, metaphorical and elliptical language, cultural references, the highly connotative character of the terms.

The rhyme constitutes an essential element in the texts of El Rass, but also in general in rap, in fact several scholars examine the technical aspects of the lyrics such as metrics and versification. In the era of “old school”¹⁸, the typical pattern of the song consists of a series of couplets with a final rhyme; another technique used is that which covers keeping the same rhyme for more than one couplet. Over time, rappers also experiment with other rhyming techniques, such as the internal rhyme consisting of rhyming words within the same verse; in the songs of rappers we also find other kind of rhymes as the “transformative rhymes”¹⁹ composed of words that rhyme little with each other but transformed into rhymes through the alteration of pronunciation. In the lyrics of El Rass we often observe internal and final rhymes that alternate and form much more complex structures.

A not insignificant factor to highlight is the rapper's tendency, unlike other Lebanese artists, to refuse to use other languages, English or French, but uses only Arabic, both the high register, little used in general in rap, and the Lebanese variety, considering *fushā* and *'ammiyya* tools at his disposal, which he can use when he deems it appropriate, depending on the state of mind in which he finds himself or the subject matter. The choice to use *fushā* is probably due to an attachment to the Arab cultural heritage, to the rhythmicity of this language and to the fact that classical Arabic has more precise terms than the dialect and allows the artist to express himself more effectively on many topics and to better communicate all the shades of meaning.

Thanks to his ability to make the most of every linguistic nuance, his original “flow”²⁰ and an excellent cultural background, El Rass has given birth to a real new school in terms of Arabic rap, in fact the rap of El Rass is very original and is distinguishable from that of the many other rappers who populate the Beirutian music scene. His elaborate language, full of puns, figures of speech and religious and cultural references make his rap completely accessible only to an audience of erudite Arabs²¹.

¹⁶ SHORT, Mick, *Exploring The Language of Poems, Plays and Prose*, Longman, London-New York, 1996, 11.

¹⁷ DOUTHWAITE, John, *Towards a Linguistic Theory of Foregrounding*, Edizioni dell'Orso, Alessandria, 2000.

¹⁸ the expression “Old School” refers to early rap (late seventies, early eighties).

¹⁹ BRADLEY, Adam, *Book of Rhymes - The Poetics of hip hop*, Basic Civitas, New York, 2009.

²⁰ *Flow*: here this term indicates the rhyming sequence in rap music.

²¹ Among the very original rappers with a particular style, we can mention the Egyptian singer, of Algerian origin, Ahmed Mekky. He is a well known and popular figure in Egyptian rap and released many successful hits like

Analysis of texts: themes and language

The *corpus* examined consists of four lyrics: the first is *Burkēn Bayrūt* “The volcano of Beirut”, taken from the album *Kašf al-mahğūb* (2012) and written in Lebanese dialect; the second, رسالة *Risāla* “Letter”, is taken from the same album, but written in Standard Arabic; the third, with the double title عشق *’Išq - Islamology* “Love - Islamology”, is also taken from the same album and is written in Standard Arabic; the fourth, entitled *’Āsfe bi-finžān* “Storm in a cup”, written in Lebanese Arabic, is taken from the 2014 album *’Ādam, Darwin wa l-baṭrīq*. The lyrics *Burkēn Bayrūt* and *’Āsfe bi-finžān*, are united from a linguistic point of view by the use of the variety of Lebanese Arabic with all its phono-morpho-syntactic characteristics. Specifically, we observe the phenomenon of *’imāla* (for which the long vowel *ā* is realized *ē*), albeit not in a systematic way, the rendering of the morpheme *š* with the vowel *-i*, not in a systematic way (we find also *-e*); regarding the diphthongs *ay* and *aw* we observe a tendency towards monophthongization (*ē*, *ō*), contrary to what happens in the Beirut variety where the diphthongs remain. The phoneme /q/ is realized in most cases as a occlusive laryngeal [ʔ] (in the transcription here it is rendered <’ >); about the interdental consonants in most cases the /t/ is pronounced [t] or [s], while /d/ is mostly rendered in [z] and, in some cases, in [d].

The male and female proximity demonstrative adjectives are rendered respectively *hayda e haydi*; sometimes there is also the use of the invariable demonstrative adjective *ha*. The negation of the nominal sentence is rendered by *miš*. As regards the syntax, the components of the period are often moved for reasons of rhyme and metrics or to emphasize concepts, in this way it is not always possible to find the sequence S.V.O. (Subject, Verb, Object) typical of Arabic dialects.

Furthermore, these two texts also present a similar theme, as both carry a message linked to the revolution, but proposed in a different way: in the first case the text is marked by a heated spirit of protest, expressed through a very impetuous tone; in the second case, however, the song takes the form of a story told in a calm tone, the idea of protesting in the streets is absent and the revolution is understood here in a figurative sense, as a continuous process of individual and social change.

In particular in *Burkēn Bayrūt* the author imagines a volcano at the base of Beirut, which metaphorically symbolizes everything that simmers within the city and the people; a socio-political situation in turmoil that can suddenly explode like a volcano. The song *’Āsfe bi-finžān*, unlike the previous piece, presents a more narrative-descriptive style, taking the form of a real romantic tale, in which the author describes the scene of a woman sitting in a bar, who initially reads a book, then listens the music from her headphones while she lights a cigarette, at the end, comes out of the bar. The singer who speaks in the first person seems to fall in love with this mysterious girl at first sight. The apparently romantic aspect of the song actually hides a double meaning, in fact, even if everything in the song is part of reality, the frame, essentially, is a metaphor: as we can understand from the verses, the woman El Rass is talking about stands for the revolution²².

Moqadema, included in the album *Ašl-o ’arabī* (2012). In this text the author refers to the Arab cultural tradition, quoting verses by the poet Al-Farazdaq (641-730).

²² The author himself gives this interpretation in the interview with Fernanda Fischione nel 2017: <https://www.poesiadelnostrotempo.it/el-rass-il-rap-arabo/>.

The other two songs, رسالة *Risāla* and عشق *‘Išq - Islamology*, both in classical Arabic, in terms of content, are similar: they both describe the rapper’s personal vision of religion and the way he relates to it. Analyzing the stylistic aspect, we observe that the rapper’s flow is faster in the dialect songs, while it slows down slightly in the classical Arabic ones, characterized by a more marked pronunciation of the words, also due to the presence of the *‘i rāb*.

In the song رسالة *Risāla*, El Rass, using very poetic language, sends a message to his listeners in which he expresses his vision of God and religion and his relationship with the divine. El Rass has a mystical vision of religion, close to Sufism, based on the continuous search for God in daily life. The God of which the author speaks is “love for all”: he shows goodness to all, without distinction of any kind, is against injustice and wants equality of women and men (“how wicked that God who desires women to be mute”), love for children and respect for every living thing. From the song therefore emerges a relationship of the author with religion completely centered on mystical research, that is, on the attempt to reveal what is hidden in the depths of the human being, as also confirmed by the title of the album of which the song belongs, *Kašf al-maḥḡūb* “Unveiling the hidden”. This title is inspired by a Sufi text, as the rapper himself explains:

The disc owes its name to a text by Ali Hajvery, a Sufi master who lived about nine centuries ago. According to Sufism, the veils represent the obstacles that stand between the individual and reality. Cultural stereotypes, the fear of the different, borders, are all obstacles that we should break down in order to aspire to a better future. We must destroy these barriers in order to meet each other correctly, in a loving way, in order to truly have a dialogue²³.

The lyric عشق *‘Išq - Islamology* expresses the way in which the author relates to Islam. The title in Arabic is عشق “love”, but in many versions available on the web next to the title in Arabic we also find the English word “Islamology” which means what is precisely the author’s Islamology, that is his personal vision of Islam, which El Rass considers a religion founded on love; the rapper’s relationship with religion is oriented towards the ethical aspect of religion. In particular, the rapper addresses a harsh criticism of religious leaders who have commodified religion, speculated on it and given importance to formal and superficial aspects, forgetting instead the true fundamental principles of Islamic doctrine, that is the original values of purity, love and equality.

Notes on the corpus

For convenience and to avoid repetition of the titles, I will report the examples taken from the lyrics, numbering the texts as follows:

Text 1: *Burkēn Bayrūt*

Text 2: رسالة *Risāla*

²³ (Translation of the author). LASAGNA, Paolo, *Il banchiere diventato un rapper poeta*, 09/05/14 <http://ne-na-news.it/musica-il-banchiere-diventato-un-rapper-poeta/>.

Text 3: عشق *'Išq-Islamology*

Text 4: *'Āsfe bi-finžān*

The number after it refers to the verse of the song: for example Text 1: 4. (the latter is the verse number). About every aspect (lexicon, rhetorical figures, figurative expressions, rhymes and assonances, puns and references of a cultural, religious, historical nature) only a few examples are given here.

The entire texts can be viewed in the appendix and can be found on the following sites: <https://www.genius.com>, <https://www.reverbnation.com>, <https://www.youtube.com/>, <https://www.soundcloud.com> (the last two sites report only the audio version).

The examples taken from the lyrics in Lebanese Arabic will be reported in scientific transcription (as is typical of the methodology of Arabic dialectology), those taken from the texts in Standard Arabic will be reported in Arabic characters, as in the original version.

Regarding the texts in dialect, the etymologically long vowels in post-tonic open syllable are transcribed only when they are pronounced as such (according to a phonetic transcription), therefore the final vowels, which in classical Arabic are long, are rendered short, for example *ana* “I”, *'ša'rāt-a* “her hair”, *'ammaru* “they built”.

Lexicon

In the texts in Lebanese Arabic the author uses a little researched lexicon and is closer to a colloquial and spoken language in everyday life. Some classicisms are found on a phonological level, for example in some cases the phoneme /q/ is realized as uvular to give solemnity to the terms, and on a morphological level, in which we notice the rendering *mu-* of the participle of the derived forms (for example *mu'alla* “hanging” o *muġla* “impenetrable”) and plurals with the morpheme *ā* (*'ārā* “opinion”).

In the song *Burkēn Bayrūt* we find a loan *dīkūr* from French “décor”, in the lyric *'Āsfe bi-finžān* we observe the Italianism *kābūtšīnō* “cappuccino”.

In *رسالة Risāla* and عشق *'Išq* the lexicon becomes more refined and characterized by cultural and religious references, this is due to the solemnity of the themes; in these cases the author uses the high variety of the language. When the rapper deals with religious topics or his vision of faith, he often uses the Standard Arabic that is felt most suited to this theme, being the language of the Koran.

Figures of speech

In the texts, the author makes use of metaphors as in the text 1: 11. *bwāžəḥ ət-tāž* lett. “I face the crown”, in which the crown metaphorically symbolizes power; 20. *haydi miš 'ašmet sa'āfe haydi ḥalbet əl-mušāra'a* “it is not the capital of culture, this is a battlefield”, metaphor with which the author alludes to the religious and political clashes that characterize the city of Beirut; 23. *ra'bet-o ṭawīli məʔl mēlik əl-ḥazīn* “Its neck is as long as that of a heron”, in reference to the ruling class that with its “long neck” better reaches the “prey”, that is, the weaker social classes; 47. *war'it ət-*

tūt lett. “mulberry leaf”, metaphor in this case of “modesty” or “candor” as opposed to the previous word *ad-da’āra* “debauchery”. We find similes: text 4: 13. *law bātšūf əl-hawa kīf ma ‘ša ‘rāt-a ‘am yət ‘āmal* / 14. *mətl əmm hādqne təfl-a ‘am tər’os* “if you saw the air as she braids her hair!” / “like a nurse cradling her baby”. In the text 3 the author uses the synecdoche: 5. نيرانهما تلتهم الباب أجزائك باب للكونين “your body is the gate of the two worlds, which is destroyed by their fires”, in this case the expression أجزائك “your parts” is used to mean “your body”. The syntactic rhetorical figure of the anaphora is often used, such as in the text 2, in which the author repeats at the beginning of the verses 16, 17, 18, 19. the verb form ليس *laysa* “it is not”. Finally, the rapper also uses the morphological rhetorical figure of alliteration, repeating the same phonemes in subsequent words, as in the text 1: 3. *Bayrūt sabbatet ḥabbet ət-tawra lli fī-na nabbatet* “Beirut consolidated the seeds of the revolution that had germinated within us”; 15. *‘ammaru dammaru zammaru tzammaru* “They built, they destroyed, they honked their horns, they complained”; 17. *‘a’l-on ḥarrabu ḡarrabu harrabu* “they have ruined, they have made strange, they have let their minds escape”. In the text 4: 24. *ṣār Salīm ysarser, bas tarkīz-i ma byətba ‘ser* “Salim started to chat, but my concentration has not dispersed”.

Figurative expressions

The author often uses a figurative language both in Standard Arabic and in Lebanese Arabic. Text 1: 10. *iza wa’afṭ taksīr btəṣīr žəz’ mən əd-dīkūr* “If you stop breaking you become an ornament” (lit. “if you stop breaking you become a part of the decoration”), here the author means that whoever does not make noise, does not create some difficulties in a critical sense, becomes useless and inert.

In the text 2: 14, 15. بنس رب حاقد يشتهي بكم النساء / يزود الشيطان بالوقود ليحرق السماء / “How wicked that hateful God who desires women to be mute / who supplies the devil with fuel to set the sky on fire”, the latter expression here has the sense of creating havoc or doing evil deeds; 37. لا تظنن البوادي مقفات. *al-Bawādī* is a desert area”, in the sense that appearances should not be believed. The author in this case probably refers to one of the areas forming part of the so-called “Dubailand” of the Emirate of Dubai, consisting of a complex of entertainment facilities (amusement parks, hotels, commercial and residential buildings) built starting from 2006 on the basis of a project for the development of that previously deserted area; 34. يا صديقي قد خبرنا الفكر في عنق الزجاجة. lit.: “My friend, we have been so adept in the art of thinking in the neck of a bottle”, in common and also political language, this last expression (في عنق الزجاجة) is used to indicate an *impasse*, a difficult situation, an obstacle to overcome.

Text 3: 1. نسعى لقتل الزمان. “let’s try to kill time”, this expression means “to pass the time”; this idiom also has equivalents in many European languages; 9. أجراس كنائسنا بكما. “The bells of our churches are silent and the call to prayer of our mosques is deaf”, figurative expression used to mean that religious sentiment has disappeared and there is no dialogue between religions. Text 4: 10. *sakkaret yūn-a ‘allet əṣ-ṣōt bi-səmmā ‘āt-a w šardet* “She closed her eyes, turned up the volume on the headphones and ran away”: the verb *šarad*, *yəšrad* “flee”, “wander,” is used figuratively to say that the girl the author talks about has put on headphones to listen to music and is escaped from reality, in fact in the following verses she is still physically present in the bar.

Rhymes and assonances

The rhymes that El Rass uses are for the most part final, but we also observe assonances and internal rhymes. In practically all verses we observe rhymes; just to name a few examples in which we observe both internal and final rhymes: text 1: 42. *əl-mōt la-l-balīd šanam* / 43. *əš-šabʿr la-l-ʿanīd ḥəlʿm* / 44. *ta ʿlīh əš-šahīd zulum* / 45. *ḥalīṭ əl-ḥadīd w əd-damm, əl-ʿilēž w əs-samm* “for the stupid, death is a myth” / “for the stubborn, patience is a dream” / “divinizing the martyr is oppression” / “a mixture of iron and blood, cure and poison”; text 4: 62. *ma ʿūl šuwar mažhūli, ʿan ʿiṣʿ-na mas ʿūli?* “Are they credible hidden images, are they responsible for our love?”.

Puns

There are puns based on homophony. Text 1: 6. *ʿa-dam damār-na w ʿadam ḥərriyit ḥayār-na* “On the blood of our destruction and in the absence of freedom of choice”, in which the author plays on the homophony of *ʿa-dam* “on the blood” e *ʿadam* “absence”. Always in the text 1: 30. *kēn əl-ḥārīrī ma ṭār w ma šār maṭār əl-ḥārīrī* “Al-Hariri would not fly away and it would not become Al-Hariri airport”: here is another pun based on the homophony of *ma ṭār* “he would not fly away” e *maṭār* “airport”.

Even in the text 4 there is a case of homophony between *bariʿa* “innocent” and *barīʿa* “their glow”: 26. *nažarāt-i miš bariʿa, barīʿa taffah əd-dahab* “my looks are not innocent, their glare makes the gold look disfigured”. Finally, always in the text 4 at the verse 21. *iža Salīm²⁴ ʿāta ʿni ʿāl ʿmarīd*, *ḥəyy m ʿāfa* “Salim arrived, he interrupted me and said (I’m) sick’, brother, you are cured” we find a pun based on the double meaning of *Salīm*, which in addition to being a masculine proper name, is also an adjective and means “healthy”: the combination of the name *Salīm* “healthy” with the adjective *marīd* “sick” creates the effect of an ironic contradiction.

References of a cultural, religious, historical nature

Text 1: 30. *kēn al-Ḥārīrī ma ṭār w ma šār maṭār əl-ḥārīrī* “Al-Hariri would not fly away and it would not become an airport”; here the rapper refers to former Lebanese prime minister Rafiq al-Hariri killed in a car bomb attack in February 2005. Following his death, Beirut airport was renamed “Rafiq al-Hariri International Airport”, in memory of the former prime minister. The killing of Rafiq al-Hariri is also remembered as the event triggering the subsequent “cedar revolution”: a series of protests against the military presence of Syria, held responsible for the attack.

In the text 4. 52. *والشورى تصير عدا، قالها نديم قطيش* “Consultation becomes hostility said Nadim Koteich”, the author refers to a sentence uttered by Nadim Koteich, a Lebanese journalist and political analyst. Through his “DNA” program, which consists of an analysis of satirical news, Nadim Koteich criticizes and comments on the latest political events in Lebanon and the Middle East region in a biting and satirical way.

²⁴ Salim is a man who comes in to beg in the bar where the singer is sitting.

Text 3: 2. البيان الفرقان *al-Bayān, al-Furqān* two of the names of the Koran (lit.: *furqān* “separation (of the true from the false)” and *bayān* “statement”, “proclaims”); 7. غربتك الصغرى بين الناس والكبر مناصك في الإحساس “your minor exile is among the people, your pride is the refuge in the senses”, the term *ḡurba* literally means the state of exile, the separation of feeling like a stranger, but also the sense of loneliness, of estrangement from own homeland; 9. أذان “*’adān*” is the Islamic call to prayer; 22. جبريل و الجبروت *Ġibrīl* is the name of the archangel Gabriel and the term *al-Ġabarūt* signifies the omnipotence of God; *’alam al-Ġabarūt* in Islamic cosmology it is a high level in the sphere of divine presences, where the most chosen angels are found.

Text 3: 35. جنات تجري من تحتها الأنهار “thus the new foundations of religion foresee gardens under which rivers flow”, this expression is a quotation that is found in several suras of the Koran (just to name a few: sura 3 v. 15, 136, 198; sura 4 v. 13, 57; sura 5 v. 85; sura 9 v. 72, 89, sura 14 v. 23).

We observe several references to the Sufi language such as in text 2: 25. إدراكه بفنائى و مراده ببقائى “His perception with my death, his will with my existence”, 40. فاستبقتى نحو نفسى ، نحو اشواك الحدود “Anticipate me towards my soul, towards the barbed wire of the borders”, 41. بين جلدي و القيود “We meet behind my glass, between my skin and the chains”; in text 3, the term used in the title عشق is proper to the Sufis to indicate love for God, and always in the text we find the concept of self-annihilation in order to unite with God 23. أنا الموجود في عدمي و أنت المحدث القدم “I exist in my annihilation and you are the renewed past”.

Text 4: 30. *Aštarūt w Adūnīs* “Astarte and Adonis”: two Phoenician deities whose cult was practiced in the current Syro-Lebanese area; Astarte was the goddess of fecundity and fertility, married to Adonis, the patron god of vegetation. Here the author compares him and the woman he talks about to the two married gods; 31. *in-šāllah li-l-infižār al-žēyy ma nšīr Nizār w Balqīs* “we hope that the next explosion we do not become Nizar and Balqīs”: the author refers to the Syrian poet Nizar Qabbani and his second wife Balqīs al-Rawī, who died in an explosion in Beirut in 1981. The author then makes a comparison between Nizar and Balqīs and him and the woman, symbol of the revolution, hoping that the woman/revolution will not end in tragedy; 58. *yəḥrə’ kutub-i ka-l-Muḡūl* “it burn my writings like the Mongols”: historical reference to the invasion of Baghdad by the Mongols (1258), who, shooting fire arrows, destroyed the so-called *Bayt al-Hikma* “The House of Wisdom”, one of the largest libraries, as well as the first and one of the most important cultural institutions in the Arab-Islamic world.

Conclusion

As Simpson states²⁵, not only poetic or literary texts can be subject to stylistic analysis, but also those that are not included in certain canons, such as the song, which represents a historical document and must be studied, such as literature or cinema, because, like other productions of humanity, it tells about society²⁶.

²⁵ SIMPSON, Paul, *Language, Ideology and Point of View*, Routledge, London, 1993.

²⁶ CALVET, Luis Jean *Chanson et société*, Payot, Paris, 1981.

The musical genre of rap based on orality and often compared to poetry, constitutes an interesting field of investigation not only at a sociological but also at a linguistic level.

For the stylistic and linguistic peculiarities, in the Arab world and beyond, songs by the Lebanese singer El Rass have aroused particular echo. His lyrics are loaded with political and social content: the rapper carries out a careful analysis of the society that surrounds him, without closing himself off in a pre-established ideology. Through his songs he invites the Arabs to develop critical thinking freeing themselves from the bridle represented by political, social and religious conditioning. The songs of El Rass through the strength of his language have become famous not only in Lebanon but in several other Arab countries: their message goes beyond any localism to spread throughout the Arab world and in all societies that, like the Lebanese one, need a change.

Unlike most of the Arab rappers who use the dialect for their songs, in fact colloquial Arabic is perceived as a preferential tool to get messages and to represent their identity, this author often chooses not to resort to the variety of Lebanese Arabic, but to Standard Arabic.

Many of his lyrics can be considered poetic texts in which the author uses, especially in classical Arabic, a very elaborate language, characterized by numerous rhetorical figures, puns, singular figurative expressions created by the author and frequent references to political and social contexts. Therefore his texts, sometimes characterized by a sophisticated language and full of cultural references, involve difficulties of understanding, all the more for a non-Arab listener. For the marked connotative language, who listen to the lyrics or who have to carry out a translation activity, must have linguistic and extra-linguistic information to interpret the text and to understand what is implicit and what is omitted.

Another interesting aspect of this author's texts are the continuous religious references and sometimes the quotations of expressions taken directly from the Koran. While Koranic intertextuality is customary in literature, the inclusion of Koranic quotations in rap, considered by many to be a subversive musical genre and imported from the American context, it is an original trait and an attitude not so widespread among Arab rappers. The author draws mainly on Sufism, through the language and images taken from Islamic mysticism.

Arabic rap generally reflects the linguistic characteristics of the countries in which it is produced and in some cases is marked by the interference of Western languages and by the phenomena of bilingualism and trilingualism. Unlike the lyrics of other Lebanese rappers, in the *corpus* analyzed the phenomenon of transglossia is not found, in fact there is no switching from Arabic to French or vice versa, as El Rass only uses the Arabic language in his songs.

We can argue that this artist gives birth to a new school of Arab hip hop, in fact his music is not for the masses, but for an audience of learned Arabs; the hip hop created by El Rass appeals to thinkers, young revolutionaries, experts in the musical genre and constitutes a special case of rap music in the Arab world.

Appendix

The texts listed below are those mentioned in this research and were taken from the site <https://www.genius.com>.

Regarding the lyrics written in Lebanese Arabic, since the various Arabic dialects have no formal recognition and are affected by a lack of spelling and writing conventions, each author invents a graphematic rendering.

Text 1

بركان بيروت

1. مباح شفت بلمنام بيروت عمترق تحت رماد بركان
2. كان يعده ولعان "سكاي بار" ال فحموا الناس بس
3. بيروت ثبتت حبة الثورة اللي فينا نبتت
4. لما أحبطت نفوسنا من الجمود
5. فينا بيروت تحركت
6. عدّم دمارنا و عدم حرية خيارنا
7. بيوت بيروت تعمّرت
8. سكرنا عجفاف دمو عنا جفوننا عليها تسكرت فتخمرت
9. إذا بطلت تطير قدرك علأرض مقهور
10. إذا وقفت تكسير بتصير جزء من الديكور
11. بحاور بناور بالأخر بواجه التاج
12. بتوضى بصلي بتوصلني أصوات أنات المحتاج
13. تأمل العلم بعزي العمل من الأمل 13.
14. خيارني عنار خفيفة دوب المسمار وتسنوي الأفكار النظيفة
15. عمّروا دمروا زمروا تدمروا
16. ربك صبره دربه جربه
17. عقلن خربوا غربوا هربوا
18. وقبلوا بالفن عحيط الشارح
19. عشرط ما يكون في شك بشارع
20. هيدي مش عاصمة ثقافة هيدي حلبة المصارعة
21. بيروت لا تعرف في الماضي ولا تعرب بالمضارع
22. تحول التركيبة خلى العقل الجامد فكر حاله مالك المدينة
23. رقبته طويلة مثل مالك الحزين وايدو لوزيري
24. اعتبر نفسه أول مين اكتشف هلجزيرة
25. بأجر الفقير شقق بأسعار مدروسة
26. بشكل تضل طموحاته ممعوسة
27. نهبوا الأرض من ربعي وصارت الحرب شركة استثمار بمفعول رجعي
28. تحت شعار إعادة الإعمار
29. لو ما كان خالص دوره وانتهى عقد الأيجار
30. كان الحريري ما طار وما صار مطار الحريري
31. عاصمة لبنان بتوازن بين ضريحين
32. وانتينان غاغتيلان في علامة استفهام
33. واحد قدس الموت بس لسبب
34. واحد قدس الحياة بس بالكذب
35. واحد بايدو تحوّل الذهب سمّ
36. وواحد تخبي من الذهب بالدم
37. مين الشهيد؟
38. اللي مات تحت صباييط ثورة عبيد شهيد؟
39. اللي مات فتحول على حملة اعلانات هدفها ترفع الطائفة معدلات التجنيد؟

40. قنابل بالبريد وصل
 41. سيوف علوريد حصل
 42. الموت للبليد صنم
 43. الصبر للعنيد حلم
 44. تأليه الشهيد ظلم
 45. خليط الحديد والدم، العلاج والسم،
 46. الرفاه والهم، النوعية والكم
 47. الدعارة وورقة التوت
 48. بمدينة بيروت علم

Translation - Text 1

“Beirut’s volcano”

1. Yesterday I dreamt Beirut was drowning under volcanic ash
2. The people were turned to charcoal but Sky Bar [a posh Beirut club] was still lit up.
3. Beirut suppressed the seed of the revolution, the one that sprouted
4. When our spirits were foiled from immobility
5. In us Beirut moved.
6. On the blood of our destruction, and the negation of our freedom of choice
7. The houses of Beirut are rebuilt
8. We got drunk on the dryness of our tears, our eyelids closed on them and fermented
9. If you stop flying your destiny on land is distress
10. If you stop breaking, you become part of the decoration
11. I discuss, I maneuver, ultimately I confront the crown
12. I perform ablutions, I pray, I receive the moaning of the needy
13. The meditation of knowledge strips work from hope
14. My choice is on low fire, melting the nails, and clean thoughts are ripening.
15. They built, they destroyed, they honked, they complained
16. Your god made him patient, tested him and trained him
17. Their minds: ruined, westernized, chased off
18. They accepted art pissed on back alleys
19. As long as there is no doubt in the streets
20. This is no capital of culture, it’s a wrestling ring
21. Beirut can’t speak of itself in the past nor conjugate itself in the present.
22. Transitions and transformations made the closed mind think he owns the city
23. His neck is long like a stork and his hand is as long as that of a minister
24. He thinks himself the first who discovered this peninsula
25. He lets the poor rent apartments at prices studied
26. To crush ambitions
27. They stole the land from my cousins and the war became a backward-looking investment
28. Under the slogan of reconstruction
29. If his time wasn’t up and his contract finished
30. Hariri didn’t have to fly and it wouldn’t have become the Hariri airport
31. Lebanon’s capital keeps balance between two shrines

32. And on both assassinations, there is a question mark
33. One sanctifies death but for a reason
34. And one sanctifies life with lies
35. In one's hand gold turned into poison
36. And the other hid from gold with blood
37. Who is the martyr?
38. Is he who died under the shoes of the revolt of the oppressed a martyr?
39. Is it he whose death was transformed into an advertising campaign to raise the levels of sectarian enlistment?
40. Bombs came in the mail,
41. Swords to the jugular: true stories
42. Death to the cold is statuette
43. Patience to the stubborn is a dream
44. Divinity to the martyr is oppression
45. The mixture of steel and blood, the cure and poison
46. Luxury and distress, quality and quantity
47. Prostitution and candor:
48. The science of the city of Beirut

Text 2

رسالة

1. إنها أخلانا
2. إنه الموت المبكر، عودنا نحو الجماد
3. قيد قلب قد تيجر، تحت أمطار الرماد
4. قد خلقنا نحن نهدي، نحن نرتكب العمى
5. نستعيض عن الوجوه بيتسمات الدمى
6. كيف نمشي؟ كيف نرسم نورنا الممتد؟
7. من تقاسيم الغيوم، نحو نعشي، كيف نحكي؟
8. و أسود الارض تشكي ضلمها عند الكلاب مالمامات؟ هل طريق للهدى؟
9. بغير وصلن و غياب؟ اعذرنا ثم قاينا، اعذرنا انها الأحشاء فينا.
10. سامحيننا ما ظننا الشر فيك
11. و ربنا كان يعاني من رهاب مستديم، ربنا كان شجاعا،
12. يحمل السيف، يمانى الدهر مطاعا.
13. بنس رب لا يفوق الموت موتاً
14. بنس رب حاقد يشتهي بكم النساء،
15. يزود الشيطان بالوقود ليحرق السماء
16. ليس رباً من يطهر بالدماء
17. ليس رباً من يحيل الطفل كهلاً
18. ليس رباً من يداوي العلم جهلاً
19. ليس حبا
20. و الرب حب الكل
21. حب العدل كنه الكون
22. جوهر الأسباب طيب العطر سر اللون
23. غاية روح عاشقة و منية نفس ماشقة
24. فيه ما فيه و لا قيل بفيه

25. إدراكه بفنائني و مراده ببقائي
 26. كيف نمشي؟ نجعل الأحلام نوراً يعترينا فيصير العمر حيناً.
 27. كيف نحكي؟ نرسم الصمت إطاراً للكلام، فيصير الحب ديناً
 28. ماالجوب؟ من تراب للتراب 28.
 29. يا صديقي، كلنا في البحر أسماكٌ نحيلة
 30. و احتمالات النجاة كلها صارت ضئيله
 31. يا صديقي كلما ناحت سماء عاد للارض قليلٌ من ضياء،
 32. يرسم الناس وجوهاً مستطيلة
 33. يكتب الحب قوافي مستحيلة
 34. يا صديقي قد خبرنا الفكر في عنق الزجاجاة
 35. و احترفنا موتنا حتى السداجة
 36. يا صديقي عمرنا صار بحاجة لاعتراف بالزمان
 37. لا تظنن البوادي مقفرات، لا تظنن جنوني في سبات
 38. لكنني عدت لرقصي بين موتي و الحياة.
 39. كل عرسٍ يا صديقي وصل حي برفات
 40. فاستيقني نحو نفسي، نحو اشواك الحدود
 41. نتلاقى خلف كأسٍ.. بين جلدي و القيود

Translation - Text 2

“Letter”

1. It is our downfall
2. It is early death, our return to inanimate substances
3. The heartbeat dispersed under showers of ash
4. We were created, we roam, we act blind
5. We put bloody smiles in the place of our faces
6. How do we go on? How do we show our extended light?
7. Among the fragments of the clouds, almost blinded, how do we talk?
8. The darkness of the earth complains of its own darkness among the dogs, what is death? Is it the right way?
9. Being distant and absent? Forgive us and give us strength, forgive us to the bowels.
10. Forgive us, we didn't think badly of you.
11. Our God suffered from a constant phobia, our God was courageous
12. He carried the sword with him, was defeated by fate, obedient
13. How wicked is that God who cannot go beyond death
14. How wicked that hateful God who desires women to be mute
15. That supplies the devil with gasoline to set the sky ablaze
16. It is not God who cleanses with blood
17. It is not God who transforms the child into an adult
18. It is not God who treats the wise as ignorant
19. It is not love
20. And God is love for everyone
21. Love for justice is the essence of the universe
22. The essence of the material, the goodness of the smell and the mystery of color
23. The ultimate goal of every passionate soul and the desire of every wounded spirit

24. There is what there is, it was not said with his mouth
25. His perception with my death, his will with my existence
26. How do we go on? We give dreams a light that enlightens us, so life becomes an opportunity
27. How do we talk? We decorate silence with a frame of words, so love becomes a faith.
28. What's the answer? From the dust of the dust
29. My friend, in this sea we are all thin fish
30. And all chances of taking cover have become minimal
31. My friend, every time the sky cries, a little light returns to earth
32. People show bullying faces
33. Love writes impossible lines
34. My friend, in moments of tension we have been so adept in the art of thinking
35. And we practiced our death until it became natural
36. My friend, our life makes it necessary to accept fate
37. Don't believe that al-Bawādī is a desert area, don't believe that my madness is in deep sleep
38. I am back to dance between death and life
39. Every marriage is a vital union in the rubble
40. Anticipate me towards my soul, towards the barbed wire of the borders
41. We meet behind my glass, between my skin and the chains

Text 3

عشق

1. هل نعيش الحياة و نسعى لقتل الزمان و نملاً بالذهب الأجوف زاد الهوان
2. أم نعيد خلق الثواني وخط البيان نسير الدرب بإيمان ونبحت عن حدّ الفرقان
3. ثكأتك الدنيا يا ولدي فقدتك برفضك للنسيان
4. عينيك دامية الأهداب لن تزرع فيها حقول سراب
5. أجزائك باب للكونين نيرانهما تلتهم الباب
6. تصيح منزلة للحق حسب مقبرة الأتواب
7. غربتك الصغرى بين الناس و الكبر مناصك في الإحساس
8. إيقاعك أصداء للشمس و حدائك تحطيم للأجراس
9. أجراس كناسننا بكما و أذان مساجدنا صماء
10. تمجد ربا مختبئاً في فكي مصاص دماء
11. يمعن قهرا في الفقراء و يسحق أحلام الحكماء
12. امننت لإهك صمت النجوم فشرد ضميرك ممن يلوم
13. أنت إلهك ضوء العيون فتطهر به من ظلام القرون
14. أنت إلهك تعشق و غيرك في خوف يغرق
15. قلبي في التقى راهب و مالي في الهوا صاحب
16. عقلي زورق الألام و الأضواء عقلي غيمة سوداء
17. منها النار منها الماء فيها الطائر الولهان فيها التائه التائب
18. فلا فرح و لا حزن و لا ثقل و لا وزن و لا نار أهاب بها و لا طمع و لا عدن
19. مرادك حسب أحوالي و منك اليأس و الوهن فما بالي بترحالي و مالدنيا و مالكن

20. وكيف نحكم الأفكار والأشياء. والأفكار كالسائر نحو الزمان و في خطواته الزمن
 21. أنا المجهول بالموت فكيف يختفي ألمي
 22. لو كنت ذعرت من جبريل و الجبروت في جُنحيه لما أهديتني قلبي
 23. أنا الموجود في عدمي و أنت المحدث القدم
 24. فلا الأفراح لي خمُرُ و لا الساعات لي عمرُ
 25. و لا الآيات لي أمرُ و لا الأشواق لي جمرُ
 26. الأرض لا تشناق للموتى و الراحلين
 27. لكن أيتام السماء عليها يفرضون الموت و الجسد الحزين
 28. هذه تربة الرحم الإلهي الجليل صار للشيطان فيها الف قبر منتفخ
 29. فالحدود أحياء المدافن فصلت للجائعين
 30. أن يعيش المترفون الظالمون في رحاب الموت مستحيل
 31. باعوك يا وطني الطهور طهارة مارسوا رجولة قرد ركز فض بكاراة
 32. لا بأس أن يكون الغشاء مصنعا في الصين فرقيب دولتنا و خطيب جمعتنا و لفيف سادتنا
 33. قد عولموا القانون و الإفتاء و صار في الأسواق مؤشر أسهم للدين
 34. و تحرر التجار من قيد العبيد من يحبس الأفكار في الاسعار لا حجة له بالحديد
 35. هكذا التجديد في اصول الدين جنات تجري من تحتها الأنهار
 36. للهانزين على شهادة من لجنة في المعهد الشرعي للتمثيل
 37. و جهنم نارها أعدت للعاشقين
 38. من على شرفة الجنون
 39. كفرت بكم جميعا رغم إرتجافي و كوني لفقري شفيعا
 40. صفتت من أعراني بقطع لساني لقاء شريط مسجل و حق منوب
 41. فبدل ما شئتم ان يتبدل منكم مجدي لن أتسول و عن دين سكري لن أتحول

Translation - Text 3

“Love”

1. We live life trying to kill time, filling the void with gold and increasing humiliation
2. Or we celebrate every moment of our time and the Koran; do we walk our path with faith and live by following the rules of the Koran?
3. My son, the world has lost you, it has lost you because you refused to forget
4. Your bleeding eyes will not cultivate a field of chimeras
5. Your body is the gate of the two worlds, which is destroyed by their fires
6. The rule of law becomes like a cemetery of clothes
7. Your minor exile is among the people, your pride is the refuge in the senses
8. Your rhythm is a glare of the sun and your song destroys the sound of the bells
9. The bells of our churches are silent and the call to prayer of our mosques is deaf
10. Glorify a God hiding in a vampire's jaws
11. He devotes himself to oppressing the poor and annihilates the dreams of the wise
12. Your God has ensured everyone's silence and your conscience banishes those who criticize
13. You are your God, light of your eyes; (the one who) purified himself from the darkness of the centuries
14. You are your God, who loves himself and everyone else drowns in fear
15. My heart is as devoted as a monk's and my money is coveted like a (rich) master's
16. My mind is a boat of pains and lights, my mind is a black cloud

17. Of fire and water, in which there is the bewildered bird and the repentant wanderer
18. So I have neither joy nor sadness nor heaviness nor a flame to be spurred on, nor greed, nor Eden
19. My conditions depend on your will, on you the strength and on you the weakness. So I don't care about my death, earthly life and the burial shroud
20. And how do we judge our ideas and things? Ideas are like a traveler (who advances) in time and in their steps there is the (sign of) time
21. I was created with death, so how could my pain scare me?
22. If you hadn't feared Ġibrīl and al-Ġabarūt with his wings, you would not have given me the gift of writing
23. I exist in my annihilation and you are the renewed past
24. Wine for me is not joy and hours for me are not life
25. The verses of the Koran are not an order for me and the passions are not burning coal for me
26. The Earth has no shortage of dead people and defuncts
27. But the orphans of heaven above it decree death and the affliction of the body
28. This land of the divine womb, solemn has become the land of the devil, in which there are a thousand swollen tombs
29. Al-Hūd is a neighborhood of graves reserved for the poor
30. The rich bullies live in large open spaces, where death is impossible
31. They sold, oh my homeland, virginity in exchange for circumcision, practiced ape manhood, focusing on the loss of virginity
32. It doesn't matter if the hymen is made in China
33. Those who control our nation, those who pray on Friday and all our leaders have globalized Islamic law and the 'iftā' and religion has become a stock indicator in the markets
34. The traders have freed themselves from the bond of slavery; who gives a price to ideas and has no excuse
35. Thus the new foundations of religion foresee gardens under which rivers flow
36. For those who possess the certificate from the committee of the Islamic representative institution
37. It is hell, its fire is prepared for lovers
38. From the terrace of madness
39. I don't believe all of you despite my trepidation and my poverty is one of intercession
40. I slapped those who urged me to cut my tongue in exchange for a recording and a truth put in writing
41. They changed what they wanted to change about you. I will not beg for my glory and I will not convert to a fake religion

Text 4

عاصفة بفنجان

1. بزأوية القهوة كانت عم تقرا كتاب
2. عن علاج الاكتئاب بالأعشاب

3. قيل الملامح الجمال بالسؤال مرسوم ع وجهها
4. مع كل صفحتين عيسة عدم اقتناع وفجأة بتخلق بسمه
5. عرفتها أي بسمه؟ تبع اللي بنسى اسمي
6. رأسها مش تشنج دون أي اصطناع
7. فيه لمعان بعونها من طينة الإبداع
8. تبع الدماغ يلي كلما تغذى جاع
9. ع شوي سكرت الكتاب ولففت الشال، شكلها بردت
10. سكرت عونها، علّت الصوت بسماعاتها وشردت
11. أنا أول ما عم فيق
12. مع كل شفة قهوة بؤبؤ العين بيضيق
13. والمشهد بيتكامل لو بتشوف الهوا كيف مع شعراتها عم يتعامل
14. مثل أم حاضنة طفلها عم ترقص
15. اصابعها عم تنقر ع الطاولة تماماً ع الوزن، لا بتزيد ولا بتنقص
16. لدرجة سمعت شو عم تسمع بس بعيني
17. وخياراتها بالموسيقا عجوني
18. نستني السيگارة وذكرتني فيها لما ببطء شعلتها
19. وصرت أخذ سحبة مع كل مجة عم تفلتها من شفافها
20. كل زفير يحركه للشال فوق كتافها
21. إجا سليم قاطعني قال «مريض»، خيي معافى
22. بس زكاتك زيح الكرسي ع اليمين ننتقه
23. بنوبك ثواب، والثواب ببشفي
24. صار سليم بئرثر، بس تركيزي ما بيبتعثر
25. نظراتي مش بذيئة بس الحياة أدب
26. نظراتي مش بريئة، بريقتها تفه الذهب
27. طيب هالأصرت معلق
28. بغيمة أحاسيس عقلي معلق
29. قلبي محدق بحقلة فوانيس
30. ع ضفاف الكابوتشينو وعشوتروت وأدونيس
31. انشالله الانفجار الجاية ما نصير نزار وبلقيس
32. سليم رغم الإسهال الحاد اللي صاب لسانه
33. ما خلى إحساسني حاد عن ألثها ثانية
34. بس الموت بالمدينة قدر شنتت الجوارح
35. تكاثر قوارض يعني انقراض جوارح
36. أشباه حواجز بتتضطر عقلي يناور
37. فحال النشوة داب
38. ما فاق غير لما شفتها طلبت الحساب
39. النبض صار يتسارع والأصوات بالراس تنكاتر
40. آراء عم تتقاتل
41. بكتفي كمان لحظة ولا هي حجة ت ماطل؟
42. أنا فعلاً حسبتها ولا كان إعجاب باطل
43. ت يغذي الألوان براس شاعر؟
44. بس لأ، قلبي قلبي
45. وتوضيت منيح قبل ما بعونها صلي
46. إذا ما سمعتها قلبي كيف ممكن اعشق؟
47. بلا عشق كيف بعيش؟
48. إذا عطيت فرصة بعقلي لكل حب ببشرق
49. ما بصير نسونجي وبنوصف بالطيش
50. بركي لازم استشيرها أخذ رأيها بالإشكال

51. ما الحكي ببلاش ما بدي تحس باعتداء
 52. والشورى تصير عداء، قالها نديم قطيش
 53. خلص ليكها عم تقوم
 54. بس إذا تركتها تروح رح ضل عم لوم. شكّي
 55. واتساءل إذا كان ممكن لها اللحظة تدوم
 56. لها رشة تقول
 57. لها سحر يضل يصول ويجول
 58. بسراديب روجي يحرق كتبي كالمغول
 59. ويعلمني لغة جديدة، فريدة، خاصة بشخصين
 60. بتتحكى بكل مقاطع الجسمين
 61. معقول هيدي رومنسية من روايب كان يا ما كان بالطفولة؟
 62. معقول صور مجهولة، عن عشقنا مسؤولة؟
 63. وقف الطريق ووقفت بوجهي
 64. وبحلقت بعيوني حسيت احترق وجهي
 65. قالت: بكرا أنا هون جاية اشرب قهوة الصبح
 66. ففكر يا فتح، وخبرني مين

Translation - Text 4

“Storm in a cup”

1. In a corner of the bar he was reading a book
2. About treating depression with herbs
3. The book covered her beautiful features, with a questioning expression painted on her face
4. Every two pages she frowned unconvinced and suddenly smiled
5. I knew every smile from her, with her smile I forget my name
6. Her forehead wrinkles without any pretense
7. The twinkle in her eyes comes from natural creativity
8. Of her brain, which every time she feeds quite hungry
9. She closed the book and wrapped herself in the shawl, as if she were cold
10. She closed her eyes, turned up the volume on her headphones and ran away
11. I am the first who cannot stay awake
12. With each sip of coffee, the pupils shrink
13. And my eyesight fogs up, if I saw the air as she braids his hair!
14. Like a nurse cradling her baby
15. His fingers are tapping the table perfectly in time, neither speeding up nor slowing the pace
16. I was able to hear what he was hearing just by looking at her
17. Her musical tastes astounded me
18. She made me forget about (my) cigarette and made me remember it when she slowly lit one
19. I started taking a puff with every puff of smoke he blew from his lips
20. Each puff of smoke ends up on the shawl over her shoulders
21. Salim came, interrupted me and said “(I am) sick”, my brother, you are healthy
22. But your alms, move the chair to the right, a little
23. Get the reward and the reward will heal

24. Salim began to chat, but my concentration has not dispersed
25. My looks are not cheeky, good manners are needed in life
26. My looks are not innocent, their glow makes the gold look disfigured
27. Well, now I'm hung up
28. In a cloud of sensations, my mind is impenetrable
29. My heart is fixed in a field of lanterns
30. On the banks of the Capuchin, Astarte and Adonis
31. We hope that the next explosion will not end up like Nizar and Balqis
32. Salim with the ease that hit his tongue, does not go away
33. My senses have given up on feeling it again
34. But death in the city is capable of dispersing birds of prey
35. Reproduction of rodents means extinction of birds of prey
36. Some kind of barriers force my mind to try to free itself
37. The state of delirium persists
38. I woke up only when I saw her ask for the bill
39. The heartbeat began to accelerate and the voices in my head to multiply
40. Opinions are fighting each other
41. Is it enough for me even (having seen it for) a moment or do I find an excuse to stall?
42. Did I really perceive it or was it a false mistake?
43. Are the colors that nourish the head of a poet?
44. But no, my heart, tell me
45. I had purified myself with good ablutions before burning for his eyes
50. Maybe I should give her a nod, hear his opinion so as not to have uncertainty
51. Shut up is free, I don't want you to feel bothered
52. "Consultation becomes hostility" said Nadim Koteich
53. Enough, she's getting up
54. But if I let her go, I'll stay and scold myself
55. I wonder if it is possible for this moment to last
56. Let this thrill speak
57. Let this magic stay, attack and circle
58. That in the dungeons of my soul burn my writings, like the Mongols
59. And teach me a new, unique language created especially for two people
60. We speak using every part of our bodies
61. Is this romantic love story credible made up of residues of what happened during childhood?
62. Are unknown images that represent our love credible?
63. Stop on the street: she stopped in front of me
64. And she looked me right in the eye, I felt my face get inflamed
65. She said: I'm here tomorrow, I'll come to drink morning coffee
66. So think about it, smart, and let me know who won.