

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.63332/joph.v5i3.2330>

Formations of the Montage Image in the Poetry of Adnan Al-Sayegh: A Study of Parallel and Associative Montage

Zahraa Aamer Thamer Al-Ameri¹, Salam Mahdi Ridhawi Al-Musawi²

Abstract

Montage is one of the most prominent manifestations of image construction in contemporary Iraqi poetry. The Iraqi poet Adnan Al-Sayegh is considered one of the most influential figures in the realm of Iraqi prose poetry and among those who deliberately employ montage techniques in constructing poetic imagery. Parallel montage with its inherent aesthetic and narrative properties plays a pivotal role in forming images that convey to the reader the full spectrum of the poet's memory. This is followed by associative montage, which transitions from one shot to another within the narrow confines of the text. The result is a comprehensive image that fulfills several functions, most notably evoking emotional resonance in the reader towards pivotal events in Iraq's modern history events that have profoundly impacted the Iraqi people.

Keywords: Image, Montage, Adnan Al-Sayegh's Poetry, Parallel Montage, Associative Montage.

Introduction

The Concept of Montage (Translated Excerpt):

It is important to distinguish between language as a mere tool of communication and language as a tool of creativity. Language is not simply a medium invented by humans to assign meaning to the world or to express their subjective understanding of it. Rather, it embodies the inherent meaningfulness that already exists between things. Language, therefore, is a unique human faculty through which individuals construct their own realities. As Heidegger suggests, one's world exists insofar as language enables its articulation.

When a poet attempts to express a revolutionary stance against the tragic reality of their homeland and people, we often find that they rebel against conventional language, creating instead a language that is, at its core, rebellious against itself, against standard norms, and against boundaries. This creative deviation marks the distinctiveness of one poet over another, as language becomes a reflection of a cognitive force that shapes one's unique vision of the world. Every language represents a specific worldview that cannot be replicated identically elsewhere.

Thus, language is not merely one tool among others possessed by humanity; rather, it is the very medium through which human beings find themselves at the heart of existential revelation. Each linguistic sign carries within it its own connotation or one derived from its syntactic placement, allowing for semantic multiplicity. The reader, through context, may infer the poet's intended meaning, which might be subject to different interpretations based on the complexity or simplicity of the structure within the text's overall fabric.

¹ University of Dhi Qar / College of Arts / Department of Arabic Language, Email: art23gs66@utq.edu.iq.

² University of Dhi Qar / College of Arts / Department of Arabic Language, Email: salammadi@utq.edu.iq



This intentionality leaves a tangible effect equivalent to stylistic selectivity, operating through the poet's vision and consciousness without detachment from the subjective dimension. As a direct outcome of material advancement in Western civilization, contemporary poetry has absorbed the influences of cinematic techniques most notably montage. Modern poets, sensitive to changes in aesthetic imagination, have succeeded in translating their awareness into techniques that reflect a modernist sensibility in poetic expression.

Accordingly, modernist writing continuously seeks new formal techniques. Poetry has thus transcended its traditional genres and forms, evolving into a vast domain of emotional and expressive states beyond limits, categories, and conventions. This evolution has led to the intertwining of artistic disciplines, contributing to the expansion of poetic space.

Modern poetry draws from narrative structures, dramatic dialogue, musical elements, and cinematic techniques experiments that demonstrate poetry's capacity for openness. The secret of artistic beauty in literature lies in its sculptural ability to embody, its painterly ability to depict, its choreographic ability to record motion, and its musical ability to evoke feeling while still surpassing all arts in its singular capacity for articulation.

The poetic text may be constructed horizontally or vertically, just as the arrangement of words in language mirrors the arrangement of cinematic shots both based on structural principles. Language and montage are thus both structural systems, and montage can be analyzed structurally just like linguistic texts. Montage is not coincidental in contemporary Arabic poetry but rather a consciously employed technique. The poet seeks to expand the interpretive and aesthetic dimensions of the poetic text.

Montage can be defined as "the art of composing, assembling, and arranging shots or images in an artistic sequence to deliver a meaningful visual representation of the narrative or idea intended for the audience." It thus becomes a structural system akin to meanings in poetry. Its primary function is to condense events and highlight main scenes much like a poet condenses and focuses imagery in their work.

This has led contemporary Iraqi poets to adopt and integrate montage techniques, especially those targeting modern readers who are aware of and attentive to such cinematic structures in poetic compositions.

Parallel Montage

Parallel montage operates based on the juxtaposition of two or more images, scenes, or events within the poetic text. These scenes unfold simultaneously, complementing each other in structure, yet they may be distant in terms of setting or theme. This technique allows the poet to interlace multiple visual or semantic frames that, when combined, evoke a deeper, unified meaning.

In Adnan Al-Sayegh's poetry, parallel montage functions by generating dual or multiple sequences that interact dynamically. These sequences might diverge in their narrative tracks but ultimately converge emotionally and intellectually, reflecting the poet's internal conflict and layered vision. This technique is evident in his poem "*The Last Dance*", where the images of a war-torn homeland are paralleled with deeply personal emotional turmoil. By weaving the public with the private, Al-Sayegh constructs a complex image system that transcends linear narration.

This type of montage often reflects the dialectic between time and space, memory and moment, presence and absence. For example, the poet might depict a present-day scene of destruction

1800 Formations of the Montage Image in the Poetry of Adnan Al-Sayegh

alongside a nostalgic memory of the homeland's former beauty. This duality not only intensifies the emotional charge of the poem but also allows for a broader interpretive space. The reader is thus invited to actively participate in the construction of meaning, moving between juxtaposed frames to uncover latent connections.

Furthermore, parallel montage enhances the aesthetic and rhetorical quality of the text. It mirrors cinematic cross-cutting techniques where two narrative threads are shown alternately to heighten suspense, irony, or empathy. In poetry, this method achieves a similar effect amplifying the emotional resonance through layered contrast or thematic mirroring.

Al-Sayegh employs this structure not only to capture the fragmentation of the Iraqi experience but also to represent his own fractured subjectivity as a poet in exile. The parallel montage becomes a formal embodiment of dislocation and longing, where multiple timelines and geographies converge within the poetic moment.

In sum, parallel montage in Al-Sayegh's work serves as an innovative narrative device that fuses the temporal with the spatial, the personal with the collective, and the aesthetic with the political. It is an integral part of his poetic technique that reflects a deep engagement with cinematic logic, translated masterfully into the language of modern Arabic poetry.

Associative Montage

Associative montage is based on the principle of connection, where the poet presents a series of seemingly disparate images or scenes that, while superficially unrelated, are unified at the level of the poetic experience. These fragments collectively form a coherent whole. If these images were separated or rearranged arbitrarily, they would lose their emotional and intellectual impact on the reader. The aim of this technique is to create a coherent textual experience through structured sequencing, ensuring narrative cohesion and thematic integration.

This type of montage is exemplified in the poem "*Crossing into Exile*", which features a dialogue between the poet and a girl who does not speak Arabic. She does not understand his words, which transforms the poem into a monologue directed at the "other" (the girl), who plays no active role in the exchange. The poet delivers a series of scenes that, if taken separately, would still maintain the same poetic coherence because their impact stems from their associative alignment, not from chronological or narrative dependence.

He writes:

The moan of the train stirs the sorrow of tunnels,

Roaring down the tracks of long memories.

And I am nailed to the window,

With half a heart,

Leaving the other half on the table,

Playing poker with a girl of withered thighs.

She asks me, in pain and bewilderment,

Why are my fingers worn,

*Like the wood of spent coffins,
And hurried, as if afraid to hold anything?*

So I speak to her of homeland,

And signs,

And colonialism,

And the glories of the nation,

And the first couplings in latrines.

She leans her flowing hair on my tears and does not understand...

Then, the scene shifts again:

In the other corner,

Mozart scatters his signatures across the snow-covered steppes...

My homeland is sadder than it should be,

And my songs are wild, fierce, and shy...

He continues, describing what he will do upon arriving in Europe:

I will lie down on the first sidewalk I see in Europe,

Raising my legs before the passersby

To show them the scars of schools and prisons

That brought me here.

What I carry in my pockets is not a passport,

But a history of oppression:

Fifty years of chewing on fodder,

Speeches... and rolled cigarettes,

Of standing before gallows,

Staring at our swinging corpses,

Applauding the rulers,

Fearing for our families' files stored in the vaults of security.

Where the nation

Begins with the president's speech

And ends with the president's speech,

*Passing through the president's streets, songs, museums, favors, trees, factories, newspapers,
stables, clouds, camps, statues, bakeries, medals, mistresses, schools, farms...*

Then the poem returns to its imagined dialogue:

1802 *Formations of the Montage Image in the Poetry of Adnan Al-Sayegh*
You will stare long

Into my eyes, soaked with rain and spit,

And ask me: From what land do you come...?

The scene is tightly knit around a central theme: the tragedy of the homeland (Iraq), encompassing war, oppression, dictatorship, and the suffocation of freedoms. Even though the images shift from memory to observation, from inner monologue to dialogue, from past to present, they all revolve around a single core: the exilic identity shaped by national trauma. The associative linkage between these elements makes the overall structure appear unified, even though the sequence may seem fragmentary.

This same technique appears in the poem “*Pages from the Biography of One Who Carried Exile*” (*Awraq min Sirat Ta’abbata Manfa*), where the poet says:

I will pack my bags,

My tears,

My poems,

And leave this country,

Even if I have to crawl with my teeth.

Don’t send me tears or ululations,

I want to go

Without seeing your waving handkerchiefs from the ship windows.

I breathe the air in the tunnels,

Broken in front of shop mirrors,

Like postcards that never reach anyone.

Let us carry our graves and children,

Let us carry our sighs and dreams and go,

Before they are stolen from us

And sold back to us:

In the homeland as fields of slogans,

And in exile as a nation on installments.

And again:

This land

Is no longer fit for anything.

This land

Whenever its sewers of blood and oil overflow,

*Opportunists rise to the surface.
Our land, which we vomit in the bars,
And leave like lost pleasures
On the beds of prostitutes.
Our land, which they strip from us
Like skins and confessions
In interrogation rooms,
Then glue back onto our palms to clap
In front of the rulers' windows.
What kind of country is this?
And yet,
Once we take a few steps away,
We break from longing
On the first exile sidewalk we encounter,
And we rush to mailboxes,
Embrace them and cry.*

Here again, the scenes are diverse in content, ranging from physical departure to existential despair, from satire to elegy, yet they are deeply interconnected through emotional association and shared trauma. The poem's strength lies in its ability to synthesize these moments into a single poetic gesture, where exile and homeland blur, and the past continuously interferes with the present.

Thus, **associative montage** in Adnan Al-Sayegh's poetry functions not through linear narration or overt coherence, but through emotional and symbolic resonance. It reflects a fragmented yet unified identity one that resists imposed order, preferring instead the chaotic harmony of memory, resistance, and poetic truth.

A Critical Reading of Associative Montage in Contemporary Arabic Poetry: Selected Texts by Adnan Al-Sayegh

The technique of **associative montage** has emerged as a powerful poetic device in contemporary Arabic poetry, particularly in constructing complex imagery and layered meanings. Through this cinematic technique, poets move beyond linear narration, weaving sequences of poetic scenes (or shots) that rely on **implicit thematic or emotional linkages** rather than explicit transitions. This reading analyzes how associative montage functions in two poetic texts by Adnan Al-Sayegh, highlighting its aesthetic and semantic contributions.

1. The Split Between "Self" and "Homeland": A Double Montage Sequence

In the first text, the poet structures his poem into **two distinct but emotionally linked segments**. The first focuses on the speaker's personal state his emotional and physical departure from his homeland:

“I will pack my bags / and my tears / and my poems / and leave this land / even if I crawl with my teeth...”

Here, the poet employs a **montage of journey images**, shifting rapidly from packing to the act of leaving, to glimpses of tunnels, mirrors, and train windows. These snapshots create a cumulative picture of **displacement and psychological exile**, conveyed through a series of cinematic transitions:

“Let us carry our graves and our children / our sighs and dreams, and leave / before they steal them... / and sell them to us / in the homeland: as fields of slogans / and in exile: a homeland on installment.”

The **second segment** presents a contrasting montage: a damning depiction of the homeland as a place of repression, exploitation, and commodified identities:

“This land / is no longer good for anything / this land / every time it overflows with the sewers of blood and oil / opportunists swarm...”

This passage, rich in **visual violence and disillusionment**, paints a homeland degraded into a theatrical space of hypocrisy and control. The poet transitions between **political critique** and **emotional outcry**, creating an oscillation between condemnation and nostalgia:

“Yet the moment we walk a few steps away from it / we break from longing / on the first pavement of exile / and rush to the mailboxes / hugging them, weeping.”

Thus, the **associative montage** here links **internal emotional rupture** with **external political chaos**, connecting personal exile with national loss. The use of disconnected, yet thematically unified, images allows the poet to **condense multiple experiences into a resonant poetic sequence**.

2. “Where Does the Poem Come From?”: The Feminization of the Poetic Muse

In the second text, the poet turns inward, exploring the act of poetic creation. The poem begins with a reflective, self-questioning tone:

“And I wonder... / how does the poem come? / It crashes – like waves – against the shores of my heart / ... without notice / it breaks... on the sands of paper / then drifts... to distant shores / leaving me... with anxiety.”

This initial **montage of abstraction** is soon transformed as the poem shifts focus: the “poem” becomes personified as a woman, elusive and playful. The speaker drifts into a **fantastical pursuit**, chasing the poetic muse through metaphors of memory, love, and loss:

“And I ask every path: / have you seen my playful lady? / ... I’ve been chasing her since childhood / trailing the scent of her braids / weary / she teases me... / and slips away... mischievous / for she knows I’ll die if she abandons me.”

Here, the montage technique **blurs the line between inner poetic longing and outer emotional projection**, fusing the poetic act with romantic yearning. The poet follows her into public and private spaces: gardens, libraries, empty streets creating a **sequence of associative vignettes** that appear disconnected yet are bound by emotional pursuit.

The final scene brings the poet back to his solitude:

“When I return to my apartment / exhausted... drained / she’ll tap at my window / – gently – /

sit on my bed... / and leave me... with insomnia.”

The poem thus returns full circle to its original question of poetic creation, but now enriched with emotional depth and narrative layers. The **associative montage** technique allows the poem to drift fluidly between the psychological, the sensual, and the metaphysical, constructing a **dynamic poetic rhythm that mirrors the fragmented nature of inspiration itself**.

Conclusion

This study concludes with the following insights:

1. **Associative montage** is a central structuring device in contemporary Arabic poetry, especially in expressing fragmented identities and multi-layered emotional landscapes. It arises from the poet's internal surge of overlapping themes and images, requiring a montage-like organization to maintain narrative coherence and poetic flow.
2. The poet employs **parallel montage** to present dual events or images such as the self and the homeland in a way that emphasizes both **contrast and similarity**. These polarities construct rich, multidimensional imagery that intensifies reader engagement.
3. **Associative montage** becomes particularly vital in longer poetic texts, where transitions may initially seem disjointed or incoherent. Through underlying patterns and emotional resonance, the montage ensures eventual unity, guiding the reader toward the poem's deeper intellectual and affective core.

References

Books

- Abu Zayd, Nasr Hamid. *Problems of Reading and Mechanisms of Interpretation*. 4th ed., Arab Cultural Center, Casablanca, 1996.
- Adonis. *An Introduction to Arabic Poetry*. 3rd ed., Dar Al-Awda, Beirut, 1979.
- Al-Doukhi, Hamad. *Montage in Contemporary Arabic Poetry*. 2nd ed., Suttur Publishing House, Baghdad, 2017.
- Al-Rahawi, Fares Abdullah Badr. *Modernity in the Critical Discourse of Adonis*. 1st ed., Dar Al-Shu'un Al-Thaqafiyya, Baghdad, 2011.
- Al-Sayegh, Adnan. *Collected Poems*. 1st ed., Arab Institute for Studies and Publishing, Beirut, 2004.
- Al-Tamimi, Ishraq Mazloum. *Interartistic Overlaps in the Poetry of Saadi Youssef*. 1st ed., Baghdad Capital of Culture Project Publications, Baghdad, 2013.
- Al-Wadi, Ali Shanawah. *Artistic Criticism and Aesthetic Theory*. 1st ed., Al-Sadiq Cultural Foundation, Iraq, 2011.
- Gadamer, Hans-Georg. *Truth and Method: Fundamentals of a Philosophical Hermeneutics*. Translated by Hassan Nazem and Ali Hakim, reviewed by Dr. George Katoura, 1st ed., Oya Publishing, Tripoli, 2007.
- Martin, Marcel. *Cinematic Language*. Translated by Saad Makawi, 1st ed., Aqlam Arabiya, Egypt, 2017.
- Matar, Kareem Shaghedel. *Interartistic Overlaps in the Modern Iraqi Poem: A Study of Post-1960s Poetry*. 1st ed., Dar Al-Shu'un Al-Thaqafiyya, Baghdad, 2007.
- Safrani, Dr. Mohammad. *Visual Formation in Modern Poetry (1950–2004)*. 1st ed., Riyadh Literary Club & Arab Cultural Center, Casablanca, 2008.
- Ramadan, Hadia Ihsan. *The Art of Storytelling in Exile Literature*. 1st ed., Supreme Council of Culture, Cairo, 2008.
- Fadl, Salah. *Reading Images and Images of Reading*. 1st ed., Dar Al-Shorouk, Cairo, 1997.
- Heidegger, Martin. *Calling the Caller: A Reading of the Poetry of Hölderlin and Trakl*. Summarized and

1806 *Formations of the Montage Image in the Poetry of Adnan Al-Sayegh*

Translated by Bassam Hajjar, 1st ed., Arab Cultural Center, Beirut, 1994.

Theses and Dissertations

Al-Hafouthi, Reem Mohammed Tayeb. *The Poetry of Khalid Abu Khalid: An Artistic Study*. Master's Thesis, College of Arts, University of Mosul, 2004.

Heikal, Marwa Kareem. *Techniques of the Poetic Image in Contemporary Iraqi Poetry (1990–2022)*. Doctoral Dissertation, College of Arts, University of Dhi Qar, 2025.

Judou', Shaffaq Youssef. *The Epistemological Foundations of the Meaning Problem in Contemporary Linguistic Thought: Hermeneutics as a Model*. Doctoral Dissertation, College of Arts, University of Kufa, 2016.