Human vs Posthuman Author
(A Comparative Analysis of Human and AI-Generated Poetry Translations)

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the differences between human and AI-generated translations of Arabic poetry, focusing on how well each approach preserves key literary devices. While AI translation tools have made significant advancements, poetry presents unique challenges due to its reliance on nuanced meaning, cultural depth, and stylistic complexity. This research aims to (1) compare human and AI translations of Arabic poems, (2) identify which literary devices present the greatest challenges for AI, and (3) explore the impact of these differences on the intended function of the poet. The study specifically analyzes metaphors, assessing how accurately this device is rendered in English translations. By conducting a qualitative comparative analysis of selected poems, this research highlights the strengths and weaknesses of AI translation and evaluates its implications for literary preservation. The findings will contribute to discussions on AI's role in creative translation, emphasizing the need for human expertise in maintaining poetic integrity.

Keywords: Poetry, Arabic, Translation, AI literature, AI translation, Poetic style, Metaphor.

Introduction:

The earliest AI-written literary works were produced in the 1950s. These works were largely nonsensical and lacked deep meaning until the 2010s when ChatGPT was able to produce works that were coherent and acceptable by human standards. While machine translation has been an established "skill" that computers are able to perform with acceptable results for at least the last 20 years, AI translation has evolved beyond literal interpretation, raising questions about whether it can authentically preserve the artistic and cultural depth of poetry, and defy human abilities to write may suggest that AI would go beyond a literal translation of a literary text, and produce a coherent translated piece that takes into consideration the style and meaning of the original work, and mimic a human-like literary work. Some Critics argue that AI writings lack human experience, while others see potential in using AI in analyzing literary works. In the article "How Artificial Intelligence Constrains the Human Experience" (2024), Ana Valenzuela et. al., argue that "AI may reduce complex human experiences and identities into simplified representations, formulas, or data points in a way that leaves people feeling objectified". On the other hand, some research suggests a placebo effect, where people are biased toward AI created literature, and tend to dislike it due to the knowledge that it is merely created by AI. In the article "Humans vs. AI: Whether and Why We Prefer Human-Created Compared to AI-Created Artwork" (2023), Lucas Bellaiche et. al. found that people tend to be negatively biased against AI-created artworks relative to purportedly human-created artwork". This article explores how human and AI-generated translations of poetry differ in terms of meaning, style, and cultural adaptation.

Existing studies acknowledge that AI translations often lose metaphor, rhythm, and cultural depth, but they do not analyze which specific poetic devices (e.g., imagery, allegory, meter) AI loses most. This research will compare 3 poetic devices to conclude the most accurately translated and the least accurately translated literary device. This research has 3 objectives as follows:
1. To compare the preservation of meaning in the human-translated poems with AI-translated
2. To explore how AI recognizes literary devices and
3. To understand the impact of the potential differences on the intended function (emotional resonance, cultural relevance) of the translation.

5. Literature Review

Article 1: "Artificial Intelligence based Arabic-to-English machine versus human translation of poetry: An analytical study of outcomes" (2023) by Noha Alowedi and Arif Al-Ahdal, published in Journal of Namibian Studies.
This study examines discrepancies between machine-generated and human translations of Arabic poems into English. The researchers analyzed two Arabic poems, "Nothing of Note" and "One Day," comparing translations to assess how well each approach preserved the original's poetic nuances.

This article is highly relevant to the current research as it provides an empirical foundation for analyzing how AI models handle poetic translation. By comparing AI and human translations, it sheds light on the extent to which AI can retain meaning and poetic structure. Additionally, this study focuses on specific linguistic elements, such as metaphor and emotional depth, which align with the objectives of this research. By referencing this article, the current study can build upon its comparative approach and apply a more detailed analysis to specific literary devices. Furthermore, "Nothing of Note" and "One Day" serve as case studies illustrating AI's translation challenges, which may provide insights into similar issues faced in this research's selected poems.

Article 2: "Translating Classical Arabic Verse: Human Translation vs. AI Large Language Models (Gemini and ChatGPT)" (2024) by Mohammed Farghal and Ahmad S. Haider.
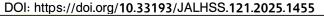This article evaluates the translation of 15 Classical Arabic verses by comparing English translations from a human translator and two AI models, Gemini and ChatGPT. The study focuses on thematic clarity, creativity, and prosody, revealing that while AI models show potential, human translators excel in capturing the intricate nuances of classical poetry.
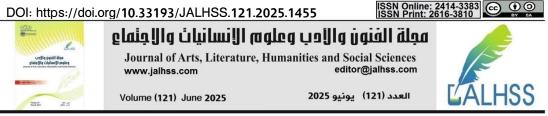The significance of this article lies in its in-depth comparison of multiple AI models, which directly contributes to this research's goal of understanding AI's translation capabilities. Its analysis of **thematic clarity** and **prosody** will serve as a valuable point of reference when assessing how AI preserves rhythm and stylistic coherence in poetry. Moreover, since classical Arabic verse often employs complex poetic techniques such as **meter, rhyme, and deep intertextual references,** this article provides a basis for determining whether AI struggles more with classical poetry than with modern forms. By integrating its findings, the current research can explore how AI translation results compare across different poetic traditions and structures.

Article 3: "Bridging Linguistic and Cultural Nuances: A Comparative Study of Human and AI Translations of Arabic Dialect Poetry" (2025) by Mohammad Awad AlAfnan.
This research analyzes translations of Arabic dialect poetry from Gulf, Levantine, and Egyptian dialects into English. It compares human and AI translations across criteria like form, word usage, poetic techniques, language conventions, and illustrations. Findings indicate that human translators better preserve the emotional rhythm and cultural depth essential to poetry, while AI translations often render a more prose-like format.
This article is particularly useful because it focuses on **dialect poetry**, which introduces additional linguistic and cultural complexities beyond standard Arabic poetry. Since dialects often include **regional idioms, informal expressions, and cultural references,** this study's findings will help contextualize AI's limitations in handling non-standard language. By examining how AI approaches dialect poetry, the current research can extend its analysis to assess whether AI performs better with

formal literary Arabic or if its weaknesses in cultural adaptation persist across different linguistic forms. Additionally, the findings regarding AI's tendency to produce **prose-like translations** can inform this study's evaluation of whether AI translation sacrifices poetic structure for clarity.

6. Methodology

This study employs a qualitative comparative analysis of human and AI-generated translations of Arabic poetry. Three Arabic poems will be selected, each representing a different degree of reliance on metaphor, symbolism, and layered interpretation. The selection criteria will include:

1. A poem with direct, literal meaning – This type of poem is expected to be easier for AI translation since it requires minimal interpretative work.
2. A poem with moderate use of figurative language – This poem will include some metaphors and cultural references, testing AI's ability to preserve deeper meaning.
3. A highly symbolic and abstract poem – This selection will push AI translation to its limits, assessing how well it captures metaphor and deeper cultural significance.

Each poem will be translated by:
a) A professional human translator with expertise in Arabic poetry.
b) AI translation models, specifically OpenAI's ChatGPT and Google's Gemini, chosen for their advanced natural language processing capabilities.

Evaluation Criteria:
The translated texts will be analyzed based on the following key aspects:
1. Preservation of Meaning – Does the translation accurately convey the original poem's intent, theme, and message?
 2. Retention of Literary Devices – How well are metaphors are preserved?
3. Cultural Depth – Does the translation reflect the cultural and historical significance embedded in the poem?

To ensure a thorough and unbiased evaluation, the translated versions will be assessed by the researcher. My qualitative feedback will be categorized to determine patterns in AI's translation strengths and weaknesses. Additionally, readability tests and stylistic comparisons will help quantify any discrepancies between human and AI translations.

By applying this comparative framework, the study aims to highlight the extent to which AI translation can preserve the integrity of Arabic poetry and where human expertise remains essential.

Selected Poems:
1. Ghayath Almadhoun ("Adrenaline," 2017) "Massacre" – Almadhoun's poetry is regarded as having a direct quality, which will be our first poem. This poem discusses themes of war, exile, and identity. Almadhoun writes in a style influenced by prose poetry, without traditional line breaks or meter.

2. "A Violet Darkness" – Najwan Darwish (Nothing More to Lose, 2014) - Darwish's poem explores themes of love, national identity, and historical rupture, weaving personal and collective grief into its metaphors. Through images of cracked myths and broken love, the poem conveys how both cultural heritage and human connection erode over time. The layered metaphors require a translator to interpret implicit meanings, making this poem a strong candidate for assessing AI's ability to preserve nuance and contextual symbolism.

3. "Woman of Mint" – Fatena Al-Gharra - This poem is deeply metaphorical, using natural imagery to explore themes of femininity, transformation, and desire. The mint plant is personified, its purity and innocence gradually altered by external forces. The poem's rich sensory language and layered meanings challenge AI's ability to recognize and adapt poetic metaphors in a way that retains their emotional and symbolic depth.

These poems show an escalating difficulty: Almadhoun's more direct style allows for a baseline comparison, Darwish's layered metaphors add interpretive complexity, and Hashem Beck's intricate lyricism maximizes AI's translation challenges.

Diverse themes & stylistic approaches: Your selection spans war, exile, resistance, cultural identity, and personal reflection, offering a comprehensive test of AI's translation strengths and weaknesses.

Cultural & linguistic richness: These poets engage with historical, religious, and regional references, testing how well AI captures the depth of Arabic poetry beyond mere words.

The poems, along with their human and AI translation will be included in the appendix of this paper.

7. Results and discussion:

7.1. Comparing the Translation of Metaphors in the 3 poems

Poem 1:

1. **"المجزرة مجازٌ ميتٌ يأكل أصدقائي"**

AI translation: "The massacre is a dead metaphor that devours my friends."

Human translation: "Massacre is a dead metaphor that is eating my friends"

Analysis:

The poet personifies the massacre as an entity that actively consumes his friends, stripping them of their identities and turning them into victims. The phrase "dead metaphor" suggests that mass violence has become a routine, lifeless concept, void of meaning due to its repetition in history. This line critiques how massacres are often reduced to empty rhetoric rather than recognized as real, human tragedies.

Comparison:

The AI translation uses "devours", which conveys a forceful and immediate act of destruction, while the human translation's "is eating" suggests an ongoing, drawn-out process. The AI translation has a slightly smoother structure in English, whereas the human translation retains the Arabic phrasing more closely. The choice of "Massacre" without "The" in the human version makes it feel more abstract, almost like a proper noun, while the AI version follows a more standard grammatical structure. While both convey the meaning effectively, the human translation better preserves the raw, continuous horror of the action, whereas the AI version makes it feel more like a definitive statement.

2. "المجزرة أحنُّ على أصدقائي من الإعلان العالمي لحقوق الإنسان"

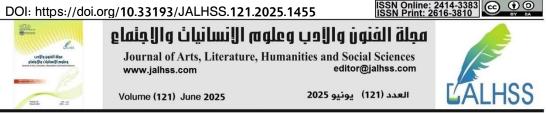AI translation: "The massacre is more compassionate toward my friends than the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.")

Human translation: Massacre is more compassionate to my friends than the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Analysis:

This striking irony presents the massacre as offering a twisted form of refuge, granting the dead an escape from the hypocrisy of human rights declarations that fail to protect them. It highlights the failure of international bodies to prevent violence, making the massacre seem like a grim but inevitable fate.

Comparison:

Both translations successfully capture the ironic contrast between the massacre and the failure of human rights institutions. However, the AI translation's "toward" makes the sentence slightly more formal and detached, while the human translation's "to" is more natural and emotionally charged. Additionally, the human translation's absence of "The" before "Massacre" makes the phrase feel more poetic and direct. The AI version sticks closer to standard English syntax, whereas the human translation

maintains a rawer poetic tone. The human translation better conveys the bitter sarcasm, as it feels less like an explanation and more like a declaration.

3. "المجزرة هي الوحيدةُ التي منحتهم اللجوء بغض النظر عن خلفياتهم"

AI translation: "The massacre was the only one that granted them asylum, regardless of their backgrounds.")

Human translation: Massacre is the only one to grant them asylum regardless of their backgrounds;

Analysis:

The poet sarcastically portrays the massacre as an indiscriminate force that offers "asylum" to all, emphasizing how death does not discriminate by wealth, education, or social standing. It critiques a world where real asylum is denied to those in need, yet death remains the only universal equalizer.

Comparison:

The AI translation "was the only one" makes the sentence feel more factual, as if describing a past event, while the human translation's "is the only one" keeps it in the present, reinforcing the massacre's ongoing and relentless nature. The AI's phrasing feels more structured and explanatory, while the human version is more immediate and poetic. The human translation's "to grant" is also slightly more fluid than the AI's "that granted", making the phrase feel more natural in English.

Poem 2:

1. "فَوْقَ تُرْبَةٍ تَتَشَقَّقُ فيها الأَساطير"

AI translation: "Above soil where myths crack open"

Human translation: "on soil where myths fall apart."

Analysis:

This metaphor presents the land (or soil) as a place where myths, often seen as timeless and foundational narratives, are breaking apart. The "cracking" suggests disintegration, loss of cultural heritage, or the erosion of deeply rooted beliefs. This image could symbolize a fractured history, the fading of collective memory, or the failure of past ideals to hold in the present. The land itself becomes a witness to this disintegration, emphasizing a sense of cultural and existential rupture.

Comparison:

The AI translation uses "crack open," which suggests an active breaking or revealing process, possibly implying that something new is emerging from the myths as they break. In contrast, the human translation uses "fall apart," which conveys a more passive and complete disintegration, emphasizing decay rather than transformation. The AI's choice of wording retains some ambiguity—do myths break apart to reveal truth, or are they simply eroding? The human translation, however, aligns more closely with the theme of loss and historical rupture, reinforcing the idea of irreversible decline rather than a moment of revelation.

2. "أَجَلْ، كانَ الحُبُّ زَمَناً وتَشَقَّقَ، هو الآخَرُ مِثْلَ وَجْهِ بِلادِنا"

AI translation: Yes, love too was a time—then it cracked,

Just like the face of our land.

Human translation: Yes, love was time, and it too

fell apart, like the face of our country.

Analysis:

This metaphor equates love to a period of time, suggesting that it was once whole, continuous, and perhaps full of meaning. However, just like the cracked face of the country, love has fractured. The comparison to the country's face implies a parallel between personal and national deterioration—love has not only faded but has been fundamentally broken, just as the homeland has suffered fragmentation and ruin. This line reinforces a deep connection between personal emotions and collective historical trauma, suggesting that neither love nor the homeland can escape the passage of destruction.

Comparison:

The AI translation's use of "then it cracked" mirrors the literal Arabic word choice but feels abrupt and somewhat mechanical. "Cracked" evokes a sudden break rather than a slow, inevitable deterioration. The human translation, with "fell apart," conveys a more organic and tragic unraveling, emphasizing the gradual decay of both love and the homeland. The phrase "the face of our country" in the human version feels more poetic and personal than "the face of our land" in the AI translation, which sounds slightly detached. The human translation more effectively captures the emotional weight of love and national identity breaking down together.

3. "حِصَّتي مِنَ النّاس عُبورُ أَشْباحِهِم"

AI Translation:"My share of people is the passing of their ghosts"

Human translation: "My share of the people is the transit of their ghosts.

Analysis:

Here, the speaker describes their connection to people as merely encountering their "ghosts," implying absence rather than presence. The metaphor suggests that the speaker experiences others in a spectral, transient way—perhaps through memories, echoes of the past, or the lingering presence of those who are gone (physically or emotionally). This could symbolize alienation, exile, or the inability to form meaningful human connections. The use of "ghosts" instead of "people" highlights themes of loss and detachment, reinforcing the poem's melancholic tone.

Comparison:

Both translations capture the essence of encountering only the "ghosts" of people rather than living, meaningful connections. However, the AI translation's phrase **"passing of their ghosts"** suggests fleeting movement, as though the ghosts simply drift by. The human translation's use of **"transit"** carries a heavier implication of journeying or being in between states, reinforcing a sense of liminality and displacement. "Transit" also subtly suggests a process of loss over time rather than a single moment. The human translation thus retains a more nuanced, existential tone,

whereas the AI version feels more literal and lacks some of the depth of poetic ambiguity.

Poem 3:

1. "تُجَرْجِرُ الشَّبَقَ مِنْ وَجَع الشَّوْكُ"

AI Translation: "She drags desire from the pain of thorns."

Human translation : "She hauls her desire from the anguish of thorns,"

Analysis:

This metaphor presents **desire** as something being physically dragged out of **pain** and **thorns**, creating a striking contrast between longing and suffering. The image suggests that passion or love is intertwined with hardship, reflecting themes of resilience, struggle, and emotional intensity. The **thorns** symbolize obstacles or wounds, while the **dragging motion** implies an effortful, almost reluctant extraction of feeling from pain. The metaphor evokes a sense of longing that is not purely pleasurable but instead born out of hardship and endurance.

Comparison:

The AI translation uses "drags", which conveys effort but sounds somewhat mechanical, whereas the human translation "hauls" adds a stronger sense of laborious struggle, making the desire seem heavier and harder to bear. Additionally, "anguish" in the human version enhances the emotional depth compared to AI's more neutral "pain." The human translation better preserves the poetic weight of suffering, whereas the AI version is more literal and lacks emotional resonance.

2. "يَنتَزِعُ عِفَّةَ النِّعْناعَةِ بِخَشْخَشَةِ أَوْرَاقِهِ الجَبَلِيَّةُ"

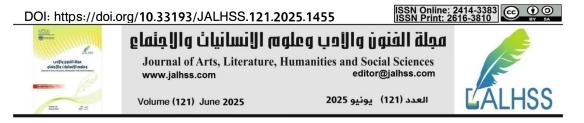AI Translation: "He strips the mint's innocence with the rustling of its mountain leaves."

Human translation: "He takes the pure mint with the force of his leaves,"

Analysis:

This metaphor personifies **Mint** as a woman with innocence (عِفَّة), which is being stripped away by the **rustling of mountain leaves**. The act of **stripping innocence** suggests an intense, almost violent transformation—perhaps a loss of purity, an awakening, or a forced confrontation with reality. The **mint** represents something fresh and untouched, while the **mountain leaves** act as an external force altering its state. This could symbolize the vulnerability of nature, femininity, or identity in the face of overpowering circumstances.

Comparison:

The AI translation "strips the mint's innocence" is closer to the literal Arabic meaning, but it sounds stark and slightly clinical. The human translation, "takes the pure mint with the force of his leaves," softens the phrasing while maintaining the metaphor's underlying tension. "Force of his leaves" makes the imagery more physical and pressing, whereas "rustling of its mountain leaves" in AI's version is more delicate

and passive. The human translation suggests a more deliberate and overpowering act, while the AI version seems to depict a more subtle and indirect loss of innocence.

3. "يُوقِفُ مَجرَى التَّنَفّس وَقْتاً كَأَنَّهُ الأَبَدْ"

AI Translation: "It stops the flow of breath, as if for eternity."

Human translation: "Her breath stopped, as if for eternity."

Analysis:

This metaphor creates a sense of **overwhelming intensity**, where something—perhaps emotion, passion, or pain—becomes so consuming that it **halts breathing**, making time feel endless. The **suspension of breath** can symbolize anticipation, ecstasy, or deep suffering, while the comparison to **eternity** (الأبَد) magnifies the impact. The phrase blurs the boundary between a temporary, fleeting moment and an infinite, unending experience, emphasizing the emotional depth of the poem.
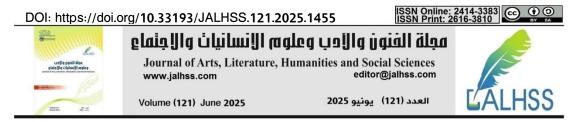
Comparison:

The AI translation **"stops the flow of breath"** is more technical and detached, while the human translation **"her breath stopped"** feels more immediate and personal. The AI version maintains a **neutral tone**, whereas the human version evokes **a sense of finality and stillness.** The AI's phrasing suggests a **process** (something actively stopping the breath), while the human translation presents it as **an event that has already occurred.** This small shift creates a stronger emotional impact, making the human version feel more visceral and poetic.

8. Conclusion:

This research highlights the significant differences in how AI and human translators handle metaphors in Arabic poetry. While AI models have advanced in linguistic accuracy and fluency, their approach to metaphor translation often remains literal and structurally rigid, lacking the depth and interpretative flexibility that human translators provide. Through the comparative analysis of selected metaphors, it is evident that AI struggles with capturing the emotional weight, cultural nuances, and layered meanings embedded in poetic metaphors.

The findings show that AI translations tend to prioritize grammatical correctness and direct equivalence, often missing the metaphor's underlying tone, irony, or symbolic resonance. In contrast, human translations demonstrate an ability to adapt metaphors in ways that preserve both their literary beauty and deeper connotations. By selecting words and structures that align with the poetic essence rather than just the literal meaning, human translators maintain the intended impact of the original Arabic text, particularly when dealing with irony, abstraction, or personification.

Ultimately, this study reinforces the necessity of human expertise in translating poetry, especially when metaphors play a central role in meaning-making. While AI can serve as a useful tool for initial translations, human intervention remains essential to refining and preserving the artistic and cultural integrity of poetic texts. Future research could explore how AI models might improve in metaphor interpretation through fine-tuning with poetic datasets or human-in-the-loop training approaches.

However, for now, **the art of translating metaphors remains a distinctly human craft—one that AI has yet to master.**

9. Appendix:

Poem 1: Ghayath Almadhoun ("Adrenaline," 2017) - "Massacre"

المجزرة مجازٌ ميتٌ يأكل أصدقائي، يأكلهم بلا ملح، كانوا شعراءَ، وأصبحوا مراسلين مع حدود، كانوا متعبين وأصبحوا متعبين جداً، "يعبرون الجسر في الصبحِ خفافاً "، ويموتون خارج التغطية، إنني أراهم بالمناظير الليلية، وأتتبعُ حرارة أجسادهم في الظلام، ها هم يهربون منها إليها، مستسلمين لهذا المساج الهائل، المجزرة أمهم الحقيقية، أما الإبادة الجماعية فهي مجردُ قصيدةٍ كلاسيكيةٍ يكتبها جنرالاتٌ مثقفون أحيلوا إلى التقاعد، الإبادة الجماعية لا تليق بأصدقائي، فهي عملٌ جماعي منظم، والأعمال الجماعية المنظمة تذكرهم باليسار الذي خذلهم.

المجزرةُ تصحو باكراً، تحمّمُ أصدقائي بالماء البارد والدم، تغسلُ ملابسهم الداخلية وتعدُ لهم الخبز والشاي، ثم تعلمهم قليلاً من الصيد، المجزرة أحنُّ على أصدقائي من الإعلان العالمي لحقوق الانسان، فتحتْ لهم الباب حين غُلِّقتْ الأبواب، ونادتهم بأسمائهم حين كانت نشراتُ الأخبار تبحث عن عدد الضحايا، المجزرة هي الوحيدةُ التي منحتهم اللجوء بغض النظر عن خلفياتهم، لم يهمها وضعهم الاقتصادي، لم يهمها إنْ كانوا مثقفين أو شعراء، إنها تنظر إلى الأشياء من زاوية محايدة، لها نفس ملامحهم الميتة، وأسماءُ زوجاتهم الأرامل، تمرُّ مثلهم على الأرياف والضواحي، وتظهرُ فجأة مثلهم في الأخبار العاجلة، المجزرة تشبه أصدقائي، لكنها دائماً تسبقهم إلى القرى النائية والمدارس. الأطفال

.المجزرة مجازٌ ميتٌ يخرجُ من التلفزيون، ويأكل أصدقائي دون رشة ملح واحدة

AI Translation:
The massacre is a dead metaphor that devours my friends,
devours them without salt.
They were poets and became reporters with borders.
They were tired and became very tired.
"They cross the bridge in the morning, light-footed,"
and die out of coverage.
I see them through night vision goggles,
tracking the heat of their bodies in the dark.
There they are, fleeing from it to it,
surrendering to this massive massage.
The massacre is their true mother,
while genocide is nothing but a classical poem
written by cultured generals retired from service.
Genocide does not suit my friends—
it is an organized collective effort,
and organized collective efforts remind them of the left that betrayed them.
The massacre wakes up early,
bathes my friends in cold water and blood,
washes their undergarments,
prepares their bread and tea,
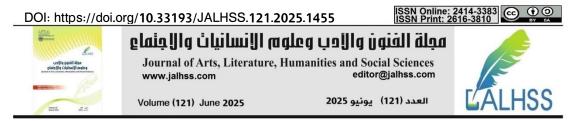then teaches them a little about hunting.

The massacre is more compassionate toward my friends
than the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.
It opened the door for them when all others were shut.
It called them by their names
while news bulletins searched only for numbers.
The massacre was the only one to grant them asylum,
regardless of their backgrounds.
It did not care about their economic status,
it did not care whether they were intellectuals or poets.
It sees things from a neutral perspective,
bearing the same dead expressions as they do,
carrying the names of their widowed wives.
Like them, it passes through villages and suburbs,
and like them, it suddenly appears in breaking news.
The massacre resembles my friends,
but it always arrives before them—
to remote villages and children's schools.
The massacre is a dead metaphor
that emerges from the television
and devours my friends
without a single pinch of salt.

Human Translation: Translated from the Arabic by Catherine Cobham
Massacre is a dead metaphor that is eating my friends, eating them without salt. They were poets and have become Reporters With Borders; they were already tired and now they're even more tired. 'They cross the bridge at daybreak fleet of foot' and die with no phone coverage. I see them through night vision goggles and follow the heat of their bodies in the darkness; there they are, fleeing from it even as they run towards it, surrendering to this huge massage. Massacre is their true mother, while genocide is no more than a classical poem written by intellectual pensioned-off generals. Genocide isn't appropriate for my friends, as it's an organised collective action and organised collective actions remind them of the Left that let them down.

Massacre wakes up early, bathes my friends in cold water and blood, washes their underclothes and makes them bread and tea, then teaches them a little about the hunt. Massacre is more compassionate to my friends than the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Massacre opened the door to them when other doors were closed, and called them by their names when news reports were looking for numbers. Massacre is the only one to grant them asylum regardless of their backgrounds; their economic circumstances don't bother Massacre, nor does Massacre care whether they are intellectuals or poets, Massacre looks at things from a neutral angle; Massacre has the same dead features as them, the same names as their widowed wives, passes like them through the countryside and the suburbs and appears suddenly like them in breaking

news. Massacre resembles my friends, but always arrives before them in faraway villages and children's schools.

Massacre is a dead metaphor that comes out of the television and eats my friends without a single pinch of salt.

Poem 2: Najwan Darwish ("Nothing More to Lose," 2014) - "A Violet Darkness"

ولَيْسَ سِوى أَن أَتْبَعَ عَتَماتٍ بَنَفْسَجِيّة
فَوْقَ تُرْبَةٍ تَتَشَقَّقُ فِيها الأَساطير
،أَجَلْ، كانَ الحُبُّ زَمَناً وتَشَقَّقَ، هو الآخَرُ
مِثْلَ وَجْهِ بلادِنا

حِصَّتي مِنَ النّاس عُبورُ أَشْباحِهِم.

AI Translation:
And nothing remains but to follow violet darkness
Above soil where myths crack open
Yes, love too was a time—then it cracked,
Just like the face of our land.
My share of people: the passing of their ghosts.

Human Translation:
And all that remains for me is to follow a violet darkness
on soil where myths fall apart.
Yes, love was time, and it too
fell apart
like the face of our country.
My share of the people
is the transit of their ghosts.

Poem 3: Fatena Al-Gharra. "امرَأَةُ النِعْنَاعْ" ("Woman of Mint")

امرَأَةُ النِعْنَاعْ
تُجَرْجِرُ الشَّبَقَ مِنْ وَجَع الشَّوْكْ
نُوَشْوِشُها.. تَمْلأُكَ وَقْتاً مُشْمِساً
نَسُوقُ فِيْ حَاشِيَتِها شَذَا اللَّحْظَةِ العَابِرةْ
تُمَسِّدُ أَلَقَهَا بِرَائِحَةِ رَبِيعْ
تَرْسِمُ حُدُودَ اللُّهاثِ دَائِماً
لا يُرضِيها سِوى القُرِّيصُ البَرِّيُّ
وَحْدَهُ يَرْصِفُ نعُومَةَ اللُّغَةِ بِشَوكِهْ
طَعْمُهُ يُرَطِّبُ حَلاوَةَ المَشْهَدْ
يَحْتَلُّ الجَسَدَ المَتْرُوكَ لِلبَياضْ
يَنْتَزِعُ عِفَّةَ النِّعْنَاعَةِ بِخَشْخَشَةِ أَوْرَاقِهِ الجَبَلِيَّةْ
يَتْرُكُ نُدُوبَهُ فِيْها
شَوْكُهُ.. أَلَقُهُ المُتَلاحِقْ
يُوقِفُ مَجرَى التَّنَفُّسِ وَقْتاً كَأَنَّهُ الأَبَدْ
ثُمَّ يُدَغْدِغُ مِرفَقَ النِّعْنَاعَةِ بِوَخزَةٍ حَاسِمةْ

AI Translation:
"The Woman of Mint"
She drags desire from the pain of thorns,
Whispers to it… fills it with a moment of sunshine.
She carries in her hem the fragrance of a fleeting instant,
Massaging its glow with the scent of spring.

She always traces the boundaries of breath,
Satisfied only by wild nettle—
It alone paves the softness of language with its thorns.
Its taste moistens the sweetness of the scene,
Occupies the body abandoned to whiteness,
He strips the mint's innocence with the rustling of its mountain leaves.
Leaving its scars upon her.

Its thorns… its relentless brilliance—
It stops the flow of breath, as if for eternity.
Then tickling the mint's elbow with a decisive sting.

Human Translation: (collaboratively produced by Sara Vaghefian and Sarah Maguire)
She hauls her desire from the anguish of thorns,
whispering: sunlight abides in you.
She is followed by the aroma of a fleeting moment
which she ignites with the perfume of Spring.
Not once does she gasp for breath.
Only wild nettle sates her desire:
his hair alone will make her easy.

His presence delights the scenery.
He populates vacancy.
He takes the pure mint with the force of his leaves,
scarring her deep inside.
His sting... his victory.
Her breath stopped, as if for eternity.
Then he tickles her elbow with his sting.

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