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FARIDA MEGUELLATI - HADJ LAKHDAR - NIVERSITY OF BATNA1

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Introduction

Criticism can be understood as both subjective and objective. It is subjective in that it is shaped by the critic's culture, taste, emotions, and perceptions, while it is objective in its adherence to established scientific ideas and standards (Youssef, 1987, p. 38). However, early Arab criticism was predominantly characterized by impressionism, wherein evaluative judgments were based on an innate sense of taste, often rendering judgments that lacked comprehensive explanations. Over time, especially during the Abbasid era, Arab criticism witnessed significant development. This evolution was marked by the emergence of critical texts aimed at establishing the foundational principles of literary critique. Ibn Salam Al-Jamahi is widely acknowledged as one of the earliest critics to contribute to the formalization of these principles. His book *Tabaqat Al-Shu'ara* (al-Majali, 1992, p. 72) stands as a pivotal work in this regard.

Additionally, Andalusian criticism did not remain isolated from these developments, as it addressed several critical issues, including the structure of the poem. Critics held differing views regarding the definition of poetry, both ancient and modern. As Ibn Mandur asserted, «the aim of poetry is that its verses are distinct,» while Ibn Jinni offered a different perspective:

“It was called a poem because it was intended to be... and it was said that it was called a poem because the one who said it celebrated it. Therefore, we revised it with good pronunciation and the intended meaning. Only three, ten, or fifteen verses make up the poem. The Arabs refer to it as a poem in relation to what is more than that. Poetry is connected to a specific number of verses, as shown by this critical text” (Mandur, 1997, p. 264).

A poem fulfills the purpose for which it was deliberately created, and it is not considered a poem unless it embodies a particular set of qualities—some related to its linguistic expression and others to its meaning. Some scholars, including Ahmed Matloub, have provided definitions of poetry. Matloub defines a poem as «a collection of poetic verses adhering to one of the Arabic meters, unified by a single rhyme» (Matloub, 2001, p. 323). This definition highlights Matloub's focus on the formal aspects of poetry.

One of the most significant definitions in Arabic literary criticism, which incorporates the artistic essence of poetry, is that «a poem is a structure composed of elements and forces that interact in a manner where poetic meanings crystallize through linguistic expression.» This view presents the poem as a cohesive whole, where its ideas converge and unfold progressively within its developmental flow (Bakkar, 2009, p. 24). This comprehensive description encompasses both the internal and external elements that combine to form an integrated poem, both in form and content.

Salah Fadl traces the origins of the word 'structure' to the Latin word *stuerere*, which refers to both a structure and the process of construction. This concept emphasizes the assembly of various components from an architectural perspective to achieve aesthetic harmony (Fadl, 1978, p. 175). Accordingly, the poem consists of both internal and external components, and its formation is governed by artistic mechanisms that elevate it to the status of a literary work.

Ibn al-Sarraj presented his critical perspective on this issue in his work *Jawahir al-Adab wa Thakhira' al-Shu'ara' wa al-Kitab*. He raised important questions about the fundamental units necessary for constructing a poem, the characteristics its language should possess, and the primary and subsidiary poetic elements that contribute to its artistic nature.

1. Systematic and Structural Rules

1.1 Al-Mutala

The first component that al-Sarraj discusses, and considers in need of improvement on the part of the poet, is the introduction of the poem. He states: "The poet should focus on refining his recitation, ensuring the strength of his syllables so that the beginning of the verse hints at what follows, and the end delivers power without hesitation or reliance on others. It has been said: The work of poetry is like a lock and its key—its beginning—and it has also been said that a good opening is the mount of success and a harbinger of joy. It is the first thing that strikes the ear, from which one can gauge the poet's quality" (al-Sarraj, 2008, p. 374).

This critical perspective highlights the importance of the poem's introduction, emphasizing that it sets the tone for the reader, captures their attention, and encourages further engagement. In al-Sarraj's view, a strong beginning is the key to success and happiness in poetry. Since the introduction is the first part to reach the listener's ear, the poet must carefully choose a compelling narrative, use clear and simple language, and avoid unnecessary complexity and forced expression. The poet should also be sensitive to the preferences of the audience, even when these preferences differ from the poet's own inclinations. Al-Sarraj stresses the importance of avoiding language that people dislike, as this could alienate the audience (Rasheeq, 1963, p. 223).

This shows that, for ancient critics, the poet's attention to the recipient and the alignment of the words with the context were essential. Furthermore, the critic highlights certain faults the poet should avoid in their composition. For instance, al-Sarraj advises against overusing certain expressions, such as love, which he associates with weakness, unless employed by a master poet like Imru' al-Qays (al-Sarraj, 2008,

p. 374). Similarly, «it is desirable for the poet to include praise at the beginning of the poem, just as it is desirable in the opening of a sermon» (al-Sarraj, 2008, p. 374). However, he warns against excessive praise or excessive brevity in the opening lines. Abu Tammam, for example, was known for his magnificent openings, which exuded grandeur. Thus, the connection between the poet and the listener is critical for achieving the structure and impact of the poem.

1.2. Al-Khuruj

Due to its importance in connecting the components of a poem, this stylistic element is considered fundamental. Ibn al-Sarraj asserts that a poet must «be kind» when offering praise, as doing so brings happiness to the individual being praised. He remains consistent in identifying the praiseworthy individual, describing him succinctly without excessive elaboration, and then continuing to commend him (al-Sarraj, 2008, pp. 378-379).

Ibn al-Sarraj also distinguishes between Al-Khuruj and Takhalus. He defines Takhalus as «departing from a particular meaning, returning to the initial point, and then moving on to a second meaning» (al-Sarraj, 2008, pp. 379-380), or shifting between topics, «as a poet does when moving from love poetry to apology» (al-Sarraj, 2008, p. 380).

On occasion, a poet will «attribute something, offer praise, return to the relative, and then resume the praise.» Ibn al-Sarraj refers to this as Ilmam. Good transitions, or Ilmam, are an artistic technique that allows the poet to shift smoothly from one meaning to another or from one purpose to the next. This is done with subtlety, ensuring harmony and cohesion between the different parts, so as to avoid disruption and prevent the recipient from sensing a disjointed or unnatural shift in meaning. In composite poems, where the speech covers two purposes, this technique demonstrates the poet's skill and insight. Consequently, critics have emphasized Ilmam as a necessary and esteemed component in the structure of a well-crafted poem.

1.3 Ending

Since the conclusion forms the foundation of the poem, it must be precise, final, and unmatched by any subsequent ideas. If the opening of the poem is akin to a key, then the concluding section must serve as the lock that secures it (Rasheeq, 1963, p. 239). According to Ibn al-Sarraj, «the lasting impression left by the conclusion is due to its proximity to the end, and therefore it must be of the highest quality, as actions are judged by their conclusions» (al-Sarraj, 2008, p. 381). For this reason, the poet must pay special attention to improving the ending. Among the defects that Ibn al-Sarraj advises poets to avoid in their conclusions is leaving the reader unsatisfied, with a feeling of wanting more (al-Sarraj, 2008, p. 381).

Supplication is traditionally used as a means to conclude, particularly when it serves those in need, except in the case of leaders, who find such endings captivating. The conclusion is the last element of a poem to remain in the listener's memory, and it is often recalled independently from the rest of the poem. Therefore, it must convey a profound meaning and exhibit excellent diction. It should not conclude with a stanza that leaves the audience feeling incomplete or awaiting more.

From this, we can infer that Ibn al-Sarraj sought to outline the essential principles or systematic rules for constructing poetic discourse effectively. Earlier critics often likened a poem to the creation of a human being, in which the various parts are intricately connected. If any part is isolated or if the structure lacks precision, the whole loses its integrity, diminishing its beauty and virtue. These components are fundamental prerequisites for the creative distinction of any work, whether poetry or prose (Al-Hatami, 1979, p. 215).

Thus, the author must skillfully navigate between meanings and ideas, ensuring a clear and coherent opening that reveals the work's content. The conclusion, in turn, must be appropriate, well-focused, and impactful, as it is the last element to resonate in the mind and heart of the audience and the final impression left on the listener.

2. The Poetic Language

Since language conveys meaning, it is considered «the most important factor in a poem's ability to be constructive... The genius of poetic expression is rooted in its foundation, and from its building blocks, creative structures emerge, combining brilliance with various complementary and supporting elements» (Qassem, 1981, p. 6). The language of poetry revives with each poem, giving rise to new life and generating fresh meanings. The poet transcends rigid templates, while still adhering to grammatical rules, to forge new relationships that result in innovative poetic meanings. This approach is regarded as one of the cornerstones of poetic excellence. Therefore, the poet must avoid certain flaws when selecting words due to their crucial role in shaping meaning (al-Sarraj, 2008, p. 370), including:

- Avoiding obscure, marginal, or vulgar expressions, as the careful selection of words brings the meaning closer to the recipient. The worst kind of poetry is that which requires explanation.
- Avoiding the use of letters that converge in terms of their phonetic articulation, such as combining the adverb with the letters «haa» and «taa.»
- Choosing expressive words that are well-suited to the context and situation.

The uniqueness of poetic language is reflected in this meticulous attention to word choice. A skilled poet carefully selects words, distinctively arranges them, and organizes them with precision. In other words, the poet creates fresh relationships between words, enabling the language to better convey the emotions and ideas that inspire poetic expression.

3. Prosody and Rhythmic Structure

Music is perceived as one of the:

“basic elements that if [poetry] loses, it loses one of the major characteristics that distinguishes it from prose, which must also have its own music, and have its own psychological rhythm, but music and rhythm are different. In their arrangement, the greatest difference is from the clear and expressive music of poetry and

from its specific organized rhythm, so it was said that whoever parted his soul to music would not be able to be a real poet” (Hani, 1999, p. 220).

This is why Ibn al-Sarraj emphasized that *awzan* (meter) and rhyme are integral components of poetry. They enhance its quality, endear it to the listener, and embellish its form, making people more inclined to study and recite it. These elements also facilitate memorization. As al-Sarraj (2008, p. 303) notes, the musicality in poetry fosters a response between the poem and its recipient. The rhythm and sound patterns create a connection that engages the listener, making the experience of poetry both more enjoyable and more memorable.

“the music of the soul depends on the music of the utterance, so the more the words are syllables and harmonious, the stronger their effect on the mind, and the better their impact on the soul, and that is through its sweet music and its beautiful tune, and that effect is nothing but the tune of the soul arising from its comfort and its behavior, its natural path free from astonishment and disturbance” (Hamid, 1949, p.93).

Awzan (meter) and rhyme are fundamental elements that contribute to the construction of a poem, endowing it with distinct rhythmic qualities that set it apart from prose. These elements establish the external rhythm of the poem. According to Ibn al-Sarraj, they also play a role in shaping the internal rhythm. Recognizing the importance of balance and contrast, the critic proposed several verbal and moral enhancements that would add a rhythmic dimension to the poem’s structure. These improvements help to imbue the poem with a musical quality, which is crucial for capturing the recipient’s attention and ensuring its impact, all without compromising the integrity of the meaning.

4. The Artistic Image

An essential aspect of the poetic experience is expressed through imagery, which serves as a linguistic composition that bridges form and content, often within the context of a distinctive or illuminating observation (Bushra, 1994, p. 26). This makes imagery crucial for conveying the creator’s emotions, as it has the capacity to reveal meanings that are deeper than the surface-level interpretation of the poem. As Ihsan (1996, p. 200) notes, “the image, encompassing all metaphorical forms, is the product of creative power, and studying it leads one to the very spirit of the poet.” Consequently, it can be argued that the rhetorical devices of poetic imagery are varied, with rhetoric playing a significant role in shaping poetic expression by drawing attention to simile, metaphor, personification, and other rhetorical techniques.

Among the most significant rhetorical patterns identified by Ibn al-Sarraj are simile, metaphor, representation, and symbol. In his view, these patterns must serve to enhance and clarify the meaning of the poem; otherwise, they would be unnecessary. This is

particularly important because the image serves as the crucial link between the poem and the recipient's mind. Such mastery can only be achieved by a talented poet with the ability to invent new meanings, and the creation of sophisticated imagery is feasible only for a poet endowed with depth and breadth of imagination. It is through this imaginative power that the poet is able to evoke strong emotions, nurture feelings, and stir the hearts and minds of the audience.

Conclusion

Ultimately, as with any purposeful expression, a poem must begin with strength and clarity. It can be argued that Ibn al-Sarraj did not deviate from the foundational principles established by earlier scholars. He emphasized that the opening of a poem is crucial, as it is the first element to capture the listener's attention. Additionally, he highlighted the importance of seamless transitions from one meaning to another, particularly in compound poems. Word choice, according to Ibn al-Sarraj, is critical, given the unique nature of poetic language, which must be capable of conveying the deepest emotions of the heart.

Regarding meter and rhyme, these two elements are fundamental to the structure of a poem. Along with verbal and moral embellishments, they contribute to the rhythmic dimension of the poem, giving it distinctive qualities absent in prose. Furthermore, poetic imagery serves as a bridge between the poem and the reader's mind. Ibn al-Sarraj also acknowledged the importance of rhetorical devices such as simile, metaphor, representation, and symbol in enhancing poetic imagery. This relationship between the poem and the reader's thoughts is particularly noteworthy, especially given that Ibn al-Sarraj was influenced by Ibn Rasheeq's views, particularly as expressed in *Al-Omdah*, regarding the qualities and critique of poetry.

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Abstract

The composition of a poem consists of both internal and external elements, each contributing to its construction and establishing artistic mechanisms that define its literary value. In his work *Jawahir al-Adab wa Thakhari' al-Shu'ara wa 'l-Koutab*, Ibn al-Sarraj presents his critical approach, outlining systematic and structural principles that ensure the harmony between the poem's components, such as language and imagery, while maintaining a coherent structure. These principles facilitate the integration of form and content, thus enhancing the poem's overall quality and impact. The techniques emphasized by Ibn al-Sarraj highlight the distinctive nature of Arabic poetry and its artistic framework, contributing to a unique expression within the genre. This research provides significant insights into the critical understanding of classical Arabic poetry's structure.

Keywords

Poem, Structure, Ancient, Arabic, Ibn al-Sarraj

ملخص

تتألف القصيدة من مكونات داخلية وخارجية، تساهم في بنائها وتحدد أليائها الفنية التي تجعل منها قطعة أدبية. في كتابه جواهر الآداب وذخائر الشعراء والكتاب، طرح ابن السراج تصويره النقدي من خلال استعراضه لقواعد نظم وبنية تضمن التناغم بين عناصر القصيدة مثل اللغة والصورة الفنية، مع الحفاظ على الهيكلية المتكاملة. تسهم هذه القواعد في دمج الشكل والمضمون، مما يعزز من جودة وتأثير القصيدة بشكل عام. وتسلط التقنيات التي أبرزها ابن السراج الضوء على الطبيعة المميزة للشعر العربي وآلياته الفنية، مما يساهم في تقديم تعبير مميز ضمن هذا النوع الأدبي. تقدم هذه الدراسة رؤى هامة لفهم البناء النقدي للشعر العربي الكلاسيكي.

الكلمات المفتاحية

Résumé

Le poème se compose d'éléments internes et externes qui contribuent à sa construction et établissent des mécanismes artistiques en tant qu'œuvre littéraire. Dans son ouvrage *Jawahir al-Adab wa Thakhari' al-Shu'ara wa'l-Koutab*, Ibn al-Sarraj présente sa conception critique en exposant des principes systémiques et constructifs qui assurent l'harmonie entre les composants du poème, tels que la langue et l'imagerie, tout en garantissant une structure cohérente. Ces principes facilitent l'intégration du fond et de la forme, améliorant ainsi la qualité et l'impact global du poème. Les techniques soulignées par Ibn al-Sarraj mettent en évidence la nature distinctive de la poésie arabe et ses mécanismes artistiques, contribuant à une expression unique au sein du genre. Cette recherche offre des perspectives précieuses pour la compréhension critique de la structure de la poésie arabe classique.

Mots-clés

Poème, Structure, Ancien, Arabe, Ibn al-Sarraj.
