

Literary Reception in Classical Arabic Rhetoric:  
The Case of Al-Āmedī's *Al-Muwāzanah*

Submitted by:

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Submitted in accordance with the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy  
The University of Leeds

Faculty of Arts, School of Modern Languages, Cultures and Societies  
Department of Arabic, Islamic and Middle Eastern Studies

April, 2016

The candidate confirms that the work submitted is his own and that appropriate credit has been given where reference has been made to the work of others.

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*This thesis is dedicated to the soul of my mother*  
***Qalilah Saeed al-Harhi***

*I miss you every day...*

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

Firstly, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my supervisor Dr. Sameh Hanna, for his continuous support throughout my Ph.D study and related research, and for his patience, motivation, and immense knowledge. His guidance helped me in researching and writing this thesis. I hope that one day I will become as good an advisor to my own students as Dr. Hanna has been to me. My sincere thanks also goes to my co-supervisor, Dr. Claire Lozier, for the long discussions that helped me to organize my thoughts and her helpful advice with my written style. In addition, assistance provided by Dr. Stephanie Dennison and Mrs. Karen Priestley was also greatly appreciated. Many thanks also to Taif University and the University of Leeds for giving me the opportunity to work on this thesis.

I would like to express my greatest thankfulness to my father, Professor Mohammed al-Harhi, who helped me to find many recent academic sources. In addition, I would like to express my deepest sense of love and appreciation to my beloved wife, Sumayyah Al-Harhi, who supported and encouraged me throughout this endeavor.

Most importantly, none of this would have been possible without the love and patience of my inspiring brothers and sisters: Mashour, Majid, Mujahid, Najat, Mazin, Nuha and Nada. I also thank my friends: Wisam Hussain, Fahad al-Dowsari, Omar Baqarwan, Ali al-Mahdi and Abdulmajid al-Hamadani who helped me stay sane through these difficult years. Their support and care helped me overcome setbacks and stay focused on my study.

## ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the nature of literary reception in Classical Arabic rhetoric, in particular the concept of horizon of expectations, by undertaking a detailed analysis of a key critical work from the fourth century AH, al-Āmedī's *Al-Muwāzanah*. It begins by tracing those ideas that contributed to the development of reception theory and then examines in depth two concepts which are of central importance in this research, namely, the horizon of expectations (Hans Robert Jauss) and the role of the reader (Wolfgang Iser). In addition to outlining the Western understanding of the elements of this theory, consideration is given to its counterpart in Arabic rhetoric and the obstacles which prevented it from developing along similar lines. The main sociocultural influences that contributed to the formation of the Arab worldview during the Abbasid era are discussed together with the main philosophical debates which served to shape the reading strategies and horizon of expectations of Classical literary scholars.

Close textual reading of al-Āmedī's *Al-Muwāzanah* is used to analyse the methodological principles which underpin his explicit critical framework and to reveal the implicit criteria, including *'amūd al-shi'r*, which he uses to evaluate the poetry of Abū Tammām and al-Buḥturī. It is argued that identification of these aspects of the text can be used to provide an insight into al-Āmedī's horizon of expectations and, more broadly, to reflect the strategies which were used to read, interpret and evaluate literary texts during the Classical period.

**Keywords: al-Āmedī, *Al-Muwāzanah*, horizon of expectations, Classical Arabic rhetoric, reception theory, worldview, Abū Tammām, al-Buḥturī, reader**

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## Transliteration from Arabic to Latin

	ء		ظ
B	ب	‘	ع
D	د	m	م
Ḍ/ḍ	ض	n	ن
Dh	ذ	k	ك
Ḥ/ḥ	ح	q	ق
J	ج	l	ل
Kh	خ	H	هـ
R	ر	y	ي
s	س	n	ن
Ṣ/ṣ	ص	gh	غ
sh	ش	f	ف
t	ت	w	و
Ṭ/ṭ	ط	z	ز
th	ث		

### VOWELS:

#### LONG:

Ā ā آ Ū ū و Ī ī ي

#### SHORT:

a َ u ُ i ِ

## Introduction

This thesis explores literary reception theory in Arabic rhetoric from the pre-Islamic era until the end of the fourth century AH by focusing on one of the key works in the history of Classical Arabic literary criticism, namely *Al-Muwāzanah* by al-Āmedī. In order to do this, it draws on a number of contemporary concepts associated with the German literary theorists Hans-Robert Jauss and Wolfgang Iser, employing these to shed new light on recipients of literature and their horizons of expectations during the Abbasid era.

In essence, this thesis is interested in understanding the nature of the different roles played by readers, both expert and non-expert, during what was a key period for literary production in Classical Arabic. This period also saw the establishment of foundations for critical practice and cultural theory which were to influence the Arab world for centuries to come. Furthermore, it was an era in which opposing worldviews clashed head on, as traditionalists came into conflict with modernists.

This study does not seek to prove that this type of reception theory has its origins in the heritage of Arabic critical studies. Rather, it will consider the extent to which Classical literary scholars acknowledged the role which readers played, not only in textual interpretation but also in establishing and applying the criteria by which literary creations were to be judged in terms of their form, content and aesthetic qualities. It was these standards of excellence which also ultimately served to formalise the poetic conventions known as *'amūd al-shi'r* and to firmly establish them within Arabic rhetorical studies. This illustrates the extent to which the reader has always been a crucial factor in the fields of Arabic rhetoric and criticism.

It will also be argued in this thesis that a number of cultural, social and religious factors have contributed to the failure to develop a comprehensive reception theory in Arabic criticism. Of these three, the latter can be considered the most important, since the Arabic language itself, the study of rhetoric and textual interpretation are all inextricably linked in the Islamic worldview with the Holy Qur'ān. Indeed, Messick has argued that “The transition from the unity and authenticity of the Word of God to the multiplicity and disputed quality of the words of men is perhaps the central dynamic problem of Muslim thought” (cited in Lambek, 1990: 23). Within this frame of reference, to give readers freedom of interpretation would be tantamount to allowing them to apply their own ideology and ultimately to challenging divine authority.

Reception theory challenged the long-established right of the creator of the text to claim ultimate authority over its meaning, arguing instead that readers were also co-creators of the text, having the right to interpret this as they saw fit and in line with whatever political or religious ideology they might choose. Such an idea is clearly inconsistent with the Islamic school of thought, which still forms the ideological framework within which all forms of Arab knowledge operate. Therefore, whilst the Arab world witnessed the start of attempts to open up to other cultures, including Persian, Roman and Greek, in the mid-third century AH, at the same time the charge of *zandaqa* (apostasy) effectively erected a barrier to those developments that would have allowed Arabic criticism to develop in different directions that might, in turn, have led to the creation of a fully-fledged reception theory.

This thesis focuses on a book which is considered to be one of the most important works of literary criticism produced at the end of the fourth century AH, namely, *Al-Muwāzanah* by al-Āmedī. In addition to reflecting a key moment of cultural conflict

between the two most prominent literary schools of the period, the traditionalists and the modernists, this work also offers contemporary literary scholars a unique insight into how al-Āmedī and other readers at that time received literary texts. Drawing on the concept of “horizon of expectations” (Jauss 1982) from reception theory, this study analyses *Al-Muwāzanah* in order to establish the worldview of Arab readers in the Classical era and to determine the extent to which this helped to form their reading strategies and critical practices.

### **1.1 Al-Āmedī**

Relatively little is known about the early life of the writer and literary scholar Abū al-Qāsim al-Ḥasan bin Bishr bin Yaḥyā al-Āmedī, the author of *Al-Muwāzanah*. He was born in al-Baṣrah at the start of the fourth century AH (around 11<sup>th</sup> century A.D). Then, after studying with literary and linguistic scholars such as Niftāwaih, al-ʿAkhfash, al-Zajjāj, and ibn Duraid, he moved to Baghdad, then the capital of the Abbasid caliphate to work as an author and critic. He wrote many critical and linguistic studies including *Nathr al-Manzūm*, *Māfi ʿIār al-Shiʿr li ibn Ṭabaṭabā min al-Khaṭaʿ*, *al-Muʿtalif wa Al-Mushtarak min Mʿānī al-Shiʿr*, *Tabyīn Ghalaṭ Qudāmah bin Jaʿfar fī Naqd Al-Shiʿr*, *Maʿānī Shiʿr al-Buḥturī*, *al-Radd ʿAlā ibn ʿAmār fīmā akhṭaʿa fihī abū Tammām*, and *Tafḍil Shiʿr Imruʿ al-Qays ʿAlā al-Jāhiliyyīn*. His two best known works are *Al-Mukhtalif fī ʿAsmāʿ al-Shuʿarāʿ wa Kunāhum wa alqābuhum* and *Al-Muwāzanah*, the work which will be studied in detail here. He eventually returned to al-Baṣrah where he died in 370 AH.

### **1.2 Al-Muwāzanah**

*Al-Muwāzanah* is considered to be one of the first texts in the history of Arabic literature in which the author presents an explicit framework outlining the critical

method which he intends to use in passing critical judgement on the poetic works to be assessed. One of the objectives of this thesis, therefore, is to explore the method proposed by al-Āmedī and to consider what it reveals about the nature of literary criticism in the fourth century AH.

Al-Āmedī's book is important for several reasons. Firstly, it focuses on the work of Abū Tammām and al-Buḥturī, who were two of the most famous poets during the Abbasid period. Each had their own admirers and these two camps, the modernists and the traditionalists, constantly debated which poet was the better of the two. In addition, re-reading al-Āmedī's critical interpretations can provide the contemporary literary scholar with detailed insights into many of the fundamental debates of his time relating to literary creation, in particular the relative merits of craftsmanship versus natural talent and ambiguity versus clarity of expression.

Moreover, al-Āmedī attempted to devise and apply his own theoretical model in *Al-Muwāzanah*. This involved making use of inductive reasoning by analysing selected examples from the poems of Abū Tammām and al-Buḥturī and then making general assessments of their literary value. These judgements were based on the norms and conventions of Classical poetry, known as *'amūd al-shi'r*.

This thesis views al-Āmedī as an expert reader, studying his interpretation of the works of Abū Tammām and al-Buḥturī and examining the extent to which he was objective in his critical judgments regarding their work. Considering his evaluation of their poetry provides revealing insights into the critical practices and concepts employed by literary scholars at that time.

### **1.3 Methodology adopted in this study**

In terms of the methodological approach taken in this thesis, it begins by establishing the theoretical and critical frameworks within which al-Āmedī's work is

to be situated. This involves identifying the underlying principles of reception theory, from Western and Arab perspectives, and reviewing critical responses to *Al-Muwāzanah*. Contextualisation is also crucial to the approach taken here and close attention is paid to establishing the sociocultural dynamics of the literary scene and the historico-political circumstances which characterised al-Āmedī's age. In addition, those literary sources which can be said to have influenced him significantly as a critic are also explored.

Since it makes use of concepts from contemporary Western literary theory to shed light on the nature of textual interpretation of Classical Arabic poetry, the approach adopted here can be considered eclectic, drawing on “what appears to be best in various doctrines, methods, or styles [...] composed of elements drawn from various sources” (Merriam-Webster Dictionary Online). The results show that using this innovative comparative approach can offer a new perspective not only on al-Āmedī's own critical practices but also in highlighting the importance of *Al-Muwāzanah* as a reflection of the worldview of the Classical reader.

The theoretical focus of the thesis effectively conditioned the sections from *Al-Muwāzanah* which were chosen for analysis using close textual reading. These are either key passages in which al-Āmedī outlines his approach and critical frameworks which are to be used in his evaluation of the two poets, or they are examples which have been chosen because they are particularly revealing about his application of his methodology.

It is necessary to say something here about the version of *Al-Muwāzanah* which has been used in this study. No definitive date has been established for the original manuscript of al-Āmedī's text and some six edited versions of this work have been published thus far. According to Muḥy al-Dīn (1944), who edited the fourth

published edition of the manuscript, earlier editions were seriously flawed in the way they were presented and omitted significant amounts of information. He attempted to correct this by producing a new edition based on a number of existing copies of al-Amedi's original manuscript. Muḥy al-Dīn also added some indexes to aid the reader and a lengthy informative introduction. However, since Muḥy al-Dīn's book was published during the Second World War when paper was expensive and in short supply, it was printed on poor quality paper and few copies remain (Ṣaqr, 1961).

Comparison of Muḥy al-Dīn's edition with that of Ṣaqr published in 1961 reveals that the former editor omitted many parts of *Al-Muwāzanah*. The fifth edition contains 563 pages and is divided into two volumes, as against the 227 pages of Muḥy al-Dīn's edition although both editions have similar size pages and typeface. A quick glance at the table of contents in the two editions shows that Ṣaqr's edition is more detailed and better organised and, in addition, he was able to correct a number of typographic errors which had appeared in the previous edition.

It is worth noting that in 1987, as part of his doctoral project, Muḥārib edited a supplementary volume which consisted of sections from *Al-Muwāzanah* which had been omitted from all the previous editions. Although Muḥārib claims that some parts of *Al-Muwāzanah* are still missing, there is sufficient existing material to provide valuable insights into al-Āmedī's methodology and critical thought.

This study used Ṣaqr's edition of *Al-Muwāzanah* since it offers the most accurate and best organized version of al-Āmedī's work to date. In addition, this study also made use of Stetkevych's (1991) English translations of passages from *Al-Muwāzanah* which appear in her book about Abū Tammām's poetry and the literary scene in the Abbasid era since these have been used by many other critics. All other

translations from Arabic which appear in the text of this thesis were carried out by the researcher himself unless otherwise acknowledged. In those instances where the researcher disagrees with Stetkevych's rendering of the text this has been noted and an alternative translation provided.

#### **1.4 Significance of the Research**

As previously mentioned, a number of recent Arabic critical studies have addressed reception theory; however, these studies have attempted to apply Western theory without paying due attention to the context in which the Classical Arabic text was produced and how it would have been received by its original readers. This study draws on concepts from Western reception theory but also takes into account the specific circumstances in which *Al-Muwāzanah* was written and which also shaped al-Āmedī's worldview in order to gain a new understanding of readers and the strategies which they employed when evaluating literary work.

#### **1.5 Research Questions**

The main aim of this research is to explore the nature of literary reception in Classical Arabic rhetoric, in particular the concept of horizon of expectations, by focusing on al-Āmedī's *Al-Muwāzanah*. In order to achieve this aim, this thesis addresses the following questions:

- 1. Which disciplines, movements, schools and theories have made a major contribution to the development of Reception Theory in Western thought? How has Reception Theory been interpreted and used by contemporary critics of Classical Arabic literature?*
- 2. How were the concepts of the literary recipient and literary reception understood in Classical Arabic rhetoric? Why did early interest in these*

*concepts fail to develop into a fully-fledged theory of reception in Arabic literary criticism?*

3. *What are the main sociocultural, historico-political and literary influences that contributed to the formation of the worldview of readers of Arabic literature during the Abbasid era?*
4. *What are the principles underpinning al-Āmedī's critical method in Al-Muwāzanah and to what extent did he systematically and objectively apply these in his comparative assessment of the poetry of Abū Tammām and al-Buḥturī? What does close textual analysis of Al-Muwāzanah reveal about al-Āmedī's horizon of expectations, literary reception in the Abbasid era and his understanding of the concept of 'amūd al-shi'r?*

## **1.6 Outline of the thesis**

**Chapter two** focuses on the transformation which occurred in Western critical studies when the emphasis in literary criticism shifted from the author to the reader. The chapter begins by considering the influence of linguistic approaches to textual interpretation, in particular the work of Ferdinand de Saussure. It then examines the role which Russian Formalism, Structuralism and post-Structuralism played in the development of reception theory. Finally, it focuses on two concepts which were of key importance in reception theory and which are explored in depth in this thesis, namely, the horizon of expectations (Hans Robert Jauss) and the role of the reader (Wolfgang Iser).

**Chapter three** examines the emergence of the recipient and the development of this concept in Classical Arabic rhetoric from the pre-Islamic era to the Abbasid period. It also explores the religious, cultural and social factors which help to explain why reception theory failed to emerge as a fully-fledged concept in Classical Arabic

criticism. The focus shifts in the latter sections of the chapter to consider how Western literary reception theory has been appropriated by contemporary critics for the purposes of interpreting Classical Arabic texts.

**Chapter Four** aims to establish the historico-political and socio-cultural factors which helped to form the Arab worldview during the Abbasid era and to examine how this framework determined how literary texts were received during that historical period. This chapter discusses some key critical texts of the Classical period including *Kitāb Al-Badī'* (ibn al-Mu'tazz), *Naqd al-Shi'r* (Qudāmah ibn Ja'far), *Kitāb Al-Ṣinā'atayn: Al-kitābah wa Al-shi'r* (al-'Askarī) and *Ṣaḥīfat* (Bishr bin al-Mu'tamir) in order to identify the range of reading strategies which were employed during that historical period. The impact of non-Arab cultures is also analysed with particular emphasis on the influence which Greek and Persian cultures had on Classical Arabic thought. Finally this chapter reviews the main literary debates which shaped the horizon of expectations<sup>1</sup> of Abbasid era readers, namely, *al-Qadīm wa al-Jadīd* (Tradition Versus Modernity) and *al-Lafẓ wa al-Ma'nā* (Word Versus Meaning).

**Chapter Five** focuses on al-Āmedī's *Al-Muwāzanah*, and in addition to considering its impact on Arabic literary criticism, it contains a close textual reading of this work in order to identify the critic's horizon of expectations as revealed through the methodological principles which he employed in his evaluation of the work of Abū Tammām and al-Buḥturī. After establishing the principles which underpin the critic's framework, this chapter determines the extent to which he applies this systematically and objectively to the work of these two poets. In addition to

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<sup>1</sup> For the purposes of this thesis, 'horizon of expectation' can be defined as: A term used in the reception theory of Hans Robert Jauss to designate the set of cultural norms, assumptions, and criteria shaping the way in which readers understand and judge a literary work at a given time.

examining his understanding of the key concept of *'amūd al-shi'r*, this chapter also analyses al-Āmedī's attitude towards the two opposing worldviews of traditionalist and modernist readers with the aim of revealing his horizon of expectations.

**Chapter six** reflects on the extent to which the aim of the thesis has been achieved and assesses the findings of this research and the contribution which it has made to the field of Classical Arabic literary studies. It also outlines the limitations of the approach taken in this study and suggests possible areas which future research may fruitfully explore.

## **1.7 Literature Review**

This review of previous studies consists of two major sections. The first examines previous studies related to Reception Theory in Classical Arabic rhetoric and criticism while the second focuses on studies linked to the book *Al-Muwāzanah*. Although numerous studies have discussed Reception Theory in Classical Arabic literature in an effort to highlight the existence of literary theory in this period, they do so in either a general manner or they focus on the work of specific poets.

### **1.7.1 Previous Studies on Reception Theory in Classical Arabic Rhetoric and Criticism**

Shbāyk's (2010) article 'Zuhūr Manzūr Al-Mutalaqqī fī Al-Turāth Al-Naqdī 'ind Al-'Arab' lays a great deal of emphasis on the fact that the origins of interest in recipients of texts are clearly evident in Classical Arabic critical studies, referring specifically to the text by Bishr ibn al-Mu'tamir, which provides general guidelines regarding literary style. His study traces the appearance of the concept of the recipient in Classical Arabic literature, illustrating this by using the works of three literary scholars from that period, namely, al-Jāhiz, 'Abdulqāhir al-Jurjānī and Ḥāzim al-Qarṭāginnī. The study confirms that some elements of Reception Theory, such as the horizon of expectations and the implicit reader, were already apparent in these Classical Arabic texts. Shbāyk's study also discusses how Classical recipients used interpretation to identify the stylistic devices used by the poet, which in turn helped them to understand the text. In addition, he highlights that further studies are required to understand how Classical literary scholars drew on their knowledge of rhetorical devices to interpret the text.

Although Shbāyk's study provides evidence of similarities between Reception Theory in Western literary studies and in Classical Arabic studies, it fails to focus on the differences between them, and it is these differences which may be capable of providing a wider perspective on the theory. Moreover, there are some inconsistencies in the way which he applies Western Reception Theory to Classical Arabic text.

Al-Brikī's (2006) study of Reception Theory in Classical Arabic criticism entitled *Qaḍiyyat Al-Talaqqī fī Al-Naqd Al-Qadīm* was in a similar vein. Her book-length study consists of five chapters, each of which attempt to prove the existence of this theory in Classical Arabic literary and critical studies, by drawing similarities between Classical Arabic thought and its contemporary Western counterpart, with particular focus on the works of the most prominent early exponents of Reception Theory, such as Wolfgang Iser and Hans Robert Jauss. She also explores the relationship between interpretation and reception. The study focuses on Reception Theory as understood by Classical Arabic critics in their examination of certain critical and rhetorical issues including ambiguity, clarity, metaphor, and numerous other issues associated with stylistics. However, al-Brikī's study fails to account for many important issues which have strong links to the theory: for example she ignores the specificity of Classical Arabic texts. In addition, the fact that the study depends on an apparently random selection of examples placed in each chapter without any attempt to provide a rationale for their inclusion tends to detract somewhat from the overall approach.

Demonstrating that Classical Arabic critics came up with Reception Theory before their Western counterparts forms the focal point of many studies written in Arabic,

such as those mentioned above, as well as al-Shihri's study, entitled 'Min Şuwar Al-Talaqqī fī Al-Naqd Al-‘Arabī', in which the author affirms that Classical Arabic criticism was aware of the importance of the reader's role in evaluating the literary text; however, this did not consist of a systematic approach but of random insights into Classical Arabic literature. He illustrates this point with a number of examples (2000: 76).

Moreover, al-Shihri asserts that the purpose of Arabic rhetoric is to attempt to form a connection between the text and its recipient. Nevertheless, the major weakness of the study is its failure to fully develop his argument in reference to Western Reception Theory.

Other studies do not recognise any link between reception theory and its presence in Classical Arabic literature, such as al-Zu'bī's *Al-Mutalaqqī 'ind Ḥāzim Al-Qarṭajannī* (2001) basing his argument on his reading of Ḥāzim's work, al-Zu'bī claims that there is no connection between Western Reception Theory and the interest in the recipient in Arabic criticism and that, furthermore, they have different visions and attitudes. While this may be a valid idea, he fails to elaborate on the exact nature of the differences between the two. In addition, he fails to provide sufficiently detailed support for this conclusion.

Al-Tājānī has written many studies on Reception Theory, investigating the field of recipient interest in Classical Arabic criticism, including the book entitled *Al-Talaqqī 'ind Ḥāzim Al-Qarṭajannī fī Minhāj Al-Bulaghā'* (2010). This book explores the lexical and functional implications of the concept of text reception, providing a detailed examination of all the terms related to the concept of reception in *Minhāj Al-Bulaghā'*. This study recognizes the close link between the process of receiving text in poetic language and of concentrating on poetic functions and styles. In

addition, the book provides a detailed cultural contextualisation of the work of Ḥāzim al-Qartājannī as well as analysing his impact on critical thought.

Another study by al-Tājānī (2011) 'Al-Shi'r wa Al-Talaqqī fī Al-Jāhiliyyah' focuses on the status of text recipients in the Pre-Islamic era and their roles in the designation of the themes of poems. This article explains the extent to which recipients affected the development of poetry during that historical period, in terms of how poets endeavoured to win their admiration or approval. Although al-Tājānī provides copious examples and anecdotes to validate his claims concerning the significance of the recipient in the history of Arabic criticism, as in his previous book-length study, he makes no attempt to establish a link between Classical Arabic ideas and Western reception theory.

In his Masters dissertation, *Al-'Ibdā' wa Al-Talaqqī fī Al-Shi'r Al-Jāhilī*, Ḥasan (2004) analyses the creativity and reception of text in the poetry of the pre-Islamic era. This work consists of a preface followed by four chapters which examine the concept of Reception Theory, poetic creativity in pre-Islamic poetry, the factors involved in this creativity, and, finally, the aesthetics of Reception Theory in pre-Islamic poetry, respectively. Ḥasan argues that many of the elements of this poetic creativity originate from older sources, in particular, ancient legends including *jinn* (demons), prophesy and magic. The second major source of motivation came from the impact of religious factors such as religious poems. Ḥasan claims that the recipient was a major element in this poetic creativity and, therefore, played a major role in the establishment of the most noteworthy stage in the history of Arabic poetry.

Conversely, Ḥūm (2012) claims that the author's role is more important than that of the reader in the process of Reception Theory, by virtue of the former's ability to use the aesthetics of literary forms with perfect craftsmanship of meaning. According to Ḥūm, even though the absence of the reader in this context presents a problem for the author, this absence is not inconsistent with the reader's presence in the mind of the writer at the time of creation. Selecting emotive words, concentrating on conveying meaning, diversifying metrical forms, and applying the figures of rhetoric are all factors that assist the author during the process of text reception.

There are countless studies which endeavour to demonstrate the interest amongst Classical Arabic scholars in the reception of the text and its recipient. One of these, al-Ḥallāq's (1999) *Al-Naṣṣ wa Al-Mumāna'ah- Muqārabāt Naqdiyyah fī Al-'Adab wa Al-'Ibdā'*, centres on interpretation in the Arab mindset and argues that clarity is one of the most important factors concerned with text reception and that the importance of the metaphorical meaning lies in the creator's ability to draw the attention of the reader by employing craftsmanship. Using a stylistic analysis of Classical Arabic literary texts, the study concluded that there are many types of meaning in Arabic discourse, including referential, connotative, descriptive, contextual, literal meaning and *Ma'nā Al-Ma'nā* (the meaning of meaning), which is considered to be the most valuable of the above.

The study also illustrates the sources of Classical Arabic literary aesthetics, for instance the reader's imagination and textual construction. In its findings, the study focuses on the critical opinions of 'Abdulqāhir al-Jurjānī and Ḥāzīm al-Qarṭajannī. The importance of this study arises from proving the interest in reader response in

Classical Arabic criticism. However, al-Ḥallāq does not give any attention to Reception Theory in Western studies or apply any aspects of this to his study.

*Al-Mutalaqqī 'ind Ḍiyā' Al-Dīn ibn Al-'Athīr* is another study that focuses on the recipient in Arabic criticism. Al-Ḥārthī's (2004) Master's dissertation begins with an introduction to highlight the importance of the recipient in the Classical Arabic critical movement, starting with al-Jāḥiẓ. The study follows ibn al-'Athīr's readings of different types of text, viewing him as an expert reader, and also examines the many different levels of reading a text. The research deals with two types of recipients: active and passive. The active reader has an impact on the text by building new meanings from the received text. Conversely, the passive reader is a recipient who relies on the context alone to appreciate the aesthetics of the text. Al-Ḥārthī reflects on the rhetorical devices used by Classical Arabic scholars as a strategy in text reception. It is crucial to take note of the fact that the study confirms ibn al-'Athīr's dependence on some of al-Āmedī's ideas and opinions. The study reveals a number of important findings, such as the importance of the cultural framework of the reader in understanding the text and as a crucial element of the reader's horizon of expectations.

One of the key studies in the field of recipient strategies in Classical Arabic poetry is *Nazariyyat Al-Talaqqī Usūl wa Taṭbiqāt*, by Ṣāliḥ (2001). The importance of this critical study lies in its consistent use of the semiotic method, with Ṣāliḥ linking theory to many modern critical issues, for instance Structuralism, Stylistics and the issue of Modernity. In the second chapter of his book, Ṣāliḥ highlights the fundamental elements of theory in Western studies, noting a close resemblance between the initial stages of literary theory in both Western and Arabic traditions.

He argues that reader response criticism and the aesthetics of Reception Theory are useful ways of approaching literary understanding in the Classical Arabic tradition. Ṣāliḥ reached the conclusion that the role of the reader evolved as a result of the developments which took place in critical doctrines. Thus, doctrines such as Structuralism, Semiotics and Deconstruction, have shattered the authority of the creator of the text; and instead given the reader full authority to fill in any gaps in the text's meaning.

Other literary scholars have examined the impact of these modern Western theories on contemporary Arabic criticism of texts and its critical readings. One of these studies is al-Bāz'ī's (2004) *'Istiqbāl Al-Ākhar Al-Gharbī fī Al-Naqd Al-'Arabī Al-Ḥadīth*, which focuses on how Arabic critics were influenced by the rules and principles of the new critical doctrines. This book is divided into two sections, with the first examining the most important Western literary critics and their contribution to Western criticism. It also evaluates the extent to which the work of these critics helped to transform Western criticism, in particular, theories such as Structuralism which analyse the literary text through its language. The second section examines the extent to which Arab critics have been influenced by these schools of literary criticism, both positively and negatively. The study notes that the concepts of Western criticism posed several problems for these critics, the most important being problematic terminology.

In his article, al-Raḥmūnī (2011) argues that Arabic rhetoric has great significance to both types of recipient, namely, readers and listeners, a conclusion which he arrived at by conducting research into the definitions of Arabic eloquence. Al-Raḥmūnī's work focuses on listeners more than readers, since Arabic criticism was

initially based on the process of listening before texts were recorded in written form. Hence, the research draws parallels between the Arabic aesthetics of listening with the importance of reception, despite the fact that this attempt to make connections is unsystematic, attempting simply to find any reference to the aesthetics of Reception Theory in Classical Arabic criticism.

According to al-Raḥmūnī there is a strong link between the concept of reception and Arabic rhetoric which is apparent in many aspects. In addition, this study makes use of examples from many rhetorical texts to support this idea of the existence of the concept of reception in Arabic Rhetoric. However, it fails to provide any definition of Western Reception Theory and does not address the notion of theory in Western criticism. It is worth noting that reception theory in the West has typically been applied to purely written texts. In the pre-modern Arab tradition, however, all texts – and perhaps particularly poetry – arguably had a strong oral component, and were largely written down to preserve their form for oral performance.

Some studies, such as that by al-‘Allāq (2002), place most of their emphasis on the reception of poetry. His study focuses on contemporary poetry to demonstrate the use of a particular reading techniques, including *Al-Qinā‘* (The Mask) which he claims is one of the most important techniques used in reading modern poetical discourse due to its regular use by many great modern poets such as Ezra Pound, T.S. Eliot and W.B. Yeats. This technique facilitates the expression of the poet’s vision of the world on the one hand, while on the other, it prevents the poet from being dominated by his/her emotions and unique personality. Using this technique is important for readers since this aesthetic value enables them to read the text without

any personal or emotional pressure. Al-‘Allāq’s study is influenced by Socialist philosophy which eliminates the existence of individuality in the text.

However, his study does not focus only on poetic discourse, but also uses some examples drawn from novels due to their poetic qualities and the clear overlap between the genres of poetry and novel. Two types of intertextuality are also dealt with in this study, namely, explicit and implicit. The latter requires a more conscious recipient.

Unfortunately, the links between the two different genres (poetry and novel), which the study tries to justify, remain weak due to the clear presence of different features in each genre. The inclusion of examples from novels also renders the title of the study somewhat misleading since al-‘Allāq suggests he is focusing on poetry and reception.

Al-Yāfi (1999) also studies poetry and reception, but from the perspective of the literary images and rhetorical devices of Arabic poetry. The study defines several levels of text reception and subscribes to some of Iser and Jauss’ views. The study also focuses on Kuwaiti poetry and the impact of the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait by providing some illustrative readings. The movement of Arabic poetry in Syria and Lebanon is also addressed in the study.

The most important part of the study lies in the opening part that deals with the levels of receiving poetic text. However, few connections are made between the other parts of the study and the title, except of course for poetry being the common theme, as it is an assortment of isolated studies.

Through studying different levels of reception, the study produced some substantial findings with innovative readings in the reception of Arabic poetic text coming from the methods used in the interpretation. The study argues that the process of reception of the poetic text in the Arabic worldview does not neglect the relationship between the poet, the text and the reader, meaning that Arabic reception is an integrative process.

However, interpretation is the theme most commonly discussed in the study of Arabic reception and Muftāḥ (1994) is one of the scholars who examines this aspect in considerable depth. His study relies on Arabic rhetoric with the aim of illustrating Arab interest in interpretive reading. The study also tries to illustrate the principles and fundamentals of textual interpretation in Arabic thought. The study also attempts to clarify the efforts of the Classical Maghrebi rhetorical scholars such as al-Qayrawānī in analysing text and highlighting their ability in interpretation.

In addition, the study shows that the approach used in their interpretation still exists and continues to be used in many linguistic studies. It accentuates the importance of interpretation in reading Arabic discourse due to the richness of the Arabic text and its imaginative meanings. Moreover, it emphasises that historical and social context are crucial factors in determining how texts are interpreted.

Indeterminacy of meaning is also one of the interests of the Classical Arabic rhetorical scholars. Attempts have been made to limit this indeterminacy by setting out conditions and terminology for the text during writing or reading. The purpose behind making these rules was not only to limit the diversity of interpretations but also maintain social cohesion. The study examines the impact of discourse on Classical Maghrebi society and tries to link it to developments within this society.

‘Athar Al-Mutalaqqī fī Al-Tashkīl Al-Uslūbī fī Al-Balāghah Al-‘Arabiyyah’ shows that readers play a crucial role in establishing the literary text in Arabic rhetoric and argues that the concept of context of situation<sup>2</sup> can be found in Arabic rhetoric over a thousand years ago, and was known as *al-Maqām*. According to al-Qaṣṣāb (2011) there are three indications of the presence of interest in recipients in Arabic rhetoric; first, the function of literature is to educate people, teach them Arabic and spread wisdom and good morals. Secondly, rhetoric favours clarity and avoids ambiguity in the literary phrase, in order to convey meaning to the recipient without complexity. The third indication is that rhetoric requires high quality literary text, and attention to the selection of words and phrases in addition to applying them in an elegant manner so as to attract readers.

### 1.7.2 Critical Studies on Al-Āmedī’s Kitāb Al-Muwāzanah

A number of studies have focused on al-Āmedī’s *Kitāb Al-Muwāzanah*. One of these is Ḥumūd (2007) comparative study entitled *Muwāzanat Al-Āmedī wa Wasāʾat Al-Jurjānī*. Despite the significant differences between these two works by al-Āmedī and al-Jurjānī, the study attempts to examine not only these differences but also their similarities. Whilst al-Āmedī compared the poets Abū Tammām and al-Buḥturī in his study, al-Jurjānī focused on critical opinion regarding the poems of al-Mutanabī. In addition, to presenting al-Āmedī’s critical background, Ḥumūd also provides a brief overview of the state of Arabic criticism in the fourth century AH. His study also discusses al-Āmedī’s aims in *Kitāb Al-Muwāzanah* and his method. It also focuses on critical issues such as *al-sariqāt al-shi‘riyyah* (poetic plagiarism), *al-Lafẓ wa al-Ma‘nā* (Word Versus Meaning) and the issue of ‘*amūd Al-shi‘r*’.

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<sup>2</sup> Bronislaw Malinowski’s concept of “context of situation,” examines the relations between language use and social interaction. This first appeared in *Coral Gardens and their Magic* (1935).

Despite the author's obvious admiration for al-Āmedī's approach, this study is contradictory in its judgment of his work, referring to him in one place as an objective critic whilst at another, Ḥumūd accuses him of being a biased critic of one of the poets. Moreover, the study does not discuss any aspect of Reception Theory. Nonetheless, it is important as it contains significant information on *Al-Muwāzanah*, al-Āmedī's cultural framework and the state of Arabic criticism at the time the two authors were writing.

Like the previous study, Maṣābīḥ's (2009) work also finds fault with the approaches of both al-Āmedī and al-Jurjānī in their respective works, *Al-Muwāzanah* and *Al-Wasāṭah*. Maṣābīḥ divides the study of Classical Arabic criticism into three stages: traditional criticism, methodological criticism and practical criticism, and contends that some of al-Āmedī's critical opinions are based on Reader Response criticism, rather than on a practical approach. In the researcher's view, using this framework, al-Āmedī could be considered to be one of the founders of practical criticism.

Other studies on *Al-Muwāzanah* include 'Qaḍiyyat Al-Lafz wa Al-Ma'nā min Khilāl *Al-Muwāzanah* bayna Shi'r Abī Tammām wa al-Buḥturī' (Al-Futūḥ, 2012). This study focuses on the issue of the literal meaning of the book and cites the work of al-Āmedī on these issues.

Only two studies link *Al-Muwāzanah* to the use of Reception Theory. The first is 'Ufuq Al-Talaqqī Al-Naqdī ladā Al-Āmedī: *Al-Muwāzanah* Namūdhajan' (Khalūfah, 2007). This study describes al-Āmedī's stages of reading by examining his horizon of expectations and the extent to which he interacted with the creativity of poets. Khalūfah argues that al-Āmedī was not able to deal with the poems of Abū Tammām and justifies this opinion by stating that al-Āmedī's approach was

dependent on Arabic Classical styles, meaning that this method cannot address the new style adopted by Abū Tammām. Khalūfah is also of the opinion that al-Āmedī was biased towards al-Buḥturī in that he prefers *al-ṭab* ' (natural talent) to *al-ṣṣan* 'ah (craftsmanship). This study demonstrates that *'amūd al-shi* 'r represents the literary norm that poets must conform to in *Al-Muwāzanah*. This study neglected the role of al-Āmedī's cultural and scientific background, and the impact of the state of Arabic criticism in the fourth century AH on his method of receiving literary texts but it opens the door to more critical research on this theme.

Būghanūṭ (2011) holds that al-Āmedī, like many other traditional critics, attempts to enforce the concept of the implied reader *'amūd al-shi* 'r as a method of text reception. Moreover, *'amūd al-shi* 'r embodies the old concept of the implied reader as it contains the principles and rules that formed the model of the literary text.<sup>3</sup>

Overall, these previous studies are useful, whether in agreement or disagreement with the approach taken here in this thesis, since the presence of a range of opinions gives the study a balance and hence, its results may be more acceptable. The most important points which emerged from the previous studies are that there is no study in English on Reception Theory in Arabic literature and that only a small number of studies addressed the theory through *Al-Muwāzanah*, highlighting the need for this study.

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<sup>3</sup> For more detail about the concepts of implied reader and *'amūd al-shi* 'r, see Chapter three.

# **FROM THE DEATH OF THE AUTHOR TO THE BIRTH OF THE READER: SITUATING RECEPTION THEORY IN WESTERN LITERARY CRITICISM**

## **1.1 Introduction**

In Western tradition, literary text has typically been interpreted using any one of a number of approaches drawn from such disciplines as linguistics, psychology, sociology, and history, all of which relate to the author as an individual. Each one of these approaches claims to reveal a specific aspect of the human experience and conceives of the author as being the creator of a text which reflects his/her own unique experience. In these approaches, the author is considered to be more important than the text, and even less attention is paid to the concept of the reader.

In his now famous essay which announced “The Death of the Author”, French literary critic and theorist Roland Barthes noted the extent to which the author has tended to be viewed as being of key importance in literary studies, dominating even the literary text itself:

The author still reigns in histories of literature, biographies of writers, interviews, magazines, as in the very consciousness of men of letters anxious to unite their person and their work through diaries and memoirs. (1977: 143)

Originally published in the late 1960s, Barthes’ essay reflects the shift in critical approaches to literary texts which had taken place over the course of the twentieth century including the emergence of so-called New Criticism in the West. This new critical understanding redefined the concepts of author and reader, and even of text itself. The author’s claims to influence and ultimate authority over the text as its sole creator were challenged. As the reign of the author came to an end, the text was

liberated and granted autonomous status. Freeing the text in this way also opened it up to various methods of interpretation and shifted emphasis to the role of the reader as receiver of the text.

This chapter will focus on those disciplines, movements, schools and theories that made a major contribution to producing this revolution in critical thinking about literary texts which was to have a significant impact on the establishment of Reception Theory, the approach which is of central importance in this study.

## **1.2 Towards Reception Theory**

### **1.2.1 Ferdinand de Saussure**

An approach which focused primarily on the language of texts, placing this at the primary level of critical understanding, was particularly influential in the establishment of movements and philosophies such as the Russian Formalists (in particular, the Prague Linguistic School), Structuralism, and Marxist theories. These developments are usually most closely associated with the work of Ferdinand de Saussure whose importance is highlighted by Harris:

No one writing about Saussure today needs to take on the task of establishing the historical importance of Saussurean ideas; for that has already been established beyond question and many times over. Saussure's influence, direct and indirect, dominates the twentieth-century development of those academic disciplines devoted to the study of language, languages and analysis of text. (2001: 01)

Saussure's impact was also felt in philosophy and in the sciences (Holdcroft, 1991: 04) but his influence is most strongly linked to linguistics and literary criticism, more specifically critical theories, such as Structuralism and Semiotics. Both of these can be traced to ideas originally put forward by Saussure in his lectures published as *Cours de linguistique générale* [Course in General Linguistics] (1916).

One of the best known passages in Saussure's work is the analogy which he draws between language and the game of chess, considering them both to be systems:

As the game of chess is entirely in the combination of the different chess pieces, language is characterized as a system based entirely on the opposition of its concrete units. We can neither dispense with becoming acquainted with them nor take a single step without coming back to them; and still, delimiting them in such a delicate problem that we may wonder at first whether they really exist. (1983: 107)

David Holdcroft explores Saussure's use of the chess game analogy to illustrate the importance of language as a system:

[Saussure] does not expand on this claim, but presumably what he has in mind is the fact that to learn how to play chess someone has to learn what the point of the game is, what the relative weights of the pieces are, and what their legitimate moves are. Moreover, none of these things would seem to be determined by external exigencies or designed to achieve an ulterior purpose; they are internal to the game in the sense that they depend on the nature of the game itself and nothing else. (1991: 78)

Just like the pieces in a game of chess, each unit of language has a specific location with its own individual role. Any change in the place of a unit also leads to a significant change in its function. Thus, the value of each linguistic unit depends on its position within the text, and every word in the text is important, subject to its position in the context. Saussure's idea of studying language as an independent system is a development which later influenced the ideas of Structuralism, particularly when viewing language as a number of units which form the overall vision of the text.

This idea led Saussure to consider the units of language which made up the text, and to conclude that:

The statement that everything in language is negative is true only if the signified and the signifier are considered separately; when we consider the

sign in its totality, we have something that is positive in its own class. A linguistic system is a series of differences of sound combined with a series of differences of ideas; but the pairing of a certain number of acoustical signs with as many cuts made from the mass of thought engenders a system of values; and this system serves as the effective link between the phonic and psychological elements within each sign. (1983: 120)

Saussure talks of the need for a comprehensive integrated study of both parts of the language system, which he refers to as the signified and the signifier. Furthermore, he recognises that the relationship between these two elements is significant. This idea created a new critical approach which views the text as a linguistic document composed of various elements, each having its own value. As Jonathan Culler explains, this approach to reading the text entailed trying to focus on the text's meaning based on its language as the link that connects all of these elements, maintaining it in isolation from its historical and social context, or as he puts it: "The link between language and mind had to be broken for a time – and language had to be studied as an object itself. It had to be treated, temporarily, as a system of forms with no special relation to mind" (1976: 59).

Here Culler encourages readers to focus solely on discovering the language itself, not as a system which builds and gathers the text units but as the purpose of reading the text. This approach is beneficial in the fields of pure linguistic studies. However, critical studies have been influenced by this linguistic knowledge which contributed to the development of the methods of literary criticism.

In his work, Saussure discusses a broad range of issues including linguistic value, the mechanism of language, the distinction between the linguistics of language (*langue*) and of speech (*parole*), and language as a system of signs. It can therefore be said that many of the principles and concepts originally outlined by Saussure at the start of the twentieth century, such as diachronicity and synchronicity, entity,

unit, sign (the basis of semiotics) and phoneme had a major influence not only on Western linguistics but also on literary criticism.

### 1.2.2 The Russian Formalists: Viktor Shklovsky and Roman Jakobson

Saussure's idea of viewing literary text as a piece of language that could be analysed using appropriate tools was taken up by the Russian formalists who advocated the transformation of literary theory in 1917 when Viktor Shklovsky published his essay *Art as Device*. Along with Shklovsky, the most prominent thinkers of Russian Formalism are considered to be Boris Eichenbaum, Boris Tomashkevsky, Yuri Tynyanov and Roman Jakobson who later became a member of the Prague School.<sup>4</sup> Formalists' principles and their method of interpreting literary text were crystallised in Shklovsky's *Art as Device*, which explains how to use language in a literary way by creating "defamiliarization".<sup>5</sup> Shklovsky states that the purpose of literary language "is not to make us perceive meaning, but to create a special perception of the object - it creates a vision of the object instead of serving as a means for knowing it" (Lemon and Reis, 1965: 18). According to Shklovsky, making objects unfamiliar enables readers to see them in a new and unexpected way. Therefore defamiliarization makes the literary text attractive to readers as it creates an element of surprise and encourages them to search for the causes of this in the text. The reader is then in a position to engage with text.

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4 As a movement, Formalism arose together with Russian Futurism which had emerged in opposition to Russian Symbolism. This artistic movement was influenced by Italian Futurist Filippo Marinetti's "Futurist Manifesto" (1909). Russian Futurists compared the words in poetry to the colours used as a medium by artists and believed that a writer's prowess lay in his/her method of mixing and arranging words (Rice and Waugh, 1996 :16).

5 The Russian word he used is "ostranenie" or literally, making strange.

For Formalists, artistic technique is not intended to deliver meaning as much as it is to make readers look at the familiar in a new light. Shklovsky discussed how Leo Tolstoy employed “defamiliarization” as an artistic technique in his writing.

After we see an object several times, we begin to recognize it. The object is in front of us and we know it, but we do not see it, hence we cannot say anything significant about it. Art removes objects from the automatism of perception in several ways [...] Tolstoy makes the familiar seem strange by not naming the familiar objects. He describes an object as if he were seeing it for the first time, an event as if it were happening for the first time. In describing something, he avoids the accepted names of its part and instead names corresponding parts of other objects. (ibid: 13)

Shklovsky’s essay played a crucial role in the transformation of criticism. The relationship between the language of the text and its process of interpretation has without a doubt been changed by defamiliarization. Defamiliarization opens the text up to the reader rather than the author.

Russian Formalists examined the language of the literary text in isolation from its thematic content in order to find out how the author had constructed the text; they became fixated on examining the arrangement of the words in the literary text. In short, their interests lay in analysing **how** poets and novelists wrote, not **what** they wrote about. As Peretc<sup>6</sup> has observed: “One must always bear in mind that in literary history the object of investigation is not what the authors are saying but how they are saying it” (Erlich, 1965: 56). Indeed it could be argued that the Formalists’ method reflects the inherent relationship between theory and practice since the formation of theories is based on collecting the phenomena of a practice and analysing them.

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<sup>6</sup> Vladimir Nikolaevič Peretc (1870-1935) was an eminent historian of Russian medieval literature.

More specifically, this method of reading literature opened up two new perspectives on the text: the first highlighted the analysis of the author's creativity in terms of his/her use of literary language, the second placed emphasis on the reader and his/her ability to perceive the aesthetics of the text.

With the passage of time, the idea of looking at the impact of craftsmanship on the literary text evolved among the Russian Formalists until they began to classify language as literary or practical, the purpose of the latter being to enable effective communication among members of a community which is generally understood to be the core function of language. However, there are no words that are used exclusively in literature, words themselves being the same in both practical and literary types of language. They argued that the differences between literary and practical language are implicit in the types, combinations, and arrangement of words in the text:

One might apply this fairly easily to a writer such as Gerard Manley Hopkins, whose language is difficult in a way which draws attention to itself as literary, but it is also easy to show that there is no intrinsically literary language. Opening Hardy's *Under the Greenwood Tree* at random, we read the exchange "How long will you be?" "Not long. Do wait and talk to me." There is absolutely no linguistic reason to regard the words as "literary". We read them as literary rather than as an act of communication only because we read them in what we take to be a literary work. (Selden, 1997: 32)

Thus, critical schools have tended to analyse what makes literary language literary, which features distinguish it from other types of expression, leading some critics to focus on the form and others on meaning. Formalist theory adopts the former position, namely that literary language can be distinguished from non-literary language in terms of the quality of its construction. In this respect, Formalists considered poetry to be: "the quintessentially literary use of language: it is speech

organized in its entire phonic texture. Its most important constructive factor is rhythm” (ibid: 32).

At this stage, literary criticism focused on the text as language and meaning, and was already treating the text as having a form of independence from the author. Increasingly, critical and linguistic studies began to concentrate on the language of the text and language functions. Together with fellow countryman, Petr Bogatyrev, Roman Jakobson, one of the key Russian Formalists, helped to found what later became known as the Prague School of linguistic theory in 1926. At this stage, Jakobson began to concentrate on the functions of language through his analysis of communication as a language system and he identified six different communication functions that are connected to both the sender and the recipient: referential, emotive, conative, phatic, metalingual and poetic. According to Jakobson, these functions vary in importance, the poetic one being of key importance:

The poetic function is not the sole function of verbal art but only its dominant, determining function, whereas in all other verbal activities it acts as a subsidiary, accessory constituent. This function, by promoting the palpability of signs, deepens the fundamental dichotomy of signs and objects. Hence, when dealing with the poetic function, linguistics cannot limit itself to the field of poetry. (cited in Sebeok, 1960: 356)

Jakobson’s identification of the poetic function of language in communication between sender and receiver also proved to be another essential step in the process of shifting the focus from the author to the reader.

Jakobson also studies the six factors he says determine the functions of language: the addresser, message, addressee, context, code, and contact:

The **addresser** sends a **message** to the **addressee**. To be operative the message requires a **context** referred to (‘referent’ in another, somewhat ambiguous, nomenclature), graspable by the addressee, and either verbal or

capable of being verbalized; a **code** fully, or at least partially, common to the addresser and addressee (or in other words, to the encoder and decoder of the message); and, finally, a **contact**, a physical channel and psychological connection between the addresser and the addressee, enabling both of them to enter into and stay in communication. (ibid: 353)

Here, Jakobson develops the idea of the speaking-circuit which was proposed by Saussure (1983: 11-13). According to this notion, the message starts from the sender's brain and goes into the receiver's ear through physiological transmission. Basing his ideas on Saussure's speaking-circuit, Jakobson demonstrates how the message forms inside the sender's mind, and how it then reaches the receiver. It can therefore be said that, this school of thought raised awareness about authors' ability to give meaning to a text. Using elements of linguistic communication theory, it was possible to consider how meaning was conveyed from the author's mind to that of the reader. Applying this model to understanding literary communication prompted critics to view these factors separately, in the process creating the three major types of emphasis which were to persist in literary criticism for several decades. One grouping of critics focused on the role of the author, analysing the individual writer's style. A second set of critics were more interested in exploring the role of the text and examining its linguistic aspects. This group contributed to the development of structuralism and post-structuralism. It was not until sometime later that a new critical school would emerge which finally focused on the role of the reader, namely, Reception Theory.

### 1.2.3 **Barthes, Eco and the Role of the Reader**

Structuralism is one of the most influential critical theories in the history of Western literary criticism. Like Russian Formalism, it was influenced by the development of Saussure's and Jakobson's ideas, and its main interest lies in the form of the text

rather than the content. As Rice and Waugh note: “Structuralism is not particularly interested in meaning *per se*, but rather in attempting to describe and understand the conventions and modes of signification which make it possible to mean; that is, it seeks to discover the conditions of meaning” (1996: 22-23).

Structuralist studies contributed greatly to reducing the author’s authority over the text, as they viewed interpretation in terms of reading literary text as an open document. In this way, the reader is able to engage with the text through its language. As previously noted, one of the most prominent thinkers of structuralism is Roland Barthes whose essay, entitled “The Death of the Author” (1968), proved to be immensely influential in the development of reader-centred thinking.

Barthes notes that he is not the first to have written about the “death of the author”, and cites the French poet Stéphane Mallarmé as being one of the first advocates for liberating text from its author, on the grounds that the text expresses itself through its language, poetics and aesthetics. In his essay, Barthes argues:

It is language which speaks, not the author: to write is to reach, through a pre-existing impersonality – never to be confused with the castrating objectivity of the realistic novelist – that point where language alone acts, “performs,” and not “oneself”: Mallarmé’s entire poetics consists of suppressing the author for the sake of the writing.(1977: 143)

Here Barthes revives Mallarmé’s concept and refines it, applying Saussure’s idea; according to which the recipient must treat the text as a language system.

Barthes’ essay have been interpreted in at least three ways. Some critics have equated the death of the author with the revival of the text; others have argued that the death of the author signifies the birth of the reader; whilst a third group maintain that Barthes’ declaration was premature and that the author is still alive and well. The debate among Western critics regarding the relative importance of reader- and

author-centred approaches has lingered on, despite the influence of the ideas of structuralist theorists such as Barthes and Umberto Eco. Gough has also ironically suggested that the critic deserves greater attention: “If there are given rules, we might decide that the critic is given a higher importance than the author, since the former is more industrious in exposing the structuralist truth in texts or narratives” (1997: 230).

Barthes’ proclamation of the Death of the Author finds its parallels in the work of German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche who had declared “the Death of God”, in the nineteenth century. Nietzsche was reacting against the despotism of the Church, which obliged people to follow rules which it had ordained, in this sense meaning the Church suppressed the role of the receiver. Therefore, in order to give people the right to question the authority of the Church, there was need for a revolution in thinking. By comparing these two concepts, the idea of the death of the author can be redefined as the revolution against the authority of the author and the freeing up of the text to multiple interpretations discovered in its own contents and poetics. Barthes elaborated on this point:

Literature<sup>7</sup> (it would be better from now on to say writing), by refusing to assign a secret, an ultimate meaning, to the text (and to the world as text), liberates an activity that may be called an anti-theological activity, that is truly revolutionary since to refuse to fix meaning is, in the end to refuse God and his hypostases - reason, science, the law. (Barthes, 1977: 147)

This revolution gives the reader the freedom to enter into dialogue with the literary text.

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<sup>7</sup> Barthes explains his specific understanding of the terms “author”, “writer”, “literature” and “writing” in another of his essays entitled “Authors and Writers”. He defines literature as “the body of the projects and decisions which lead a man (the author) to fulfil himself” (Barthes, R. 1972. *Critical essays*. Evanston Ill.: Northwestern University Press.188). See page 188.

Barthes' comments on the importance which has typically been placed on the role of the author in various artistic fields:

The image of literature to be found in contemporary culture is tyrannically centred on the author, his person, his history, his tastes, his passions; criticism still consists, most of the time, in saying that Baudelaire's work is the failure of the man Baudelaire, Van Gogh's work his madness, Tchaikovsky's his vice: the explanation of the work is always sought in the man who has produced it, as if, through the more or less transparent allegory of fiction, it was always finally the voice of one and the same person, the author, which delivered his confidence. (ibid: 143)

For Barthes, the authority of the author does not exceed that of the text and the author cannot defend his/her views or purposes because he/she has become less important than the text from the point of view of the reader. Barthes attempts to exclude the effect of both the author and of literary history when dealing with text, aiming to detect patterns in acoustic, morphological and stylistic structures, regardless of what was written by the author. Instead his focus lay in answering the question of how it was said.

A text is made of multiple writings, drawing from many cultures and entering into mutual relations of dialogue, parody, contestation; but there is one place where this multiplicity is focused, and that place is the reader, not, as was hitherto said the author. The reader is the space on which all the citations that make up writing are inscribed, without any of them being lost; a text's unity lies not in its origin but in its destination. Yet, this destination cannot any longer be personal: the reader is without history, biography, psychology; he is simply that someone who holds together in a single field all the traces of which the written text is constituted. (ibid: 148)

Barthes viewed the reader as an empty vessel into which all the information and experiences provided by the text are poured. Here Barthes stresses the important role of the reader in interpreting the text as he/she wishes. Building on the work of

Saussure and Jakobson, Barthes emphasised the primacy of the text and the need for this to be interpreted independently by the reader, freed from the constraints that culture's insistence on the prime importance of the author-text relationship had traditionally imposed.

Gough summarises the implications of the death of the author for literary critics in the following terms:

The text is the bearer of its meaning. It is an object in its own right, an entity persisting over time separately from any person and it is open to viewing and interpretation by the eyes of all and sundry, open to the author no more than anyone else, the same object to anyone who understands the language in which it is written. (Gough, 1997: 230)

These ideas also influenced the work of Italian semiotician, literary critic and writer, Umberto Eco, who created the concept of *opera aperta* or open text, in which he envisages the reader having direct access to interpreting the text without needing to have regard for the authority of the writer. His critical approach is based on semiotics and he emphasises the reader's response to the text. Eco's essay "The Role of The Reader" (1979) is one of his most influential pieces of writing, and it is here that he coins the term "model reader". Eco claims that:

To make his text communicative, the author has to assume that the ensemble of codes he relies upon is the same as that shared by his possible reader. The author has thus to foresee a model of the possible reader (hereafter Model Reader) supposedly able to deal interpretively with the expressions in the same way as the author deals generatively with them. (Eco, 1979: 07)

Eco thus views the text as a collaboration between the author and the reader, with each having their own function. The role of the author is to generate meaning and that of the reader is to interpret this code, but he/she is free to read or respond to the text as he/she wishes, without viewing the author as its sole owner. As the next

section of this chapter will show, the founders of Reception Theory in German studies were greatly influenced by Eco's views.

### **1.3 Reception Theory (*Rezeptionsästhetik*)**

#### **1.3.1 Hans Robert Jauss and the Horizon of Expectation**

The late 1960s and early 1970s marked the beginning of *Rezeptionsästhetik* (literally, reception aesthetics), normally known as Reception Theory. This was a product of the University of Konstanz, and the two German academics, Hans Robert Jauss and Wolfgang Iser, are two of the most important founding members of this theoretical school. In 1967, Jauss delivered his inaugural lecture entitled "What is, and to what end does one study literary history?" deliberately echoing the title of Friedrich Schiller's own inaugural lecture delivered May 26 1789 "What is, and to what end does one study universal history?" In it Jauss described the impact of history on our understanding of the present and called for a new approach to literary studies.

There had been other attempts at discussing this topic, most notably an article by Harald Weinrich, entitled '*für eine Literaturgeschichte des Lesers*' (For a Literary History of the Reader) and Iser's lecture, "Indeterminacy and the Reader's Response in Prose Fiction". In his lecture Jauss compared Marxist and Formalist viewpoints on the interpretation of literary texts, arguing that the former are interested in looking into the text's meaning, whereas the latter consider form and poetics. Jauss, however, proposed a new method of understanding a literary text, *Rezeptionsästhetik*, which focuses on the text's impact on its recipient (Selden, 1995: 319-320).

Every theory has its roots and its precursors and, in the case of Reception Theory, Holub notes that these include Russian formalism, Prague school structuralism, the phenomenology of Roman Ingarden, Hans-Georg Gadamer's hermeneutics, as well as approaches from the sociology of literature (1984: 14). Holub also highlights much older connections, drawing links between Reception Theory and ideas expressed by Aristotle concerning audience response:

Aristotle's *Poetics*, by its inclusion of catharsis as a central category of aesthetic experience, may be considered the earliest illustration of a theory in which audience response plays a major role. In fact, the entire tradition of rhetoric and its relationship to poetic theory can likewise be viewed as a precursor by virtue of its focus on the impact of oral and written communication on the listener or reader. (ibid: 12) <sup>8</sup>

Given that Arab thought in the Abbasid era was greatly influenced by the ideas of Aristotle, this may be one of the reasons for the emergence of the interest in audience reception in Arabic rhetoric. This idea is explored in greater depth in Chapter Three.

Jauss created the concept of the "horizon of expectation" as the basis of Reception Theory, and he also draws on Gadamer's hermeneutic concept with its focus on the three acts of the hermeneutic process: understanding, interpretation and application (1982: 139). Moreover, the importance of applying historical knowledge to our understanding of the present also forms one of the most important and influential factors in Jauss' ideology.

Jauss links the idea of the horizon of expectation with the process of text interpretation. He does this by relying on the reader's literary knowledge and linguistic background. This relationship adds clarity to the theory as they provide readers with specific principles that aid them in their interpretation of the text.

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<sup>8</sup> In *Poetics* Aristotle was specifically concerned with drama, focusing mainly on tragedy.

Moreover, Jauss emphasised the importance of the reader acquiring prior knowledge regarding the literary genre being read. Selden explains Jauss' method thus:

Jauss suggests three ways to objectify the horizon of works that are historically less sharply delineated. First, one could employ normative standards associated with the genre. Second, one could examine the work against other familiar works in its literary heritage or in historical surroundings. Finally, one can establish a horizon by distinguishing between fiction and reality, between the poetic and practical function of language, a distinction that is available to the reader at any historical moment. (1995: 323)

Jauss reiterates the importance of establishing the horizon of expectation and then assessing the aesthetic distance between the individual work and this horizon, as this is the process which allows critical readers to make their assessment of the quality of the text (ibid: 323). This concept of "aesthetic distance" helps to differentiate between three reader reactions. In the first instance, the reader finds the piece of writing is composed according to known aesthetic standards and conforms to his/her expectations. In this case, inherited aesthetic norms are invoked and replicated to constitute a sort of artistic tradition, and preserve its aesthetic heritage based on the historical value of literature. In this case the literary reception is coupled with satisfaction and even a sense of euphoria caused by the aesthetic pleasure which is characteristic of texts with inherited aesthetic traditions. The result is what Barthes (1976) refers to as the Pleasure of the Text.

In the second case, there is a conflict between a new work of literature and the familiar and customary horizon of expectations. This is the reason why some new works are initially found to be unacceptable for a while. They lack a receptive community due to their new style and/or themes, their altered function, or their innovation in terms of genre. For these reasons, they seem so odd when they first

appear that the audience is disappointed and gets a feeling of dissatisfaction and dysphoria; unlike when the work lies within the recipient's horizon of expectations.

In the third case, the new aesthetic standards of the work manage to establish a new horizon of expectations that acquires its own artistic credit which is dialectically related to contemporary questions and concerns. This can happen when there is a group of readers with sufficient open-mindedness and intellect to accept this new horizon and appreciate it. Thus, their horizon of expectations as well as their literary repertoire is gradually expanded (Ḥamīd, 2005).

In addition, Jauss' theory opens up the study of specific literary readings and of reading strategies and also introduces the concept of different types of readers, including the super-reader who "is not only equipped with the sum total of literary historical knowledge available today, but is also capable of consciously registering every aesthetic impression and referring it back to the text's structure of effect" (1982: 144).

### 1.3.2 Wolfgang Iser and the Role of the Reader

Iser is perhaps most associated with the concept of the implied reader and although he does not focus on this idea in *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response* (1980), this term has gained the attention of many critics and scholars. For Iser, the purpose of the implied reader is to bridge the gap between the text and the reader in new ways through the interactive model of reading (Selden, 1995: 330). According to his original definition, in his book *The implied reader: patterns of communication in prose fiction from Bunyan to Beckett*, this concept incorporates "both the pre-structuring of the potential meaning by the text, and the reader's actualization of this potential through the reading process" (Iser, 1974: xii).

Jauss and Iser are representatives of the two branches of the Konstanz School, the main difference between their works being that Jauss was greatly influenced by hermeneutics, whereas Iser was more interested in the work of Polish theorist Roman Ingarden on the role of the reader in the production of the text's meaning.

In his work, Ingarden distinguishes four strata or layers of meaning within a literary work:

The phonetic stratum (2) the semantic stratum (3) the stratum of objectivities represented by purely intentional states of things defined by the meanings of sentences, and (4) the stratum of schematized aspects by means of which represented objectivities of the work become manifest. (1973: 12)

The literary work is thus framed by these strata and Ingarden views the completion of these and hence the production of meaning as being the reader's responsibility (Selden, 1995: 298).

According to Zhonggang:

The stratum which functions as the transition to the meaning intention is of great importance for the aesthetic value of the work. The stratum of meanings makes it possible for the author/poet to infuse a literary work with his intentions and for readers to infer the meanings of the work. In addition, understanding a sentence means actualizing the meaning intentions in that sentence. (2006: 48)

For Iser, Ingarden's "interactive model" of reading, in which "the convergence of text and reader brings the literary work into existence" served as the basis of Reception Theory. Iser further notes that this text-reader convergence "can never be precisely pinpointed, but must always remain virtual, as it is not to be identified either with reality of the text or with individual disposition of the reader" (1974: 274).

According to Iser, the reader is able to create the meaning of the literary text by interacting with it without any external influences, and through a process of filling in

the gaps (*Leerstelle*)<sup>9</sup> which can take several forms. At its most basic level, this process involves merely connecting various segments in a text. Thus, a plot will break off at one point in a novel and resume at a later time, at which point the reader is called upon to fill in the gap by supplying missing information about what occurred interim (Selden, 1995: 333). Here, in Iser's adoption of Ingarden's notion of gap filling, it can be seen that each reader applies what he/she knows when supplying the missing information, and in this sense, participates with the author in the creation of meaning.

This process of gap-filling may lead to the single meaning originally owned by the author being transformed into multiple meanings from various sources. Ingarden observes that literary works of art contain a great deal of indeterminacy, and argues that this lack of determinacy is not accidental as it is necessary for the literary text (1973: 51). Iser also highlights the need for the author to avoid filling in all the gaps in the text:

The author of the text may, of course, exert plenty of influences on the reader's imagination – he has the whole panoply of narrative techniques at his disposal – but no author worth his salt will ever attempt to set the whole picture before his reader's eyes. If he does, he will quickly lose his reader, for it is only by activating the reader's imagination that the author can hope to involve him and realize the intentions of his text. (1974: 282)

According to Iser's idea of "realization", the interpretation of literary text is more the reader's responsibility than the author's, and this understanding opens up the literary text to multiple readings and interpretations. Iser made use of an analogy to illustrate the multiplicity of readings offered by texts which contain indeterminacy:

Two people gazing at the night sky may both be looking at the same collection of stars, but one will see the image of a plough, and the other will

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<sup>9</sup> The original German word literally means "empty place".

make out a dipper. The “stars” in a literary text are fixed; the lines that join them are variable. (1974: 282)

The role of the horizon of expectations is to help limit the indeterminacy of meaning and to create a balance between the multiplicity of interpretations. In other words, the horizon of expectations can be said to help prevent the chaos of interpretation that can occur as a result of multiple interpretations of the text.

#### **1.4 Conclusion**

This chapter has shown the shift which has occurred in the nature of the relationship between the author and the reader in Western thought, meaning that the literary text is no longer subject to the sole authority of the author. Instead, it is seen as the beneficiary of the author’s creativity and the reader’s skills and knowledge. The reader is thus the main object of the author’s work and the author’s role is to strive to activate the reader’s imagination in order for his/her literary work to have an impact.

On the other hand, Reception Theory, and Iser’s work in particular, has had a significant influence on non-European literary critics and theorists. Within the West, a clear example of this influence can be found in the famous argument between Iser and Stanley Fish that erupted when the American critic wrote an unfavourable review of Iser’s *Act of Reading* (1980). Books about Reception Theory and Reader-Response Theory have only reached the Middle East in Arabic translation relatively recently. Examples of important texts which have appeared include Iser’s *Act of Reading*, translated by ‘Abdulwahāb ‘Allūb in 2000, Gadamer’s *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, translated by Moḥammad Shawqī al-Zayn in 2006, and Jauss’ *Towards an Aesthetic of Reception*, translated by Rashīd Binḥadū in 2004. In addition, Holub’s work which offers a critical introduction to Reception Theory was

translated by 'Izz al-Dīn Ismā'īl in 2000. A more detailed discussion of the impact of these translations on contemporary Arab literary criticism follows in Chapter Three.

# Conceptualising the Recipient in Classical and Contemporary Arabic Literary Criticism

## 1.1 Introduction

This chapter focuses on four important issues. It begins by examining the interest in recipients in Classical Arabic rhetoric and goes on to map the concept of literary reception during the Classical period. It also considers why literary reception did not develop into a fully-fledged theory; and concludes by assessing the relationship between these concepts and Western Reception Theory. It will also explore how Reception Theory has been interpreted by contemporary Arabic critics, and the ways in which they have endeavoured to link this with Classical Arabic rhetoric.

Before beginning this discussion, it is important to clarify the terminology used in Classical Arabic rhetoric to refer to the term of *al-mutalaqqī* (recipient), such as *al-qāri*' (reader), *al-sāmi*' (listener) and *al-mukhāṭab* (addressee). In spite of the fact that the origin of the word *al-mutalaqqī* lies in the Holy Qur'ān,<sup>10</sup> Classical Arabic scholars of rhetoric did not initially use this term frequently. The word *al-qāri*' also came into use but was not popular among rhetoricians, especially in the early period of establishing Arabic rhetoric as a discipline. The term which was most frequently used to indicate the third component of the process of literary communication was *al-mukhāṭab*. Indeed, this term was later employed by many schools of Classical

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10 The root of *al-mutalaqqī* is *talaqqā* which is found in several Qur'anic verses. For example:

قال تعالى (فتلقى آدم من ربه كلمات فتاب عليه إنه هو التواب الرحيم)

Allah said: Then Adam received Words from his Lord, and his Lord relented towards him. He is Oft-Returning with compassion and is Merciful. Al-Baqarāh. v: 37.

Arabic rhetorical studies, and was particularly popular during the codification<sup>11</sup> stage, especially after the division of the rhetorical disciplines into *ʿIlm al-bayān* (figures of speech), *ʿIlm al-maʿānī* (semantics), and *ʿIlm al-badīʿ* (embellishments). Given that, at the time, literary texts were oral performances, it was natural that the word *al-sāmiʿ* should have been the most commonly used of these terms, and rhetoricians such as ibn Qutaybah,<sup>12</sup> al-Jāhiz,<sup>13</sup> Abū Ḥayyān al-Tawḥīdī<sup>14</sup> and ʿAbdulqāhir al-Jurjānī<sup>15</sup> all made use of it in their respective foundational works on Arabic rhetoric.

## 1.2 The Centrality of the Literary Recipient in Classical Arabic Rhetoric

### 1.2.1 The Emergence of the Recipient

Since Classical Arabic rhetoricians were particularly interested in literary reception, the role played by the recipient in the process of literary creation was of major importance to them. Given that it can be argued that one of the main aims of rhetoric is to ensure discourse is compatible with context, then rhetoric is concerned with how meaning is communicated to listeners or readers, and the extent to which this should be pitched at their level of understanding, taking into account both their psychological and ideological state. The importance of the recipient is not arbitrary, and there are logical reasons for the emergence of this concept.

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<sup>11</sup> For further details concerning the codification of Arabic, see 'The Development of Classical Arabic' Versteegh, K. 1997. *The Arabic language*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press. pp 53-73.

<sup>12</sup> Qutaybah, ʿ. I.M.I. 1958. *Al-Shiʿr wa al-shuʿarāʾ*. Cairo: Dār al-Maʿārif. pp 76- 103.

<sup>13</sup> Al-Jāhiz, A. ʿ. i.B. 1960. *Al-Bayān wa al-tabyīn*. Cairo: Muṣṭafá al-Ḥalabī. pp 87- 115- 315.

<sup>14</sup> Al-Tawḥīdī, A.Ḥ. 1944. *Al-ʿImtāʿ wa al-muʿānasah*. Cairo: Dār al-Maʿārif. pp 140- 143.

<sup>15</sup> Al-Jurjānī, ʿ. 1992. *Dalāʾil al-ʿiʿjāz*. Cairo: Dār Al-Madanī. pp 183- 200- 201.

Firstly, when Arabic literature was being established in the period from the pre-Islamic era until the early second Hijrah century, there was no codification of most Arabic knowledge. Literary works, whether poetry or prose, took the form of oral text communicated by the composer to the listener, who received it, memorised it, and then spread it. Thus, the role of recipients during that early period did not consist solely in appreciating the text; for in addition, they were assigned the role of memorising and disseminating the text. This made their role invaluable as they were the sole medium by which the text could be kept alive and disseminated to a broader audience.

A second factor which helps to explain the importance of the recipient in the literary process is that consumers of Classical Arabic literature possessed a highly developed level of linguistic competence and a remarkable socio-historical awareness which qualified them to understand the poet (*al-shā'ir*) and to pass judgements on literary compositions. In the past, Arab poets travelled to the *Quraysh* (the people of Makkah) to introduce their poems to them. They were held to be the arbiters of poetic quality and their approval or rejection of a poet's work guaranteed its popular success or failure (Al-Aṣḫānī, 1823: 112/21). For instance, al-Aṣḫānī cites the anecdote of al-Nābighah al-Dhubaynī who was one of the most famous poets in Makkah reproducing his critical rhetorical comments on some of Ḥassān bin Thābit's poetry:

For [al-Dhubaynī], it was rhetorically more effective to describe swords with the expression *يبرقن بالدى* (they sparkle in darkness) and not by *يلمعن في الضحى* (they twinkle in the midday), because guests come more often at night-time than during the day. Similarly, the expression *يقطرن دما* (dripping with blood) is less effective than *يجرين دما* (flowing with blood), because the former denotes “a limited number of people killed by the fighter's sword”, while the

latter signifies “the pouring down of blood from the large number of people killed by the fighter’s sword”. (cited in Ḥusayn, 2006: 32)

Most of al-Nābighah’s comments reproduced here focus on the relationship between the signifier and signified, and examine the social meaning of the signification. This example shows how the method of rhetorical critique during the pre-Islamic era and up to the early second Hijrah century depended on recipient response which was based on their own cultural, linguistic and critical background. A further piece of evidence which suggests the extent to which the people of Makkah were noted for their linguistic abilities as recipients of Classical Arabic compositions is that in the Qur’ān they are challenged by Allah to produce some verses imitating Qur’ānic style.<sup>16</sup>

At the beginning of the Islamic era, there was a growing interest in the role played by recipients, as Classical Arabic literature itself came under new influences. Some of these were external, such as Greek philosophical thought,<sup>17</sup> but new Islamic principles also transformed literary criticism. Poets were expected to be mindful of the moral and religious impact that their poems might exert on the minds of recipients/hearers and as a result, were expected to include some Islamic teachings in their work which would influence recipients to become virtuous:

There was a clear Islamic influence on the themes conveyed by various poetic genres such as romance, eulogy and satire. However, this influence was most marked in the appearance of ascetic and mystical subject matter. This was a logical response to the virtues and noble principles being spread by Islam. Muslims dealt with each other in an

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<sup>16</sup> See *ṣūrat Hūd* v.13 Allah says : أَمْ يَقُولُونَ افْتَرَاهُ فَلْيَأْتُوا بِسُورَةٍ مِّثْلِهِ وَادْعُوا مَنِ اسْتَنْطَعْتُمْ مِّن دُونِ اللَّهِ إِن كُنْتُمْ صَادِقِينَ : Or say they: He hath invented it? Say: Then bring a surah like unto it, and call (for help) on all ye can besides Allah, if ye are truthful.

<sup>17</sup> Detailed discussion of the influence of Ancient Greek thought on Arabic rhetoric, specifically the work of Aristotle follows in chapter four. 4.4.2 Non-Arab Cultural Influences.

Islamic context with the Prophet Muḥammad as their role model.<sup>18</sup> (Al-Samarrā'ī, 1977: 213)

Indeed, these new developments created closer links than had previously existed between the poet and the audience in the literary communication process, which now followed Islamic principles. The main aim of Arabic poetry during the early Islamic period was considered to be to guide recipients towards virtue and to extol moral values. Poets became very careful about the subjects that they referred to, how they composed their works and the possible meanings which might be inferred from these, in order to avoid the threat of eternal damnation. This is clearly shown in the following quotation since according to the prophet Muḥammad:

“Shall I tell you of the root of the matter and of its contours and of its top?” I said: “Certainly, Messenger of Allah.” He said: “The root of the matter is Islam, its contours are Prayers and its top is working in the cause of Allah (Jihad).” Then he asked: “Shall I tell you of that with which you can control of all this?” I said: “Certainly, O Messenger of Allah.” Then he took hold of his tongue and said: “Keep this in control.” I said: “Shall we be called to account in respect of that which we say?” He answered: “May your mother lose you, will people not be thrown face down into Hell only on account of the harvest of their tongue”. (cited in Al-Muntherī, 2000: 21/4)

This inevitably led to the emergence of new forms of Arabic literature. This new literary strategy was reflected in Arabic rhetoric, prompting growing interest in the role of the recipient.

### 1.2.2 Rhetoric and its Recipients

This interest in the importance of the role played by the recipient of literary texts surfaces in several places in Classical Arabic rhetoric studies and, interestingly, it makes an appearance as attempts were being made to define aspects of Arabic rhetoric itself. For example, al-Jāhiz defines rhetoric as:

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<sup>18</sup> Unless otherwise indicated, all translations from the original Arabic are mine.

A concise appellation of all things, revealing and unveiling their meaning as well as reaping their harvest, by using whatever means, since the target and goal sought by the addresser and the listener are understanding and explanation. Therefore, it [rhetoric] is how you elucidate meaning. (1960: 76/1)

Al-Jāhiz here specifically mentions “understanding” and “explanation” in association with the concept of rhetoric, with the former being the goal of the addressee, while the latter is the responsibility of the addresser. However, both are in favour of the recipient:

The addresser has to establish the nature of meaning and balance it between the receivers’ status and the nature of the circumstances by which each rank and each context has its own form of speech, in order to match what is said to what is meant, and to match what is meant to the status of the audience, as stated by Bishr bin al-Mu‘tamir. (cited in Al-Jāhiz, 1960: 139/1)

It is clear that Bishr envisages a significant role for the addresser in matching the text to the recipient. Bishr bin al-Mu‘tamir, who was the author of the earliest surviving document relating to Arabic rhetoric, said that the addresser must be aware of the circumstances of the recipients, and then use this knowledge in the literary text to attract them. Therefore, rhetoricians have decided that “the best words are the ones with a meaning that touches the heart faster than the sounds hit the ear” (Al-Jurjānī, 1991: 140).

According to al-Tawhīdī “rhetoric lies in what is understood by the populace but accepted by the elite” (1988: 241/3) and he adds elsewhere that rhetoric should focus on the audience in two ways. Firstly, he emphasises the importance of the meaning of the text reaching recipients using sophisticated stylistic devices. Secondly, in order to achieve compatibility of discourse with context, rhetoricians must think about different types of recipients, such as the “populace” and the “elite”, taking into account their individual circumstances.

In Classical Arabic criticism there is evidence of great interest in the role of the recipient. Al-Jurjānī emphasises the need to engage recipients emotionally:

It is accepted that the point is to provoke a sense of wonder in the listener at something he has never seen. This amazement is not complete unless the speaker is daring, like someone who does not care about being rejected but forces others willingly or unwillingly, to picture another sun rising from where the sun sets and their meeting together; the place where the first sun set becomes the place from whence the second rises. This kind of analogy usually seeks to amaze. It requires both art and craft in order to produce this unique appeal. Do you not see that the metaphor in his saying “*a sun to shade me from the glare of the sun*” is rather different from the metaphor in “*they never witness two suns*” despite the fact that both poets are declaring something that is uncommon and unconventional. (Al-Jurjānī, 1991: 92)

Al-Jurjānī focuses on provoking the amazement of the recipient as one of the most important aims of Arabic rhetoric. There are two techniques involved in creating this sense of wonder. Firstly, making things strange: this sense of strangeness is important in order to attract an addressee to a literary composition. Thus, the literary text relies on defamiliarisation in its structure, which makes it attractive to the recipient.<sup>19</sup> This notion does not mean that literary meanings should be ambiguous and difficult for the recipient to understand, as its significance should be clear. This clarity of meaning is required for the text to be understood in the recipient’s mind, so that it becomes as appealing as possible. Secondly, this involves using an elevated form of language to appeal to the listener, and presenting a carefully crafted idea. al-Jurjānī claims that if the nature of things is not clearly described and revealed, but referred to obliquely by the addresser, this more subtle approach produces a greater emphasis (1992: 306).

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<sup>19</sup> This idea can be linked to Viktor Shklovsky’s understanding of defamiliarisation in his famous article ‘Art as Device’. See section 2.2.2

Al-‘Askarī also focuses on the importance of using a particular type of language when addressing recipients. He argues that words which are easy to pronounce and crystal-clear in meaning are ordinary and doomed to be rejected. The beauty of art is believed to lie in the illusion that stimulates the mind and enriches the emotions with timeless experiences, as well as always being perceived as a coherent whole (1952: 79). This means that language has an important role to play in the poetics of literary text and, to a certain extent, in the creation of meaning. This issue of *al-Lafz wa al-Ma‘nā* (word versus meaning) became a key debate in Classical Arabic criticism.

However, choosing attractive meanings also has an important role in the production of a literary sentence, so the poet should employ words accurately. ‘Aṣḥūr (1991) asserts that a poem is a metaphorical composition which produces poetic effects. When denotation is detected by recipients, they are forced to contemplate this and be affected by its connotations, carrying sensory streams referring to denotations and implicit signs, incorporating multiple meanings.

There is also evidence of interest in the role of the recipient when Classical critics discuss how the author maintains the attention of the recipient. Thus, ibn Ṭabāṭabā observes: “The bard diligently develops the exordium, heuristics, and then the conclusion, for they function as poetic means by which pathos and attentiveness are evoked” (2010: 25).

Finally, Classical Arabic critics paid great attention to the ability of recipients to interpret literary text. Sophisticated literary language is:

Like pearls in shells; you must open the shells. Those shells, like every very precious item, must be gently opened. Not every intellect is granted the opportunity to reveal the content, nor is access granted to every thought. Not everyone succeeds in opening the shell; those who do succeed are possessors of knowledge. (Al-Jurjānī, 1991: 128)

A skilled recipient considers the contextual expressions, analyses the text and pays close attention to its stylistics in order to comprehend them. The careful recipient, therefore, has to grasp the value and aesthetics of a text, which requires a very knowledgeable recipient with refined tastes and a natural talent. Ibn Ṭabāṭabā determines a criterion for poetry which is based on the judgment of the knowledgeable recipients, who have the capability to judge the poem by their critical skills:

The proof of a poem's quality is determined by the expert recipient. If it is approved and accepted then it is well-crafted. If it is not approved and rejected, then it is not. This proof is based on the recipient's ability to distinguish between acceptable and unacceptable poetry, to approve or reject it on this basis. (2010: 20)

This judgment of the quality of Classical Arabic poetry was based on the criteria set by the concept of *'amūd al-shi'r*.<sup>20</sup> Al-Jurjānī expresses this idea in the following terms: "each word approved and term sought should result in a logical rationale and an accepted cause. In addition, an approach to the sentence and authentic evidence for our thoughts should be provided." (1992: 41) Thus, Classical Arabic rhetoric restricted the freedom of poetic discourse by applying certain standards and criteria which became an important element of the expert recipient's expectations.

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<sup>20</sup> *'Amūd al-shi'r* is a set of criteria for determining the quality of poetic words and meanings. These standards and criteria were derived from the different Classical Arabic means which were used in poetic formulations and structures by the Classical poets. This term appears in the work of al-Āmedī's *al-Muwāzanah*, who employs it to judge between Abū Tammām and al-Buḥturī.

### **1.3 Conceptualising Literary Reception in Classical Arabic Rhetoric: From Pre-Islamic to Abbasid Literature**

Strategies for reading Classical Arabic literature changed many times in line with the political, religious and social changes occurring in Arab society. This section traces the development of literary reception in Arabic rhetoric by exploring how recipients responded to Classical Arabic literary texts and the reading strategies they employed. It is important to note that just two literary genres were recognised at that time: poetry and oration (*khaṭābah*). Since mapping the concept of literary reception in Classical Arabic rhetoric is a vast subject, four key issues have been chosen for in-depth examination.

The first of these relates to how recipients responded to literary text before the appearance of critical methods. The second examines the method of literary text reception using the work of Classical Arabic linguists. The third considers the work of al-Jāhiz, the founder of literary reception and Arabic rhetoric (*al-Bayān al-'Arabī*), and the impact of his method on Arab critics, studying his rhetorical method and focusing on how he interpreted the literary text in terms of its poetic function. The fourth focuses on the rhetorical ideas of one of the most important literary scholars of the period, 'Abdulqāhir al-Jurjānī. Building on the work of al-Jāhiz, he established the foundations of Arabic rhetoric, influencing subsequent schools of thought concerning literary reception. It is thus possible to determine three stages in the evolution of the concept of literary reception in Classical Arab culture, namely, non-theoretical literary reception, linguistic reception, and rhetorical reception.

In the pre-Islamic era and early Islamic era, prior to the appearance of critical methods, there was no theory of literary reception, meaning that recipients judged

work on the basis of their own criteria, without following any specific approach. Although there was no critical method in the pre-Islamic period, this was one of the most important periods of Arabic literature. This was mainly due to the people's reverence for poetry, and to the fact that poetry recounted Arab history and served as a repository of their knowledge and aphorisms (Khaldūn, 1377: 651). Ibn Sallām states that “poetry in the pre-Islamic era was the register of the people's learning and the final word of their wisdom (*muntahā ḥukmihim*) which they adopted and followed” (cited in Beeston, 1983: 27). Moreover, ‘Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb stated: “There is no Arab knowledge except for poetry” and in a missive to Abū Mūsā al-Ash‘arī, he advises him to “ask people around about you to learn poetry because, it guides them to high morals, wisdom and knowledge of Arab heritage” (cited in Al-Qayrawānī, 1972: 10/1).

### 1.3.1 Pre-Islamic era

Arabs in the pre-Islamic era were more interested in poetry than any other literary form and poets were greatly honoured. According to al-Qayrawānī:

When there appeared a poet in a family of the Arabs, the other tribes roundabout would gather together to that family and wish them joy of their good luck. Feasts would be got ready, the women of the tribe would join together in bands, playing upon lutes, as they were wont to do at bridals, and the men and boys would congratulate one another; for a poet was a defence to the honour of them all, a weapon to ward off insult from their good name, and a means of perpetuating their glorious deeds and of establishing their fame forever. (cited in Lyall, 1930: 17)

In this passage, al-Qayrawānī shows the great stature that was accorded to poets during that historical period. A poet was able to raise the status of his tribe by praising it whilst at the same time denigrating another tribe by satirising it. In

addition, poetry played a significant role in warfare amongst Arab tribes since poets spurred on combatants to defend their tribe and satirised their enemies.

The general consensus amongst critics is that there was no critical doctrine during this historical period. Ḍayf claims that Classical Arabic criticism did not begin to develop until the end of the Umayyad period and that the criticism became more sophisticated in the Abbasid period, particularly when Arabic linguists started to study literary texts. In addition, Ḍayf confirms that Classical Arabic criticism in general was interested only in the individual issues in the pre-Islamic poetry. Moreover, Arab recipients did not study the poem (*qaṣīdah*) as a whole unit but studied each verse (*bayt*) individually (1962: 30-31).

However, some modern day critics deny the existence of any critical comments at that time. For instance, ‘Allām claims that since recipients in the pre-Islamic era were illiterate and simply listened to poetry being performed, they were not able to distinguish between *al-lafz wa al-ma‘nā* (word and meaning).<sup>21</sup> ‘Allām notes that “if we had asked a poet in the pre-Islamic era of what was the most attractive feature of a poem, the words or its meaning, he would not have been able to understand you; for one simple reason; he did not distinguish between them” (1979: 32). According to ‘Allām, neither poets nor those who listened to their poetry in the pre-Islamic period had the ability to make critical judgments which casts doubt on the validity of these claims concerning critical awareness.

Al-Qaṣṣāb notes that by the end of the pre-Islamic era, composing poetry was a craft, and poets were expected to study and work hard at becoming bards (2011: 14). Given that poetry in the pre-Islamic period was of an exceptionally high quality, it seems unlikely that it could have been produced by poets who lacked any sense of

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<sup>21</sup> This key concept is discussed in further in Chapter Four section 4.5.2.

the literary. Dayf argues that “the poets in the pre-Islamic period were interested in choosing the best words, meanings and imagery. And they were making critical judgments which are undoubtedly the basis of Arabic rhetoric” (1965: 13). This suggests that a pre-Islamic literary reception movement evolved in parallel with the development of poetry, and that the high quality of poetry was produced by interaction between poets and their recipients.

However, modern Arabic criticism has paid scant attention to this critical heritage of the pre-Islamic period for two main reasons. Firstly, since discourse relating literary reception at that time was unwritten, none of this has survived, unlike poetic texts which were more easily memorised, disseminated and eventually recorded in written form. The long gap between the pre-Islamic period and the period of codification of Arabic in the second century AH caused the loss of so much of the heritage of Classical Arabic criticism. Secondly, in the Islamic era, “the great majority of Muslims had no sympathy whatever with the ancient poetry, which represented in their eyes the unregenerate spirit of heathendom. They wanted nothing beyond the Koran and the Ḥadīth.” (Nicholson, 1914: 132)

However, traces of literary reception in the pre-Islamic era do still remain and can be found in three key forms, namely *riwāyah*, poetry fairs and the development of the poetic genre known as *qaṣīdah*.

### **1.3.1.1 *Riwāyah* (Transmitting)**

The first form of these can be found in the interaction between the poet and the *rāwī* (transmitter):

The Arab poet was not a narrator. He was a master of brevity, a magician of rhythm and words. His transmitter or *rāwī* would act as a commentator to supply detail and the necessary background. Having already reached the hearts of his listeners through the effect of his verses, he left the elucidation of their

meaning to be dealt with by his transmitter. Hence, from ancient time, Arabic poetry needed its commentators-cum-transmitters. (Beeston, 1983: 29)

The *rāwī* thus played an essential role in ensuring that the poem was interpreted by all the recipients, and he was the link between poet and audience. The transmitter was the most important resource for Arabic poetry in that he memorised the poems then disseminated them among people. Thus, the transmitter had to have the appropriate linguistic and cultural background; he also must be an expert in *ayyām al-‘Arab*,<sup>22</sup> in order to be able to understand the references in poems and then convey them correctly. The most famous transmitters in Classical Arabic criticism were al-Aṣma‘ī, Abi ‘Amr bin al-‘Alā’ and al-Mufaḍḍal al-Ḍabbī (Al-Jumaḥī, 1974: 46/1). Al-Qayrawānī relates that when Ru‘bah bin al-‘Ajjāj was asked: “Who is the *fahl*<sup>23</sup> of the poets?’ He replied: The transmitter” (1988: 114). It is clear that *riwāyah* (the act of transmitting poetry) was the first step in honing their poetic skills for novice poets, since by memorising poems they learnt large quantities of vocabulary and how to employ a range of figures of speech, being exposed to them in the structure of the literary discourse:

They attached themselves to the poet as admirers and diffusers of his verses, learning them by heart and declaiming them after his manner or in accordance with his directions. Often a transmitter would himself be a poet and, in turn, would also have someone to transmit his own verses. Zuhayr stood in relation to his maternal uncle, Bashāmah b. al-Ghadīr, and to the poet Aws b. Ḥajar, and, in turn; he had Huṭay‘ah himself, to become a poet of renown, as his transmitter. (Beeston, 1983: 29)

Thus, before poetry could be recorded in written form, pre-Islamic poets were wholly dependent on *riwāyah* as a means of disseminating their work to recipients.

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<sup>22</sup> *Ayyām al-‘Arab* literally, the days of the Arabs, is used to refer to pre-Islamic tribal battles.

<sup>23</sup> Literally, a stallion. This word also refers to an outstanding poet. The existence of this term suggests that a set of criteria was being employed to make such judgements.

The central importance of the role of the *rāwī* is reflected in the fact that much of the work of that period has been lost because “numbers of *rāwīs* perished in the wars, or passed away in the course of nature, without leaving any one to continue their tradition” (Nicholson, 1914: 132).

### **1.3.1.2 *Al-aswāq al-shi‘riyyah* (Poetry fairs)**

The popularity of *al-aswāq al-shi‘riyyah* (Poetry fairs) is another example of the existence of a tradition of literary reception in the pre-Islamic era. Poetry fairs, such as those held at Dhu al-Majāz, Mijannah and most famous of all, ‘Ukāz, were the places where poets performed for audiences during the pilgrimage season:

Plenty of excitement was provided by poetical and oratorical displays, not by athletic sports, as in ancient Greece and modern England. Here rival poets declaimed their verses and submitted them to the judgment of acknowledged masters. Nowhere else had rising talents such an opportunity to gain wide reputation: what ‘Ukāz said today all Arabia would repeat tomorrow. (ibid: 135)

These fairs functioned as a major means of disseminating poetry at that time. During these events, there were several types of recipients. Firstly, the average recipient was interested in listening to his preferred poets and relied purely on his personal likes or dislikes in relation to poetic texts. Secondly, there were also *rāwī* who were experts in the language and metre of the Arabs, and in the style and ideas of their poets. Thirdly, poets were in attendance, not only to recite their poems, but also to learn from the works of other poets. Finally, a judge, a master-poet, would be chosen from among the poets and a leather tent was pitched for him alone. The judge was one of the most important recipients due to the impact of his judgments on the audience, as his opinion alone determined the success or failure of the poet’s work. For example, when ‘Alqamah bin ‘Abadah al-Tamīmī recited his poem to the men of the Quraysh tribe, renowned for their linguistic and literary prowess, they admired it and said to

him “this is the timeless jewel (*ṣimṭ al-dahar*)”. A year later, he returned to recite another poem:

طَحَا بِكَ قَلْبٌ فِي الْحِسَانِ طَرُوبٌ ... بُعِيدَ الشَّبَابِ عَصَرَ حَانَ مَشِيْبُ  
يُكَلِّفُنِي لَيْلَى وَقَدْ شَطَّ وَلَيْهَا ... وَعَادَتْ عَوَادٍ بَيْنَنَا وَخُطُوبُ

Surprised by this heart, so inflammable still

When grey I stand in the wake of youth,

I think of Leila, her nearness gone,

Of things untoward that set us apart. (cited in Tuetey, 1985: 99)

The *qurayshi* admired this poem just as much, and said: “These are the timeless jewels (*ṣimṭā al-dahar*)” (Al-Aṣfahānī, 1823: 112/21). However, no critical reasoning can be discerned in this brief comment and the criteria being used to judge the poem are unclear. This method of criticism emerged in the oral culture of the pre-Islamic Arabs because such short critical comments would be easily remembered and disseminated.

### 1.3.1.3 The development of the *qaṣīdah*

The appearance of a canonical form of poetry in the shape of the *qaṣīdah* (ode) is a strong evidence of agreement amongst critics and poets about an ideal form and structure for poetic text. In this sense, the development of the *qaṣīdah* is one of the most important manifestations of Classical Arabic literary reception. According to Nicholson, the *qaṣīdah* followed a set structure:

The verses (*abyāt*; singular *bayt*) of which it is built vary in number, but are seldom less than twenty-five, or more than a hundred; and the arrangement of the rhymes is such that, while the two halves of the first verse rhyme together, the same rhyme is repeated once in the second, third, and every following verse to the end of poem. (1914: 77)

In addition, pre-Islamic poets used a standard three-section pattern:

The amatory prelude (*nasīb*), “disengagement” cast in the form of a camel journey (known as *takhalluṣ*), and the final section, the body of the poem, dealing with the motive (*qaraḍ*). (Beeston, 1983: 43)

This form did not develop arbitrarily or spontaneously, but was the result of consensus among poets and critics and all poetry was structured in the same fashion. As a result of the existence of this consensus both poets and recipients were able to reach agreement concerning the standard of excellence to which literary works needed to aspire. Consequently, a set of *qaṣīdah*, commonly referred to as *al-Mu‘allaqāt*<sup>24</sup> (suspended poems) became established as the gold standard among all poets and critics. The same poems are still revered among Arab critics today. The preference for these odes by the pre-Islamic recipients indicates a high level of literary discussions and critical awareness.

Overall, these manifestations previously mentioned are clear evidence that a significant critical movement already existed in pre-Islamic culture despite claims to the contrary.

### 1.3.2 The impact of Islamic thought

With the appearance of the Prophet Muḥammad, and the revelation of the Qur’ān, the form of literary reception changed as other aspects of the text became more important. As previously noted, in the pre-Islamic era, poetry was an important source of knowledge, but in the new Islamic culture the main source of knowledge became the Qur’ān and ḥadīth, because for Islamic recipients poetic texts were valued for highlighting the inimitability (*‘i jāz*) of the Qur’ān.<sup>25</sup> According to ibn

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<sup>24</sup> *Al-Mu‘allaqa* (plural: *al-Mu‘allaqāt*) is most likely derived from the word *‘Ilq*, meaning a precious thing or thing held in high estimation, either because one hangs on tenaciously to it, or because it is hung up in a place of honour, or in a conspicuous place in a treasury or store-house (Lyall, 1930: xlv). Tradition has it that the *Mu‘allaqāt* were originally embroidered on cloths and hung on the walls of the Ka‘aba.

<sup>25</sup> This refers to the Islamic doctrine which holds that the Qur’ān has a miraculous quality, both in content and in form that cannot be imitated by any human linguistic endeavour.

‘Abbās: “if you do not understand something in the Qur’ān, go back to poetry to find the meaning; poetry is the repository of Arab knowledge (*dīwān al-‘Arab*)” (cited in Al-Qayrawānī, 1972: 10/1).

There was considerable controversy among Classical Arabic critics concerning early Islamic attitudes towards poetry. It has been argued that Islam was opposed to poetry, and encouraged Muslims to focus on the Qur’ān.<sup>26</sup> In contrast, it has also been claimed that the Prophet Muḥammad was aware of the impact of poetry on Arab recipients and thus used this medium to spread his teachings amongst Arabs, and to defend Islam by satirising its enemies.<sup>27</sup> Moreover, he acknowledged the importance of poetry in forming the mind-set of Muslims and therefore was in favour of poetry which served to direct readers towards good morals, and divert them from evil-doing (Al-Ḥārthī, 1989: 53). Thus, there was a shift in the strategy employed for reading literary texts and poetic text became a linguistic document used by recipients to understand the meaning of the Qur’ān.

This new focus on the linguistic aspect of Classical Arabic literature meant that recipients needed to pay close attention to the language used in the text in order to judge its worth by Qur’ānic standards. This involved recipients in examining words and their meanings, as well as everything related to the literary text including its prosody, rhyme and parsing. This approach was based on error analysis of the poet’s grammar, words, meanings, rhyme and prosody (Al-Marzubānī, 1995: 34-35).<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Ibn ‘Abbās reported: The Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) said “He who does not memorise any part from the Qur’an he is like the ruined house” at Al-tirmidhī.

<sup>27</sup> This controversial issue is dealt with in considerable detail in sources such as *Abdullah, M.Ḥ. 1975. Muqaddimah fī al-naqd al-adabī. Kuwait: Dār Al-Buḥūth al-‘Ilmiyyah.* and Ouyang, W.-c. 1997. *Literary criticism in medieval Arabic-Islamic culture: the making of a tradition.* Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

<sup>28</sup> See Qutaybah, ‘.I.M.I. 1958. *Al-Shi’r wa al-shu‘arā’.* Cairo: Dār al-Ma‘ārif. p 151, and, see Al-Marzubānī, M.i.‘. 1995. *Al-Muwashshah fī ma’ākhidh al-‘ulamā’ ‘alā al-shu‘arā’.* al-Ṭab‘ah 1. ed. Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyyah. pp. 166-167

Linguistic reception did not stop at this point, but proceeded to attempt to extract linguistic principles from the literary text, analysing the text's compatibility with the rules of syntax.

However, many Classical Arabic scholars criticised the linguistic method; for instance, al-Jāhiz claimed that the linguists focused on obscure poetry to find grammatical errors, or unusual vocabulary without considering the essence of the literary text (1960: 349/3). Indeed, it is clear that al-Jāhiz saw linguists as exploiting poetry for their own ends; but this is not reason enough to claim that they were uninterested in the meaning of the poetry. In fact, al-Jāhiz himself also employs poetry in his works as a source of information, using it, for example, to provide factual knowledge about animals for his text *Al-Hayawān*.

Classical Arabic linguists divided the history of Arabic poetry into two stages: Classical and modern. By their reckoning, the Classical period covered the pre-Islamic era (some one hundred and fifty years before Islam) until the middle of the second century AH, while the modern period started at the beginning of the Abbasid era (Al-Qaṣṣāb, 1980: 25). The main reason for this division was based on the linguists' rejection of the techniques and language employed by the new poets, who were named *al-Muwalladūn*. This group of poets came after Bashshār ibn Burd and included Muslim ibn al-Walīd, Abū al-'Atāhyah, Abū Tammām and al-Buḥturī. They renewed the style of poetry by introducing new words and literary forms. Thus, the linguists' approach to reading was not a neutral method, as they openly voiced their preference for Classical poetry not necessarily for its superior literary qualities, but because they thought this would maintain the purity of Classical Arabic.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> This point is developed in detail in Chapter 4.5.1.

### 3.3.3 The influence of al-Jāhiz

From the middle of the second century, literary reception strategy was influenced by changes in the Arab worldview, especially with the emergence of the rationalist movement (*Mu'tazilites*) in Islamic theology. This group of scholars was the most important group of 'Ahl al-kalām<sup>30</sup> and they believed in free-thinking and free-will as opposed to pre-destination. Additionally, they revered the mind; they also claimed that only by contemplating the world are human beings able to realise that there is only one creator of everything (Wahba, 1974: 336). This movement transformed Arab culture from a state of cultural inertia to creativity and innovation, at the same time freeing up readers to interpret texts as they wished.<sup>31</sup> However, this freedom was limited by Islamic teaching and its approach to the language of the text.

Al-Jāhiz was one of the most important scholars in the rationalist movement and his method of literary criticism was based on combining old and new approaches, and combining the heritage of Arab culture and other cultures, such as Indian, Persian and Greek. Al-Jāhiz's *Al-Bayān wa Al-Tabyīn* is one of the most important texts in Arabic literature: "In this book all cultures are equal, Arab and non-Arab; although it has been written in Arabic and a Bedouin style based on Islamic thought, it has benefited from Greek thought, and combined theoretical and experimental approaches" (Al-Jāhiz, 1938: 11/1).

This openness to other cultures represented an unprecedented step towards the independence of the reader, thus ending the conflict between the *al-Muwalladūn* (Non-Arab poets) and the traditionalists who refused to countenance any renewal in

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30 Groups of scholars who appeared in the Umayyad period and were interested in rhetoric, discussion and debate.

31 The impact of *Mu'tazilite* thought is dealt with in detail in Chapter 4.3.2.

poetic form or meaning. It has been claimed that, unlike Classical Arabic poetry which continued to evolve, literary criticism stopped developing in the middle of the second century AH and critics found the new poetry incomprehensible (‘Abbās, 1993: 44). Unable to keep up with the latest poetic trends, critics resisted any attempts at renewal in Classical Arabic poetry, linking these developments with the aims of the much-feared *al-Shu‘ūbiyyah* movement.

Al-Jāhiz argued that the essential condition for cultural openness was that readers must have a good background in Classical Arabic literature in addition to a knowledge of foreign cultures (1960: 171/1). Using his method, he tried to make literary criticism less biased and more objective, applying this approach in all his work and ideas; for example, he focussed on the content of poets’ work rather than the era to which they belonged or their stature. Al-Jāhiz was interested in the impact of the poet’s environment on the quality of his poetry, believing that a desert-dweller, such as a Bedouin, produced superior quality poetry to village poets.

Al-Jāhiz also focuses on the impact of the poet’s ethnicity on the originality of the poetry, claiming that the work of Arab poets is more original than that of non-Arab poets (Al-Jāhiz, 1938: 130/3). However, al-Jāhiz’s method is primarily based on the poet’s literary skills. For example, he often cited texts from Abū Nuwās, one of the *al-Muwalladūn* who was much-lauded for his poetry, preferring one of his poems to one by al-Muhalhal, considered to be one of the most important poets in the pre-Islamic period (ibid: 129/3). Additionally, al-Jāhiz compares many modern and Classical poetic’ works in his book *Al-Ḥayawān*, basing his critical judgements on the poet’s craftsmanship and the extent to which the poet attracted his reader without considering the era in which the poem was written.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> See *al-Ḥayawān*. pp.325-326-327

The relationship between word and meaning is one of the most essential issues mentioned by al-Jāḥiẓ who focused more on the importance of words than their meanings. He proposes some fundamental rules relating to eloquence, recommending that poets should avoid four linguistic defects. Firstly, assonant sounds should not be combined morphologically, since they are difficult to pronounce and unpleasant on the ear and he gives a phonological explanation for this. Secondly, unfamiliar words should be avoided as their meanings cannot be determined without looking them up, which is a drawback. Thirdly, poets should conform with the grammatical and morphological rules of Arabic. Finally, overly common words are trite and eloquence is based on words that are neither overly unusual nor overly common (1960: 144/1). According to al-Jāḥiẓ, the reader's attention shifts from the moral function of the literary text to its poetics, encouraging them to focus on the language used in the text. Thus, he established a new reading strategy in Classical Arabic literature which can be compared to the Formalist method in Western thought.

There is a major debate between critics about al-Jāḥiẓ's critical attitude towards literary meanings. He claims that

Meaning is accessible to everyone, native or non-native. It is all about versification, choosing the right words, and the quality of the material produced [...] poetry is a craft, a type of weaving, and a kind of imagery. (Al-Jāḥiẓ, 1938: 131/3)

Some have interpreted this as evidence that he is more interested in words themselves rather than in the meaning of the text, and in the skilled poet who chooses the appropriate words without paying undue attention to their meanings. For example, Abū Hilāl al-ʿAskarī argues that meanings are understood by all people, both Arab readers and others, but people vary in their choice of words and how they

arrange them in a poetic system (1952: 169). In addition, al-Qayrawānī is in complete agreement with al-‘Askarī, arguing that meaning is of secondary importance to the elements of a literary work (1972: 127/1). In fact, there are many formalist critics who agree with al-Jāhiz’s critical approach, such as Muḥammad Ghunaymī Hilāl (1973: 257), Badawī Ṭabānah (1969: 279-80), Shawqī Ḍayf (1962: 161), Iḥsān ‘Abbās (1993: 98) and Muḥammad Zaghlūl Sallām (1964: 66).

### **3.3.4 The influence of ‘Abdulqāhir al-Jurjānī**

However, al-Jurjānī, the renowned Arabic literary theorist, claims that Classical Arabic critics did not understand al-Jāhiz’s ideas about the relationship between word and meaning. Al-Jurjānī based his own theory of rhetoric, *Naẓariyyat al-Naẓm* (word order theory), on al-Jāhiz’s understanding of this relationship.

‘Image’ is an analogy between what we realize with our minds and what we see with our eyes. Just as beings differ in terms of their appearance, so that distinguishing one man from another or one horse from another depends on some particularity in each one’s appearance, so too with products of craftsmanship. Therefore distinguishing one ring from another or one bracelet from another is subject to the same rule. Similarly, having found something that distinguishes the meaning in one line from the meaning in another, we express this realization by saying that the image of the meaning in this line is different from the image of the meaning in the other. Our use of the word “image” is therefore not a concept we invented that should be ignored; on the contrary, it is something commonly used by scholars. It is sufficient to quote al-Jāhiz in this respect as saying “poetry is a craft, a type of weaving, and a kind of imagery”. (1992: 508)

It is important to address the meaning of the terms ‘image’ and “magination” in Arabic rhetoric to fully grasp al-Jurjānī’s idea. The image is the artistic tool by which the poet portrays the universe around him or narrates a private experience. He depicts a scene from his own life or from the real world. Words and the

interrelations between them are the backbone of this image. It is clear that the poet draws on the real world to create his images, and the difference between them is the result of the poet's imaginative capacity.

The image cannot be separated from the imagination because it is the latter that enables the poet to create mental images of things from the realm of direct sense-perception. He combines and reshapes incongruous things that seem to have little connection, establishing a relationship that resolve this incongruity, and replaces it with harmony and congruity. This is because such loose ends interact and intertwine and become a linguistic entity and an autonomous artistic whole that transcend its constituents (Ḥamdān, 1989: 287).

This relationship between the image and the poet's imagination fascinated al-Jurjānī. The poetic imagery he mentioned resulted from his own investigation into how the poet makes poetic meaning by using rhetorical devices. Therefore, poetic imagery is a process of deliberate creation of illusion intentionally aimed at attracting the recipient. This process starts with the image contained in the poem. The image in turn contains power to trigger the desired emotion. This process produces its effect when the recipient recognises the meaning of the poetic image by comparing this with his own experience, linking these on a subconscious level, and thereby triggering an emotional response (‘Aṣḫūr, 1991: 246).

Imitation can be seen as an imaginative activity embodying the real world in the creator's imagination. Hence, imagination is seen as the way to achieve mimesis in poetry.

Al-Jurjānī argues that for both poets and readers, understanding rhetorical devices such as metaphor, simile, paradox and alliteration, is an important means of creating and analysing the literary text:

The process of creating the form of the literary text is like that followed by the person selecting the colours and patterns for a garment. A process of selection and thought goes into combining all these elements in a unique way. Thus, a magnificently unique product is created. Bards follow a similar process when they ponder all the grammatical rules and aspects in order to produce their verse. (1992: 87-88)

The previous passage explains how a rhetorical image is produced. In this passage, al-Jurjānī likens the poet's use of words to form a literary image to that of the skilled tailor who professionally mixes colours and patterns to produce a beautiful garment. If recipients are influenced by a poem, they should think about the poet's efforts in producing the text. Here al-Jurjānī understands that readers should focus on the interaction between the word and its meaning; and how the literary text expresses itself through its language. Al-Jurjānī's understanding paves the way to rhetorical interpretation which depends on the reader's ability to seek and discover the structure of a literary image. Al-Jurjānī uses structural analysis to uncover the impact of the imagination on poetic imagery such as *at-tashbīh* (simile) and *al-isti'ārah* (metaphor). It is clear here that Al-Jurjānī has shifted the focus of Arabic critical discourse from the author to the reader with the latter now expected to play an active role in interpreting the literary text.

Thus, poetic imitation is not only an effective reflection of the world by the creator, but also a re-formulation of its components in the imagination. Imagery, according to al-Jurjānī, entails a kind of construction or a process of searching for the multiple interrelations between things. He argues that the poet combines forms and links all these elements in his imagination to sensations. From everyday experiences and abstract meanings, the poet produces a new thing independent of its constituents, thereby arousing feelings in our souls which are totally different to how we feel about such things in themselves. Thus, al-Jurjānī sees poetic imagery (simile and

metaphor) as the most important element of the literary work due to its strong impact on readers. In his work, al-Jurjānī specifically comments on the impact of simile on the reader:

If you look at similes, you will find out that the further things are from one another, the more they delight the soul. Pleasure, delight and what arouses the inner sense of liberation and what combines discordant sources of happiness and connects lines of elation is your seeing two dissimilar things in a state of similarity and two disharmonious things in a state of harmony. It is engrained in people's nature that if something is attained after great endeavours, much longing and experiencing affection towards it, the attainment gives greater joy and is more deserving of merit. Therefore, its effect upon the soul is stronger and subtler and the soul clings to it more tenaciously and is more intrigued by it. (Al-Jurjānī, 1991: 130)

Simile is a rhetorical device used by the poet to clarify meaning or embellish an idea for the reader. Thus, the readers of the text should focus on the simile to reach the meaning of the text.

Al-Jurjānī divided similes into two types. The first is *at-tashbīh al-mufrad* (the singular simile), which is simple form of poetic imagery that does not require much effort on the part of the reader for it to be understood (for example, “the man is as strong as a lion” poses no difficulties in terms of meaning). The second type he refers to as *at-tashbīh at-tamthīlī* (the compound simile) and this involves more complex poetic imagery (Ibid: 90). Readers of the text need to follow the elements of the imagery which it contains and to imagine the scene in their mind to grasp the central idea of the text. Al-Jurjānī cites this verse from the Qur'ān as an example:

إِنَّمَا مَثَلُ الْحَيَاةِ الدُّنْيَا كَمَاءٍ أَنْزَلْنَاهُ مِنَ السَّمَاءِ فَاخْتَلَطَ بِهِ نَبَاتُ الْأَرْضِ مِمَّا يَأْكُلُ النَّاسُ وَالْأَنْعَامُ حَتَّىٰ إِذَا  
أَخَذَتِ الْأَرْضُ زُخْرُفَهَا وَازْبَيَّتْ وَظَنَّ أَهْلِهَا أَنَّهُمْ قَادِرُونَ عَلَيْهَا أَتَاهَا أَمْرُنَا لَيْلًا أَوْ نَهَارًا فَجَعَلْنَاهَا حَصِيدًا  
كَأَنَّ لَمْ تَعْنُ بِالْأَمْسِ كَذَلِكَ نَفْصَلُ الْآيَاتِ لِقَوْمٍ يَتَفَكَّرُونَ

The example of [this] worldly life is but like rain which We have sent down from the sky that the plants of the earth absorb - [those] from which men and

livestock eat - until, when the earth has taken on its adornment and is beautified and its people suppose that they have capability over it, there comes to it Our command by night or by day, and We make it as a harvest, as if it had not flourished yesterday. Thus do We explain in detail the signs for a people who give thought. <sup>33</sup>

According to al-Jurjānī the pleasure of this text comes from the effort that the reader must make to grasp its meaning by following the figures of speech. Al-Jurjānī analyses poetic text as an expert reader, and maps a new reading strategy for readers which is based on looking at the aesthetics of the literary text by using interpretative tools.

The second key element of poetic imagery that al-Jurjānī focuses on is metaphor, which he defines as a figure in which:

A word has an origin well recognised in linguistic usage with examples proving that it belongs to a specific referent at first being used, then the poet otherwise uses this word for another referent and transfers it to this new referent so, it becomes, as it were, a borrowed thing. (ibid: 30)

Metaphor in Arabic rhetoric means taking the word in its literal sense and then using it in a context where no definite referent can be assigned to it. On the role of metaphor in embodying meaning, al-Jurjānī writes:

You can see the inanimate thing alive and speaking, the inarticulate person an eloquent speaker, speechless objects expressive, and implicit meanings plain and explicit. Metaphor sets the standards for quality; there is no excellence without its presence. You also find that comparisons are generally not effective unless they are obscure. In other words, metaphors will show you subtle meanings that are the internal workings of the mind made explicit and visible, and the physical qualities of things are reduced to their essence until they can only be perceived by interpretation. (ibid: 43)

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33 See Yūnus verse 24

In al-Jurjānī's opinion, metaphorical or poetic language is the means that the poet uses to convey his own personal experience and feelings since that is the only medium which adequately reflects the complexity of the human condition. The poet thus encodes his intended meaning and the recipient needs to decode this. In order for these two operations to take place at the same level and to generate a correspondence between them and achieve the purpose of the discourse, the sentence itself should provide clues to the criteria by which it has been encoded and the recipient should be aware of such criteria (Isma'īl, 1987: 44).

As this examination of the work of al-Jāhīz and al-Jurjānī has shown, their critical writing draws attention to the role of the reader in the processes of literary reception and highlights the importance of that role in interpreting the literary text. It also suggests the emergence of a new Arab reception theory which specifically addressed the literary concerns of their time. However, the scholars who came after them chose to focus exclusively on developing the rhetorical approach, and failed to take into account the ideas of al-Jāhīz and al-Jurjānī and to pursue their theoretical insights.

#### **1.4 The Appropriation of Reception Theory by Modern Arabic Criticism**

Reception Theory is one of the most important critical theories in contemporary criticism and it has had a significant impact on Arabic studies. It is important therefore to establish how this theory emerged in Arabic literary criticism because some Arab critics have argued that its origins lie in Classical Arabic literature. This claim should be viewed as forming part of a trend which can be seen in a number of Arabic studies which have attempted to demonstrate that Arabs played a key role in creating many modern theories and literary genres, their ultimate aim being to establish the superiority of one culture over another. As we shall see, works by al-

Brikī (2006) and Shabāyik (2010) both fall into this category. The aim here is to clarify the confusion caused by the misuse of Reception Theory by some Arab researchers which has created major methodological problems when this theory has been wrongly applied in the context of Classical Arabic studies.

In his study on the influence of Western critical and literary doctrines, ideas and theories on contemporary Arab thought, ‘Ayyād claims that Arab modernists appropriated elements of Western culture for use in their own culture but demonstrated a lack of precision in the terminology they used when employing these doctrines, ideas and theories (1993: 18). Ḥamūdah describes ‘Ayyād’s idea as an astute diagnosis of the Arab modernists dilemma in dealing with other cultures since they had one foot in their own culture, and the other in Western culture, permanently trying to find the reason for the critical crisis in Arab literary discourse, and always blaming what they call the “crisis in terminology” without considering their own terminological exactitude. The main reason for this crisis does not lie so much in the misuse of terminology as in the differences between Western and Arab cultures, which have not been taken into account (1997: 32-33). According to Ḥamūdah, it is vital to understand these differences before employing Western critical terms and principles to any study of Arabic literature.

Similarly, Gharkān observes that:

Some scholars – fearing the accusation of having become culturally detached from their Arab legacy – seek to submit Arabic literature to their own interpretation. This approach to reading literature has led to some extremely odd claims and neologisms among critics. The truth is that our Classical critics possessed a deep understanding consistent with the peculiarity of their own language and its poetic discourse, which needs no false “modernization” to be worthy of studying. Contemporary scholars, on the contrary, without any knowledge of Arabic critical discourse and terminology, have forced

those Classical critical views into their contemporary patterns, and approached texts in a way that serves their own intellectual and critical theories. (2004: 16)

As our later evaluation of Arab scholars' engagement with Western Reception Theory will show, failing to acknowledge the original identity and the components of these theories or ideas has led many Arab critics to apply them incorrectly in their studies, subsequently causing, as Ḥamūdāh noted, a crisis in terminology. It is essential to have a clear understanding of Reception Theory in order to deal correctly with its terminology and principles.

With regards to Reception Theory, then, three major issues need to be addressed. Firstly, it is necessary to trace how this theory reached the Arabic literary scene. Secondly, it is important to understand how Arab critics received and employed this theory in their own literary studies and thirdly, to determine whether Arabic literature has its own form of Reception Theory.

#### **1.4.1 Opening up to the West**

Beginning then with the first of these issues, in recent times, two major factors have contributed to the cultural openness of Arabs to Western cultures. The first of these which has played a significant role in this cultural openness is the scholarship carried out by Arabs who studied abroad in Western countries, especially France and Britain, and who were thus more open towards Western culture in general, and modern literary criticism in particular. These scholars including Aḥmed al-Ḍayf, Rifā'ah al-Ṭaḥṭāwī, and Ṭaha Ḥusayn introduced many Western ideas and theories to the Arabic literary scene.

Aḥmed al-Ḍayf was the first of these scholars to encourage Arab openness towards Western critical methods in his work arguing that Arab researchers should rid themselves of the notion that Classical Arabic literature represented the zenith of

critical and rhetorical thought. He also urged Arab intellectuals to study Western critical theories and doctrines in order to develop their patterns of thinking and their analytical tools (‘Ayyād, 1993: 96). This period saw the introduction of many Western theories, such as structuralism, deconstructionism and Reception Theory.

Other studies based on Western critical methods followed, written by Arab intellectuals including Ṭaha Ḥusayn, Ahmed Amīn, Amīn al-Khūlī and Ahmed al-Shāyib. Ḥusayn’s work was influenced by René Descartes’ theory of knowledge. In his work about pre-Islamic poetry, Ḥusayn applied the so-called “method of doubt”, which is central to Cartesian theory.

However, al-Bāz’ī claims that many of these Western ideas were employed inaccurately by Arab intellectuals and he highlights Ḥusayn’s use of Cartesian epistemology as an example since he adopts a selective approach to this theory, failing to acknowledge all its dimensions and, at the same time, decontextualizing it historically and culturally. Al-Bāz’ī argues that the work by critics in the 1940s and 1950s, such as Muḥammad Mandūr, Shawqī Ḍayf, Mārūn ‘Abūd, Shukrī ‘Ayyād, Ghāali Shukrī, ‘Alījawād al-Ṭāhir and Iḥsān ‘Abbās, could be considered to be more accurate and successful (2004: 110-14). Al-Bāz’ī appears to prefer these critics because they were specialists in literary criticism and dealt with foreign critical thought carefully, without attempting to force its critical terms arbitrarily into the context of Arabic criticism.

In his article *Ishkālyyat al-Manhaj fī al-Naqd al-Ḥadīth*, Faḍl analyses the transformation of the Arabic criticism scene after this opening up of Arab critics to the Western critical schools. He observes:

When introduced to us, the Western literary schools [of criticism], which essentially had a tremendous impact on some Arab critics, are no longer identified by two key characteristics within the context of Arabic literary

traditions. The first characteristic is that they are deeply rooted in Western civilisation, which comes as a result of its internal, as well as its historical, progress. The other characteristic is that they emerge and are perceived in terms of historical linearity. Thus, we are apparently stuck with their theoretical ramifications. In this respect, their fundamental tenets, which are ultimately premised on integral philosophical perspectives and developing principles, have evolved into mere works of criticism that are espoused by certain individuals and of limited influence. At the same time, these schools have played a vital role in reshaping the Arabic literary scene and sustaining control over its production. (1988: 393)

Faḍl relates the terminological crisis to the beginning of the openness towards Western critical schools, as Arab critics encountered these new methods without any previous experience and used the principles and terms of these critical doctrines in ignorance of their original historical context. However Faḍl adds that this crisis in the Arabic criticism scene proved to be short-lived, as an important transformation occurred when the critical method was separated from literature and became dependent on analytical data which related to the Humanities. This allowed it to be applied to any literary product irrespective of its culture or language (ibid: 395).

This new stage in Arabic criticism, called *Azmat al-Naşṣ* (methodological criticism)<sup>34</sup> by some critics, saw the new Arabic literary scene became part of the global arts scene using these different approaches. Mandūr, one of the most important critics of Arab literature at this stage, realised the importance of using Western thought while taking into account that these ideas originated in a different cultural milieu, and should not be transferred directly into Arabic criticism without careful analysis and reformulation (1988: 170).

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<sup>34</sup> For more details about *Azmat al-Naşṣ* see Al-Bāz'ī, S. 2004. *Istiqbāl al-ākhar al-gharbī fī al-naqd al-'arabī al-ḥadīth* Beirut: Arab Cultural Center. p120.

It was at this stage that Reception Theory was introduced from the West into Arabic literary studies. These Arabic critical studies attempt to convey Reception Theory whilst taking into account the unique features of Arabic text, with the aim of avoiding a crisis in terminology. Al-Ghadhāmī, for instance, studied Western Reception Theory, and then introduced many terms and principles from this theory into contemporary Arabic criticism. However, he highlights the particular nature of Arabic text in his discussion of Roman Jakobson and the indeterminacy of meaning, noting that Arab readers will not accept the idea of the multiplicity of readings of the text. Al-Ghadhāmī claims that to limit the indeterminacy of meaning in Arabic text, the meaning in context should be the only reference guiding the text's readers (2006: 75-80).

ʿAwaḍ's book *Naẓariyyat Al-Naqd Al-ʿArabī Al-Ḥadīth* also studies Western critical doctrines, outlining the evolution of Reception Theory, via Wolfgang Iser and Hans Robert Jauss. He makes two pertinent observations about the theory. Firstly, he claims that any critical theory not based on all the elements of literary communication should be considered incomplete. Secondly, he argues that the text itself must be the most important element in directing readers to its meaning (1994: 54-63). According to both al-Ghadhāmī and ʿAwaḍ, Arab readers are unable to accept the principles of Reception Theory as it is expressed in Western terms. Thus, they try to convey the theory while taking into account the specifically Arab attitude towards the interpretation of the text.

The second factor which has played a significant role in the cultural openness of Arabs to Western cultures is translation of Western critical theory books and philosophy as well as literary works, including Reception Theory. Among the many Arabic translators who have played a role in introducing other cultures to the Arab

literary scene, the most prominent ones are Jābir ‘Asfūr, Mohammed Shawqī al-Zayn, Antoin Abou Zeid and ‘Izz al-Dīn Ismā‘īl.

Like many other modern Western theories, Reception Theory has received a great deal of attention from Arabic translators. Relevant translated works include Iser’s *Act of Reading* translated by Ḥamīd Laḥmīdanī (Arabic translation published in 1995); Gadamer’s *La Philosophie Herméneutique*, translated by Muḥammad Shawqī Al-Zayn (2004); Holub’s *Reception Theory: A Critical Introduction* translated by ‘Izz al-Dīn Ismā‘īl (1997), and Jauss’s *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception* translated by Rashīd Binḥadū (2004). The appearance of these books in Arabic succeeded in bringing Reception Theory to the Arab literary scene.

However, there is still a debate in Arab literary circles concerning the emergence of Reception Theory, with some Arab critics accepting that this is a Western achievement. Alī Bakhūsh, for example, follows the development of the theory from Roman Ingarden to Wolfgang Iser and Hans Robert Jauss. He also analyses Reception Theory terminology, considering the different types of readers, such as the Super Reader, the Informed Reader and the Model Reader. In addition, he confirms that this theory has clearly impacted on new Arabic critical studies, identifying several studies in the Arabic literary field which are based on Reception Theory. Bakhūsh (2013) claims that the reason for this interest is that Arab researchers were looking for freedom in reading literary texts, and this helped them to achieve their goal.

In the same context, Ḥamūdah, in his study *Al-Marāyā Al-Muḥaddabah min Al-Bunyawiyyah ‘ila Al-Tafkīkiyyah*, confirms that, despite some critics claiming that they had introduced new methods for reading Arabic literary texts, Western critical schools clearly impacted on this new form of criticism. Kamāl Abū Dīb, for

example, claims that his structural method is a purely Arab method and an improvement on the French approach to reading literary texts. Ḥamūdāh, however, rejects this idea and highlights the similarity between French structuralism and Abū Dīb's own approach, which uses different terminology but is essentially based on the same principles (1997: 29-30). Clearly, Abū Dīb was looking primarily for the acceptance of Arab recipients, so he attempted to delude them by using his own new Arabic terminology. Moreover, in his book, Ḥamūdāh refers to the emergence of Reception Theory from Ingarden's *The Literary Work Of Art* (originally published in German in 1965) and to the efforts of the scholars of the Constance School (ibid: 322-34).

However, many studies about Reception Theory adopt Abū Dīb's attitude towards modern theory. Al-Brikī claims that the model of the reader appeared in Classical Arabic rhetoric in two forms: the passive and the active reader. From al-Brikī's perspective, "passive readers" simply receive the meaning of the literary text to understand the message of the author. Thus, recipients of this type do not participate in the creation of textual meaning through their own reading, which leads to the text's meaning being one-sided. Active readers, on the other hand, participate in the production of meaning of the received text because they are completely free to add their own understanding (2006: 86-87). Al-Brikī concludes that passive reception, which ignored active readers and focused on the author, was the prevailing model in Classical Arabic rhetoric. Al-Brikī claims that Reception Theory clearly has its roots in Arabic rhetoric, (ibid: 89). But the concept of the active reader or model of reception was not fully developed theoretically, because of the prevalence of the passive reception concept. She argues that there is convincing evidence of an Arabic precedent for this theory.

## 1.4.2 Arab historical precedents for Reception Theory

### 1.4.2.1 Claims for Arab primacy

In reality, there is little evidence to support al-Brikī's claims that Arabic studies preceded the establishment of Reception Theory as there is only one model of reception in Classical Arabic rhetoric which evolved gradually. This appears, rather, to be an unfounded attempt to find the origins of Reception Theory in the history of Arabic literature. One can point to a multiplicity of readings for literary texts in Classical Arabic rhetoric but this is the result of the disparate abilities of readers, with some focusing on the language of the text, others on meaning, and yet others on the moral function of the literary text. Therefore, this multiplicity is not necessarily indicative of the existence of many reader types in Classical Arabic rhetoric, as al-Brikī suggests.

A similar idea of Arab primacy is found in Shabāyik's article, 'Zuhūr Manzūr Al-Mutalaqqī fī Al-Turāth Al-Naqdī 'ind Al-'arab' which claims that Reception Theory was present amongst the Classical Arabic critics. The title of his paper, "The Appearance of Reception Theory in Classical Arabic Criticism", clearly indicates his position on this issue. Moreover, he states that the foundations and principles of this theory can be clearly traced to Arabic rhetoric (2010: 1-2). It is important to note that Shabāyik views the Classical Arabic reader as an active reader, with this concept in the Arabic mind-set corresponding to the implied reader in Western thought. He defines the implied reader in Arab understanding as "being present in the mind of the author during the creation of the text" (ibid: 26).

Shabāyik's study suggests that three prerequisites were needed by the reader in Arabic Reception Theory: language proficiency, literary culture, and aesthetic sense. Additionally, for the literary text to be open to interpretation two factors were

needed: firstly, cohesion of its elements and secondly, that the meanings of the text should be familiar to the reader (ibid: 59-60).

However, Shabāyik was not successful in his use of some of the terminology of Reception Theory, such as the “implied reader”, since in Western criticism this refers to “both the pre-structuring of the potential meaning by the text, and the reader’s actualization of this potential through the reading process” (Iser, 1974: xii). Thus, in Iser’s understanding the role of the implied reader fills the gap between text and reader in a new, interactive model of reading. However, Shabāyik suggests that the author should bridge this gap between literary text and readers by taking into account their circumstances and abilities. Moreover, Shabāyik’s understanding of the relationship between reader and literary text is different from that imagined in Western Reception Theory. In Western culture, readers depend on some specific principles which help them in interpreting the text, and these are based on the concept of the horizon of expectation.

In contrast, the term *‘amūd al-shi‘r* is the foundation of Arabic text interpretation. It is clear from Shabāyik’s study that he does not understand the theory as presented in Western studies, which leads him to draw the wrong conclusions, as there are many differences between the theory in Western studies and the attention given to the recipient in the Classical Arabic criticism.

Some Arab critics have interacted with Western Reception Theory on the grounds that it is the first theory to show real interest in the reader, which has changed the strategies for reading text and freed the reader from the authority of the author. In her book *Nazariyyat Al-Talaqqī Usūl wa Taṭbīqāt*, Ṣāliḥ compares Reception Theory in Western studies and the central role of recipients in Classical Arabic rhetoric. However, Ṣāliḥ realises the importance of taking into consideration the

specific nature of Arab literary culture by highlighting the fact that Arabic recipients started with oral reception until the foundation of *'amūd al-shi'r* in literary text interpretation. Thus, she does not attempt to force Western terminology onto Arabic literary texts (2001: 59- 60). These types of methodological studies take advantage of Western theory in order to enrich the Arabic literary scene.

Gharkān also takes issue with the idea of attempting to apply contemporary Western-inspired literary criticism to texts from a different culture and historical period:

While Arabic poetic concepts were not yet fully formed, Reception Theory emerged in the West. Arabic researchers then ignored their work at hand to celebrate the newcomer, which created two problems for them: the risk of confusion between the poetics of the text (the message) and the poetics of the recipient (the message receiver). The mistake lies in trying to force contemporary concepts such as reader or critic onto Classical texts beyond reasonable limits. Applying them in this way reformulates the elements of the text arbitrarily, denying it the necessary relation to the speaker, the context, and the rich cultural heritage it belongs to. In addition, this mistake deprives poetics of all the elements critical theory can be based on. The adoption of the productive free reading technique allows critics to state their own views on a poor text to make -with criticism- a creative text out of it, with the premise of the reader completing the text. This results in negligence of stylistic peculiarity, which guarantees the immortality of text, as a cultured reader would interpret philosophical allusions used ingeniously in a supposedly cultured manner by an obscure Abbasid poet as profound philosophical theory and find apparent reasonable grounds for his interpretation. (2004: 15-16)

Gharkān criticises those critics who apply terms from Western Reception Theory to Arabic criticism without being aware of the differences between the two cultures. In this passage Gharkān tries to protect the process of text interpretation in Arabic criticism, and refers to the importance of understanding the nature of a literary text

in its original context before using a particular method to read it. Moreover, studying theory in order to prove the primacy of Arabic criticism in creating literary theories will give the researchers inaccurate results.

#### **1.4.2.2 Arguments against Arab primacy**

After reviewing the development of the text recipient concept in Classical Arabic rhetoric, and tracing the identity of Reception Theory, it is clear that there are no special Arab theories concentrating on the recipient, as found in Western studies. However, great attention is given to the recipient in Arabic rhetoric although this focus on the addressee does not mean that Arabic critics were seeking to establish a theory about recipients. The attention paid to the recipient in Arabic rhetoric is a part of the overall attention given in any literary culture to the three elements of speech communication: author, text, and recipient. Although the Classical Arabic rhetorical scene was able to create a theory about the recipient, like Reception Theory, the circumstances which contributed to the emergence of this theory in Western studies were not available for Arabic rhetoric. Although many Arabic studies have attempted to trace the roots of Reception Theory to the Arabic literary heritage, some for the purposes of proving the superiority of Arab over Western culture and thought, to date not a single study has attempted to explore the reasons why Reception Theory was not established during the Classical period of Arabic literature.

There are three possible reasons for this lack of Reception Theory in Classical Arabic rhetoric, even though it paid great attention to the recipient. Firstly, Arabic rhetoric was founded on the holy Qur'ānic text and many scholars of Classical Arabic rhetoric emphasise that the Qur'ān was the key contributor to the emergence of Arabic rhetoric and to the development of literary excellence. Ibn Qutaybah says:

The excellence of the Qur'ān can only be recognized by those possessing great perception and vast knowledge, who understand the various views and versatility in the styles of the Arabs and how God distinguished their language above all others. For among all people there is not another which had received such (linguistic) effectiveness, eloquence, and possibilities as the Arabs received with the special divine gift when he made prosper in the Apostle and he willed to stand out in the Book as proof of his prophethood. (cited in Cantarino, 1975: 16)

Ibn Khaldūn also emphasises that Classical Arabic scholars were interested in the text of the Qur'ān in order to understand Islamic teachings since understanding the text's structure is the only way to truly appreciate Islamic teachings. Additionally, Ibn Khaldūn refers to the establishment of Arabic linguistics, involving elements such as rhetoric, syntax and morphology, as a result of concerns about Islamic teachings (1377: 545-552). According to Ibn Khaldūn, many rhetorical methods applied to the Qur'ānic text are regularly employed in the interpretation of literary texts. Islamic scholars tried to protect the holy text by employing a special reading strategy to interpret it known as *Maṣādir al-tafsīr* (Interpretive Resources), as coined by Ibn Taymiyyah.

Interpretive resources are the primary resources on which interpreters of the Qur'ān depend and include: the Qur'ān itself, *Sunnah* (Hadith), the narration of Companions, the narration of the Successors and the followers of the Successors, reason, and independent reason. Ibn Taymiyyah dubbed this method “approaches to interpretation” (1971: 93). This strategy of reading the Qur'ān limits the multiplicity of interpretations by readers, and also impacts on how literary texts are interpreted.

Moreover, the fact that Muslims believe the Qur'ān is a divine revelation means that there is resistance to any attempt to give the text freedom from the author's authority, while in modern Western thought the first step is to separate the text from

its author. This act of liberation would effectively lead to the destruction of the sacredness of the Qur'ān. In Western culture the holy scriptures have been through several stages of liberation, starting with Spinoza's idea of Biblical criticism, which was the first strategy to read the Holy Scripture with less limitation as a product of human spiritual development. Spinoza's method of interpretation of holy texts had an impact on the new critical doctrines, especially Formalism, as Harris explains:

The first rule to be observed is that what the scripture teaches can be sought only in the scriptures themselves. Secondly, as the scriptures do not themselves define the subjects about which they discourse, we must elicit the definitions from them by comparing what is written of the same subjects in different places [...] Next, we must beware of confusing the sense of a statement with its truth and reading into it with our own reasoning, but must investigate every passage solely in terms of the language used and reasoning based upon the scripture itself. Fourthly, the words actually used must be taken in their literal meaning, even if they conflict with reason, and may be regarded as metaphorical - however seemingly rational - only if they conflict with what we have found them to mean most generally throughout the text [...] Finally, we must bear in mind the special characteristics of the language in which the text was originally written and from which it may have been translated. (1973: 211-212)

As Harris notes, Spinoza opens the holy text up to a multiplicity of readings, destroying its sacredness. Many Western critics believe that Spinoza's method was the first step in the transformation of Western thought, and they claim that strategies for reading texts changed as a result of his ideas. Todorov, for instance, claims that:

After Spinoza, commentators no longer need to ask: "does this text speak rightly?" But only "what exactly is it saying?" Commentary, too, has become immanent: in the absence of any common transcendence, each text becomes its own frame of reference, and the critic's task is completed in clarification of the text's meaning, in the description of its forms and textual functioning, far removed from any value judgment. By this token, a qualitative break is

achieved between the text studied and the text of the study. If the commentary were concerned with truth, it would be situated at the same level as the work being commented upon and the two would bear upon the same object. But the difference between the two is a radical one, and the text studied becomes an object (an object-language), while the commentary accedes to the category of meta-language. (1988: 07)

Here Todorov focuses on the impact of Spinoza's strategy on reading holy texts in Western criticism, breaking the sacred barrier which protected the text from the reader's empowerment. This change in the nature of interpreting Holy Scripture opens the text to many reading methods; some of which followed Spinoza's method, while others did not. However, it is clear that this method contributed to the establishment of many Western doctrines.

Northrop Frye's method is one of the most important of these, advocating the independence of criticism. Frye argues:

It is all too easy to impose on literature an extra-literary schematism, a sort of religio-political colour-filter, which makes some poets leap into prominence and others show up as dark and faulty. All that the disinterested critic can do with such a colour-filter is to murmur politely that it shows things in a new light and is indeed a most stimulating contribution to criticism. Of course such filtering critics usually imply, and often believe, that they are letting their literary experience speak for itself and are holding their other attitudes in reserve, the coincidence between their critical valuations and their religious or political views being silently gratifying to them but not explicitly forced on the reader. Such independence of criticism from prejudice, however, does not invariably occur even with those who best understand criticism. (1957: 07)

This formalist method makes the holy text, like the literary text, express itself through its language. As Hartman observes: "The virtue of Frye's system is that it methodically removes the one barrier which prevents art from exerting wide

influence: the distinction of kind between sacred and secular, or between popular and highbrow” (1970: 361). Thus, the implication is that any text is adjustable for multiple readings, including the Qur’ānic text, as long as the context supports the reading.

Moreover, there is evidence that the Qur’ānic text may have several different meanings which can be applied in various contexts, but extracting and applying these requires a qualified and capable reader. Thus, the Qur’ānic text is valid for all times and places, as it can be read in different ways. Indeed, people's views, ideas and visions have changed over the course of time; these changes are the result of multiple interpretations of the text’s meanings. However, some religious scholars attempt to preserve one meaning for the Qur’ānic text, despite the fact that Sūrat al-Ḥijr states that Allah’s divine protection will save the holy text from any corruption or distortion.<sup>35</sup>

These authorities, including religious scholars and political parties, consider any innovation or new way of reading holy texts as tantamount to sacrilege. This belief also extends to innovation or new ways of reading literary text. Indeed, it seems that the authorities, especially the political ones greatly fear innovation in reading text as text. The Qur’ānic text is considered to be the fundamental document of political and social regulation, and thus the best way for a government to maintain control is to control the interpretation of the text. Readers must not be allowed to directly access the text themselves but only through the scholars who are nominated by those in power.

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قال تعالى في سورة الحجر الآية 10: (إنا نحن نزلنا الذكر وإنا له لحافظون) 35

Verily, We Ourselves have sent down this Exhortation, and most surely We will be its Guardian.

The second reason for the lack of Reception Theory in Classical Arabic criticism is to be found in the specific role which is played by the literary text in Arab culture. It serves to convince the text's recipient of the message which it contains. Most Classical Arabic literary texts were intended to serve a moral function by extolling some moral virtue. Ibn Ṭabāṭabā confirms that the literary text should be based on the personal integrity of the poet and he also encourages the reader to search for the moral lesson in the text rather than literary pleasure (2010: 83). Some modern critics have demonstrated that finding the moral of the text was considered to be one of the critical Classical Arabic methods, which went hand in hand with the other Arabic literary doctrines (Al-Ḥārthī, 1989: 109-110).

In fact, the existence of these different doctrines created a balance and a vital discipline in the interpretation of literary texts. Moreover, this moral aim clarifies the poet's function in constructing the literary text. Therefore, critics developed several terms for the words which are used in the literary text by the poets to make the meaning of the text clear to readers.<sup>36</sup> In fact, the moral function of literature, the existence of different critical methods and the clear purpose of the literary text all led to the creation of a disciplined reading method in Classical Arabic rhetoric. Thus, the presence of these principles can be regarded as a strategy for creation and reception of the literary text in Classical Arabic literature, meaning that a Reception Theory was not needed.

The third and final last reason for the lack of Reception Theory in Classical Arabic literature is *'amūd al-shi'r*, which embodies many of the standards and criteria for the ideal literary model. These can be divided into major groups. The first group relates to form, and the second to content. *'amūd al-shi'r* plays a significant role in

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<sup>36</sup> See Al-Jāhīz. 1960, *Al-Bayān wa al-tabyīn*. Cairo: Muṣṭafá al-Ḥalabī. p144

controlling both creation and interpretation of the text. Therefore, it plays a similar role to the concept of the horizon of expectation in Western literature, being both a discipline and a critical process which limits the indeterminacy of interpretation.

Al-Hārthī, who has studied the emergence of the concept of *'amūd al-shi'r*, refers to its major role in regulating the shift in Arabic criticism from creation to reading; he also claims that as a set of standards and criteria they are not fixed being more flexible and active, as they do not enforce one single method of literary creation and criticism (1996: 513). Al-Hārthī's findings indicate that *'amūd al-shi'r* allowed readers a degree of freedom in their interaction with the literary text.

## 1.5 Conclusion

In conclusion, Classical Arabic rhetoric paid great attention to the recipient, who is referred to by several terms in rhetorical studies: *al-mutalaqqī*, *al-qāri'*, *al-sāmi'* and *al-mukāhṭab*. However, the term *al-sāmi'* is more commonly used in the rhetoric, owing to the fact that Arab culture was an oral culture at that time. This discussion also highlighted the importance of recipients in Classical Arabic literature according to their multiple functions and levels of language. Moreover, the argument concerning the impact of foreign cultures, particularly Greek culture, on Arabic recipients emphasises that the interest in recipients in both Arabic and Western criticism comes from Aristotelian thought. Analysis of Classical Arabic rhetorical studies, such as those of al-Jāhiz, ibn Qutaybah, Abū Ḥayyān al-Tawḥīdī, 'Abdulqāhir al-Jurjānī and ibn Ṭabāṭabā, showed evidence of the existence of differing concepts of the recipient. Three distinct stages of literary reception in Classical Arabic rhetoric were identified; the impressionistic stage, the linguistic stage and the rhetorical stage. Each of these had its own characteristic principles,

suiting to the period in which it emerged. The rhetorical reading strategy, for instance, mentioned by al-Jāhiz and ‘Abdulqāhir al-Jurjānī, focused on the reader whilst the rhetorical method encouraged recipients to focus on how the author used his imagination to link reality and its literary representation.

This chapter confirms that Reception Theory is an achievement of modern Western culture which was introduced into Arab culture as a result of factors including scholarship and translation. This chapter also highlighted the difficulties faced by many Arab critics in dealing with and understanding the elements and principles of this literary theory and the problems which they faced in attempting to apply this without taking into consideration the differences between Arab and Western culture. As this chapter has demonstrated, there are no historical precedents for a uniquely Arab Reception Theory. However, there is clear evidence of the fact that Classical Arabic literature had its own distinctive methods and reading strategies, and that these reflected a sophisticated awareness of the roles of both author and recipient.

# **The Sociocultural Dynamics of the Literary Scene in the Abbasid Era**

## **1.1 Introduction**

This chapter focuses on the sociocultural dynamics of the literary scene in the Abbasid era in order to gain an insight into the prevailing trends in literary reception during that period and to reveal the principles on which al-Āmedī's method has been based. Thus, this chapter has three key aims. The first of these is to identify the main influences that contributed to the formation of the Arab worldview during the Abbasid era. Secondly, the principle factors which contributed to the formation of the cultural frame of reference for readers during this period will be identified and examined, and then finally, the main literary debates which were reflected in the critical arguments that occurred among Abbasid era scholars concerning poetry will be discussed in detail, focusing specifically on two key areas: Tradition versus Modernity, and Language versus Meaning. This discussion will serve to shed light on the most important issues that helped to form the consciousness of the literary audience, and the principles that framed their understanding during that historical period.

This chapter is divided into four main sections, the first of which highlights the various historico-political and socio-cultural factors which helped to form the Arab worldview during the Abbasid era. In the second section, the focus shifts to examine in more detail the cultural framework which determined how literary works were received. The third and fourth sections concentrate on two of the key literary debates which emerged during the Abbasid era, the importance of which has been highlighted by numerous scholars. Following a detailed exploration of the Tradition

versus Modernity debate amongst the Abbasid literati, this chapter concludes by considering in depth another of the issues which divided both critics and writers, whether language itself or the meaning it conveyed should be of prime importance in poetic composition.

## **1.2 Overview of the Abbasid Era**

The Abbasid era is considered to be one of the most important literary ages in the heritage of Arabic literature, since, as this chapter will explain, this period witnessed the appearance of some of the literary debates which were to dominate critical thought for centuries to come and also saw the establishment of the disciplines of Arabic rhetoric and linguistics. Literary critics often use historical periodisation to classify Arabic literary works, referring to the pre-Islamic era, the Islamic era, and the Umayyad era. However, critics disagree amongst themselves regarding the periodisation of the Abbasid era.

Earlier scholars such as al-Askandarī (1919) in his book *Al-Wasīṭ fī al-Adab al-‘Arabī wa Tārīkhuh* and Maḥmūd Muṣṭafā (1931: 16-19/2) claimed that there were two major Abbasid eras, the first being one of progress and prosperity (132-334 H), the second one of decline (334-656 H). They saw the former period as being the more important in terms of literary achievements.

Zaydān (1957: 16/2), one of the first scholars to show an interest in linking literary study with politics, differed on this periodisation, dividing the Abbasid era into four stages. The first he identified as the Islamic Golden Age (132-232 H), which witnessed the rise of movements with an interest in scientific and literary issues. The second stage he referred to as the so-called “Dead Period” (232-334 H), during which politicians neglected the advancement of all branches of knowledge as they were more preoccupied by State matters. Linguistics and literary movements

reached their peak during the third stage (334-447 H), finally fading once more during the fourth stage (447-656 H), known by Arab historians as the Era of Decline.

According to Zaydān, then, periods of outstanding achievements alternated with periods of political and literary decline. A number of scholars concur with Zaydān's characterisation, including Khafājī in his book *Ibn al-Mu'tazz wa-Turāṭihu fī al-Adab wa al-Naqd wa al-Bayān* (1958), and Ḍayf in his work about *Ta'rīkh al-adab al-'Arabī*, part three (1966) and part four (1977). However, al-Maqdisī agrees with Zaydān's opinion concerning the first three stages but argues that the fourth stage can be considered to have ended in 590 H, and proposes that the years 590-656 H comprise a fifth stage (1977: 7-9).

These literary scholars tended to focus on how political changes affected the development of different literary movements during the Abbasid rule, which spanned over five centuries. They drew parallels between periods of political strength and weakness, and the flourishing and decline of poetry and literary criticism in those same historical periods. However, whilst political changes may occur relatively quickly, often in response to specific events, changes in human thought, including how new ideas are reflected and expressed in literary form, are not prompted solely by political developments, requiring a more gradual process and evolving over time.

Concerning the lack of direct linkage between political change and broader sociocultural transformation, Amīn claims that even if the Umayyads had remained in power longer, most of the literary developments and social reforms which took place during the Abbasid era would still have occurred (1961: 02/1). He thus suggests that multiple factors were responsible for the formation of the Arab

worldview in the Abbasid period; political change was one of these, but it was not the sole influence. Therefore, alternative influences on literary developments during this historical period need to be explored.

### **1.3 The formation of the Arab Worldview in the Abbasid era**

#### **1.3.1 Political Change in the Abbasid Era**

##### **1.3.1.1 From Damascus to Baghdad**

Numerous important political events can be said to have significantly impacted on the formation of the worldview of Abbasid readers, creating a particular Arab worldview including the tension between religious conservatism on the one hand and more revolutionary, liberal ideas on the other. Choosing Baghdad, which became known as the City of Peace (*Madīnatu a-Salām*), as the capital of the Abbasid caliphate can be viewed as an essential step towards establishing a new political regime following the Abbasid revolution. As Le Strange notes, the Abbasid caliph al-Mansūr considered several options before finally settling upon Baghdad, understanding the crucial importance of the role which the new capital city would play in governing the state:

Damascus, peopled by the dependents of the Umayyads, was out of the question. On the one hand it was too far from Persia, whence the power of the Abbasids was chiefly derived; on the other hand it was dangerously near the Greek frontier, and from here, during the troublous reigns of the last Umayyads, hostile incursions on the part of the Christians had begun to avenge former defeats. It was also beginning to be evident that the conquests of Islam would, in the future, lie to the eastward towards Central Asia, rather than to westward at the further expense of the Byzantines. Damascus, on the highland of Syria, lay, so to speak, dominating the Mediterranean and looking westward, but the new capital that was to supplant it must face east, be near Persia, and for the needs of commerce have water communication with the

sea. Hence everything pointed to a site on either the Euphrates or the Tigris, and the Abbasids were not slow to make their choice. (1972: 4-5)

Thus, this geographical relocation by the new regime of their capital city to Baghdad not only reflected the shift from the Umayyad dynasty but also marked the rise of Persian influence on Abbasid political and administrative systems and also on culture and thought. Dayf (1966) claims that the Abbasid caliphs established their state on Persian foundations, as shown by their adoption of their divan system (*Al-dawāwīm*)<sup>37</sup> for political administration. Dayf cites as examples the establishment of *dīwān al-kharāj* (the office dealing with taxation, including the *Zakāt* levy), *dīwān a-zimām* (the control department which dealt with other financial matters, including salaries of state officials); *dīwān al-jund* (military affairs department); and *dīwān al-Khabar* (information department, responsible for disseminating information throughout all the cities throughout the caliphate) (1966: 19-22). The same author also notes that each one of the Abbasid caliphs appointed a senior advisor or Grand Vizier (*Wazīr*) influenced by the Persian system. Given the importance of the Persians in the formation of the Abbasid state, and the important role played by this individual as representative of the caliph in delivering the sovereign's decisions and instructions to his subjects, most of the Grand Viziers in the Abbasid era were Persians (ibid: 23). Whilst the Grand Vizier served a useful administrative role dealing with necessary duties and responsibilities, he also served the function of distancing the caliph from the ordinary people, adding to his aura of remoteness and sanctity.

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<sup>37</sup> In Arabic, the term was first used for army registers, then generalized to any register, and by extension applied to specific government departments. See Duri, A. A. (1991). "Dīwān i.—The caliphate". *The Encyclopedia of Islam, New Edition. Volume II: C–G*. Leiden and New York: Brill. pp. 337–327.

### 1.3.1.2 The Role of the Caliph

Whilst this close relationship between the Abbasid state and the Persians changed the lifestyle in the palace, and was also evident at the level of State departments, administration and bureaucratic systems, these outward changes were not significantly influential on the Arab worldview of the time. Rather, one of the most significant political changes influencing the popular mindset during the Abbasid era was the shift which occurred in the concept of the caliph who became more like the Persian notion of the king which implied a role as religious leader and defender of the faith (ibid: 19-22). It must be remembered that Abbasids established their own state on the principle that, unlike the Umayyads, they were direct descendants of the Prophet Muhammad and considered themselves to be as Crone explains:

The best of creation after the Prophet, almost prophets themselves and chosen by God to be heirs of the prophets, but of the Prophet above all [...] they were also kinsmen of the Prophet, to whose legacy they had a hereditary right. (1986: 81-82)

At the same time, however, they continued to maintain the notion of the institution of the caliph and of the caliph himself as being “guidance and light, rain *ghayth*, a source of healing and a refuge against error, God’s rope and the pillar of Islam” (ibid).

Dayf argues that prophets do not bequeath anything to their heirs, referring to the well-known account of Abū Bakr’s response to the Prophet Muhammad’s daughter Fatima when she asked about her share of her father’s inheritance: “We [prophets] do not bequeath, and what we leave behind is [to be given] in charity”. He concludes that if there is to be no inheritance in terms of money or property, then the inheritance of titles would be forbidden as well. However, the Abbasid caliphs were protecting themselves and their rule from the judgements of some religious scholars

(*'ulamā'*) who interpreted the text of the Qur'ān and of the Hadith differently (1966: 20).

It can be argued that the legitimisation of the right to govern on the basis of kinship with the Prophet Muhammad began at the beginning of the Umayyad era, but they did not use the text of the Qur'ān to justify this. It is necessary here to examine the concept of *khalīfat Allāh* (literally, successor to God) in Arab culture to understand the relationship between the caliph as ruler and the nation as ruled. Crone notes that “A *khalīfa* is somebody who stands in the place of another, that is a deputy or a successor depending on whether the other is absent or dead” (1986: 4). The term is viewed as a shortened form of either *khalīfat Allāh* or *khalīfat rasūl Allāh* (successor to the Messenger of God), the conventional view being “that the caliphate is succession to Muhammad rather than deputyship on behalf of God” (ibid: 4).

It is important to note the conventional Islamic view that the caliph is the representative of the Prophet Muhammad in political issues but not in religious matters. In other words, political power passed to the caliph; but religious authority remained with the Prophet himself or, differently put, it passed to those scholars who remembered what he had said (ibid: 1).

In his book-length study of the relationship between ruler and ruled in the early Islamic era, which highlights the role of the *'ulamā'* (scholars) in the formation of this relationship, Adunīs<sup>38</sup> claims that the ruled (in contemporary terms, citizens), were referred to by the *'ulamā'* as “*al-mukallaf*”, meaning “those responsible for specific tasks”. He argues that this shows that the *'ulamā'* did not conceive of the

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38 This is the pen name of Ali Ahmad Sa'īd Asbar (n.1930-), a Syrian-Lebanese poet, literary critic, translator, and editor, who is a highly influential figure in contemporary Arabic literature. His work combines a deep knowledge of Classical Arabic poetry and revolutionary, modernist expression. For further details see Petri Liukkonen 2008 “Adunīs”, Books and Writers Available online at: <http://www.kirjasto.sci.fi/adonis.htm> .

relationship between ruler and ruled in terms of a relationship between *Imām* and *Ummah* (individual religious reader and society); in other words, they did not base their understanding on the idea of human rights but rather on the idea of duty (2011: 76/1).

According to Adunīs, the '*ulamā*' used their interpretation of holy scriptures to convince the ordinary people that in their understanding of Islam, Muslims have no rights, only duties that must be performed for Allah. Adunīs identifies two types of duties: those which the individual Muslim must perform for God, including prayer, charitable giving and fasting, and those which are related to social and political issues and concern society (*al-Ummah*) and God (ibid: 77/1). Thus, the early Arab worldview was conditioned by this prevalent understanding that '*ulamā*' were responsible for interpreting scriptures, acting as the gatekeepers of Islamic law which only they understood. This formed a barrier between readers and their freedom in dealing with religious text whilst political issues were portrayed by the '*ulamā*' as not being of importance to the individual. Adunīs also argues that the Arab caliphs intentionally promulgated the idea that ordinary readers were incapable of dealing with the text, and appointed particular '*ulamā*' to interpret the text in their favour. This alliance between '*ulamā*' and rulers, which was formed in order to protect the power of the caliph, produced what might be termed "political dependency" (ibid: 161/1). As Crone explains, the result was that:

The early caliphate was conceived along lines very different from the Classical institution, all religious and political authority being concentrated in it; it was the caliph who was charged with the definition of Islamic law, the very core of the religion, and without allegiance to a caliph no Muslim could achieve salvation. (Crone, 1986: 1)

Political dependency led to the existence of a major conflict between ‘*ulamā*’ (scholars) and non-scholars regarding the imposition of specific interpretations of religious text versus the freedom to read this according to individual understanding. This conflict can be said to have helped engender the emergence of another type of Arab worldview, which is the revolutionary mindset. Consequently, the Abbasid era saw the appearance of several revolutionary movements which targeted the incumbent regime or the prevalent culture. These included the sect known as Kharijites (*Khawārij*), populism (*al-Shu‘ūbiyyah*), and the *Mu‘tazilah* movement, and all had a significant effect on the worldview of Arab readers at that time.

### 1.3.2 Theological Sects

#### 1.3.2.1 The Kharijites (*Khawārij*)

The Kharijites’ movement (*Khawārij*) was one of the politically motivated movements which drew its inspiration from a particular Qur’ānic *sūrah*:

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ إِنَّا خَلَقْنَاكُمْ مِنْ ذَكَرٍ وَأُنْثَىٰ وَجَعَلْنَاكُمْ شُعُوبًا وَقَبَائِلَ لِتَعَارَفُوا إِنَّ أَكْرَمَكُمْ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ  
أَتْقَاكُمْ إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَلِيمٌ خَبِيرٌ

O mankind! We created you from a single (pair) of a male and a female, and made you into nations (*shu‘ūb*) and tribes (*qabā’il*), that ye may know each other (not that ye may despise each other). Verily the most honoured of you in the sight of Allah is (he who is) the most righteous of you. And Allah has full knowledge and is well acquainted (with all things).<sup>39</sup>

Gibb states that on these religious grounds the Kharijites “maintained the doctrine that no race or tribe enjoyed any inherent superiority, and, in particular, opposed the theory of the inherent right of the Quraysh to the caliphate” (1962: 67).

The Kharijites thus objected to the three prevalent principles which related to the Imamate or leadership at that time: (1) the method of choosing the caliph; (2) the

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<sup>39</sup> *Sūrat Al-Hujūrāt* 49:13 translated by Yūsuf Ali

fact that the caliphate was confined to members of the Quraysh tribe;<sup>40</sup> and (3) the necessity of obedience to the caliph (2011: 234/1). The original Kharijites' movement was fairly short-lived. After first supporting the Caliph 'Ali in battle, they mutinied and turned against him. Some of these dissenters were persuaded to accept the error of their particular doctrinal interpretation of the Qur'ān whilst many others were killed in a later battle, leaving only a small number of rebels remaining. For this reason, they failed to pose the same level of opposition as either the *Shu'ūbiyyah* or *Mu'tazilah* movements.<sup>41</sup>

### **1.3.2.2 *Al-Shu'ūbiyyah***

During the Umayyad\_dynasty, at a time when many of those originally captured during the expansion of Islam throughout the Near East and parts of the Byzantine Empire had converted to Islam, the term *al-mawālī* gained prominence and was used in Classical Arabic to refer to non-Arab Muslims. Even though they were Muslims, *al-mawālī* were not entitled to equal treatment with their Arab counterparts and were politically and socially disadvantaged in many respects, particularly with respect to the taxes which the Umayyad regime exacted from them. The privileges enjoyed by Arab Muslims came to be a source of contention amongst *al-mawālī* since, as previously noted, it violated the Qur'ānic declaration of equality of all believers.

The *al-Shu'ūbiyyah* movement was a response to this lack of equality in treatment and evolved to become probably one of the most significant in terms of its direct

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40 According to Gibb (1962) the Quraysh were a powerful merchant tribe that controlled Mecca and descendants of Ishmael according to tradition. The Prophet Muhammad was born into the Banu Hashim clan of this tribe. After the introduction of Islam by Muhammad, the Quraysh gained supremacy and produced the three dynasties of the Umayyad Caliphate, the Abbasid Caliphate and the Fatimid Caliphate.

41 For a full account of the Kharijites' rebellion and its aftermath, see Hitti (1958).

impact on the worldview concerning the critical reception and composition of poetry in the Abbasid era. This movement, which started in the Umayyad era but gained its full strength in the Abbasid period, took its name *al-Shu'ūbiyyah* (*shu'ūb* referring to non-Arabs) from the Qur'ānic verse cited above (Sūrat *Al-Ḥujurāt* 49:13) which is intended to inspire feelings of brotherhood and equality amongst all Muslims as opposed to *al-mawālī* which implies a lack of equality. *Al-Shu'ūbiyyah* was therefore based on one of the most important Islamic principles, namely, the equality of all Muslims, Arab and non-Arab. The objective of the movement was “to combat the feeling of superiority which those Muslims of Arabian descent, real or claimed, had long manifested” (Hitti, 1958: 247) and it developed particularly strongly amongst the Persians, not least because the relocation of the capital to Baghdad meant that they in particular played an important political role in the Abbasid regime and had strong supporters in the government.

The *al-Shu'ūbiyyah* was the root cause of numerous socio-political, religious and cultural conflicts during the Abbasid era which were to contribute to the formation of the Arab worldview during that historical period and Gibb highlights the central importance of the *al-Shu'ūbiyyah* movement claiming that it should be understood not merely as “a conflict between two schools of literature, nor yet a conflict of political nationalism, but [as] a struggle to determine the destinies of Islamic culture as a whole” (1962: 62).

Among the Kharijites (as mentioned above) and also the *Shi'ites*, the *al-Shu'ūbiyyah* acquired a political dimension, which led to power struggles, challenges to the ruling Abbasid dynasty and in some instances, open rebellion. In the case of some Persians,

the religious aspect of *al-Shu'ūbiyyah* led them to be labelled as *zindiq* or heretics,<sup>42</sup> an element which is dealt with in further detail in the following sub-section. In general though, the form in which *al-Shu'ūbiyyah* was most influential in cultural terms was in the literary controversy which it generated, which “had a large impact on poetry and criticism, and was an essential factor in many critical debates, including the debate on tradition and modernity” (ibid: 129).

Under the Abbasid dynasty, *Shu'ūbī* poets challenged what had previously been the cultural hegemony of the Arabs. They “derided Arab pretensions to intellectual superiority and claimed for non-Arabs superiority in poetry and literature” (Hitti, 1958: 247). Poets such as Bashār ibn-Burd and Abū Nuwās “declared themselves anti-everything that is Arabic and they exploited any chance to highlight their ideologies” (Al-Taṭāwī, 1988: 128). Moreover, they were “were skilled in the Arabic language and proficient in the creation of poetic text; thus they could disseminate their ideas among recipients” (ibid: 129). Hitti (1958: 247) observes that the *Shu'ūbī* cause was represented by scholars such as al-Birūnī and Ḥamzah al-Aṣḫānī whilst the opposition included intellectuals of both Arab and Persian extraction, including al-Jāḥiẓ, ibn-Durayd, and ibn-Qutaybah al-Balādhūrī.

The attitude of *Shu'ūbī* poets toward Arabs can be clearly seen in the work of Abū Nuwās. In one example, the poet ironically dismisses two of the most prestigious Arab tribes: “Who are Tamīm? Who are Qays? Who are they like? Allah sees the Bedouin is nothing” (cited in Al-Taṭāwī, 1988: 129). Moreover, by emphasising the seeming divine disregard for these Arab tribes who are considered as powerful in

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42 Bernard Lewis (2000:1287) writing in *Islam in history: ideas, people, and events in the Middle East* (Chicago: Open Court) offers the following definition: "In legal parlance the Zindiq is the criminal dissident—the professing Muslim who holds beliefs or follows practices contrary to the central dogmas of Islam and is therefore to be regarded as an apostate and an infidel. The jurists differ as to the theoretical formulation of the point of exclusion, but in fact usually adopt the practical criterion of open rebellion". This term is also related to Zandaqah.

human terms, he doubles the force of his insult. This use of religious discourse was an essential element of the *Shu'ūbī* technique for alerting readers to underlying meaning in their work. In another example cited by Gibb, Abū Nuwās declares: “I have never been honoured by an Arabic surname, and it has never given me praise or pride” (ibid:129). This line shows the extent of the conflict between Arabs and non-Arabs at that time, which often amounted to open contempt for each other’s opinions and work. This conflict thus affected literary reception since it could lead to critical judgements on literary texts being based not on the language which they employed or the themes they dealt with but the ethnic identity of their author.

### **1.3.2.3 The Mu‘tazilites (*al-Mu‘tazilah*)**

The *Mu‘tazilah* movement was another important factor that contributed to the formation of the Abbasid worldview, particularly in the methods of interpreting and critiquing texts and ideas. Theological debates which had emerged at the end of the Umayyad era took on a central importance during Abbasid times, with debates between representatives of opposing tendencies taking place in the mosques, especially in Basra, Kufa and Baghdad. Amongst the many different groups taking part in these disputations, were the staunchly traditionalist ‘*ulamā*’, the Kharijites, the Murjiites (*al-Murji’ah*) and *Mu‘tazilah* (*Ahlu al-Kalām*). In terms of the focus of this study, the *Mu‘tazilis* were one of the most influential groups because their discourse proved attractive for the audiences. Each poet was keen to attract as big an audience as possible, especially young listeners to ensure that they did not go to other groups. The most important features of the ‘*i‘tizāl*’ (rational theology) speeches given by the *Mu‘tazilites* were said to be: choosing emotive words intended to influence the audience, employing good diction, and using logical evidence. Dayf provides the example of a famous debate between Al-Hassan al-Baṣrī and his

student 'Amr bin 'Ubayd versus the leader of *al-Mu'tazilah*, Wāṣil bin 'Aṭā', in which the Mu'tazilite persuaded 'Amr bin 'Ubayd to accept his point of view (1965: 32-33).

These intellectual debates led to the rapid dissemination of ideas which helped to broaden the cultural horizons of the intellectually curious in the Abbasid era because each group sought to gain followers who would espouse its principles and orientations. Thus, this led to the spread of a diverse range of forms of discourse and critical methods. Some discourse relied heavily on logical argumentation, such as *Mu'tazilah* speeches; other speakers cited the Qu'rān and other religious texts to support their point of view, but according to al-Jāḥiẓ the most influential orators relied on a mixture of styles, eloquently combining religious rhetoric with a philosophical style which presented evidence in a logical manner (1938: 134/2).

In his article which focuses on political attitudes amongst the *Mu'tazilah*, Watt argues that the members of this group were looking for a new form of literary analysis which would offer a compromise among the then prevalent schools of thought: the traditional '*ulamā*' method, which drew on religious ideas; the *Shī'ah* method, which involved not thinking about the meaning of the text but simply following their *imām* (leader), who was descended from the Prophet's family; and the Kharijite method, whose specific interpretations of the Qur'ān had turned them into political extremists (1963: 53-56). Watt says that later, when some of the '*ulamā*' of Basra became interested in Greek philosophy and were nicknamed Jahmites, they reacted by claiming to be followers of 'Amr bin 'Ubayd and Wāṣil and giving a theological definition of '*i'tizāl*' (ibid: 56). The *Mu'tazilites* played a significant role in both political and cultural life in the Abbasid era, and later

became particularly noted for their opposition to ideas which came from other cultures and “vigorously attacked the Manichaeism<sup>43</sup> views” (ibid: 46).

The openness to foreign cultures during the Abbasid, especially Persian, led to the appearance of some non-Islamic religious ideas such as Manichaeism and Zoroastrianism.<sup>44</sup> Certain aspects of these religious beliefs were embraced by some *Shu‘ūbī* philosophers and poets, creating a conflict between the Abbasid caliphs and the *Zandaqah*. During this period, this term was applied to anyone suspected of undermining religious orthodoxy by cloaking an esoteric faith such as Manichaeism or Zoroastrianism beneath a profession of Islam. Many different philosophical schools and religious sects were drawn into this conflict, supporting the Abbasid caliphs, in order to protect Islamic principles from foreign ideas.

Noting the dangers posed by the new ideas from the *Zandaqah*, Caliph al-Mahdī established a new *dīwān* to track down any poets or writers who were secret followers of Manichaeism, Zoroastrianism or any other religious ideas which ran contrary to Islamic teachings. He used the ‘*ulamā*’ and the *Mu‘tazilites* scholars to oppose this movement, and sent any suspected *Zindīq* firstly to jail; then, if he failed to recant, he would be killed. Caliph al-Mahdī and his successors had many poets and authors put to death on charges of *Zandaqah*, including ibn al-Muqaffa‘ and Bashshār ibn Burd (Ḍayf, 1966: 83). In the case of the latter, Huart writes that:

Bashshār held the element of Fire to be superior to that of Earth, and justified Satan, who was created out of Fire, for having refused to bow down before

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43 Manichaeism, founded in Persia by Manes was a dualistic religious system which combined Christian, Gnostic, and pagan elements and was based on a supposed primeval conflict between light and darkness (OED).

44 Zoroastrianism is a monotheistic pre-Islamic religion of ancient Persia founded by Zoroaster. According to its teachings, God created twin spirits, one of which chose truth and light, the other untruth and darkness.

Adam, who was made of clay, as the Qur'ān relates. He even wrote a stanza which strongly betokens his Zoroastrian views: "The Earth is dark, and Fire is brilliant. Ever since it has existed men have worshipped it". (1903: 68)

Although those who dealt with forbidden ideas were punished, in general terms the Abbasid caliphs did encourage knowledge which in turn helped to broaden the intellectual horizons of the Arab worldview. This development of educational life in the Abbasid era is reflected in the establishment of the *khātib*, schools where children learnt the skills of writing, reading and poetry, as well as memorising the Qur'ān (Al-Jāhiz, 1960: 180/2). Cultural gatherings for famous poets and their followers, such as the Al-Marbid poetry festival in Basra, also helped to popularize this literary form. Poets would perform their work before large audiences who came to hear new poems and to expand and enhance their linguistic knowledge of Classical Arabic (Al-Aṣfahānī, 1823: 150/3). Furthermore, the appearance in the mosques of groups of students eager to learn was a clear sign of the importance of education in the Abbasid era, with these circles playing an essential role in disseminating knowledge and ideas with society. Every mosque had its own group of scholars, each one teaching a different subject, such as *Fiqh*, Hadith, Arabic linguistics and Qur'ānic exegesis (Ḍayf, 1966: 100). Colloquia held in the Caliph's palaces played a similar role to the mosque circles, with the ruler inviting scholars to give seminars on different subjects (ibid: 105). Another sign of the development of cultural life during the Abbasid era is the existence of the group *al-Warrāqūn*, who established numerous libraries, such as those of 'Ishāq bin Sulimān al-'Abbāsī and Yaḥyā bin Khālīd al-Barmakī.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> For more on educational developments in the Abbasid era, see Ḍayf's book *al-'Aṣr al-'Abbāsī al-Awwal*, pp. 98- 117.

## **1.4 The Cultural Frame of Abbasid Era Readers**

As noted previously, there is no doubt that literature is a reflection of political, social and economic aspects of real life and that all these may contribute to the development of literary phenomena. However, this understanding does not mean that the worldview of humans is susceptible to this social or political change in the short term, but rather that it changes gradually over the course of time, a slow process which is reflected in literature.

Arabic literature was influenced by developments in the Arab worldview due to the length of the Abbasid era and the major socio-political changes which took place over this period, all of which affected Arab lifestyle, as previously detailed. Thus, this era saw not only the evolution of new forms of Arabic poetry but also the emergence of the literary criticism movement. In the early part of the third century AH, literary critics shifted their focus from critical commentary on the text to an interest in the creative process of authoring and, eventually, the establishment of Arabic rhetoric. These developments originated in Baghdad, the capital city of the Abbasid Caliphate.

This section examines three key factors which contributed to forming the horizon of expectations of Arab readers and their specifically Arab worldview of reading literary texts. These are the authoring movement and the work of Abbasid era critics; the impact of different theological sects on Arab understanding of rhetoric; and the influence of foreign cultures on Arabic literature.

### **1.4.1 Key Critical Texts of the Period**

By way of introduction, it should be noted that perhaps the earliest texts that might be considered to be literary criticism in Arabic appeared in the mid-second century during the Umayyad era and involved the process of “ranking” poets as part of a

broader literary method of establishing *ṭabaqāt* (classes or levels). *Ṭabaqāt Fuḥūl al-Shu'arā'* (Classes of Champion Poets) by al-Jumaḥī provides a good example of this technique. Al-Jumaḥī divided pre-Islamic and Umayyad poets into a total of ten types, putting four poets in each. This division was not arbitrary but based on established principles although al-Jumaḥī also created his own criteria, such as categorisation by the quality of the themes addressed in the poet's work or the basis of similarities between the subject matter of their poems (1974: 123-124). However, later critics eschewed the use of the *Ṭabaqāt* method because of the lack of an analytical underpinning for these judgments which made it impossible to apply them consistently and refine this technique ('Abbās, 1993: 70).

According to Ḍayf (1965: 66) Abbasid literary scholars can be divided into two types: traditionalists who tried to protect and preserve the identity of Arabic poetry and philosopher-scholars who tried to develop Arabic poetry by introducing concepts from other cultures, in particular, Greek theories. The existence of these different approaches created significant conflict among Abbasid scholars which led to the development of Arabic rhetoric. The following sections highlight some of the key works from the Abbasid period which are generally considered to have helped establish the foundations of literary criticism in the Arab literary world.

#### **1.4.1.1 *Kitāb al-Badī'* (Ibn al-Mu'tazz)**

One of the most influential works from the Abbasid period which was to play a major role in establishing the rhetorical method and to continue to impact on Arabic poetic tradition for centuries was *Kitāb al-badī'* ibn al-Mu'tazz, who was both a poet and a critic. As Van Gelder notes, this work is:

Referred to by almost all writers on stylistics and the word *badī'*, “new-fangled”, “original” or “extraordinary” is from then onwards a technical term denoting “rhetorical embellishments” or “figures of speech”. (1982: 02)

For scholars such as Dayf this work marks the beginning of Arabic rhetorical studies, and he considers ibn al-Mu‘tazz to be an expert reader because he remained neutral in his ideas about the old and the new poets, seeing the latter as a continuation of the traditions established by the former. Instead his analysis stressed the need to focus on analysis of the literary text and the linguistic capabilities of the poet being scrutinized. Thus, ibn al-Mu‘tazz focused on ‘ilm al-Badī‘ (the science of rhetorical figures) which paid particular attention to the use of figures of speech and the art of creating a beautiful style (1965: 75).

This book was authored by ibn al-Mu‘tazz in response to the allegations by the *mawālī* poets that *al-Badī‘* (the use of rhetorical figures) was not a purely Arabic product. His intention was to prove that, on the contrary, this technique was indeed an inherent element of Arabic style, and he traced its use to Qur’ānic texts and Classical Arabic poetry, but argued that the new poets used it exaggeratedly (1967: 58). Additionally, ibn al-Mu‘tazz attempted to clarify the defining features of *al-Badī‘*, limiting these to five techniques of literary embellishment, namely: *Isti‘ārah* (metaphor), *Jinās* (alliteration), *Ṭibāq* (antonyms), *Radd al-kalām ‘alā mā-Taqaddam* (epanalepsis)<sup>46</sup> and *al-Madhahab al-Kalāmī* (dialectic jargon) (ibid: 57).

#### **1.4.1.2 *Al-Bayān wa al-Tabyīn/ al-Ḥayawān (Al-Jāḥiẓ)***

Al-Jāḥiẓ was a philosopher-author who tried to describe the features of Arabic rhetoric in his studies, and in *Kitāb al-Bayān wa al-Tabyīn* and *Kitāb al-Ḥayawān* “can be found the scattered seeds of much that became part of literary theory in a more systematic fashion” (1982: 02). Given that al-Jāḥiẓ was one of the founders of the *Mu‘tazilites*, he focused on the rhetorical method for reading literary texts, and tried to outline a clear rhetorical approach which his fellow scholars could adopt. He

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<sup>46</sup> A repetition of a word or a phrase with intervening words setting off the repetition, sometimes occurring with a phrase used both at the beginning and end of a sentence.

paid great attention to attempting to provide an exact definition of the rhetorical method in his work until he finally arrived at the following explanation:

A concise term for referring to all those elements which reveal and unveil meaning as well as reaping its harvest by whatever means, since the target and goal pursued by both composer and receiver are understanding and explanation. Therefore, how a poet elucidates meaning conveys the meaning of rhetoric. (1960: 76/1)

In his work al-Jāhiz sought to develop Arabic rhetoric as a scientific discipline and to formulate a more precise means of analysing the features and qualities of Arabic literature, taking into account his understanding of other cultures. Thus, he attempted to define literary terms and refine existing concepts in areas such as *al-lafz wa al-ma'nā* (word and meaning) and *nazm* (versification). In his works Al-Jāhiz discusses literary-related issues, in particular the debate on tradition and modernity in poetry which also occupied the thoughts of his contemporaries.

#### **1.4.1.3 *Naqd al-Shi'r* (Qudāmah ibn Ja'far)**

One of the most important books of the modernist type is *Naqd al-Shi'r* by Qudāmah ibn Ja'far, who used the Greek rhetorical method to establish a new method in literary studies. He claims that his book was the first study dedicated to poetic criticism that set standards for separating what is good in poetry from what is bad (1978: 61). Although Qudāmah considers his book to be first one concerning Arabic criticism, it is clear that he was drawing on the work of previous scholars, in particular relying on the understanding and opinions of al-Jāhiz about the availability of concepts to the poet. Qudāmah observes:

All types of concepts are available to the poet, and he may treat of any themes he wants or likes, without any concept about which he desires to compose a discourse being forbidden to him. For concepts play in poetry the role of subject-matter, and poetry for them plays the same role as the form found in

every art, in which there is necessarily a subject-matter receiving the influence of forms of the art, such as wood is for the carpenter and silver for the silversmith. Whenever the poet approaches any given concept, whether lofty, low, obscene, chaste, lustful, temperate, laudatory, or calumnious, or any other praiseworthy or reprehensible concept, he must try to achieve with it the degree of ultimate perfection which he must seek. (cited in Cantarino, 1975: 121)

Here Qudāmah repeats al-Jāhiz's ideas about meanings, namely, that these are known to everyone, whether Arab or non-Arab, and that the differentiation between good and bad poetry lies in the quality of the versification (1938: 131-132/3). This is a good example of the extent to which many critics continued to draw on the views of al-Jāhiz. This obvious similarity also suggests the influence of Greek thought on their work.

Qudāmah added an important point in this passage: that the main aim of the poet is the degree of ultimate perfection which he calls craftsmanship (referred to as *al-ṣṣan'ah* in Arabic rhetoric), which in his opinion is more important than meaning. The judgment on poetry in Qudāmah's understanding is based on the quality of the craftsmanship, referring to how the poet expresses his meanings, not what he says (Al-Ḥārthī, 1996: 106). Thus, Qudāmah believes that poets can be permitted to contradict themselves in their meanings, as long as these ideas are expressed in a beautiful way (1978: 66).

In addition, Qudāmah focused in his book on defining and analysing the language of the literary text, dividing poetry into eight logical elements; four of them are independent and simple, the other four being composed from these. These four key elements are wording, concept, metrical rhythm, and rhyme, whilst the remaining four combine wording and concept, wording and metrical rhyme, concept and metrical rhyme, and concept and rhyme:

Since each of these eight [elements] has qualities for which it will be praised and circumstances because of which it will be found defective, it is necessary that its excellence and defects also be attributed to poetry, for none of these is independent of the latter. (cited in Cantarino, 1975: 123)

Thus the quality of any verse depends on these elements and their interrelations. This logical system of definition and division led to a change of method in Arabic rhetorical studies, with later authors relying on this form of analysis.

#### **1.4.1.4 *Kitāb al-Şinā'atayn: al-kitābah wa-al-shi'r* (Al-'Askarī)**

One of these authors was al-'Askarī whose focus on the aesthetics of Arabic rhetoric later led to the establishment of different branches of rhetoric. In the introduction to his work *Kitāb al-Şinā'atayn: al-kitābah wa-al-shi'r* al-'Askarī comments:

We know that if man neglects the science of rhetoric and fails to gain the knowledge of eloquence, he will not know how to perceive the miraculous uniqueness of the Qur'ān from the point of view of the beautiful composition and admirable arrangement with which God has distinguished it, nor the wonderful conciseness and delicate brevity with which He has filled it, nor the splendid elegance in which He has wrapped it, the smoothness and purity of its words, their sweetness and fluency, and all other charms it possesses which make it inimitable to mankind and put his mind in a state of helpless admiration. (ibid: 126)

In this passage, al-'Askarī linked the importance of rhetoric to the interpretation of Qur'ānic text, stating that the only method of truly understanding this is by making use of rhetorical tools. This understanding was prevalent in Abbasid thought; thus it gave the rhetorical method more importance for readers. Al-'Askarī's book drew on material from previous authors including ibn al-Mu'tazz, al-Jāhiz and Qudāmah, incorporating this into his discussions of rhetorical devices, such as simile, metaphor, alliteration, antonymy, and predication.

Having discussed some of the most influential critical texts of the period, the next section focuses on the second factor which contributed to the formation of the worldview of Abbasid recipients of Arabic literary texts, namely the influence of the establishment of the theoretical sects.

Since the *Mu'tazilite* poets and critics chose the rhetorical method as the only one suitable both for creating and reading literary text, they played a significant role in the development of Arabic rhetoric. Evidence of this importance is reflected in the fact that in his discussion of literary text creation in *Kitāb al-Bayān wa al-Tabyīn*, al-Jāhiz includes the opinion of Mu'ammār bin al-'Ash'ath, one of the most prominent thinkers in the group of the *Mu'tazilites*.

Before embarking on a detailed discussion of one of the most influential texts of the Abbasid period and beyond, Bishr bin al-Mu'tamir's *Ṣaḥīfat*, it is necessary to consider why scholars in the *Mu'tazilite* movement focused on rhetoric as a method for the creation and reception of the text. Iḥsān 'Abbās identifies two main reasons for this choice. Firstly, 'Abbās (1993) argues that this was due to the fact that the aim of rhetoric is to persuade different groups of recipients to grasp the meaning of the text. For example, al-Tawḥīdī observes that "rhetoric lies in what is understood by the populace but accepted by the elite" (1988: 241/3). Thus, this method helps authors to achieve their purpose, namely, that the author himself must ensure that the level of discourse is appropriate to the type of recipients and also suited to the context. Each type of recipient is familiar with a particular form of *aḥwāl al-ma'ānī* (discourse) and each *siyāq* (context) requires a specific form of *maqām* (expression). Secondly, 'Abbās claims that, although *Mu'tazilite* scholars were interested in Greek thought, they still believed that Classical Arabic poetry was the most important source of knowledge. Thus, they united with the traditionalist Arabic scholars in

opposing the *Shu'ūbī* scholars who tried to underestimate the value of Classical Arabic poetry.

#### **1.4.1.5 *Ṣaḥīfat* (Bishr bin al-Mu'tamir)**

However, one of the most important documents in the heritage of Arabic rhetoric is the *Ṣaḥīfat* by Bishr bin al-Mu'tamir, one of the founders of the *Mu'tazilite* movement. This text details the steps that should be taken by authors when undertaking the writing of any literary text. Bishr's text merits closer attention here, not only in order to demonstrate how the ideas which he expressed in this document influenced writers of literary texts, but also because it serves to reveal the extent to which the worldview of the author and receiver had changed at the time of its composition. Bishr writes:

Take advantage of the times when you are alert and when you are carefree, when your mind lends itself easily to you. The small amount you achieve in this hour of activity is more precious, more original, more agreeable to the ears and hearts, more immune to gross errors and more attractive to eyes and minds than any noble words and innovative meanings. Realize that this will prove more rewarding to you than what a longer day of drudgery and struggling can provide. It does not matter if you miss the target, it will never fail to be accepted as well-meaning and easy to articulate given the manner in which it was produced and the way it emerged. (Al-Jāḥiẓ, 1960: 163/1)

Here Bishr describes the creative moments which authors should take advantage of when aiming to write a literary text, stressing that more will get done in a short length of time by taking advantage of this good frame of mind than spending a whole day slaving away. Bishr also emphasises the need to choose words carefully to ensure ideas are clearly and correctly expressed:

Beware of making your style overly sophisticated as it leads you to complexity which detracts from your ideas and sullies your words. He who seeks a noble meaning should also seek noble words in which to express it. A worthy

meaning has the right to be clad in worthy words, and both have the right to be protected by you from what corrupts them or makes them distasteful, from what causes you to sound worse than you were before seeking to articulate them and devoting yourself to creating them as they should be. (ibid: 163/1)

This passage from Bishr can be considered to be one of the earliest comments by a scholar on the issue of the importance of the relationship between words and meanings in Classical Arabic rhetoric. The implication here is that certain words are better suited for the purposes of literary creation than others. Bishr identifies three rankings of writers of literary texts and encourages would-be authors to consider which of these groups they belong to:

The first one is to make your words graceful and sweet, lofty yet limpid, and to make your meaning clear and familiar, whether to a distinguished audience or laymen. Meaning does not acquire merit because it appeals to a distinguished coterie, nor does it acquire meanness because it appeals to laymen. Excellence of meaning is a matter of accuracy and producing the right effect while being appropriate. This is equally true for an unusual word or a common word. If you have the ability to speak or write eloquently, to handle subtlety and to convey the ideas of the distinguished few to the common people and to clothe your words in a fashion which is not too arcane for the mob nor too complex for elite, then you are the perfect user of rhetoric. (ibid: 163/1)

Thus, the first group, the perfect rhetoricians, have the gift of eloquence, the ability to choose the right words to address their audience and to convey complex ideas in simple language. Not all can achieve this position effortlessly, and even after hard work, it eludes many others who continue to pursue it:

If this first stage does not lend itself to you, or haunt you, or dawn on you the instant you put your mind to it so that you find a word does not fall into place nor lie neatly in its proper spot and that rhyme does not fit in its place nor match with its counterpart, sounding discordant and looking incongruous, then do not force it into a position that does not accept it. If metrical poetry is not

your pursuit and if creating good prose is not your occupation, no one would blame you if you give up on both. If you enter upon these pursuits without wit and talent, without being in control of your words, and not knowing your strengths and weaknesses, you will be subject to the criticism of those who are more flawed than you are and judged inferior by your own inferiors. If you feel burdened with the labour of literary expression, enforced to take up this pursuit for which you do not have a natural talent and still find this task daunting after due consideration, do not rush into any course of action or grow bored with it; rather leave it for another day and take it up again when you are fresh and not preoccupied as you will not miss out on any inspiration and felicity, if some natural ability does exist or if some practice and effort were required. (ibid: 164/1)

In his comparison of these two types, Bishr originated what was to become a long-running debate in Arabic literary studies, namely the opposition between craftsmanship (artifice) and inspiration (naturalness). Thus, some later critics divided the poets into two types: *maṭbūʿ* (natural) versus *maṣnūʿ* (artificial).<sup>47</sup> For Bishr, the third type of author is the one who has neither natural ability nor technical merit and lacks the necessary temperament to become a good writer. For these would-be authors he offers the following advice:

If it still eludes you, without being distracted from it by some unexpected event and without your having ignored it for a long time, the third position then is to give up this pursuit for your favourite undemanding pastime. This is because your longing for this new pursuit is due to some kind of attraction between you and [it]. Something only seeks what it shares some similarity with. The problem may be one of degree, perhaps, since the soul is not able to reveal what it contains even when it wants to, nor does a timid soul give vent to what it is suffering to the degree that one does when driven by passion and affection. (ibid: 165/1)

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<sup>47</sup> This topic is covered in depth in the study by Mansour Ajami 1984, *The Neckveins of Winter: The Controversy over Natural and Artificial Poetry in Medieval Arabic Literary Criticism*, Leiden: Brill

In his text, Bishr identifies the stylistic devices used in literary writing, and emphasises that the most important aim of the literary text is to convince readers to believe the author's ideas. In order to achieve this aim, he encourages both readers and authors to make use of the tools of Arabic rhetoric.

#### 1.4.2 Non-Arab Cultural Influences

The appearance of these theoretical and political sects reflects the fact that the Abbasid Arab worldview was influenced by many cultures, including Greek, Persian and Indian, which has led to a major debate among critics regarding which of these has had the most significant impact on Arab culture and on the Abbasid worldview. Scholars have also been particularly interested in the nature of this influence and how it was transmitted.

Ṭaha Ḥusayn was the first Arab intellectual to acknowledge the influence of foreign philosophical ideas on Classical Arabic thought in his 1931 article 'Al-Bayān al-'Arabī min al-Jāhīz ilā 'Abdulqāhir'.<sup>48</sup> Ḥusayn claims that Arabic rhetoric was based on three different elements, namely Arabic, Persian, and Greek. The Greek element relates to the accuracy of meanings and their verbal appropriateness, as well as Aristotle's main idea that meanings must match the recipients (Ja'far, 1933: 10). Ḥusayn refers to the impact of Arabic criticism methods, not the heritage of Arabic poetry, meaning that he does not doubt the uniqueness of Arabic poetry.

In his article examining the impact of foreign influences on Arab Culture during this period, Ḥassān notes that both Greek and Persian cultures were influential due to their geographical proximity with the Arab Caliphate. In addition, trade relations, especially those between Arab and Persian merchants, were an important factor which helped to strengthen this influence (1975: 272). However, he claims that

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<sup>48</sup> This article was translated from the French original into Arabic by 'Abdulḥamīd al-'Abbadī in 1933.

Persian thought exercised a greater influence on the Arab mind than Greek ideas, due to the major role played by Persian authors, translators and poets in Arabic literature and, as evidence, he cites the work of writers such as ibn al-Muqaffa', 'Abdulḥamīd al-Kātib, Sahl bin Harūn and al-Faḍl bin Sahl (ibid: 278).<sup>49</sup>

Ḍayf agrees that Arabic rhetoric was influenced by an understanding of Aristotelian ideas. However, he disagrees with Ḥusayn's opinion that this influence began with al-Jāḥiẓ, but instead traces it to a book by Qudāmah bin Ja'far entitled *Naqd al-Nathr* (1965: 87-88).<sup>50</sup> Although 'Allām agrees with Ḍayf that the Aristotelian impact was evident in the work of al-Jāḥiẓ, he believes that all Classical Arab critics and rhetoricians were influenced by Ancient Greek thought (1979: 220-21).

It is important here perhaps to clarify what is meant in this context by Greek influence on Arabic literature. For as Amīn observed, there was little if any direct evidence of Greek themes in Arabic poetry, and Hellenic poets or authors are not encountered in Arabic literature (1964: 138). Ṭabānah (1969) confirmed that Classical Arabic literature contains no references to the most famous of Greek works, Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, and there is no evidence of the impact of Greek terms and concepts such as "comedy" or "tragedy" in the Arabic literary heritage.

Ḍayf argues that although Greek was the most influential culture on Arabic thought in the Abbasid era, this impact occurred as a result of the translation of Greek texts into Arabic and was not due to the coexistence of Greek and Arab scholars, as was the case for Persian influence (1966: 69). Ṭabānah also confirms the significant role

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49 Ibn al-Muqaffa' translated many texts from Persian to Arabic, including the book *Khdāynameh*, which he called *The History of Persian Kings*, and the work *Kalīlah wa Dimnah*, which was originally written in Hindi, then translated into Persian *Al-Nadīm*, M.b.I.I. 1997. *Al-Fihrist*. Beirut: Dār Al-Ma'rifah.

50 Several modern Arabic critics agree that Classical Arab rhetoric was influenced by different schools of thought, especially Aristotelian philosophy, but there is still disagreement about whether this influence started pre- or post-al-Jāḥiẓ.

played by the translation of many Greek philosophical works specifically in the development of Arabic literature (1969: 69).

It is important to note that translation in the Abbasid era is one of the main factors in the formation of the Arab reader's worldview, as noted in an earlier section of this chapter. Ibn al-Muqaffa' and Sālim Abū al-'Alā' are just two examples of authors who translated works of philosophy from Greek into Arabic, including Aristotle (ibid: 423-424). The influence of this Hellenic philosopher has been traced in the work of many scholars including al-Fārābī, ibn Rushd and al-Qayrawānī. As Ḥusayn notes in his introduction to his edition of *Naqd al-Nathr* by Qudāmah bin Ja'far, there is no doubt that Greek thought had a major influence on the *Mu'tazilah* scholars, considered to be the founders of Arabic rhetoric.

Ḥusayn compared al-Jāhiz's critical method, with that of ibn Sallām, who follows that of the traditional Arabic author, and found that the Greek style is clearly visible in the works of al-Jāhiz, while ibn Sallām's style showed no traces of this (1933: 8-9).

However, some Classical Arabic rhetoricians, such as ibn al-'Athīr, rejected Aristotle's ideas, (1962: 211/1), whilst others were dependent on this school of thought, including Qudāmah bin Ja'far and Ḥāzīm Al-Qarṭājannī.

Cantarino confirms the importance of the influence of Hellenic philosophy on Arabic literature via the methods adopted by Abbasid critics:

Any study of Arabic poetics would be incomplete if it did not pay special attention to the Greek, and more specifically the Aristotelian, influence on Arabic literary critics and the manner in which it was reflected in their approach and theory; in spite of the rejection of any Aristotelian influence on Arabic poetry and poetic methods that can occasionally be found in Arabic letters, the Stagirite's ideas and logical methods were present and his influence clearly felt. It may be, in fact, that the awareness of this importance was the

actual cause of the eagerness with which Arabic writers denied any “foreign” influence on the “most Arabic” of all Islamic “disciplines”. (1975: 63)

Cantarino draws attention here to the fact that some Arabic critics have attempted to minimise the extent of the influence of Greek thought on Arabic literature or even deny this. As he notes, some traditionalists saw this as essential in order to protect the unique identity of Arabic literature. Sallūm suggests that was due to the conflict between the Arabs and the *al-Shu‘ūbiyyah* particularly in the Umayyad and Abbasid eras (Sallūm, 1970: 240). In addition, Greek philosophers were not monotheistic but Arabic scholars used principles and ideas based on their work in their interpretation of Qur’ānic texts which was another point of contention for some religious scholars. Thus, Arabic critics found themselves caught in a dilemma, being unable to acknowledge that the rhetorical methods they used in their studies of the Qur’ān were inspired by Greek philosophy, which had been produced by a society considered to be pagan.

Based on the factors mentioned above, it is possible to identify four reader types during the Abbasid era. The first of these are the **implied readers**, who use rhetorical knowledge to reach the ultimate degree of perfection in constructing their text, whether as poets, writers or critics. The second are the **normal readers** who are looking for textual pleasure or for a text which is morally improving. Thirdly, there are the **stylistic readers** who are interested in the craftsmanship exhibited in the literary text and at how the poet makes use of rhetorical devices and tools in the text. Finally, there are the **expert or critical readers**, who rely on a specific approach, such as the linguistic or rhetorical method, in order to analyse the literary text and assess its value. Indeed, scholars at that time, such as al-Jāhīz, al-Qayrawānī and Qudāmah bin Ja‘far, succeeded in identifying the cultural frame of the Arabic literary reader in three ways that the reader should perceive: the language of the text,

the consciousness of the author's culture, and the nature of the text. Accordingly, it is clear that most of the literary debates which occurred in Classical Arabic literature were based on these points. For example, the debate about word and meaning came from the readers' interest in the language of the text, while the debate about tradition and modernity came from their awareness of the author's culture.

## **1.5 Literary Debates in the Abbasid Era**

### **1.5.1 *Al-Qadīm wa al-Jadīd* (Tradition Versus Modernity)**

One of the key literary debates which influenced the reception of poetry in the Abbasid era, especially that composed by Abū Tammām and al-Buḥturī, concerned the issue of tradition versus modernity. This related to the rejection by the more traditional critics and readers of the changes made to the thematic and formal elements of Arabic poetry by the newer poets, whose work was championed by those who supported and extolled the virtues of these modern developments. This section examines the attitudes adopted by the two sides in this debate and analyses the impact that this debate had on the literary reception of the poetry of Abū Tammām and al-Buḥturī.

It is useful to begin by considering the exact nature of these developments which occurred within Arabic poetry during the Abbasid era since they are related both to a shift within the thematic concepts addressed in poetic works during this period and to changes made to the poetic forms themselves. The Abbasid poets evolved new *aghrāḍ* (themes) in their poetry believing these to be more appropriate to the urban culture in which they were composing their work. Whilst the panegyric concept found in traditional Arabic poetry was based on certain recurrent thematic concepts, such as generosity, courage and horsemanship, in the Abbasid era new moral themes

came to the fore. These included commending the virtues of friendship, tolerance and chastity (Dayf, 1966: 180-181).

It is known that the archetypal pre-Islamic Arabic poem consisted of three main thematic sections, each with its own customary poetic motifs, as described by Fakhreddine:

The first section is the elegiac prelude, the *nasīb*, with common motifs such as the ruined campsite of the departed beloved, the morning of departure, the scene of the departing caravan, reflections on old age, remembrances of the beloved [...] motifs that circulate around decay, loss, and nostalgia for times past. The second part is the camel and journey section, the *rahīl*, in which the poet sobers up from his memories and laments of the past, and embarks upon a journey in the desert. This section generally includes descriptions of the poet's mount, often a sturdy she-camel, and the hardships the poet overcomes on the way. [This] often offers a smooth segue from the initial elegiac motifs [to] the final section [...] the *qaṣīdah*, whether it is the praise of the patron in a panegyric, or the eulogizing of the deceased in an elegy, or a diatribe against the adversary in an invective. (2011: 211)

As Fakhreddine notes, these motifs and themes are closely related to the desert life and tribal social setting of the pre-Islamic era, reflecting the cultural context in which they were composed. Thus, the changes in lifestyle, culture and society ushered in with the Abbasid dynasty caused many poets to seek new poetic themes and forms in order to reflect the social and cultural transformation they were witnessing. This desire to escape from past poetic conventions “the eloquence of olden time” is evident in the following lines by Abū Nuwās:

صفة الطلول بلاغة القدم ... فاجعل صفاتك لابنة الكرم

The description of the ruins is the eloquence of olden time,  
So make your descriptions of the daughter of the vine.

...

تصف الطلول على السماع بها ... أفذو العيان كأنت في الفهم؟

وَإِذَا وَصَفْتَ الشَّيْءَ مُتَّبِعاً ... لَمْ تَخُلْ مِنْ زَلَلٍ، وَمِنْ وَهْمٍ

You describe the ruins from what you have heard,

Does he whose own eyes have seen them understand them as you do?

And when you describe a thing by imitation,

You are never free from faults and fancies. (cited in Stetkevych, 1991: 41)

In this text Abū Nuwās uses a satirical style to refer to the *nasīb*, the elegiac prelude in his phrase “the description of the ruins”, urging poets to break free from poetic conventions which according to him refer to things which are not of the world inhabited by him and his contemporaries but simply mere imitations of motifs borrowed from the work of earlier poets. He encourages his fellow poets to create their own new subjects and motifs, intended to meaningfully reflect the new reality of the times “make your descriptions of the daughter of the vine”. Thus, the Abbasid poets who espoused the modern poetry deliberately sought to reject the traditional motifs and themes inspired by a tribal lifestyle lived in the desert environment, and openly declared that this was their intention, as reflected in the opening lines from this poem by Abū Tammām:

لَا أَنْتِ أَنْتِ وَلَا الدِّيَارُ دِيَارٌ ... خَفَّ الْهَوَى وَتَوَلَّتِ الْأُوطَارُ

You are not you, the abodes are not abodes,

Passion has faded, the destination has changed (ibid: 81)

This intention is highlighted in al-Āmedī’s commentary on these lines:

[Abū Tammām’s] phrase “You are not you” is one of the expressions of the city folk; it is considered improper and it is not good. But his phrase “the abodes are not abodes” is well-known in the speech of the Arabs; it is in current use and is sound. That is, the abodes are not abodes as you knew them, as we said in the affirmation: When the people are people and time is time.

That is, they are like what you are familiar with. (ibid: 81)

Al-Āmedī bases his judgment on the text of Abū Tammām on the model of traditional poetry, and he does not critique the poetic concept in the text nor how Abū Tammām created his literary images. Mandūr points out that al-Āmedī’s objection is based on his rejection of *qiyās* (analogy) in syntactical matters in Abū Tammām’s phrase “*la anta anta* – You are not you” (1948: 127-130). In another

example from his work indicating his rejection of the traditional approach, Abū Tammām wrote:

مِن سَجَايَا الطُّلُولِ أَلَا تُجِيبَا ... فَصَوَابٌ مِنْ مُقَلَّةٍ أَنْ تَصُوبَا  
تَجِدُ الشُّوْقَ سَائِلًا وَمُجِيبَا ... فَاسْأَلْنَهَا، وَاجْعَلْ بُكَاءَكَ جَوَابًا

It is the nature of the ruins to give no answer,

So it is fitting that the eye should weep.

Then question them and make your weeping the reply,

You will find your yearning asking and replying. (cited in Stetkevych, 1991: 83)

Indeed, al-Āmedī approved this example because Abū Tammām follows the traditional poetic motive of asking about the abodes, and he admired the philosophical concept he expressed:

The reason for his phrase “then question them and make your weeping the reply” is that he said: it is their nature not to answer, so let your weeping be the answer. Because if they had answered, their answer would have made you cry; or because when they did not answer, you knew that the one who used to answer had departed, so answer that with your weeping. His phrase “You will find your yearning asking and answering” means that you have stopped at the abode and questioned it because of your intense yearning for those who used to be there, then you also wept out of yearning for them; so yearning was both the reason for asking and the reason for weeping. It is excellent philosophy and one of the manners [technique] that Abū Tammām has adopted, but it is not in accordance with the manner of the poets [i.e. the traditional poets], nor their way. (ibid: 83)

Al-Āmedī’s comments in this extract are important since they illustrate that it is Abū Tammām’s poetic style which represents novelty, not the literary theme it expresses. For in al-Āmedī’s opinion the poet’s work still addresses the traditional *nasīb* motifs of decay, loss, and nostalgia but takes a different approach. Al-Āmedī’s criticism here raises the issue of identifying the main differences which were perceived between the features of the new Abbasid poetic method and those found in

traditional poetry. According to Stetkevych the change in techniques reflected a key shift in the role played by poetry in the Abbasid era as opposed to the pre-Islamic era:

[T]he *badī'* poetry of the urban Abbasid court exhibits a fundamental change in function from the oral poetry of the pre-Islamic desert: whereas the latter was above all mnemonic, serving, as it were, as a *dīwān* or register of tribal values and lore, the *badī'* poetry of the literate age assumed a new exegetical function, that of interpreting the pagan tribal heritage to its Abbasid heirs. (1991: xiv)

In this context, *badī'* does not refer to the branch of Arabic rhetoric, but is used to designate the craftsmanship of the poets in creating their poetic images by the use of rhetorical devices and philosophical concepts. This usage of the term *badī'* to refer to the innovative stylistic features of modern poetry is usually attributed to ibn al-Mu'tazz who noted the fondness of the modern poets for incorporating particular figures of speech in their work.<sup>51</sup> He also claimed that Abū Tammām had developed and then mastered it (1967: 01).

The debate about tradition versus modernity originated among the traditional *Ruwāṭ al-shi'r* (narrators of poetry), such as Khalaf al-Aḥmar, al-Aṣma'ī and ibn al-A'rābī, and the new poets. The supporters of traditional poetry zealously defended the poetry of the pre-Islamic era as representing real poetry and their fanaticism led them to reject any attempts to change the traditional method in poetic form and to fail to acknowledge the worth of work by any new poets. The attitude of the traditional *ruwāṭ al-shi'r* towards the new poetic forms and themes was prompted by

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51 The word *badī'*, originally meaning “novel” or “original”, obtained its technical meaning roughly equivalent to “figures of speech” in Arabic literary criticism, poetics, and rhetoric when Ibn al-Mu'tazz wrote his treatise *al-Badī'* (274 AH), which identified a number of stylistic features commonly used in modern (*muḥdath*) poetry of the Abbāsīd period. Van Gelder, G.J. “Badī'”, *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, third edition, Kate Fleet, Gudrun Krämer, Denis Matringe, John Nawas and Everett Rowson (eds) Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2007.

their literary background. Steeped in the traditions of Arabic poetry and convinced of the necessity to preserve these, they were unwilling to accept the new concepts and forms which were produced by the new poets (Sallūm, 1970: 88). Al-Marzubānī includes an anecdote which illustrates how they perceived the difference between modern and traditional poetry:

Someone recited a poem by Abī Nuwās, then he asked ibn al-A‘rābī: “Is it a good poem?” Ibn al-A‘rābī replied: Yes it is good but I love the traditional poetry [...] the poetry of *al-Muwalladīn* (the new poets) is like basil. You smell it once, then you throw it away; but traditional poetry is like musk: its smell increases when you sprinkle it, ibn al-A‘rābī said. (1995: 384)

This comparison is a telling one. Basil would have been a common culinary herb, with a striking aroma when fresh but one which rapidly diminishes. Musk, on the other hand, as Anya King notes in her article about the symbolism of fragrance in pre-Islamic and early Islamic poetry, was viewed as a precious substance, carrying connotations of prestige and associations of beauty.<sup>52</sup> Musk has also long been noted for its unique, extremely powerful, and durable perfume. The image therefore neatly encompasses ibn al-A‘rābī’s view of the qualities of modern versus traditional poetry.

According to Sallūm, this conflict between the traditionalists and the modern poets is not solely about poetic technique but arises from the motives which underpinned the modernity movement in poetry (1970: 88). The first of these was the emergence of the *mawālī* and the movement known as *al-Shu‘ūbiyyah*, as explained earlier in this chapter. The second was to be found in the transformation which had occurred in lifestyle, with the shift from nomadism to a settled urban existence. Thus, the new

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52. A. King The Importance of Imported Aromatics in Arabic Culture: Illustrations from Pre-Islamic and Early Islamic Poetry, *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*, 67(3), 2008, pp. 175-189.

poets did not have the same close relationship with the desert environment as that enjoyed by the traditional Arab poets for whom this was an ever-present reality. Hence the modern poets and critics argued that there was a need to change the traditional approach to a new one which reflected the vastly changed circumstances of the new Abbasid lifestyle (ibid: 90-91).

According to Sallūm, the main reason for the traditional versus modern debate was the attempt by some literary scholars to prevent *al-Shu'ūbiyyah* from influencing the identity of Arabic poetry which led the traditionalists to reject modern forms of poetry or any new literary concepts. Although this perhaps suggests that there were no changes made in poetic form during this period, there is evidence that this is not in fact the case as Jacobi notes:

From the *jāhiliyyah* up to the 10th century A.D., the development of the ode can be traced in its successive stages as forming one continuous line, despite a few deviations. No one generation of poets merely imitated another. Each generation contributed some subtle changes regarding content and structure of the genre. During this process the ode lost its narrative and, to some extent, also its descriptive features, and became mainly rhetorical in style and entirely urban in character, that is to say, the narrative unity of the tribal ode was replaced by the unity of function. (1982: 22)

The tradition versus modernity debate was considered by many scholars of Arabic literature to be one of the key cultural debates during the Abbasid era. The first to discuss this issue in depth in his work was al-Jāhiz, who believed that modern poetry had to draw its inspiration from traditional poetry. Thus, he recommended that those wishing to become poets should memorise traditional poetry in order to understand how these poems had been created, thus following the same methods as poets had traditionally employed before them (1960: 90/1).

At the same time, however, he also encourages poets to take advantage of ideas from other cultures, such as Greek authors, and to use these in their works in order to bring about new developments in Arabic poetry (ibid: 145/1). Thus, al-Jāhiz seems to view traditional and modern poetry as equals, arguing that the most important point is the quality of the literary text regardless of the identity of the poet or the era in which the work was composed (1938: 132-133/3). Judging by these comments concerning his opinions on the relationship between traditional and new poetry, it appears that al-Jāhiz was a neutral reader who adopted a realistic attitude towards the need for a balance between continuity and change in poetic endeavours.

In addition, al-Qayrawānī says:

Every Ancient poet was a modern in his own time in relation to those who went before him. Abū ‘Amr ibn al-‘Alā’ used to say, “this modern poetry is so good that I was about to order our youth to transmit it” – he meant by that the poetry of Jārīr and al-Farazdaq, deeming it modern with respect to the poetry of the *Jāhiliyyah* and the *Mukhadramūn* [the poets spanning the pre-Islamic and Islamic era]. He considered the poetry of the Ancients to be the only true poetry. Al-Aṣma‘ī said: I sat with Abū ‘Amr for eight years and never heard him advance an Islamic verse as proof. When asked about the Moderns he said, “All that is beautiful in poetry preceded them, and all that is ugly came with them. Their work is not of one texture: you see a section of embroidery, a section of burlap [hessian], and one of leather.” This is the school of Abū ‘Amr and his followers, like al-Aṣma‘ī and ibn al-A‘rābī: I meant that each of them treats the people of his own age in this way and gives precedence to those who came before them. There is no reason for this except their need for poetry as textual evidence and their lack of confidence in what the Moderns produce; then it became obstinacy. (cited in Stetkevych, 1991: 38)

In this passage commenting on the conflict between the modern poets and the traditionalists, al-Qayrawānī notes that when new artistic movements emerge, they are always viewed with suspicion “their lack of confidence” by conservative

readers/scholars who prefer to look back to an imagined Golden Age of Ancient poetry. Abū ‘Amr’s textile metaphor in reference to the Moderns, the fine detail of embroidery juxtaposed with the coarse open-weave of hessian, also seems to suggest that the lack of consistency in the quality of their literary production was problematic.

In addition, ‘Abbās has argued that perhaps a further reason for this “lack of confidence” in the new poetic forms might also be found in the fact that readers, schooled in the art of critically assessing the quality of “the poetry of the Ancients” by a set of well-established criteria found themselves ill-equipped to judge the quality of these new literary texts (1993: 44). For they lacked the critical tools required to analyse the new rhetorical figures of speech used by the modern poets and critics beyond the poetic image. ‘Abbās notes that whilst poetry as an artistic form developed rapidly in the Abbasid era, literary criticism fruitlessly continued to attempt to apply the same criteria and standards developed to assess the Arabic poetry of previous centuries, proceeding at a much slower pace of evolution. As a consequence, many literary critics found it less challenging to simply reject the new literary forms.

When al-Qāḍī al-Jurjānī addresses this debate, he makes a similar point about the supposed superiority of traditional over new poetry:

You have before you these *Jāhili* and Islamic *Dīwāns*, so look. Do you find in them a *qaṣīdah* that is free from a verse or more that cannot be reproached by a fault-finder, either in its expression and meter, or in ordering and division, or in its meaning or inflection? Were it not that the people of the *Jāhiliyyah* had the good luck to come first and that the people believed firmly that they were the model, the guide-posts, and the authoritative source, you would have considered much of their poetry faulty and despicable, reprehensible and inadmissible. (cited in Stetkevych, 1991: 92)

Al-Jurjānī's use of the phrase "fault-finder" here suggests the bias in some literary scholars who criticize poetry in a way that is not balanced or reasonable but based merely on when it was composed. His comments also provide an idea of the criteria by which poetry had traditionally been judged (expression and meter, ordering and division, meaning or inflection) and also make it clear that traditional poetry was viewed as beyond reproach, acting as the model, guide-post and authoritative source for all poetic expression.

Al-Jurjānī argues that poetry has developed in three ways: firstly, in terms of language, secondly with regards to poetic imagery and finally, with respect to its subject matter. According to al-Jurjānī these linguistic developments are the result of the establishment of Islam and the settled urban lifestyle which it engendered:

People went to such extremes to smooth out [spread] the language that they permitted some barbarisms until weakness and solecism confused them. They were assisted in this by softness [the refinements] of their civilisation and the laxity of their moral character. Their customs shifted, their way of life changed, and their traditional *Sunnah* [Islamic practices and customs] was abrogated. They followed the same pattern in their poetry, refining it whenever they could and clothing their images in the most elegant expressions afforded them. Then, when compared with the speech of the Ancients, its softness [sophistication] became evident so that it was considered weak. (ibid: 93)

This passage shows al-Jurjānī's attitude to the language used in modern poetry, as he compares in negative terms what he sees as the softness (i.e. sophistication reflected in the use of rhetorical figures) of the expression used in modern poetry with the uncontrived purity of the Arabic in traditional poetic language. He sees a parallel between the change in lifestyle (from nomadic to urban) and this linguistic and artistic transformation. Thus, the language of modern poetry was not weak by the

standards of al-Jurjānī or other critics because they judged modern poetry on its own merits without taking into account the comparison between traditional and modern.

In his work, al-Jurjānī also compares the stylistic features of traditional and modern poetry and the influence of *badīʿ* in their poetic images, such as simile, *istiʿārah* (metaphor), *jinās* (paronomasia) and antonyms:

This *badīʿ* and *istiʿārah* are founded in the *qaṣīdah* of the Arabs and occurred in verse after verse without design or intention. When poetry reached the Moderns and they saw the strangeness and beauty that occurred in these verses and the elegance and grace that distinguished them from their sisters, they took it upon themselves to imitate them, and this they called *badīʿ*. It may be done well or badly, or be blameworthy, moderate or excessive. (ibid: 95)

Again here he draws a distinction between the style of traditional Arab poetry and that of the Moderns, opposing the natural poeticity achieved “without design or intention” of the former with the carefully crafted artistry of the latter. He confirms, as ibn al-Muʿtazz and al-Qayrawānī claimed, that the most important feature of modern poetry is this use of the rhetorical tools of *badīʿ* by its creators. However, he does not dismiss this imitative use of *badīʿ* as being inherently good or bad in itself, noting rather that it is how this technique is used that is important.

Based on this differentiation between traditional and modern styles, Al-Jurjānī made a distinction between two types of poetry: *ṭabʿ* (the school of natural talent) and *ṣanʿah* (the school of pure artistry). Al-Buḥturī is considered to be the master of the former school of composition whilst the latter, *ṣanʿah*, is represented by Muslim bin al-Walīd, Abū Tammām, Abū Nuwās and Bashshār, with many critics citing Abū Tammām as the master of this type of poetic creation. However, according to al-Jurjānī, any poet who creates literary text which has clear meanings and carefully crafted words follows the standards of *ʿAmūd al-shiʿr* in avoiding the overuse of *badīʿ* (1966: 46).

Rabdāwī eloquently details the differences between these co-existing groups of Abbasid poets in his explanation of the qualities admired by the followers of Al-Buḥturī and Abū Tammām respectively:

[T]hose who prefer al-Buḥturī do so because of their predilection for the sweetness of expression, beautiful transitions, proper placement of words, correctness of expressions, ease of comprehension, and clarity of meaning that they attribute to him – these are the secretaries and desert Arabs, the naturally gifted poets and the rhetoricians. Those who prefer Abū Tammām do so because of their predilection for the abstruseness and subtlety of meaning that they attribute to him and the great amount of his work that requires elucidation, commentary, and deduction – these are the conceptualists *ahl al-ma‘ānī*, the poets of artifice, and those that tend toward subtlety and philosophical speech. (Rabdāwī, 1967: 333)

At the same time, his description also helps to establish the criteria which reader-critics in both camps used to validate the quality of their preferred poets. The worldview of all Abbasid readers, critics and poets was affected to a greater or lesser degree by the ideological struggle being played out in the tradition versus modernity debate: preservation of the purity of traditional Arabic poetry as opposed to embracing the new foreign-influenced approach to creating poetic images and philosophical concepts.

### 1.5.2 *Al-Lafz wa Al-Ma‘nā* (Word Versus Meaning)

The debate which focused on word versus meaning is the second major literary debate which affected poetic text and readers in the Abbasid era. This section addresses the roots of this debate drawing on the work of Abbasid rhetoricians, and examines the extent to which the poetry of Abū Tammām and al-Buḥturī was affected by this. Using Al-Āmedi as the model of the expert reader, this section explores his attitudes towards this issue by considering his criticism of the poetry of Abū Tammām and al-Buḥturī.

This passage from Bishr which is cited by al-Jāḥiẓ shows the importance of the interaction between meaning and words in poetry and also provides Bishr's criteria for assessing the value of a literary text:

Poetry is not just words or only meanings but it is a language which is made up of words and their meanings. Thus, the value of literary text comes from the capability of the language in four elements: expression, *khayāl* (imagination), balance between the word and its meaning, and rhythm. Beware of making your style overly sophisticated as it leads you to complexity which detracts from your ideas and sullies your words. He who seeks a noble meaning should also seek noble words through which to express it. A worthy meaning has the right to be clad in worthy words, and both have the right to be protected by you from what corrupts them or makes them distasteful, from what causes you to sound worse than you were before seeking to articulate them and devoting yourself to creating them as they should be. (cited in Al-Jāḥiẓ, 1960: 163/1)

For Bishr, word and meaning are to be accorded equal importance in poetry. However, many Abbasid scholars were divided about which of these, word or meaning, was of greater importance. Whilst some placed immense value on the poet's selection and use of language, others argued that words served simply as vehicles to convey ideas and concepts and it was the profundity of this meaning which gave worth to the poetic text.

According to al-Jāḥiẓ: "meanings are available to everyone, native or non-native speakers of Arabic. It is all about versification, choosing the right word or words, and the quality of the material produced" (1938: 131-132/3). Al-Jāḥiẓ stresses that choosing the correct word is the poet's most important task when composing a literary text. Thus, he pays great attention to the linguistic features which he refers to as *al-fasāḥah* (eloquence). He identifies a number of elements which are to be avoided by writers desirous of achieving eloquence in their language. The first of

these is cacophony and al-Jāḥiẓ urges composers of poetry to avoid morphological combinations of assonant sounds, since with their uniform place of articulation, they are both difficult for the poet to pronounce and harsh on the ears of the audience. Secondly al-Jāḥiẓ cautions authors against resorting to the use of unfamiliar words, the meanings of which will not usually be understood without further investigation. Conversely, he also recommends that authors eschew triteness in their choice of vocabulary since, in his opinion, eloquent words should be neither perplexing nor pedestrian. Finally, poets are exhorted to respect the established rules of Arabic grammar and morphology.

In this formulation of eloquence, al-Jāḥiẓ establishes a new method of literary reception which is based on the formal qualities of the text, one which is shaped by his understanding that poetry is a craft, comparable to weaving or painting (ibid: 132/3). Many critics after al-Jāḥiẓ became formalist readers in the sense that they were reading the text through its grammar, syntax and literary devices, focusing on how the poets juxtaposed words in order to reflect their own feelings, using carefully crafted and highly sophisticated language. Al-‘Askarī echoes the ideas of al-Jāḥiẓ in relation to emphasizing form over content in poetry:

The essential function of poetry does not consist in the simple expression of ideas (*ma‘ānī*). The Arab as well as the non-Arab, the rustic villager and the Bedouin know how to do this. It consists in excellent, clear, brilliant, accomplished, proper, apposite and selected wording, in the abundance of its elegance and freshness, plus the right formulation and arrangement, and the absence of burdensome composition and order. (cited in Cantarino, 1975: 127)

The description from al-‘Askarī highlights the strong links between rhetoric and eloquence, in that the aim of poetry is considered to be not only conveying the meaning of an idea or concept to the reader, but also using eloquent, artfully crafted language which possesses a value in its own right as the vehicle for that meaning.

Thus, both al-Jāhiz and al-‘Askarī urge the literary reader to become more aware of the formal qualities of the text, in particular the poet’s use of language, focusing not so much on what was said, but rather on how it was said.

Al-‘Askarī argues that essentially there are two types of poetry in terms of the meaning it conveys. The first contains ideas or concepts given meaning from the poet’s own invention, and is created without the guidance of any master or from existing patterns. The second type of poetry imitates past models, following previous examples (1952: 69). It follows then that the only way to distinguish poetic excellence from banal expression is to pay close attention to the quality of the language that the poet uses to convey the meaning of these ideas and concepts. One of the recurrent images which is used to express this form/content relationship between word and meaning in Abbasid poetry compares the literary text to the body, while the words are conceived of as clothing, as seen previously in the phrase used by al-Jāhiz: “It is the right of a worthy meaning to be clad in worthy words”.

Al-Jurjānī confirms the idea of the value of words in the literary text when he writes:

Most of the poets do not assign to rhetoric any more importance than they would to the gestures of the face or to drawing lines, so they say it is merely interrogation and information, and affirmative and negative imperatives, purposes to which specific words have been assigned. They do not realize that there are details and subtleties that can only be arrived at deliberation and reflection and niceties of meaning that can only be attained by those who have been guided to them and knowledge of which has been bestowed upon them. (1992: 06)

Al-Jurjānī here agrees with al-‘Askarī’s idea that poets need guidance to develop the skills and knowledge required to perfect their creation of the poetic text which results from the poet’s craft or *ṣan‘ah*. Moreover, al-Jurjānī claims that:

Words are not sought for their own sake, but rather to be indices of meanings. If such meanings are lost or the link between meanings and words is broken, the lexical meanings of words then cease to be of importance, nor does their ease or complexity of sound make a difference. This is why scholars criticise authors who befog meaning and use vague metaphors and difficult structures because of their use of prose rhyme and paronomasia. It is inconceivable that [literary] merit lies purely in the use of sound devices such as these or that without making sense they would be of any value. (1991: 523)

Al-Jurjānī thus emphasises the importance of the link between word and concept in the literary text, for if this connection is broken due to the poet's ineptitude in using language which is unnecessarily obscure, vague or difficult to grasp, the meaning of the concept being conveyed is lost. For al-Jurjānī, words in poetry must signify something beyond themselves. Indeed, the term *lafz* which 'Abdulqāhir's uses can mean both "word" or more generally the formal properties of the text, the craft and technique *ṣan'ah* involved in producing the literary text, by using rhetorical tools to create poetic images.

Al-Jurjānī was interested in exploring how words in poetry achieve their effect and why certain words have a greater impact on the recipient of the poem. He established his theory, *Nazarīyat al-Naẓm* (theory of word ordering), which focuses on how words gain their significance from the ways in they are collocated or juxtaposed with other words and phrases in texts. He divides poetic language into three types: that whose merit comes from only the words; that whose merit comes from the placing of the word within the text (*al-Naẓm*); and a third, whose merit comes from both these aspects (1992: 99). This led al-Jurjānī to introduce another term, *Ma'nā al-Ma'nā* (the meaning of meaning). Meaning is what can be directly understood from the literal sense of a word whilst the meaning of meaning implies understanding another meaning from the word, which in turn leads to further

implied meaning or connotation for al-Jurjānī argues that discourse can be divided into two types. In the first case, the significance is clear from the sense of the word alone: for example, the fact that Zayd is not here is conveyed by the phrase “Zayd has left”. In the second case, the significance that is meant cannot be comprehended from the literal sense of the word alone. Rather another meaning is revealed through which you grasp the significance. This is the process of reading required to make sense of such literary devices as metonymy, metaphor and similes (ibid: 85). It is clear that al-Jurjānī uses the term *al-lafz* (word) to refer to rhetorical devices such as metaphor and simile. Using such devices gives greater depth to the meaning being conveyed and also draws the reader’s attention not only to the content but also to the form of the poetry. This intrinsic relationship between form and content can perhaps be considered the main difference between normal and poetic language.

However, some Abbasid scholars, such as ibn Qutaybah (1958: 65-68), were firmly of the belief that the main element of a literary text is the concept or concepts it expressed. He claimed that an appreciation of the form of a literary text did not constitute an understanding of it, since this could only be truly achieved by grasping the main meaning of the text, reflected in the ideas and concepts the author intended to present.

Other group of Abbasid scholars argued that words and meaning have equal value in a literary text. Al-Qayrawānī uses a telling image to express his understanding of the indivisible relationship between form and content, words and meaning: “Words are the body of the text and meanings are its soul, and the link between them is as strong as the link between the body and its soul” (1972: 80/1). This image reflects the idea that both word and meaning have a great influence on reader reception. Although some readers focus firstly on the poet’s use of language and technique, while others

focus initially on the key concepts which they discern in the text, Qudāmah sees words and meaning as having equal value in the poetic text, and in his work he also discusses the issue of determining good from bad in both form and content of poetry.<sup>53</sup>

Unsurprisingly, the word versus meaning/form versus content debate had a major influence on al-Āmedī's method when he discussed the words and meanings in the poetry of Abū Tammām and al-Buḥturī, having a significant impact on helping to form this critic's horizon of expectation. Thus, he chose to focus on what he saw as the mistakes which is found in the words and meanings within their texts. Analysis of al-Āmedī's work clearly suggests he falls into the circle of Abbasid scholars who thought that poetic form, in the shape of language and style, was more important than content in the shape of ideas, concepts and meaning. He advises poets to carefully select appropriate and understandable words, in order to make the poem's meaning more pleasing and attractive to the reader. Conversely, he cautions poets against employing unusual or incorrect words in their work as this may make it hard for readers to grasp the intended meanings in the poetic text. Al-Āmedī views al-Buḥturī's work as being representative of the former method, while he categorises Abū Tammām's poetry as belonging to the latter type and criticises it for its linguistic ambiguity and lack of clarity in meaning, prefers the work of al-Buḥturī (1961: 425/1).

Al-Āmedī's dislike of what he considers to be incorrect and ambiguous poetic language is evident in his commentaries on Abū Tammām's texts. Evaluating the following lines from this author's poetry:

واكتست ضمير الجياد المذاكي ... من لباس الهيجا دماً وحميم

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<sup>53</sup> See Ja'far, Q.I. 1978. *Naqd al-shi'r*. al-Ṭab'ah 1. ed. Cairo: Maktabat al-Kullīyyāt al-Azhariyyah.

في مكرٍ تلوكها الحرب فيه ... وهي مقورةٌ تلوك الشكيما

Of the clothes of war, lank-bellied, full-grown steeds

Were clothed in blood and sweat.

On a battle-field (*makarr*) in which war champed on them,

And they were lean and champing at the bit (cited in Stetkevych, 1991: 60)

Al-Āmedī comments:

This is an extremely ugly image; for he [Abū Tammām] has made war chew on the horses solely because of his saying “they were champing at the bit”. And his saying “they were [...] champing at the bit,” is also a mistake here, because horses do not champ at the bit while charging (*makarr*) and in the thick of the fight, but rather they do it when they are standing still and there is no charging (*makarr*). Then if someone says: but rather he means that war is champing at them just as they champ at the bit, the reply is: that would be a simile and there is nothing in the verse to indicate it, for the expressions of the simile [i.e. the particles of comparison] are well-known. But Abū Tammām was thrown into this error by the paucity of his experience with horses. (ibid: 61)

Al-Āmedī here complains about Abū Tammām use of unfamiliar words in this verse, which in his opinion create “an extremely ugly image”, and it more difficult for readers to grasp the meaning without looking to the *badī‘*, which comes from using metaphorical images. In addition, however, he seems to be making a further point relating to the poet’s lack of experience in war, which seems to be unrelated to his linguistic criticism.

In her reading of this extract from Abū Tammām, Stetkevych takes issue with al-Āmedī’s criticism:

[T]he original meaning of the verb *karra* is to wheel around and then return to fight, thus it involves reining in the horse and turning him for the charge. There is no reason then that the eager battle-steed might not champ at the bit while his rider draws him back from the fray to wheel round and charge again. [...] As for the interpretation of the first hemistich, *talūku* “to chew, to champ” is to be taken in two ways. The first is that the hardships of war chew on the

horses, that is, consume their flesh leaving them emaciated (*muqwarrah* in the second hemistich). The second, which al-Āmedī cites, is that war is personified as champing impatiently on the battle-steeds, just as they, eager for the charge, champ impatiently on their bits. Al-Āmedī thinks it necessary to choose between the two interpretations and rejects the second. The point of the line, of course, is precisely the double-entendre of *talūku*. The crux of the line is this metaphorical (*majāzī*) interplay, and thus it can be understood only by *ta'wīl* [interpretation]. (ibid: 61)

Here, Stetkevych disagrees with al-Āmedī's understanding of Abū Tammām's verses, and discusses the reasons for the critic's attitude. First, al-Āmedī does not appear to trust the reader's ability to understand the point which Abū Tammām is making by using this kind of poetic language. Thus, he appoints himself as the readers' guide, failing to take into account their freedom to interpret the text as they please or their linguistic knowledge which may help them to deal with the new poetic language. Second, this attitude might lead us to question al-Āmedī's own linguistic abilities as a critical reader and the extent to which he was able to understand Abū Tammām's new way of writing. However, since al-Āmedī was recognised as one of the leading philologists of his day and an expert in Classical Arabic this seems unlikely. This then suggests a further possibility, namely that he was seeking to prove the superior quality of al-Buḥturī work by drawing attention to such instances of modern writing in Abū Tammām's poetry merely to dismiss them as mistakes. For al-Āmedī's method is based on the elements of *'amūd al-shi'r* which forced him to reject any words or concepts which he viewed as unfamiliar in the methods used in traditional Arabic poetry. Furthermore, the literary reception strategy which al-Āmedī presents to readers is based purely on the need for clarity in the literary text, leading him to reject any form of ambiguity, even when this is clearly a literary strategy adopted by the poet.

Al-Āmedī's work then can be seen as a comparison not between two poets but rather two methods: the traditional method of poetry which depends on *'amūd al-shi'r*, and the new method of *al-Badī'* (Al-Ḥārthī, 1996: 177). Thus, he compares the differences which he notes between the two poets to the differences between the literary schools which they follow. The next chapter will focus on al-Āmedī's attitudes towards the poetry of al-Buḥturī and Abū Tammām, exploring his aesthetics of literary reception and the critical standards which form the basis of his critical method.

## **1.6 Conclusion**

It is clear that the formation of the Arab worldview in the Abbasid era was positively affected by a number of different factors. The relocation of the capital city to Baghdad following the Abbasid revolution impacted greatly not only on political life but also on the socio-cultural landscape, due to the influence of Persians in the Abbasid government, and the shift in power relations. Theological sects, such as the Kharijites, *al-Shu'ūbiyyah* and *al-Mu'tazilah*, all played their own role in helping to disseminate different ideas and to challenge the cultural status quo and in opening up the Arab worldview, as did the Abbasids' support for cultural activities.

This chapter also identified three key factors which led to the establishment of literary reception strategies and ultimately to the formation of the cultural frame of the Abbasid reader. These were firstly, the authoring movement, which produced some of the critical works which were to prove highly influential in the development of the rhetorical method during the Abbasid era. Secondly, the theological sects, which contributed to the debate about interpretation of literary texts; and finally, non-Arab cultural influences, in particular Greek philosophical thought. In addition, the types of literary recipients which emerged during this era were identified.

Two key debates of the Abbasid era were examined in depth: tradition versus modernity and word versus meaning. It was argued that both these debates had a major influence on the reception of poetry, in that some readers no longer judged the literary text in terms of its language but its method of composition. Moreover, attention was paid to how these debates were founded on the ideas of the poets, Abū Tammām and al-Buḥturī, and the literary scholars of the period. The influence of these debates on the reception of the work of these poets was also explored.

In conclusion, these debates played a significant role in the formulation of reader worldview in the Abbasid era, with literary criticism being affected by the prevalent understanding which had been formed by the conflict between scholars about the poetic text. This conflict led to the establishment of different critical schools, with distinct views concerning which criteria should be employed to evaluate the quality of poetry. This in turn impacted on readers who based their opinions on the critical models with which they were presented by their contemporaries.

## **Literary Reception in Al-Āmedī's *Al-Muwāzanah***

### **1.1 Introduction**

This chapter focuses on one of al-Āmedī's best known works, *Al-Muwāzanah*, in order to analyse his critical method. It has four key aims. Firstly, it will identify the principles underpinning al-Āmedī's method and to determine the extent to which he systematically applied these principles. This will provide an insight into the explicit and implicit reading strategies of expert readers in the fourth century AH. Secondly, it will discuss the impact of the method employed in *Al-Muwāzanah* on Arabic critical studies in order to determine the extent to which the literary critics who came after al-Āmedī have been influenced by his critical judgments. Thirdly, the intention is to examine how al-Āmedī dealt with the key cultural debate of his day between two opposing worldviews, namely tradition versus modernity. These are voiced in his work by viewpoints expressed by the admirers of the modernist poet Abū Tammām and his rival traditionalist poet al-Buḥturī. Finally, the chapter will aim to reveal al-Āmedī's horizon of expectations by focusing on the elements in his work which relate to literary reception and exploring how he understood this concept.

Al-Āmedī's *Al-Muwāzanah* is one of the most important books in the history of Arabic literary criticism and it clearly reflects the evolution of the readers' critical consciousness during the Abbasid era. Moreover, the book was a response to the debate amongst Abbasid readers concerning the poetry of Abū Tammām and al-Buḥturī who were the most famous poets during that period. This cultural debate has been dealt with in detail previously in Chapter Four. The focus in this chapter is on

examining the critical tools which al-Āmedī's used in *Al-Muwāzanah* to judge the respective merits of these two poets.

It is important to note that many studies have focused on the methodology which al-Āmedī employed in *Al-Muwāzanah* and on his ideas, since he is regarded as one of the most important literary scholars of the Abbasid era. However, the emphasis here in this study of literary reception in Classical Arabic literature is on the use of *Al-Muwāzanah* as a case study which not only gives us detailed insight into al-Āmedī as an expert critical reader of Classical Arabic literature in the late fourth century AH but also allows us to explore the extent to which literary reception is influenced by changes in theoretical, political and social factors.

## **5.2 Al-Āmedī's Methodology in *Al-Muwāzanah***

### **5.2.1 Explicit method**

*Al-Muwāzanah* was published in three volumes. The first of these begins with a brief introduction in which al-Āmedī describes his methodology. In the first part al-Āmedī described the critical debate taking place at the time he was writing in the Abbasid era between readers concerning the poetry of Abū Tammām and al-Buḥturī, outlining the point of view of each group. In the second part, al-Āmedī focused on what he refers to as *al-sariqāt al-shi'riyyah* (plagiarism) in the poetry of Abū Tammām and the mistakes which al-Āmedī had identified in his work. Then, the critic discusses at length the specific examples of *al-'akhtā'* (errors) in Abū Tammām's poetic imagery, focusing on metaphors and similes. He also draws the reader's attention to what he considers to be appropriate metaphors in the poet's work. The other major focus in this second part of *Al-Muwāzanah* is al-Āmedī's analysis of the rhetorical deficiencies which he finds in Abū Tammām's poetry such

as stylistic mistakes, uncommon usage of words and motifs, the poor quality of the rhetorical devices and the errors in rhyming.

In the third part of his work, al-Āmedī moves to critiquing al-Buḥturī's poetry and he identifies *al-sariqāt al-shi'riyyah* and analyses the mistakes committed by the poet in terms of the vocabulary which he uses, ambiguity of meaning and his rhyming. Al-Āmedī concludes the third part of end of *Al-Muwāzanah* by highlighting the positive features of the work of each of the poets. He also compares in considerable depth the use of the opening lines in their respective poems.

In *Al-Muwāzanah*, al-Āmedī was seeking to present to readers a new critical method founded on comparison at the level of word with word, motif with motif and verse with verse which also took into account the main subject of the poems.

It is important to note that al-Āmedī's work can be divided into two sections. He firstly describes his own theoretical methodology, outlines the Classical and the modern method of critiquing Arabic poetry and also describes the Abbasid literary scene and the conflict between the supporters of Abū Tammām and al-Buḥturī. Secondly, he applies the methodology he has established to his comparative textual analysis of the poets' work. This comparison focuses on two specific *aghrād* (themes) which are eulogy and elegy. His approach which follows the conventions of the time involves dividing each poem which is to be analysed into three main sections: the opening lines, the main body of the poem and the conclusion.

Al-Āmedī adopts a methodology which is based on a detailed comparison between two poets (Abū Tammām and al-Buḥturī), two types of readers and two literary schools. Al-Āmedī announces his aim and the method which he intends to apply in order to facilitate this comparative analysis at the start of his work:

As for myself, I will not express any preference for one poet over the other, but I will weigh *qaṣīdāh* against *qaṣīdāh*, when they agree in meter and rhyme, and motif against motif; then I will state which poet is better in this *qaṣīdāh* and this motif. At that time you may judge for yourself on the basis of the totality of each poet's work, when you are thoroughly acquainted with their good and bad points. (1961: 05/1)

It is important to note here that al-Āmedī is claiming to be objective in his appraisal of the work of Abū Tammām and al-Buḥturī and emphasises that the critic's role is to allow readers to make their own judgement about the relative merits of these poets. This is because readers' opinions about poetry vary and their preferred schools of poetry differ (ibid: 05/1). Al-Āmedī states that his methodology consists of comparing the poetry of Abū Tammām and al-Buḥturī by analysing their work poem by poem, if they are of the same metrical foot and rhyme, and motif to motif. Then he will leave the final judgment of which is the greater poem and the better technique to readers themselves on the basis of the evidence he have provided.

In the introduction to *Al-Muwāzanah*, al-Āmedī summarises opinions about the work of Abū Tammām and al-Buḥturī held by recipients on opposing sides at the time he is writing:

I found that most of the transmitters of the poetry of the moderns that I witnessed and saw claim that Abū Tammām's best poetry is better than the best poetry of others like him, whereas his worst is really: it therefore varies in quality and lacks uniformity. They [literary scholars] claim that al-Buḥturī's poetry is well-cast and beautifully embroidered, that there is nothing that is of poor quality in it: it is therefore uniform and all of a kind. (cited in Stetkevych, 1991: 50)

Al-Āmedī here focuses on the critical debate between the supporters of Abū Tammām and al-Buḥturī concerning who was the better poet. Al-Āmedī reports claims by his contemporaries that Abū Tammām's poetry lacks consistency, a key

criterion of quality used by expert readers at the time. In contrast, al-Buḥturī's poetry is of a consistently high standard in terms of both form and in his appropriate use of rhetorical devices. Thus, when this critical criterion is used to rank the work of the poets, Abū Tammām's poetry which lacks uniformity is classed as inferior.

It is already clear in this passage that al-Āmedī's claims to objectivity can be challenged. He claims that he will not express any personal preference for one poet over the other but here instead uses the subterfuge of reproducing the opinions of transmitters who clearly support al-Buḥturī.

Al-Āmedī adds some further points in his introduction in order to clarify his methodology:

I found, too, that they [transmitters] contend over which poet's poetry is more abundant, the amount of their excellent poetry, and their *badī'*, and that they do not agree on which is the better poet, just as they do not agree on who is the best of the *Jāhili* poets or the Islamic poets, or the Moderns. The reason for this disagreement is that those who prefer al-Buḥturī do so because their predilection is for sweetness of expression, beautiful transitions, proper placement of words, correctness of expression, ease of comprehension, and clarity of meaning that they attribute to him these are the secretaries and the desert Arabs, the naturally gifted poets and the rhetoricians. Those who prefer Abū Tammām do so because of their predilection for the abstruseness and subtlety of meaning that they attribute to him and the great amount of his work that requires elucidation, commentary, and deduction these are the conceptualists (*ahl al-ma'ānī*), the poets of artifice, and those that tend toward subtlety and philosophical speech. (ibid: 50)

Al-Āmedī does not neglect readers in his study, and here identifies specific groups supporting each of the poets and summarises what he sees as being the points of disagreement between them. Thus, al-Āmedī begins by presenting the points of contention in this literary debate in the Abbasid era and addressing the reasons for this debate between these readers. Al-Āmedī refers to the criteria used by each set of

readers in evaluating the two poets. These include the quantity of their literary output and a comparison of the ratio of their good work to their bad work. He argues that this disagreement amongst these readers concerning which poet is the greater is the result of not having a common critical methodology. This means readers cannot make judgements concerning the relative merits of other schools of poets, whether these are pre-Islamic poets, poets of the Islamic age or later poets.

Al-Āmedī identifies the criteria used by readers on each side of the debate. If the reader prefers clarity of discourse, well-moulded form, and correctly worded expression which does not grate on the ear, he will of necessity judge al-Buḥturī's poetry as superior. On the other hand, if readers prefer elaborately crafted, far-fetched metaphors, arcane motifs, and ambiguity that are only understood by in-depth analysis, deliberation and discernment, they will consider Abū Tammām the greater genius. Here al-Āmedī identifies the two prevailing literary worldviews of the period, namely: the traditionalists and the *ahl al-ma'ānī* (the modernists).

In addition, on the basis of these worldviews, al-Āmedī categorises two styles of poetry: *maṭbū'* (the naturally gifted style) and *maṣnū'* (the artful style). He notes:

Al-Buḥturī is like a desert Arab in his poetry and is naturally gifted (*maṭbū'*); he follows the method of the Ancients and does not depart from the accepted conventions of poetry (*'amūd al-Shi'r*); he avoids complication, abhorrent expressions, and uncouth speech. Thus, he deserves to be compared to Ashja' al-Sulamī, Manṣour [al-Namarī], Abū Ya'qūb al-Makfūf [al-Karīmī] and naturally gifted poets like them, rather than to Abū Tammām. As for Abū Tammām, he is, to the contrary, extremely constrained, a poet of artifice; he uses loathsome expressions and images, his poetry does not resemble that of the Ancients and is not in their manner, on account of his far-fetched metaphors and derived images. He is thus more rightfully included in the sphere of Muslim ibn al-Walīd and those that followed him, and is more like him than like al-Buḥturī. However, I have not found anyone

who links him to Muslim, for he falls below Muslim's level because of the soundness of Muslim's poetry, its well-cast form, the correctness of its images, and its many embellishments, innovations (*badī'*), and inventions. (ibid: 50)

Al-Āmedī here classifies al-Buḥturī as a poet of Arabian quality, natural, in the same tradition as early poets, who does not violate the tradition of the familiar Arabic poem. He believes that al-Buḥturī avoids sophistication, unacceptable and outré usage in favour of purity of expression. Thus, al-Buḥturī is more deserving of being compared to the traditionalist poets. On the other hand, al-Āmedī classifies Abū Tammām as an artful poet whose elaborately crafted style stretches the meaning of words in his poetry. Moreover, because his poetry is not in the tradition of the early poets due to the amount of far-fetched metaphors and invented meanings, Abū Tammām should be compared with Muslim ibn al-Walīd and those using the same poetic method. This comparison requires a critical method; thus, al-Āmedī applied the standards of *'amūd al-shi'r* as the main method in his critical theory.

### 5.2.2 Implicit method

Although al-Āmedī explicitly presents his methodology at the start of his work, he is also employing an implicit method which he mentions only in passing, namely, *'amūd al-shi'r*. In his article, Ajami tracked the development of the concept of *'amūd al-shi'r* from its origins in al-Āmedī until it was formally articulated by al-Marzūqī (d.421/1030). Ajami claims that:

Al-Āmedī established a definite interrelationship between natural poetry and the Bedouin tradition, between the style of the early poets which incorporated that tradition and the formal *'amūd al-shi'r*. It is evident from al-Āmedī's categorization of the two poets and the two styles they represented that he considered the natural poets as those of *'amūd al-shi'r*, and the artificial poets, Abū Tammām in particular, as falling outside the mainstream of *'amūd al-shi'r*. (1981: 35)

Al-Āmedī's critical consciousness was formed by the concept of *'amūd al-shi'r* although he does not explicitly declare this in *Al-Muwāzanah*. In al-Āmedī's understanding, *'amūd al-shi'r* refers to the conventions of Classical Arabic poetry and in his viewpoint, this consists of four elements: (1) eloquence and soundness of phraseology, (2) correctness of meaning, (3) accuracy of description and (4) rejection of excessive use of *badī'* (rhetorical devices) such as similes and metaphors (1961: 4/1). *'Amūd al-shi'r* thus emphasises clarity of meaning and expression in order to ensure that ambiguity is avoided since this will prevent the reader from understanding the poetic text.

It is important to note that al-Āmedī's attempts to apply the use of *'amūd al-shi'r* create some difficulties in relation to his stated methodology. Firstly, *'amūd al-shi'r* was not presented in a fully systematic manner until the beginning of the fifth century AH as noted above; thus, prior to that it cannot be considered to have been a clear and complete concept. This indicates that al-Āmedī interpreted *'amūd al-shi'r* on the basis of his own understanding as an expert reader and his personal preferences. Evidence for this can be found in the fact that al-Āmedī argues that using rhetorical devices is an important element of modern style whereas 'Abdul'azīz al-Jurjānī later classified these as a stylistic feature of Classical Arabic poetry. Al-Jurjānī claims that:

This *badī'* and *isti'ārah* are founded in the *qaṣīdah* of the Arabs and occurred in verse after verse without design or intention. When poetry reached the Moderns and they saw the strangeness and beauty that occurred in these verses and the elegance and grace that distinguished them from their sisters, they took it upon themselves to imitate them, and this they called *badī'*. It may be well done or badly done, or be blameworthy, moderate or excessive. (cited in Stetkevych, 1991: 95)

Al-Jurjānī here argues that rhetorical devices such as metaphor, simile, and antithesis all occurred in Classical Arabic poetry and were employed moderately by the traditionalists. However, the modern poets used the same rhetorical devices but employed them excessively. Thus, critical understanding of the differences between natural and artful poetry changed after al-Āmedī as Ajami states:

These rhetorical devices, which were basic elements of the New Style, and which were among the most prominent characteristics of artificial (*ṣan'ah*) poetry, appear to be, in al-Jurjānī's exposition of the traditional Arabic literary concept, the demarcation line between *'amūd al-shi'r* and whatever lay outside the mainstream. An interesting sidelight to a study of al-Jurjānī's presentation of *'amūd al-shi'r* is his unacknowledged debt to the critic al-Āmedī. What al-Āmedī unsystematically enumerated as negative qualities of Abū Tammām's poetry was reversed by al-Jurjānī and formulated into his six-article version of *'amūd al-shi'r*. (1981: 41)

Al-Ghadhāmī claims that the Arab poetry found before al-Āmedī's period took many forms and thus cannot be limited to the principles of *'amūd al-shi'r* as they are set out in *Al-Muwāzanah*. He argues that *'amūd al-shi'r* is a product of al-Āmedī's own cultural context and he notes that as a concept it can be seen to have shifted over the course of time, the evidence for this being found in works by other literary scholars who came after al-Āmedī such as al-Marzūqī (1994: 45-53).

The second difficulty which the use of *'amūd al-shi'r* poses for al-Āmedī is that this term was already linked to al-Buḥturī who was the first poet to use it. In response to a question about a critical comparison between his own poetry and that of Abū Tammām, al-Buḥturī answered: "Abū Tammām delved more deeply for meanings, but I am more observant of *'amūd al-shi'r*" (Al-Ḥārthī, 1996: 12). This suggests that al-Āmedī could not achieve objectivity by applying the norms of

*'amūd al-shi'r* because these would automatically highlight the negative qualities of Abū Tammām's poetry.

### 5.3 Responses to al-Āmedī's methodology

#### 5.3.1 Lack of consistency

Many contemporary critics have identified al-Āmedī's *Al-Muwāzanah* as one of the first works to devise a theoretical framework and apply this to the analysis of Arabic poetry. Mandūr (1948) identifies al-Āmedī as a good example of a literary critic who devised a methodology for evaluating poetry using theoretical principles and then tested this by applying it to study the poetic aesthetics of a particular literary school or poet. Al-Rubay'ī (1968) claims that al-Āmedī was an expert reader of Classical Arabic poetry and a unique critic who attempted to apply his own critical method in order to analyse the poetry of Abū Tammām and al-Buḥturī. He also claims that al-Āmedī used his personal poetic taste in addition to *'amūd al-shi'r*. In addition, al-Rubay'ī argues that since al-Āmedī critical standards were based on a clear objective method, his results can be considered impartial (1968: 56).

Mūfī (1985) attributes the lack of consistency in al-Āmedī's methodology to the fact that he opted to compare poems which were similar in meter and rhyme. At a later stage of the work, al-Āmedī realized that this method was not appropriate since there are many motifs within every poem making it difficult to compare these on a one-by-one basis (1961:5/1). Al-Āmedī adopted a methodology which consisted of three elements: firstly, comparing whether two verses agreed or not in meaning; secondly, comparing two poetic texts with a similar *gharaḍ* (theme) whether they agreed in meaning or not; and thirdly, comparing between two poems with similar themes whether or not they shared the same meter or rhyme (ibid:429/1). Sallūm (1987)

agrees with Mūfī that al-Āmedī chose the wrong approach at the beginning of his book due to the fact that his comparative method was not clear in his mind.

Moreover, one of the key reasons for the lack of methodological consistency is that Arabic poetry developed rapidly in the Abbasid era, while literary criticism developed more slowly. Thus, the standards long held by critics became invalid leaving them unable to understand and analyse new literary texts ('Abbās, 1993 :44). Al-Ḥārthī confirms that al-Āmedī's method did not take into consideration the shift in the Arab reader's worldview which occurred in the Abbasid era (1996: 158).

In fact, the shift in the reader's worldview played a significant role in Classical Arabic criticism leading to the acknowledgement by critics of different types of readers and authors who were looking for new reading strategies for interpreting the literary text.

On the other hand, Stetkevych, one of the contemporary critics who has focused on *al-Muwāzanah* claims that:

It is precisely al-Āmedī's failure to compare whole *qaṣidāhs* that proved to be the major failing of *al-Muwāzanah*, and indeed of Classical Arabic literary criticism in general. One wonders whether such a comparison based on agreement of rhyme and meter is even feasible. It appears that al-Āmedī himself realized in the end that it was not and ultimately abandoned even his plan to match verses and sections of poems according to meter, let alone whole *qaṣidāhs*. (1991: 51)

Stetkevych suggests here that as a model of the Classical Arabic reader al-Āmedī did not apply the comparison method which he outlined in the introduction to *Al-Muwāzanah*. Thus, in Stetkevych's understanding, as an expert reader, al-Āmedī represented Classical Arabic literary criticism and this type of reading did not assist him in applying his new method.

### 5.3.2 Lack of objectivity

The lack of objectivity in al-Āmedī's application of his methodology has been noted by many modern critics. Despite the importance of al-Āmedī's formulation of certain concepts of *'amūd al-shi'r*, this did not lead him to reach neutral judgments since his method was based essentially on his personal taste and his literary knowledge. According to al-Āmedī he was not seeking to establish a specific literary reception theory or to suggest a new reading strategy for readers.

Ḍayf (1965) maintained that al-Āmedī was not a neutral critic but was biased towards al-Buḥturī and the traditional poetry school. Ḍayf also notes that al-Āmedī tends to focus on al-Buḥturī's positive points, devoting little attention to his faults. Conversely, when he discusses Abū Tammām he focuses excessively on his *al-'akhtā'* (errors) and *al-sariqāt al-shi'riyyah* (plagiarism). In his study on the history of Arabic criticism, whilst agreeing that *Al-Muwāzanah* is a remarkable literary work in its own context, Sallūm also criticises al-Āmedī for being clearly biased in his readings of the work of al-Buḥturī and Abū Tammām towards the former (1987: 211).

In his book *Naqd Al-Muwāzanah bayn Alṭā'iyayn*, Ṣāliḥ (1987) makes several observations about al-Āmedī's methodology, noting firstly his agreement with many of the critics mentioned above that al-Āmedī was not a neutral critic since al-Buḥturī was a great poet who deserved to be compared with the greatest traditional poets whilst Abū Tammām was only a minor poet within his own modernist school. Indeed, by mentioning this idea at the start of *Al-Muwāzanah*, al-Āmedī alerts readers to his preference for al-Buḥturī. Second, Ṣāliḥ claims that al-Āmedī was biased in his judgment that 30 percent of Abū Tammām's mistakes were very

distinct examples whilst another 40 percent of the mistakes rejected by al-Āmedī would have been acceptable to some readers (1987: 222). Thus, al-Āmedī's reading should be viewed as a personal viewpoint rather than critical ideas which were founded on the consistent application of a particular literary method. Ṣāliḥ believes that al-Āmedī was not a neutral reader because he used his own understanding of *'amūd al-shi'r* in his critical work which led him to consistently favour the traditional school of poetry in his thoughts and impressions.

Ābbās also notes that *Al-Muwāzanah* is considered by many researchers to be the peak of Arabic critical studies in Abbasid literary criticism. However, he considers that despite al-Āmedī's promise of neutrality, his application of his methodology led him to be a defender of the traditional style and he showed a clear bias toward al-Buḥturī's work (1993:150). Further evidence of the imbalance in the treatment of the two poets by al-Āmedī was found by Khilbāṣ who calculated that in *Al-Muwāzanah* there is six times more positive coverage of al-Buḥturī work than of that of Abū Tammām (1989: 114). For example, al-Āmedī identified two types of reader but chose to ignore those readers who believed that Abū Tammām and al-Buḥturī were on a par. Al-Āmedī's attitude towards these readers raises two points; firstly, he ignored them because he did not agree with their opinion, arguing that "many people put these two poets in one class and are of the opinion that they are alike; nevertheless, they differ" (1961: 04/1). Thus, he was not a neutral critic and as a witness of that period he did not describe the literary scene accurately. Secondly, al-Āmedī ignored these readers because of they were not in the mainstream and he believed that it was not important to consider them. However, al-Āmedī should have included the opinions of all types of readers in order to be a neutral critic.

Mandūr is one of the few literary critics to reject claims of al-Āmedī's lack of objectivity in *Al-Muwāzanah*, arguing that literary scholars are wrong about his preference for al-Buḥturī (1948: 96- 98). Like Mandūr, Ṭayārah (2003) argues that al-Āmedī should not be judged by contemporary standards of critical objectivity but by the extent to which he followed the accepted practices of his time:

Al-Āmedī read the work of both poets and carefully chose the motifs he used to make his comparison. He also analysed the poem by focusing on its key elements and following the accepted method at the time. In *Al-Muwāzanah*, al-Āmedī attempted to be fair and accurate in making his judgements.

It is clear from this passage that Ṭayārah does not see any defects in al-Āmedī's methodological approach to evaluating the poets' work on the basis of individual verses and decontextualising them, since he matched these motif by motif.

It is also important to mention that al-Āmedī's methodology has several distinctive features. One of its advantages is that al-Āmedī overtly presents his methodology and provides the aims of his study at the start of *Al-Muwāzanah*. This is unusual in the authoring style of Classical Arabic books. Second, al-Āmedī places significant emphasis on recording the responses of readers to literary texts in his presentation of the two opposing viewpoints of the traditionalists and the modernists. Thirdly, al-Āmedī highlights the concept of *'amūd al-shi'r* as the main method besides his own personal taste in poetry. Thus, these elements are combined by al-Āmedī in his method which is intended to give readers the basis on which to distinguish between good and bad poetic style.

However, it would be difficult to make a meaningful comparison between two poetic schools by using a method which is based on decontextualised motifs from the work of two poets. This type of method forces the reader to focus on specific

themes without looking at the whole oeuvre of each poet, since some poets could excel in some genres but not in others. Moreover, it is clear that al-Āmedī was not an objective reader as he claimed in his introduction and was usually biased towards al-Buḥturī who represented the Classical literary school as opposed to Abū Tammām who represented the modern literary school. Thus, his preference was not linked to al-Buḥturī's own merits as a poet.

It is important to remember that al-Āmedī's rejection of modern forms must be understood in the context of the broader cultural debate relating to *al-Shu'ūbiyyah*, as discussed previously in Chapter Four. Thus, one of al-Āmedī's unstated aims was to protect the purity of Arabic poetry which was viewed by traditionalists as being under threat from foreign influences. In this respect, al-Āmedī's methodology serves to provide an insight into the worldview of the readers and literary scholars who were his contemporaries.

## **5.4 The Impact of *Al-Muwāzanah* on Arabic Criticism**

This section will examine the impact of *Al-Muwāzanah's* methodology on Classical and modern Arabic criticism, discussing the reactions of these studies to al-Āmedī's evaluation of al-Buḥturī's poetry.

### **5.4.1 Classical Arabic Criticism and *Al-Muwāzanah***

It is clear that both al-Āmedī's method and his evaluation of the two poets in *Al-Muwāzanah* played an important role in Classical Arabic criticism. Some literary scholars adopted his viewpoints in their discussions of rhetorical texts whereas other studies realise that al-Āmedī showed a marked preference for the poems of al-Buḥturī. This section will briefly outline some of these critical responses following a chronological order.

With respect to the critical practices of Classical literary scholars, Kabbābah has highlighted how al-Āmedī's understanding of *'amūd al-shi'r* elucidated in *Al-Muwāzanah* had a profound influence not only on Arabic poetry but also literary criticism (1997: 86-88). However, in Kabbābah's opinion, the rigidity of this theory as applied by al-Āmedī had a long-lasting and negative impact on Classical critical thought, reflected in the readings of scholars such as ibn al-'Athīr who used the theory of *'amūd al-shi'r* to engage with literary texts.

Al-Qāḍī al-Jurjānī was influenced by *Al-Muwāzanah's* comparative method in his study about al-Mutanabbī and his opponents. Al-Jurjānī does not compare between two individual poets as al-Āmedī did as he was interested in reevaluating al-Mutanabbī's work and the criticism of his opponents rather than establishing the superior qualities of one poet over another.

*Al-Muwāzanah* provoked a great deal of critical response. Al-Sharīf al-Murtaḍā claims that there is evidence of deep-seated prejudice against the modern poets in *Al-Muwāzanah*, adding that al-Āmedī's approach is inappropriate for the new style of artful poetry (1954: 95/2). As al-Āmedī's works suggest (see introduction) he has a linguistic background but as al-Sharīf al-Murtaḍā notes this new poetic style requires a wider understanding which exceeds the limits of syntax.

Al-Qayrawānī comments on al-Āmedī's clear preference for the poems of al-Buḥturī (1972: 76), in particular their opening lines. He shares al-Āmedī's opinion about Abū Tammām's excessive use of complex metaphors in poems which requires an in-depth contextual analysis of this imagery and agrees that without this, attempting to interpret them leads to ambiguity (ibid: 94). On the other hand, al-Qayrawānī rejects some of the opinions expressed in *Al-Muwāzanah* concerning Abū Tammām's poems and offers his own re-reading of some specific examples.

Al-Jurjānī's response to al-Āmedī's readings of Abū Tammām's poetry reflects the new view towards the use of rhetorical devices, since he highlights the aesthetic qualities of Abū Tammām's work which were largely ignored in *Al-Muwāzanah*. Al-Jurjānī is unconvinced by al-Āmedī's method and the readings is produced which in his opinion did not engage deeply with these texts (1992: 160).<sup>54</sup>

In his work *Sirru Al-Faṣāḥah*, al-Khafājī recognises the inherent bias of *Al-Muwāzanah*. He illustrates his opinion by detailed discussion of specific examples cited from al-Āmedī (1982: 85). Al-Khafājī believes that every expert reader should have his own set of aesthetics and method of engaging with literary texts, meaning that they have the ability to evaluate texts on their own merits. Thus, he rejected some of al-Āmedī's critical views on the grounds that they lacked this necessary objectivity (ibid: 41).

Ibn al-'Athīr acknowledges al-Āmedī's importance within the history of Arabic rhetoric but notes his lack of understanding of the different types and uses of metaphor (1962: 135-36). Ibn al-'Athīr claims this confusion is apparent in many Classical literary studies which lack a common terminology and understanding of such rhetorical devices, leading to different readings and multiple viewpoints among Arab critics.

Ṣāliḥ notes that many Classical literary scholars have described al-Āmedī as a reader who was biased against Abū Tammām's work. These include Yāqūt al-Ḥamawī, 'Ali ibn al-Ḥusayn al-Aṣfahānī and ibn al-Nadīm (1987: 222). Although al-Ḥamawī does acknowledge that *Al-Muwāzanah* is one of the most important studies in Classical Arabic literature, he draws attention to the flaws in al-Āmedī's methodology. He comments on the lack of objectivity in his judgement, reflected in

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<sup>54</sup> Al-Jurjānī criticised the readings of al-Āmedī in many places in his books. See, for example, Asrār Al-Balāghah. Pp.141-149.

his unequal treatment of the poems of Abū Tammām and al-Buḥturī (1993: 131-133).

In general, *Al-Muwāzanah* had a major impact on Classical Arabic literary criticism and it was considered to offer an important set of criteria for evaluating literary works. Nevertheless, many critics acknowledged its shortcomings in terms of its lack of objectivity and provided their own new readings of Abū Tammām's poems which were more focused on their aesthetic aspects.

#### **5.4.2 Modern Arabic Criticism and *Al-Muwāzanah***

Modern Arabic criticism has also paid considerable attention to *Al-Muwāzanah*, with many studies considering it to be a major achievement in Classical Arabic literary theory. Many modern critics have viewed *Al-Muwāzanah* as representing a paradigm shift in the critical approach to literary texts. Al-Āmedī's explicit statement of his critical principles underpinning his reading of the poetry of al-Buḥturī and Abū Tammām represented the mind-set of a new era in which expert readers were unwilling to accept purely impressionistic criticism but demanded evidence from their peers of a reasoned interpretation, ideally framed within a recognisable methodology. In the opinion of Ḍayf this development in Arabic literary criticism was the inevitable result of socio-cultural changes during al-Āmedī's era (1954: 40).

In spite of the importance of *Al-Muwāzanah* in Classical Arabic criticism, Ḍayf recognised al-Āmedī's preference for al-Buḥturī which is clear from the start. Ḍayf also acknowledges the severe restrictions of al-Āmedī's comparative methodology imposed by its fragmentary approach (ibid: 80-82). However, in Ḍayf's opinion, the crucial importance of *Al-Muwāzanah* is that al-Āmedī's critical method, partially based on wholly subjective standards of personal preference, partially based on

explicit objective criteria, reveals the prevailing critical approaches of the period and highlights the need for a new critical approach to a new type of poetry. Adunīs (2011) also viewed *Al-Muwāzanah* as a comparison between two theories of poetic creation: traditional theory as embodied in *‘amūd al-shi‘r* and represented by the poetry of al-Buḥturī and modern theory embodied in Abū Tammām’s style.

‘Abbās later developed Ḍayf’s idea concerning al-Āmedī’s flawed comparative approach which decontextualised imagery, and his biased application of his methodology in *Al-Muwāzanah*, and agreed that this nonetheless marked the shift in Classical criticism from what ‘Abbās referred to as *al-Naqd al-’Inṭibā‘ī* (impressionistic criticism) to *al-Naqd al-Manhajī* (methodological criticism) (1993: 157).

Ḍayf argues that Classical Arab critics focused on individual verses without looking at the context and al-Āmedī’s methodology provides an insight into how the linguistic scholars approached literary texts. He makes the case for taking a holistic view of all the poem’s elements since the decontextualisation of verses or images leads to superficial readings which focus on detail at the expense of meaning. Ḍayf showed that al-Āmedī applied the same Classical linguistic strategies in reading the poems and he did not look at the contexts of these verses (ibid: 87). Al-Quṭ makes a number of similar points regarding al-Āmedī’s inappropriate use of these linguistic strategies to read the work of Abū Tammām in a decontextualized fashion (1983: 16).

In his preface to his edition of *Al-Muwāzanah*, Muḥārib (1987) argues that there is evidence that al-Āmedī did attempt to carry out a more holistic comparison between two poems in the third part of his work (1961: 75). However, he acknowledges that this plays only a small role in *Al-Muwāzanah* in comparison to the much stronger

impression created by his decontextualized approach which al-Āmedī uses to attempt to convince his readers about the flaws in the modern style of writing poetry.

As these critics have noted, using individual verses to compare between the two poets strongly affected al-Āmedī's reading and his final evaluation of the aesthetic aspects of the literary works in question. It could be argued that he chose to employ this methodology intentionally since as a supporter of the traditional school it served his implicit aim of criticising the modern style of Arabic poetry. Thus, by using this comparison between the individual verses al-Āmedī was able to represent the traditional school as the superior poetic style.

## **5.5 Al-Āmedī between two worldviews**

Using an imaginary debate, al-Āmedī attempts to persuade the reader about the reasons which led him to prefer al-Buḥturī. In this debate, al-Āmedī presents and discusses a number of arguments put forward by the two opposing camps of the traditionalist, al-Buḥturī, and the modernist, Abū Tammām. This debate consists of twenty-four arguments which are divided into twelve arguments for each group. All these arguments revolve about six key literary issues which are: *al-laḥẓ wa al-mā'nā* (word and meaning), *'amūd al-shi'r, maṭbū' wa maṣnū'* (naturally gifted style vs. artful style), *al-sariqāt al-shi'riyyah* (plagiarism), *al-'akhtā'* (errors) and *al-qadīm wa al-jadīd* (tradition vs. modernity). He chooses to focus on these literary elements, which were viewed as being of major importance during his period, using them as a set of supposedly objective criteria with which to evaluate the work of the two poets (Al-Rubay'ī, 1968: 57). Although al-Āmedī claims to be simply conveying the arguments put forward by each group, analysis of the text reveals that he is, in fact,

far from being an impartial judge of evidence from both sides of the debate. Instead, he uses this as a pretext for presenting his own subjective critical opinions as a defender of the traditional school of Arabic poetry.

It can also be argued that in presenting the imaginary debate between the two opposing camps putting forward reasons why their poet's work is superior al-Āmedī provides an insight into the type of critical tools which Abbasid readers used to evaluate literary texts and to make critical judgments on their quality.

### **5.5.1 The debate method**

Al-Āmedī identifies three types of recipients of the poetry of Abū Tammām and al-Buḥturī, namely, those who some prefer the former, those who believe in the superiority of the latter and a final group who believe that both poets are at the same level (1961: 04/1). As previously mentioned, al-Āmedī only chooses to review the arguments of the first two types. His choice is a significant one which can be directly linked to the prevailing literary debates of his day concerning the clash between the two main ideologies of traditionalism versus modernism.

Moreover, al-Āmedī's lack of objectivity is clearly reflected in how he chooses to present this argument. In all but two cases, al-Āmedī starts his argument by quoting an admirer of Abū Tammām followed by the opposing view from the al-Buḥturī camp, but this cannot be accounted for because of the seniority of Abū Tammām. Rather, al-Āmedī uses this technique to persuade his readers about the merits of al-Buḥturī by ensuring that his admirers literally have the last word in the argument. In addition, he supplements these comments with his own observations which are usually favourable towards this poet.

Another example of this bias towards al-Buḥturī in the presentation of this debate can be found in the disparity between the coverage of the poets' respective followers' opinions which each man's work receives. Of the 49 pages in which al-Āmedī focuses on this issue, praise for Abū Tammām from his admirers covers a mere 15 pages, that for al-Buḥturī, 34 pages (Al-Āmedī, 1961).

## 5.5.2 The components of the debate

### 5.5.2.1 *Al-Asbaqiyyah* (Precedence)

Al-Āmedī opens the debate with the claim by Abū Tammām's admirers that al-Buḥturī cannot be considered the superior poet, simply because he comes after Abū Tammām, and is therefore in all senses of the word his follower, learning from his predecessor's literary style and use of motifs (ibid: 6/1). Abū Tammām's admirers cite three pieces of evidence which support their assertion, namely, that he gained recognition as a poet before al-Buḥturī did, that he was considered to be the younger poet's teacher and that Abū Tammām's best poems are superior to those of al-Buḥturī.<sup>55</sup>

However, those supporting al-Buḥturī refute these claims:

As for their relationship, al-Buḥturī never associated with him [Abū Tammām] nor was he ever a student of his, nor did anyone ever say this with his [al-Buḥturī's] authority, nor see that he ever needed him [Abū Tammām]. The story that they met each other, becoming acquainted at the house of Abū Sa'īd Muḥammad ibn Yūsuf al-Thaghūrī is well-known, when al-Buḥturī recited his poem which begins:

- أأفاق صب من هوى فأفيا

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<sup>55</sup> According to Haddārah, al-Buḥturī himself admitted to taking some motifs from Abū Tammām's poetry but saw nothing shameful in this because Abū Tammām was the teacher of his era. Haddārah, M. 1975. *Mushkilat al-sariqāt fī al-naqd al-'arabī, dirāsah taḥlīliyyah muqāranah*. Beirut: Al-Maktab al-Islāmī. P.68.

Has an ardent lover ever awakened from love? So have I.

Abū Tammām, who was present, kept note of many lines from the poem and said to Muḥammad ibn Yūsuf: “I never thought someone would dare to plagiarize my poetry and recite it in my presence until I saw it happen today”. He poured out the lines he had memorized, reciting most of the lines of al-Buḥturī’s poem. The latter was nonplussed. When Abū Tammām saw signs of resentment on Abū Sa‘īd Muḥammad ibn Yūsuf’s face, he said: “Prince! I swear that the poem is his and he and his poem are perfect”. He then praised it and paraphrased its meaning and stated al-Buḥturī’s merits. Then he talked of the glories of Yemen, saying that Yemenis are the wellspring of poetry. He was not satisfied until Muḥammad ibn Yūsuf gave a reward to al-Buḥturī. This well-known story disproves your allegation, as someone who writes such a poem, which is one of his best, without knowing Abū Tammām, except from what he has heard about him, has no need to associate with him or to take lessons from him or from any other poet. (ibid: 7/1)

Al-Buḥturī’s admirers cited this well-known anecdote as evidence that far from being a student of Abū Tammām, he had already won recognition for his work before the pair had even met. In the case of this argument concerning precedence, the evidence which al-Āmedī presents from al-Buḥturī’s admirers covers seven pages, whereas that for Abū Tammām take up just one. This example of the lack of balance in al-Āmedī’s presentation of evidence regarding the seniority of Abū Tammām can be seen as his attempt to reject the possibility that al-Buḥturī might have resorted to *al-sariqāt al-shi‘riyyah* (plagiarism) from the older poet’s work.

Given the importance of this argument concerning precedence, al-Āmedī continues this debate with a further claim from Abū Tammām’s supporters that al-Buḥturī borrowed from the older poet to an excessive degree and by doing so, he effectively recognised the other poet’s superiority.

Al-Buḥturī's supporters dealt logically with this claim by agreeing that given the reach of Abū Tammām's poetry, it was possible that al-Buḥturī might have incorporated some elements of his work, whether intentionally or not in his poetry. However, he did not pass this off as his own work as Abū Tammām's admirers claimed. Rather this was simply due to the fact that all poets are writing on common themes (ibid: 55/1).

This debate between the two groups of supporters draws our attention to the fact that here in al-Āmedī's work we can find evidence of how the concept of plagiarism was understood by readers in his historical period, specifically with regards to the degrees of acceptability of poets' borrowing from others' work. For Abū Tammām's admirers, this is a clear case of plagiarism simply due to the similarities between the motifs found in the work of both poets. In contrast, al-Buḥturī's admirers take a more nuanced view, arguing that there is a difference between influence and true plagiarism, the latter involving the incorporation of innovative elements from another poet's own distinctive style.

With regards to precedence, then, the arguments which al-Āmedī has presented suggest that although borrowing does exist in al-Buḥturī's lesser poetry, there is sufficient proof that this was unintentional. It was largely the result of two prolific poets residing in two adjacent countries, reflecting similar realities and of the artistic limitations imposed by traditional themes. Further consideration will be given to *al-sariqāt al-shi'riyyah* (plagiarism) in a later section of this chapter since it forms an important element of al-Āmedī's horizon of expectations.

### 5.5.2.2 Originality of technique

Abū Tammām's admirers said:

Abū Tammām is the inventor of a poetic technique of which he is recognised leader. He has become so famous for this that expressions such as “Abū Tammām's technique” and “Abū Tammām's style” have become commonplace. People followed his example and technique. This is an honour that al-Buḥturī did not enjoy. (ibid: 13/1)

In response, al-Buḥturī's admirers answered:

It is not a matter of “inventing” a technique as you claim, nor was Abū Tammām the first one to use this. He imitated the technique used by Muslim ibn al-Walīd, followed his example and even did this to an excessive and exaggerated degree deviating from the recognized path and the familiar technique. Even Muslim is not the originator of this technique, nor did he pioneer it. He simply found those rhetorical devices known as *badī'*, that is, *isti'ārah* (metaphor), *ṭibāq* (antithesis) and *jinās* (paronomasia) scattered in the poetry of the early masters, so he used them more intentionally and frequently. These devices are in Allah's Book [the Qur'ān] itself. Allah says: “and the head blazed with hoariness”,<sup>56</sup> and “and a sign for them is the night. We remove from it [the light of] day, so they are [left] in darkness”,<sup>57</sup> and he says: “and lower to them the wings of humility out of mercy”.<sup>58</sup> These are examples of *isti'ārah* [metaphorical language] which is one of the tropes of the Qur'ān. (ibid: 14/1)

Here al-Āmedī attempts to prove that Abū Tammām was not the originator of the modern poetry technique which was founded on using *badī'* to a more excessive degree than the traditional method.

Moreover, ibn al-Mu'tazz claims that Bashshār, Abū Nuwās and Muslim ibn al-Walīd and those who imitated them are not the originators of *badī'* but this appeared so frequently in their poetry that they became closely associated with it during their

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56 Sūrat Maryam V. 04

57 Sūrat Yā-Sīn V. 37

58 Sūrat Al-'Isrā' V. 24

time (1967: 15). Then Abū Tammām developed this technique and took it to extremes, producing work of uneven quality due to his excessive use of rhetorical devices. Moreover, ibn al-Mu‘tazz adds that the pre-Islamic poets occasionally incorporated features of this kind in their poems but only sometimes, they did not consciously use it at all. When they used it sparingly in their discourse, *badī‘* was well-received. According to ibn al-Mu‘tazz, Abū Tammām’s overuse of *badī‘* can be compared to Ṣāliḥ ibn Abdul-Quddūs<sup>59</sup> excessive recourse to epigrams (ibid: 16). Ṣāliḥ was a pioneering poet and if he had been less profligate in his use of these, he would have been a paragon of excellence in his field.

Al-Āmedī finishes this part of the debate with the following response from al-Buḥturī’s admirers:

Thus your [Abū Tammām’s supporters] claim that Abū Tammām’s invention of this technique and his pioneering efforts is proof of his superiority has been dismissed. His excessive use of *badī‘* is now one of his most serious defects. By contrast, al-Buḥturī never departed from the approved norms of tradition despite his frequent use of metaphorical language, paronomasia and antithesis. In fact, what distinguishes his work from that of Abū Tammām is his clarity, his mellifluous words and the accuracy of his motifs, so that his poetry is acclaimed by all. His poems are recited with the same degree of admiration by transmitters of poetry of all ages and poetic preferences. This being the case, the one whose poetry achieves popular approval is more worthy of merit and of being considered superior. (1961: 18/1)

Here in this argument, al-Āmedī’s bias towards al-Buḥturī is apparent, clearly representing his own personal opinion since he totally agrees with the idea that Abū Tammām was not the pioneer of the use of *badī‘*. The fact that al-Āmedī ends this section of the debate with this claim from al-Buḥturī’s admirers is intended to influence the opinion of his readers since the placing of this point emphasises it.

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<sup>59</sup> Ṣāliḥ ibn Abdul-Quddūs was another poet from the Abbasid era.

### 5.5.2.3 Ambiguity vs. clarity

One of the most important arguments in *Al-Muwāzanah* centres on the debate concerning ambiguity of the meaning in the poetry of Abū Tammām. Arabic literary scholars such as ibn al-ʿAthīr (1962) have argued that Abū Tammām’s contemporaries found it difficult to understand his work not only as a result of his inclusion of philosophical ideas but also due to his excessive use of artful language. Abū Tammām’s admirers claim that those who reject his poetry do so because they do not have sufficient knowledge to grasp the subtlety of its meaning and are unable to respond to it. Only literary scholars and insightful recipients of poetry can do this. If his merits are recognised by these groups, he is undaunted by those who belittle him. However, al-Buḥturī’s admirers claim that a number of literary scholars, such as Diʿbil ibn ʿAlī al-Khuzāʿī, ibn al-ʿArābī and Ḥudhayfah ibn Muhammad who were experts in poetry and the language of the Arabs, heavily criticised Abū Tammām’s poetry. For example, Diʿbil attacked him by claiming one third of his poetry was poor, one third plagiarized, and one third good. He also said: “Allah did not create him a poet. His poetry is closer to oration and prose than to poetry” (cited in Al-Āmedī, 1961: 19/1). Al-Āmedī also notes that Diʿbil did not include him in his book on poets. Moreover, ibn al-Aʿrābī said: “If this is poetry, Arabic is a worthless language”, in relation to Abū Tammām’s work. According to Ḥudhayfah ibn Muhammad, Abū Tammām’s intention was to use *badīʿ* but his metaphorical devices ended up being far-fetched (ibid: 20/1).

Al-Āmedī shows his support for al-Buḥturī’s admirers by carefully selecting the opinions of those literary scholars who were opposed to Abū Tammām’s technique and failing to include those with different viewpoints. Therefore, the admirers of

Abū Tammām are deeply sceptical about the fairness of these literary scholars. They claim that

Di‘bil is unacceptable and cannot be counted on, as he hated Abū Tammām and envied him. This is well-known about him. One poet’s invective against another is not valid. Ibn al-A‘rābī was highly unfair to him because of the strangeness of his [Abū Tammām’s] poetics and because his poetry confronted Ibn al-A‘rābī with meanings he could not understand or grasp. If asked about any of these meanings he was too proud to say I don’t know. So, he resorted to invective against Abū Tammām. As proof of this, lines from Abū Tammām’s poetry were once recited to him without his knowing who had authored them. He admired them and ordered them to be written down. When he realized they were Abū Tammām’s lines he said: Tear that to shreds.(ibid: 22/1)

Here Abū Tammām’s admirers provide their own evidence to refute the opinions previously cited and to challenge the neutrality of these literary scholars. By doing this, they emphasise that their opinions as expert readers have been influenced by factors which are not wholly related to the literary qualities of the poet’s work.

Having considered the views of the literary scholars as expert readers, al-Āmedī then shifts the focus of the debate to another type of recipient: the Bedouin reader. A brief explanation is necessary here concerning al-Āmedī’s reasons for referring to this specific category or reader here. In that period, the Bedouin were considered to represent the Arab readers who were untainted by the foreign influence which was then so prevalent in the cities. They were more interested in unadorned poetry composed by those who were naturally talented rather than the artful style and philosophical ideas of the modern school.

With reference to the Bedouin readers, Abū Tammām’s admirers claim that although they will not immediately grasp his poetry, since his language is sound, if the ideas

which it contains are explained to them, they will come to savour it (ibid: 27/1).

However, al-Buḥturī's group claim that

These are your claims regarding the Bedouins presumed taking pleasure in Abū Tammām's poetry if they understand it. This can only be proved by directly testing your hypothesis. But you are unanimous anyway that Abū Tammām's poetry has its good and bad points. This consensus is shared by your allies and your adversaries alike. You're also unanimous that excellence is a characteristic of al-Buḥturī's poetry as a whole. He who excels without faults is better than he who sometimes excels and sometimes errs.(ibid: 27/1)

It is interesting to note here that in reality, al-Āmedī did not pay much attention to the arguments of Abū Tammām's admirers, instead shifting the focus to another idea which is unrelated to their point concerning Bedouin readers. This abrupt transition might be due to the fact that the cogency of their argument was irrefutable, and he attempts to minimize its impact using this technique.

#### **5.5.2.4 *Al- 'Ilm bi Al-Shi 'r* (awareness of poetic tradition)**

One of the arguments between the followers of Abū Tammām and al-Buḥturī concerns the impact of *al- 'Ilm bi al-Shi 'r* (literally, the knowledge of poetry) on the quality of the poetry. Abū Tammām's admirers claim that he was well-versed in knowledge of poetry and in performing his work. There is no doubt that the use of *al- 'ilm bi al-shi 'r* in his poems is more widespread than that found in al-Buḥturī's work. Thus, Abū Tammām's admirers believe that demonstrating knowledge of poetry is an important aspect of the poet's work.

However, the admirers of al-Buḥturī disagree, claiming that knowledge of poetry is not as important as poetic talent. They cite the example of Khalaf al-Aḥmar who they considered to be the most talented poet among the literary scholars but, even so, his knowledge of poetry did not qualify him to be a great poet (ibid: 25/1).

Therefore, they argue that excellence in poetry is not a consequence of the poet's knowledge of poetry but rather due to his innate talent. Hence it can be argued that from the perspective of al-Buḥturī's admirers, Abū Tammām's alleged superiority on the basis of *al-ʿIlm bi al-Shiʿr* does not count and al-Buḥturī becomes worthier of merit, if it is accepted that the poetry produced by literary scholars is inferior to that of poets.

In addition, al-Buḥturī's admirers claim that Abū Tammām intentionally showed off the breadth of his knowledge of poetic expression in Arabic by introducing many obscure words in his work. For his part, however, al-Buḥturī did not approve of such usage nor did he value it or find it scholarly. They remind readers that al-Buḥturī grew up in the desert of Manbij<sup>60</sup> and was thus exposed to pure Arabic and intentionally chose to omit obscure expressions from his poetry, except when a word occurred to him spontaneously, in order to make it accessible to all readers (ibid: 26/1). Since, as previously noted, al-Āmedī's own critical evaluation was founded on the standards of *ʿamūd al-shiʿr*, he considers natural poetic talent to be the main factor in determining the quality of poetry.

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<sup>60</sup> Manbij is a town in the Aleppo Governorate, Syria, 30 kilometres west of the Euphrates.

## 5.6 Al-Āmedī's Horizon of Expectations

This section aims to identify the literary reception standards which al-Āmedī used in *Al-Muwāzanah* and his horizon of expectations by considering the critical views underpinning his judgments about the work of Abū Tammām and al-Buḥturī respectively. As argued previously in Chapter Two, knowing a reader's horizon of expectations plays a major role in understanding their reading methods. Moreover, this horizon of expectations seems to differ slightly from one culture to another and from one reader to another. Although, as previously noted, al-Āmedī discusses six issues in relation to the work of the two poets, he focuses in greater detail on three of these, namely, *al-sariqāt al-shi'riyyah* (plagiarism), *al-'akḥṭā'* (errors) and *al-ṣūrah al-shi'riyyah* (poetic imagery). Therefore, it is these issues which are examined in detail here.

### 5.6.1 *Al-sariqāt al-shi'riyyah* (plagiarism)

*Al-sariqāt al-shi'riyyah* was considered to be one of the most important critical concepts in Classical Arabic literature as attested to in the work of various literary scholars before al-Āmedī dealt with this in *Al-Muwāzanah*. In his book entitled *Themes in Medieval Arabic Literature*, which tracks the development of plagiarism in Arabic theory, Grunebaum provides a summary of Abū Hilāl al-'Askarī's understanding of this concept which gives us an insight into the how readers and literary scholars during the Abbasid era conceived of this notion. It also allows us to determine the extent to which al-Āmedī's own vision of *al-sariqāt al-shi'riyyah* influenced his critical judgements of the work of Abū Tammām and al-Buḥturī.

According to Grunebaum, al-'Askarī firstly notes that the borrowing of *ma'ānī* (motifs) is inevitable, citing the caliph 'Alī (d. 661) who said: "If speech could not be repeated, it would have long been exhausted". However, he argues that to be

acceptable, this borrowing must take particular forms. The poet was expected to either introduce the borrowed motif using his own words without the rhetorical devices found in the original and recontextualise this, or further embellish the original motif in terms of its form, context and expression. The second of these methods was considered to have more artistic merit. Al-‘Askarī also points to the importance of not making the borrowing obvious by using different techniques which help to conceal this plagiarism. Finally, he specifies the instances when this type of borrowing is unacceptable, namely, taking the original motif and using this in a virtually verbatim form or using this in any way which detracts from the quality of the original (1952: 236).<sup>61</sup>

Al-Āmedī also paid close attention to *al-sariqāt al-shi‘riyyah* in *Al-Muwāzanah*. It is clear that his approach was influenced by the work of previous literary scholars but in addition there is evidence of his own understanding of this concept. Ouyang identifies three specific sources of this influence in al-Āmedī’s work, noting that:

Al-Āmedī has preserved in *Al-Muwāzanah* some excerpts from the works belonging to the third/ninth century on *sariqāt*, the originals of which are lost. We learn from al-Āmedī of three names: ibn al-Munajjim (d. 275/888) who, according to al-Āmedī, wrote a work in which he picked out the *sariqāt* of both Abū Tammām and al-Buḥturī; ibn Abī Ṭāhir (214/829-280/894) who compiled *sariqāt al-shu‘rā’* (appropriations of poets) and *sariqāt al-Buḥturī min Abī Tammām* (al-Buḥturī’s appropriations from Abū Tammām); and Abū al-Ḍiyā’ Bishr b. Yaḥyā who also compiled *sariqāt al-Buḥturī min Abī Tammām* (al-Buḥturī’s appropriations from Abū Tammām). (1997: 134)

Thus, as elsewhere in *Al-Muwāzanah*, al-Āmedī supports his ideas by referring to the work of others in order to convey to readers that his judgement is objective and based on other scholarly opinions (1961: 59/1). However, he is selective in his

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<sup>61</sup> See Al-‘Askarī, A.H.a.-H.i.A. 1952. *Kitāb al-ṣinā‘atayn: al-kitābah wa-al-shi‘r*. al-Ṭab‘ah 1. ed. Damascus: Dār ‘Iḥyā’ al-Kutub al-‘Arabiyyah. Pp. 146-147 and pp. 172-173

choice of supporting evidence, preferring to cite those critics who belong to the same traditional school as himself whilst ignoring modernist viewpoints.

Although Grunebaum claims that al-Āmedī did not attempt to systematize his views concerning *al-sariqāt al-shi'riyyah* in *Al-Muwāzanah*, he does make an attempt to categorise different types of *al-sariqāt al-shi'riyyah*, identifying three forms of plagiarism: *sariqat al-lafẓ* (appropriation of word), *sariqat al-ma'nā* (appropriation of motif) and *sariqat al-lafẓ wa sariqat al-ma'nā* (appropriation of word and motifs). However, he then qualifies this statement by observing that poetic plagiarism of the type he is interested in only occurs at the level of motif rather than words themselves. Moreover, to emphasise this fact he then refers to two different types of literary motifs: *al-ma'ānī al-'āmmah* (common motifs) and *al-ma'ānī al-khāṣṣah* (artful motifs). Accordingly, the former type is available to all poets, both traditional and modern, whilst the latter are created by the individual poet's imagination and talent. Al-Āmedī believes that *al-sariqāt al-shi'riyyah* only occurs when an artful motif has been appropriated. He remarks

I found that ibn Abū Ṭāhir had condemned the plagiarism of Abū Tammām. He was correct in some cases but mistaken in others, because he mixed personal [artful] motifs with those that are common among the people, and the use of such motifs does not constitute plagiarism. (cited in Stetkevych, 1991: 53)

Al-Āmedī also argues that the similarity of the motifs between poets may be due to reasons such as their being from the same country and influenced by the same culture and customs, or being influenced by the methods of Classical Arabic poetry (1961: 123-130/1).

As previously argued, then, there is evidence that al-Āmedī attempted to establish a critical framework for discussing *al-sariqāt* but then fails to apply this consistently

and objectively. This is reflected in the fact that his discussion of al-Buḥturī's plagiarism lasts approximately 50 pages and he dismisses most of the examples which he chooses to comment on as not being examples of true plagiarism in his understanding of this concept. In contrast, al-Āmedī spends some 200 pages focusing on Abū Tammām's plagiarism and highlighting the sources from which he believes the poet has borrowed.

A number of examples have been chosen from al-Āmedī's extensive discussion of plagiarism to illustrate his critical response as an expert reader to the work of Abū Tammām and al-Buḥturī. Analysis of these examples will serve to reveal al-Āmedī's reading and interpretative strategies including its shortcomings and this, in turn, can tell us much about the horizon of expectations which he and his contemporaries shared in the Abbasid era.

This discussion begins with an example of how Abū Tammām used motifs borrowed from al-Kumayt al-Akbar:

Al-Kumayt al-Akbar –and he is al-Kumayt ibn Tha‘labah –said:

لا تكثروا فيها الضجاج فإنه ... محا السيف ما قال ابن داره أجمعا<sup>62</sup>

Then do not increase the clamour about it,  
For indeed the sword has erased entirely  
Ibn Dārah's words.

Abū Tammām took it and said:

السيف أصدق إنباء من الكتب

The sword informs more truly than the book.

What he is alluding to is that the astrologers had determined that al-Mu‘taṣim would not conquer ‘Ammūriyyah,<sup>63</sup> and that the Byzantines contacted him saying, “Indeed we find in our books that this city of ours

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<sup>62</sup> Although the original Arabic was not included in Stetkevych's text, these quotations have been added here to help the reader identify the original source.

<sup>63</sup> The Sack of Amorium was one of the major events in the long history of the Arab–Byzantine Wars. The Abbasid campaign was led personally by the Caliph al-Mu‘tasim in mid-August 838.

cannot be conquered except at the time when the figs and grapes ripen, and between us and that time are months when the cold and ice will prevent you from sojourning there.” But he refused to turn back and persevered against ‘Ammūriyyah until he thwarted their predictions. Therefore, al-Ṭā’ī [Abū Tammām] said:

The sword informs more truly than the book.

This is his best opening. (cited in Stetkevych, 1991: 53)

Here the borrowing being discussed is the opening line of one of Abū Tammām’s most famous poems and seems to have been chosen by al-Āmedī for a number of reasons. Firstly, he emphasises that the poet’s best effort has been plagiarised from an earlier source, thus discrediting it and suggesting to his readers that Abū Tammām is untrustworthy. Secondly, he has selected this example to display his own knowledge not only as an expert reader of poetry who is able to identify the source of the original motif but in addition, can recognise the historical event to which it alludes. However, by mentioning these historical details to support his point, al-Āmedī effectively weakens his own argument regarding plagiarism since this shows that although there is a superficial connection between the expression used by Abū Tammām and the line from al-Kumayt al-Akbar, the former poet uses this opening line to signpost a central theme of the composition as a whole.

On another level, this example illustrates one of the difficulties with al-Āmedī’s comparative methodology which decontextualizes individual motifs without taking into account their position within the poem (Ḍayf, 1954: 82). Moreover, it serves to highlight the lack of objectivity in the critic’s reading strategy, indicating the broader socio-cultural debates taking place at the time that he was writing. This helps to reveal the horizon of expectations of his era.

The difficulties of al-Āmedī's methodological approach is further confirmed by the example which he uses to follow up his previous argument:

Al-Nābighah [pre-Islamic poet] said, describing the war:

تبدو كواكبه والشمس طالعة ... لا النور نور ولا الإظلام إظلام

His stars appeared as the sun was rising,

The light was not light and the darkness was not dark.

Abū Tammām took this and spoke of the light of day and the darkness of smoke in the fire which he described thus:

ضوء من النار والظلماء عاكفة ... وظلمة من دخان في ضحى شحب

فالشمس طالعة من ذا وقد أفلتت ... والشمس واجبة من ذا ولم تَجِب

There was light from the fire while the night was still dark,

And darkness from the smoke in ghastly mid-day sun.

The sun was rising from one, when it had set:

And setting from the other, when it had not set. (ibid: 54)

Here we have further proof of al-Āmedī's flawed methodology. As Stetkevych notes in relation to this example: "the discussion of *sariqah* based on the similarity of isolated lines is not a reliable method of distinguishing the original poet from the plagiarist" (ibid : 54). Beyond this, however, these examples chosen by the critic to illustrate Abū Tammām's appropriation of the work of his literary predecessors can also provide an insight into the creative techniques which poets themselves used to conceal their borrowing. In this instance, Abū Tammām alludes to al-Nābighah's original motif of darkness and light but develops this into a more complex image by using the rhetorical device of *ṭibāq* (antithesis). More generally, this example illustrates how al-Āmedī attempts to form the horizon of expectations of his contemporaries by drawing attention to the use of *badī'* by Abū Tammām and his fellow poets in the modern school and overtly criticising this in order to discredit their techniques.

The following example is a particularly revealing one since al-Āmedī discusses a motif from Abū Tammām’s work which he considers to be an improvement on the original by a pre-Islamic poet:

Al-A‘shā said:

وأرى الغواني لا يواصلن امرءاً ... فقد الشباب وقد يصلن الأمردا

I see that coy ladies do not stay with a man  
Whose youth has fled,  
They take up instead  
With the beardless youth.

Then Abū Tammām took this image and refined it, saying:

أحلى الرجال من النساء موقعاً ... من كان أشبههم بهن خودا

The men that women find the sweetest  
Are those whose cheeks are most like theirs (ibid: 53)

Here, then, al-Āmedī clearly indicates his preference for the later poet’s reworking of the original motif by his use of the verb *yaşqul* (translated by Stetkevych here as “refined”) which implies a more polished version of al-A‘shā’s idea. However, it does not make use of elaborate rhetorical devices or complex philosophical concepts, as is the case with the other instances that al-Āmedī has criticised; therefore, we can assume that he believes this to be closer to the standards of *‘amūd al-shi‘r*, that is, natural rather than artfully crafted expression.

In another of the examples selected by al-Āmedī, he claims to be tracing the same commonplace motif from its appearance in work by al-Nābighah, then Muslim ibn al-Walīd and finally Abū Tammām:

Muslim ibn al-Walīd said:

قد عود الطير عادات وثقن بها ... فهن يتبعنه في كل مرتحل

He had accustomed the vultures to habits they relied on,  
So they followed him wherever he might travel.

Then Abū Tammām took it and said:

وقد ظللت عقبان أعلامه ضحى ... بعقبان طير في الدماء نواهل

أقامت مع الرايات حتى كأنها... من الجيش إلا انها لم تقاتل

The eagles of his banners were o'ershadowed  
in the noonday sun  
By the eagles that quench their thirst with blood.  
They stood with standards till they seemed  
part of the army,  
Except that they did not join in combat. (ibid: 55)

As is the case in many other examples which he mentions in *al-Muwāzanah*, here al-Āmedī chooses not to analyse the nature of the links between the earlier work and Abū Tammām's reworking of this, encouraging readers to simply accept his opinion. It can be argued that his reason for citing these examples is to support his opinion that the modern poets are not only dependent on their ancient literary predecessors but are even borrowing from those writing in their own era.

It is worth noting here that the critic fails to provide any reasons to explain why he believes that Abū Tammām's image has been borrowed from the previous poets and he offers no detailed analysis of this. Given this lack of explanation, the reader is left to speculate on the nature of the connection which al-Āmedī claims to have found between the use of a particular image in these three extracts. His reasoning seems to be based on the fact that all three poets include motifs which make reference to birds of prey i.e. vultures and eagles and their connection to battlefields. However, since he is so keen to prove his point about plagiarism in Abū Tammām's work by focusing on the similarities which connect the poems that he fails to acknowledge their differences. Firstly, although both vultures and eagles are birds of prey, they possess very different connotations. Vultures live off dead carcasses and for this reason are associated with battlefields, the image which is used by Muslim to alert the reader to the warlike reputation of Caliph Yazīd. However, eagles hunt live prey and do not have the same close link to the victims of war. Secondly, al-Āmedī fails

to see the mirror image which Abū Tammām creates in his motif with the representation of the eagles on the banners reflecting the real eagles flying overhead and getting ready to swoop down and drink their fill of blood. Abū Tammām's image is therefore considerably more complex and artful than the others which are referred to by the critic, suggesting that this example is a far from straightforward example of plagiarism.

With regards to Abū Tammām's skilful appropriation of his literary predecessors' imagery, al-Marzubānī considered him a skilful poet because when he borrowed a motif he refashioned it by using more verbal embellishments and more artful language (1995: 312). Ibn Qutaybah was of the same opinion, arguing that although Abū Tammām borrowed extensively from other poets, his skill was such that this often went unremarked due to the fact that he presented these motifs in a carefully recrafted form (1958: 528).

Al-Āmedī claims that Abū Tammām's admirers questioned the level of originality of al-Buḥturī's work but the critic argues that *al-sariqāt al-shi'riyyah* is less of an issue in the work of the latter poet than the former and consequently, he attempts to determine those motifs which al-Buḥturī plagiarized from others (1961: 276/1). However, al-Āmedī does not include a dedicated section referring to this topic, as was the case for Abū Tammām, but approaches it in a different way. He reproduces the opinions of a limited range of scholars such as ibn al-Munajjim, ibn Abū Ṭāhir and Abū al-Ḍiyā' Bishr ibn al-Yahyā who have taken issue with al-Buḥturī's plagiarized motifs, but then proceeds to refute them (1961: 346/1).<sup>64</sup>

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64 It should be noted that al-Āmedī neglected to mention studies by other Classical literary scholars which focused on al-Buḥturī's poetic plagiarism, for example, Ibn Ṭafūr's *Mā Akhadh Al-Buḥturī*. Haddārah identified several other critical works by Ibn al-'Athīr, Ibn al-Ḥājjib and al-Qayrawānī which analysed examples of plagiarism in al-Buḥturī's poetry and their sources.

Al-Āmedī does, in fact, choose to acknowledge over sixty examples of motifs, all of which al-Buḥturī borrowed from the work of Abū Tammām (ibid: 277/1). This appears to be the critic's strategy for defending himself from claims of lack of objectivity as does his later claim that if he had been more thorough in his literary research he might have identified many more examples in al-Buḥturī's poetry, even more than he had found in that of Abū Tammām (ibid: 323/1).

The following example provides an insight into al-Āmedī's treatment of al-Buḥturī's borrowing of a motif from another poet:

This line is one of al-Buḥturī's *sariqāt*:

أعطيتني حتى حسبتُ جزيلاً ما ... أعطيتنيهِ وديعةً لم تُهَبِ

You gave me so much money that I thought  
That this was for safe-keeping and not a gift.

He took this motif from al-Farazdaq:

أعطاني المالَ حتى قُلْتُ: يُودِعُنِي ... أو قُلْتُ: أعطى مالاً قد رآه لنا

He gave me money until I said: it is for safe-keeping,  
Or else he thought it is money that belonged to me.

Al-Buḥturī's line is much better. (1961: 314/1)

In this case, there are clear similarities between the two examples and very little evidence that al-Buḥturī developed the previous poet's idea to any significant degree. It is therefore difficult to understand al-Āmedī's opinion that the later version of the motif is better when he fails to provide any detailed analysis of the two motifs, as was previously the case with Abū Tammām's plagiarism, or any justification for his critical judgment.

Al-Āmedī's lack of close textual analysis is even more apparent in the next example, where he fails to comment on the obvious similarity at the level of language between the two poems:

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Haddārah, M. 1975. *Mushkilat al-sariqāt fī al-naqd al-‘arabī, dirāsah taḥlīliyyah muqāranah*. Beirut: Al-Maktab al-Islāmī. Pp 64-69.

Al-Buḥturī said:

إلى فتى يتبع النعمى نظائرها ... كالبحر يتبع أمواجاً بأمواج

To a youth who follows favours with their like,  
As a sea with waves following waves.

He took this motif from Abī Dahbal al-Jumāhī:

وليلة ذات أجراس وأروقة ... كالبحر يتبع أمواجاً بأمواج

A night of curtains and gentle melodies,  
Is like a sea with waves following waves.(ibid: 317/1)

Here the phrase “a sea with waves following waves” is reproduced word for word by al-Buḥturī who makes no attempt to develop the original image, simply incorporating this as it is into his own work. This suggests that al-Āmedī does not read the poet’s work with the objective eye of the critic but as a subjective admirer.

The examples discussed in this section clearly indicate that although al-Āmedī claimed to have identified several distinct types of plagiarism in the work of the two poets, closer examination shows that he failed to apply these categories in his critical interpretation in *Al-Muwāzanah*. This suggests that the concept of *al-sariqāt al-shi’riyyah* was still unclear in the literary understanding of even expert readers at the end of the fourth century HA. Like many Classical literary scholars, al-Āmedī applied this concept inconsistently, making it difficult for him to use this as a criterion with which to compare the work of Abū Tammām and al-Buḥturī.

Beyond his personal failings as an objective critic, al-Āmedī’s readings of plagiarism in the work of the two poets reveal what was understood in his era by the concept of the expert reader. This entailed having a broad knowledge of poetry since pre-Islamic times and an ability to memorise key works which enabled the expert reader to compare similarities and differences between original and borrowed motifs, with the aim of distinguishing between plagiarism and innovation (1972:

82). Ibn Khaldūn also emphasised memorizing Classical poetry as an important part of becoming an expert reader (1377: 476).

Contemporary critics such as Rajā' 'Īd (2000), Khalūfah (2007) and Būghannūt (2011) have attempted to apply the modern understanding of intertextuality to their readings of al-Āmedī's criticism. However, it is important not to judge his attitudes towards the poets of his time simply by applying current standards to his interpretation of the borrowing of motifs by one poet from another. Instead, contemporary literary scholars of Classical Arabic literature should ensure that they are aware of the horizon of expectations of that period by gaining an in-depth understanding of the concept of *'amūd al-shi'r*. It is only by employing this approach that they can hope to truly grasp the nature of *al-sariqāt al-shi'riyyah* and understand the critical judgements made by Classical literary scholars such as al-Āmedī.

### 5.6.2 *Al-'akhtā' al-shi'riyyah* (poetic errors)

Al-Āmedī highlights the poetic errors of Abū Tammām and al-Buḥturī in order to evaluate their work. Al-Āmedī asserts that the method used by Abū Tammām and other modern poets led them to commit what he considered to be a large number of errors:

Nevertheless, I have never seen those who reject this man consider plagiarism one of his major faults, because it is a category from which none but a few of the poets are free. Rather what I find them blaming him for is the large number of mistakes and violations, consistencies and sophistries in his images and expressions. I have considered the causes that led him to this, and they are what Abū 'Abdullah Muḥammad ibn Duwād ibn al-Jarrāḥ related in his book *Al-Waraqah* from Muḥammad al-Qāsim ibn Mihrawayh from Ḥudhayfah ibn Muḥammad [al-Ṭā'ī], namely that Abū Tammām desired the new *al-badī'* so much that he went to the absurd. This is

approximately what ibn al-Mu‘tazz said in his book which discussed *badī‘*. Like this too is what Muḥammad ibn Duwād relates from Muḥammad al-Qāsim ibn Mihrawayh from his father: that the first to corrupt poetry was Muslim ibn al-Walīd, and that Abū Tammām followed him, taking *badī‘* as his method until he became confused in it. It seems as if they have in mind his excess in seeking *ṭibāq* (antithesis), *tajnīs* (paronomasia), and *isti‘ārah* (metaphor) and his immoderation in seeking out these types of rhetorical devices and adorning his poetry with them, until his intention in most of the images that he produced cannot be known or understood except by assumption or guesswork. (cited in Stetkevych, 1991: 58-59)

Supporting his opinion with references to many well-respected literary scholars, al-Āmedī argues that Abū Tammām’s poetic errors are the result of his adoption of the new method, in particular his excessive use of rhetorical devices. As elsewhere in *Al-Muwāzanah*, al-Āmedī proposes a systematic approach to his analysis of the errors in the work of both poets, identifying four distinct categories of mistakes which can occur in poetry. The first of these seems to be a catch-all term which cover errors in general, whether grammatical or linguistic. The second type, which he refers to as violations, seems to imply the breaking of established traditional literary norms. The third, labelled inconsistencies, can be linked to previous concerns voiced by al-Āmedī relating to the need for consistency within a poet’s body of work, with variability being deemed a negative characteristic. Finally, sophistries is a clear reference to what he views as the over-elaborate presentation of philosophical arguments.

It is also worth noting here al-Āmedī’s use of the verb “corrupt” which reflects his strong feelings towards the new poetic technique originally pioneered by Muslim and later adopted by Abū Tammām and others and carries the connotation of a pure traditional form which has been tainted by the artful excesses the modernist poets. In

addition, the critic again emphasises that the principal reason for his rejection of this poetic technique is that excessive use of rhetorical devices leads to ambiguity.

As previously, al-Āmedī's critical strategy involves incorporating the opinions of other literary scholars concerning al-Buḥturī's errors and then refuting these on the grounds that they failed to interpret his poetry correctly. He focuses on two types of mistakes in the poetry of Abū Tammām and al-Buḥturī: those which relate to expression and those which relate to poetic imagery.

A closer examination of a number of these examples can provide an insight into the horizon of expectations not only of al-Āmedī but more generally of the expert reader's understanding of what constituted the poetic norms of the Classical period. Analysing those aspects of the work of both poets which he categorised as errors reveals their relationship to *'amūd al-shi'r* and poetic convention.

In the first of these examples, al-Āmedī engages with the opinions of one of his contemporaries, Abū al-'Abbās (more popularly known as al-Quṭurbī), and his criticism of Abū Tammām's work:

Abū al-'Abbās Aḥmad ibn 'Ubayd Allāh criticized Abū Tammām for his expression:

هاديه جذع من الأراك، وما ... تحت الصلا منه صخرة جلس

Its neck is a trunk of the Arak,

And what is under its rump is a solid rock.

Saying: it is one of his grave mistakes that he compared the neck of a horse to a tree-trunk and then said "the trunk of an Arak tree." When did he ever see Arak branches that were trunks? Or horses' necks being compared to them? Abū al-'Abbās was wrong in criticizing Abū Tammām for comparing the horse's neck to the tree-trunk, for that is the custom of the Arabs and is found in their poetry innumerable times [...] But Abū al-'Abbās was correct in denying that Arak branches are trunks, even though he does not say so

explicitly, because the branches of the Arak-tree are not thick enough to be like trunks, or even close to being so. (cited in Stetkevych, 1991: 60)

This extract shows the different ways in which al-Āmedī interacts with other critical opinions. Firstly, he refutes al-Quṭurbī's comments regarding the poet's use of the comparison between the horse's neck and the arak tree in order to demonstrate his own superior knowledge of the conventions of Arab poetry, claiming that this is a commonplace motif. Ṣāliḥ claims that if readers think about the similarities between Abū Tammām's horse and the Arak trunk the meaning of the line becomes clear. Abū Tammām's comparison was correct since in appearance the Arak trunk is usually mottled and set at an angle, having the same thickness from top to bottom. All these details match the description of the poet's horse elsewhere in the same poem. Thus, Abū Tammām's comparison is an accurate observation and better than following the Arab literary tradition of comparing the horse's neck to the palm-trunk (1987: 301). This example also illustrates that al-Āmedī's method of analysing each element of the poem separately without reference to the context in which it has been used produces a flawed interpretation.

Then, he uses a further reference to al-Quṭurbī as a pretext to criticise Abū Tammām's imprecise use of language but at the same time he once again exposes the shortcomings of his own critical method. In his determination to highlight the poet's linguistic error, he fails to employ what would have been the standard means of establishing the correct usage of the disputed term, making reference to the Qur'ān as the ultimate source of linguistic authority. The distinction which he seeks to make between trunk and branch is an erroneous one, as the following well-known Qur'ānic verses illustrate. In the first example, the word *jidh* ' (trunk) is used with its habitual meaning:

فَأَجَاءَهَا الْمَخَاضُ إِلَى جِذْعِ النَّخْلَةِ قَالَتْ يَا لَيْتَنِي مِتُّ قَبْلَ هَذَا وَكُنْتُ نَسِيًّا مَّسِيًّا

And the pains of childbirth drove her to the trunk of a date-palm. She said:  
“Would that I had died before this, and had been forgotten and out of sight”<sup>65</sup>

In the second example, it refers to the branches of the date palm:

وَهَرِّي إِلَيْكَ بِجِدْعِ النَّخْلَةِ تُسَاقِطُ عَلَيْكَ رُطْبًا جَنِينًا

And shake the trunk of date palm towards you, it will let fall fresh ripe-dates upon you.<sup>66</sup>

Thus, both al-Āmedī and al-Quṭurbī were incorrect in their assessment of the linguistic accuracy of Abū Tammām’s expression.

Al-Āmedī returns to an example from Abū Tammām’s work which he had previously criticised as a motif plagiarised from other poets:

وقد ظللت عقبان أعلامه ضحى ... بعقبان طير في الدماء نواهل

The eagles of his banners were overshadowed

In the noonday sun

By the winged eagles drinking

Their first draught of blood. (*nawāhili*)<sup>67</sup>

“*Nawāhili*” (drinking the first draught) is from *al-nahal* (first watering, first drinking) and that is the first drink; *al-‘alal* is the drinking after drinking [i.e., the second draught]. But eagles and other birds of prey do not drink blood; rather, they eat flesh. (cited in Stetkevych, 1991: 62)

Although al-Āmedī criticises the poet’s linguistic errors and lack of knowledge of the natural world, this example actually provides further evidence of his own failings as a linguist since as ibn Manzūr observes “*nawāhili*” has many definitions, one of them being “eating after extreme hunger” (1956: 682/11). Thus, Abū Tammām proves his superior knowledge of Arabic.

Al-Āmedī fails to comment on another error of expression made by Abū Tammām:

من الهيف لو أن الخلاخل صورت ... لها وشحاً جالت عليها الخلاخل

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65 Surat Maryam, verse 23

66 Surat Maryam, verse 25

67 It is should be noted that in Stetkevych’s (1991) book, she produces two different translations of the same passage.

Of ones so slender-bellied that if their anklets  
Were made into ornamented belts,  
Those anklets would fit about their waists.

[...]

مها الوحش إلا أن هاتا أوانس ... قنا الخط إلا أن تلك ذوابل

Wild oryx-except that these are docile;  
Spears in stature-except that those are withered (*dhawābilu*)

But, spears are said to be withered (*dhawābilu*) because of their suppleness and pliability, this he then denies to the stature of the women, the most perfect descriptions of whom include swaying, suppleness, and curvature, as in Tamīm ... Ibn Muqbil's lines:

يهزرن للمشي أوصالا منعمة ... هز الجنوب ضحى عيدان يبرينا  
أو كاهتزاز رديني تذاوقه ... أيدي التجار فزادوا منته لينا

When they walk they make their soft limbs quiver,  
As the south wind shakes the branches of Yabrīnā  
In the late afternoon,  
Or like the quivering of a spear  
That the hands of merchants test,

Then make the shaft more supple. (cited in Stetkevych, 1991: 63)

Another Classical literary scholar, al-Qayrawānī, does not agree with al-Āmedī's reading of Abū Tammām's text, namely, his point regarding the etymology of *dhawābilu* as being related to "withering" (1972: 196/1). Rather, he argues that al-Āmedī fails to grasp that there are two possible interpretations of this word due to the two opposing meanings of *dhawābilu*. Thus, he defends the poet's usage of this adjective, on the grounds that it does not deny the women's swaying, suppleness, and curvature, as al-Āmedī claimed; instead, Abū Tammām's description emphasises their positive feminine qualities.

This once again demonstrates al-Āmedī's failure to follow his own stated comparative method of focusing solely on the works of the two poets, since he

carefully selects an example from ibn Muqbil to support his commentary on Abū Tammām's inaccurate choice of expression.

The final example considered here relates to al-Āmedī's reading of an image created by Abū Tammām which he believes to be an error of judgement on the poet's part:

جليت والموت مبد حر صفحته ... وقد تفر عن في أفعاله الأجل

You appeared and death bared  
A brazen cheek,  
And death's appointed time  
Was pharaonic (*tafar'ana*) in its deeds.

[...] And his saying "the instant of death was pharaonic in its deeds" is an image of the utmost weakness and stupidity; it is one of the expressions of the common people. People still blame him for it, saying: he derived for death, which rules over all souls, a verb from the noun *fīr'awn* (pharaoh); but death has destroyed the soul of the Pharaoh and the soul of every tyrant in the world! (cited in Stetkevych, 1991: 66)

As with the previous examples cited above, here al-Āmedī's rejection of Abū Tammām's expression "And death's appointed time was pharaonic in its deeds" offers a useful insight into the critical judgements of an expert reader. He dismisses the poet's use of this image not only on the grounds that it is inaccurate, since death ultimately conquers even the most despotic tyrants, but interestingly also because of the language itself. Abū Tammām's choice of the verb *tafar'ana* offends al-Āmedī since he believes it to be a commonplace expression and as such he judges it unacceptable for poetic purposes.

Furthermore, it has been argued by Stetkevych that al-Āmedī fails to understand Abū Tammām's purpose in using this word since the poet's intention was to personify death itself, by drawing a parallel between this and the absolute tyranny of the pharaohs. In her opinion, it is a wholly successful motif (ibid: 66).

In addition, this example also illustrates al-Āmedī's use of loaded language since in criticising the poet's errors he makes use of the nouns *rakākah wa sakhāfah* (weakness and stupidity) to comment on the quality of the expression in this case whereas this type of negative terminology is never applied to the work of al-Buḥturī. A comparison of the quantity of space allocated to the discussion of errors in the work of Abū Tammām and al-Buḥturī respectively shows that al-Āmedī chooses to include some 44 examples from the poetry of the former whilst featuring only eight from the latter and rejecting many other examples mentioned by his fellow critics. His treatment of *al-Faḍā'il* (the literary merits) of the two poets is similarly unbalanced, with three pages for Abū Tammām and six for this rival. This underplaying of the errors and foregrounding of the merits in the work of al-Buḥturī clearly demonstrates al-Āmedī's intention to convince his readers that his personal favourite is the superior poet.

On the basis of the evidence which he provided, al-Āmedī conceded that Abū Tammām was one of the most important poets of his time but was more interested in creating artful imagery than in maintaining the purity of Arabic expression (1961: 420/1). In contrast, he claims that on the grounds of his interest in combining clarity of language with a balanced use of motifs al-Buḥturī was the more talented of the two. Al-Āmedī ends by arguing that although Abū Tammām's admirers also knew that according to the conventional criteria of the period al-Buḥturī was undoubtedly the better poet, they were still unwilling to acknowledge this fact (ibid: 426-428/1).

### 5.6.3 *Al-ṣūrah al-shi'riyyah* (poetic imagery)

In the context of Classical Arabic studies *al-ṣūrah al-shi'riyyah* refers to how poets create meaning by using *al-badī'* (rhetorical devices) including *tashbīh* (simile), *isti'ārah* (metaphor), *jinās* (alliteration) and *ṭibāq* (metonymy). In *Al-Muwāzanah* al-Āmedī discusses the issue of *al-ṣūrah al-shi'riyyah* at considerable length given the importance of the use of rhetorical devices in *'amūd al-shi'r*. However this section will focus on his treatment of simile and metaphor in the work of Abū Tammām and al-Buḥturī since he saw this as a key distinguishing feature between the two poets. In addition, his analysis of this poetic imagery and his evaluation of its literary merit in the respective works of the two poets also reveal al-Āmedī's horizon of expectations as a Classical expert reader.

During that historical era, it was believed that using *al-badī'* excessively was contrary to the standards of *'amūd al-shi'r* on the grounds that it led to ambiguity in the meaning of the literary text. This attitude can be linked to one of the most important literary debates in the fourth century AH, concerning the relative merits of *al-ṭab'* (natural talent) versus *al-ṣṣan'ah* (artful style) in creating poetry. Al-Āmedī believed that al-Buḥturī represented the former style, Abū Tammām the latter. Al-Āmedī's attitude has been shaped by the traditional understanding of *al-ṣṣan'ah*, which viewed the work of poets following the school of *al-ṣṣan'ah* as breaking the literary conventions embodied in *'amūd al-shi'r*.

This idea can be seen in the work of al-Jāhīz who distinguishes between *al-ṣṣan'ah*, using over-elaborate rhetorical devices excessively, and *al-ṣinā'ah*, creating poetic imagery which employs carefully chosen artful language in a restrained manner (1960: 14/1).<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> See Al-Jāhīz, *Al-Bayān wa Al-Tabyīn*, pp. 206-208/1 and pp. 30-31/3

Al-Āmedī focuses on what he perceived to be Abū Tammām’s excessive use of *al-badī‘* to illustrate the weaknesses in his poetry. This feature of his approach in *Al-Muwāzanah* has led some critics, like Hind Ṭaha, to argue that al-Āmedī could not understand Abū Tammām’s poetic language (Ṭaha, 1981: 172). Clearly, given the breadth of the critic’s literary knowledge and his linguistic background, this idea cannot be accurate. It has also been argued that al-Āmedī rejected Abū Tammām’s poetic imagery because his own critical methodology was not fully developed or consistently applied due to his incomplete understanding of the concept of *‘amūd al-shi‘r*. However, the fact that many modernist critics writing after the principles of this literary standard had been formalised by al-Marzūqī, also adopted a similar attitude towards Abū Tammām’s poetic imagery suggests that al-Āmedī’s negative view of the poet’s work was not caused by the shortcomings of his method.

Therefore, another reason needs to be sought for al-Āmedī’s criticism of Abū Tammām’s poetic imagery, namely, the horizon of expectations of the era in which he was writing. For this was heavily influenced by the emergence of *al-Shu‘ūbiyyah* and their cultural impact which acted as a catalyst in the conflict between modernists and traditionalists.<sup>69</sup> For this reason, al-Āmedī saw it as his duty as a critic to defend the standards of Classical Arabic poetry against what he viewed as attempts to corrupt the purity of the traditional form of Arabic poetic expression.

The intensity of al-Āmedī’s negative attitude towards Abū Tammām’s use of rhetorical devices is clearly reflected in the following extract in which he refers to some of the poet’s most distinctive metaphors in order to both demonstrate what he sees as the faults in his poetic imagery and to ridicule these:

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<sup>69</sup> This issue has been dealt with in detail in Chapter Four.

You will find many such examples in his poetry, if you look into it. For as you see, despite the meagreness of these expressions, he gave an occipital artery to time, and a hand severed from the wrist; then it is as if fate had epilepsy. He made it choked by noble men; and he made it think and smile. He made the days its sons, made time piebald, and gave praise a hand. He gave his *qaṣīdahs* flutes that are not blown or played; he made a favour a Muslim one time and an apostate another, and made an event a lowly wretch. He so attracted his patron's generosity by his claims that it fell prostrate before his *qaṣīdah*; he made glory something that can be plucked like fruit and gave it a body and a liver. He gave stature to the misfortunes of absence and beds to safety; he thought that newly-grown herbage was time weaving; he gave the days a back to ride upon; he made the nights menstruate, and time as if water were poured on it; the horse he made the son of piebald morning. These metaphors are of the utmost loathsomeness, faultiness, and meagreness<sup>70</sup> and are very far from what is correct. (cited in Stetkevych, 1991: 73-74)

Here, al-Āmedī's personal taste can be plainly seen in the words that he uses to express his judgement of Abū Tammām's images which he describes in extremely subjective terms without any critical distance as being repulsive to the reader, and being highly incorrect and unacceptable.

This extract also illustrates that, as elsewhere, al-Āmedī takes Abū Tammām's images out of the poetic context in which they originally appear and simply lists them. This decontextualisation means that recipients would be unable to grasp the meaning of these images which the poet would have used to produce clusters of sense within his work. Indeed, al-Āmedī's method here is similar to that adopted by

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<sup>70</sup> Stetkevych's translation here of al-ghathāthah as 'meagreness' in English fails to render the full sense of the original. The word might be better expressed as "inappropriateness".

the *al-lughawiyyūn* (linguists)<sup>71</sup> who gave their critical opinions on poetry without providing readers an explanation for their comments.

Al-Āmedī describes in some detail his understanding of how *'amūd al-shi'r* applies to the principles of creating poetic imagery which provides an insight into the horizon of expectations of those who advocated the traditional literary technique:

The Arabs, rather, attribute a thing to another thing that does not possess it, when it is about equivalent to it, or corresponds to it, or resembles it in some of its conditions, or is one of its causes; for in that case the borrowed expression will be suitable for the thing for which it was borrowed and appropriate to its meaning. (ibid: 74)

Here, in his commentary, al-Āmedī emphasises the importance of the fitting metaphor, that is, one which entails a suitable and appropriate comparison. He further elaborates on this point by providing specific examples from two prominent pre-Islamic poets, Imru' al-Qays and Zuhayr.

In the case of the former, the critic acknowledges that not everyone has the ability to grasp the poet's intention in creating the following metaphor which likens a long night to the motion of a camel:

فَقُلْتُ لَهُ لَمَّا تَمَطَّى بِصُلْبِهِ... وَأَرْدَفَ أَعْجَازاً وَنَاءً بِكَأْغَلٍ

Then I said to it when it stretched out its spine,  
Followed it up with its rump,  
And beautifully raised its chest.

Imru' al-Qays has been criticized for this verse by those who do not know the subjects of the images, metaphors, and tropes; for it is of the utmost beauty, excellence and soundness. [...] In my opinion this verse arranges all the qualities of the long night in their proper order. (ibid: 74)

Al-Āmedī dismisses “those who do not know the subjects of the images, metaphors and tropes” as inexperienced readers, for in his opinion this metaphor exemplifies what is required in poetic terms, namely it is beautiful, excellent and, most importantly,

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71 See Chapter Three.

appropriate. He emphasises these qualities again in his second example taken from Zuhayr:

وعري أفراس الصبا ورواحله

The steeds of youth and its camels were saddled

[...] It was beautiful to make the steeds a metaphor for youth and to make the loss of youth the unsaddling of its horses and camels. This metaphor also is one most befitting the thing to which it is attributed. (ibid)

This example also conforms to al-Āmedī's criteria in that Zuhayr produces a beautiful comparison which he also considers appropriate, the quality which the critic appears to rate more highly than all others.

Having presented examples of what he believes to be ideal models of metaphor according to traditional style, al-Āmedī then examines Abū Tammām's metaphors in order to highlight the shortcomings not only of his work but of the approach taken by the modernist poets. Al-Āmedī explains his reasons for rejecting Abū Tammām's metaphors in terms of his typology of metaphors which he categorises as fitting and far-fetched. By analysing the examples which al-Āmedī chooses for discussion, it is possible to extract the criteria which he uses to evaluate these metaphors. Thus, the fitting metaphor, that is, the traditional one, can be easily grasped by non-expert readers; it is beautiful, clear, correct and appropriate. However, according to al-Āmedī, the far-fetched modernist metaphors used by Abū Tammām are characterised by their constructional ambiguity, obscure expression, ugliness and inappropriateness. He illustrates his point about fitting metaphors which are easily comprehended versus Abū Tammām's obscure far-fetched metaphors using selected examples from his work.

The following example sheds further light on al-Āmedī's understanding of what constitutes a fitting as opposed to a far-fetched metaphor in the work of Abū Tammām. Al-Āmedī explores the poet's treatment of one specific motif, fate, and

uses this in order to draw a distinction between the acceptable and unacceptable aspects of Abū Tammām's imagery. The critic specifically takes issue with the poet's use of the expression *layyin al-akda* (literally, having a soft occipital artery) to describe fate<sup>72</sup> on the grounds that he finds this a particularly ugly image and points to other examples in the poet's work which he finds "both beautiful and correct" (1961: 269/1):

ليالي نحن في وسنات عيش ... كأن الدهر عنا في وثاق  
وأياماً لنا وله ولداناً ... غنينا في حواشيها الرقاق

Night when we lay in life's slumber,  
As if fate were restrained from us by chain,  
And days that were tender to us and to him,  
When, in their delicate selvages, we dwelt contented.

Thus he attributed delicate selvages to the days; and his saying:

أيامنا مصقولة أطرافها ... بك والليالي كلها أسحار

By you the sides of our days are polished,  
And our nights are all the break of day.

More eloquent than this, and less constrained, and more like the speech of the Ancients, is his line:

سكن الزمان فلا يد مذمومة ... للحادثات ولا سوام تدعر

Fate was still, so no hand was blamed for misfortunes,  
And free-grazing camels were not frightened.

So perhaps you can see how he mixes the beautiful with the ugly, and the good with the bad; and indeed the occipital artery is ugly when attributed to fate, but if he had used it in another place or used it literally and put it in its proper place, then it would not have been ugly. (cited in Stetkevych, 1991: 75)

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72 Al-Āmedī later reproduces the following lines from Abū Tammām's poetry which relate to this example:

يا دهر قَوْمٍ مِنْ أَخْدَعِيكَ فَقَدْ ... أَصْجَبْتَ هَذَا الْأَنْامَ مِنْ خُرْفِكَ

O fate! straighten your neck-veins,  
For you have exhausted mankind with your clumsiness.

And:

سأشكر فرجة اللب الرخي ... ولين أخادع الدهر الأبى

I will be grateful for the repose of the care free heart,  
And the softness of the neck veins of haughty fate. (cited in Stetkevych, 1991: 75)

Al-Āmedī identifies the elements of these metaphors from Abū Tammām’s work which he finds pleasing. Firstly, they resemble “the speech of the Ancients”, that is, they sound like the pure language of the pre-Islamic poets so valued by traditionalists. Secondly, he emphasises that it is the poet’s role to ensure that the expression that he uses is appropriate for the context in which it is used.

The topic of far-fetched metaphor, first mentioned by al-Āmedī, also received attention from other Classical literary scholars. Al-Khafājī refers to this type of metaphor as *al-isti’ārah al-mabniyyah ‘alā ghayrihā*, and also rejects it, like al-Āmedī (1982: 253-254). However, al-Jurjānī considers far-fetched metaphor to be one of the best ways of producing imagery. Al-Jurjānī claims that the value of a poetic image lies in the degree of effort which readers must make to grasp its meaning (1991: 116-118).

Ibn al-’Athīr, on the other hand, criticizes the attitudes of both al-Āmedī and Ibn Sinān towards far-fetched metaphors, agreeing with those scholars who encourage readers to work hard to understand the text. He also cites examples of far-fetched metaphors from the Qur’ān to support his argument (1962: 112).

Al-Āmedī argues that Abū Tammām did not establish *al-badī’* and provides examples from pre-Islamic poetry to support this point. However, the critic makes it clear that examples of this kind were relatively rare and were not considered to provide acceptable models for imitation by later poets (1961: 272/1). Al-Āmedī cites three examples of far-fetched metaphors from pre-Islamic poetry,<sup>73</sup> leading

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73 Dhū al-Rummah’s line in which he attributed a crown of the head to the forenoon:

وجوز الفلا صدع السيوف القواطع ... تيممن يافوخ الدجى فصدعنه

They performed their ablutions with sand  
On the crown of the fore-noon’s head,  
Then cut across it and across the desert’s middle  
like cutting swords.

And Ta’abbaṭa Sharran’s line in which he attributed a nose to death:

Stetkevych to question the extent to which al-Āmedī understood the concept of personification in these metaphors:

It should have been noted that al-Āmedī seems to miss the over-all personification in many of these metaphors and then finds the particular aspect that is mentioned odd or peculiar. In other words, he does not perceive the first step, the larger metaphor- often personification- within which the specific attribution is made. [...] This type of metaphor based on the personification of the abstract, which al-Āmedī condemns as outside the bounds of traditional Arab poetic taste, is precisely the type of metaphor that al-Jāhiz hailed as uniquely Arab and in which he delighted. (1991: 78)

With regards to the flaws in al-Buḥturī's poetic imagery, al-Āmedī does not dedicate a specific section to this topic, choosing instead to emphasise its strengths by arguing that some examples previously considered to be defective imagery have, in fact, been misinterpreted. It is noticeable, for example, that he does not criticise the use of personification of fate in the following lines from al-Buḥturī:

ينال الفتى ما لم يؤمل وربما... أتاحت له الاقدار ما لم يحاذر

A youth gains what he hopes not and perhaps,

Fates make possible for him what he is not cautious of. (1961: 315/1)

In a similar fashion, al-Āmedī fails to comment on the following example in which there is a further instance of personification:

عهدي بربيعك للغواني معهداً... نضبت بشاشة أنسه فتأبدا  
بجألت جفوناً لم تُعرك دموعها... وقسا فؤاداً لم يبيت بك مقصداً  
ما هاج لي نوح الحمام وما دعا... من صبوتي وصبابتي إذ غردا

I knew (*'ahdī*) your abode as

The coy maidens' rendezvous (*ma'hadan*),

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نحز رقابهم حتى نزعنا... وأنف الموت منخره رثيم  
We cut their necks until we struck them off  
And the nostril of death's nose was bloody.

And Dhū al-Rummah's line in which he attributed a nose to pride:

يعز ضعاف القوم عزة نفسه... ويقطع أنف الكبرياء عن الكبر  
He strengthened the weak of the tribe  
To match his own strength,  
And cut off pride's proud nose.

A place whose cheerful company departed,  
Thin wild beasts came.  
Stingy the eyelids that did not  
Lend their tears:  
Harsh the hearts that did not abide the night with you  
When you were stricken.  
The cooing of the dove did not  
Disquieten me,  
Nor did it distract me from my youthful passion  
When it sang. (cited in Stetkevych, 1991: 86)

Here, al-Buḥturī's personification of the eyelids in this verse could be considered to be a far-fetched metaphor but, even so, the critic describes this as "elegant and lovely" (1961: 517-18/1). This can be seen as further proof of al-Āmedī's lack of neutrality in *Al-Muwāzanah* when assessing the qualities of the poetry of Abū Tammām and al-Buḥturī.

## **5.7 Conclusion**

This chapter had four key aims as outlined in the introduction. The first of these was to identify the principles underlying the methodology proposed by al-Āmedī in *Al-Muwāzanah* in order to evaluate the extent to which he systematically applied this. It was argued that by examining the critic's approach to the poetry of Abū Tammām and al-Buḥturī insight would be provided into the explicit and implicit reading strategies of other expert readers in the fourth century AH. Analysis showed that although al-Āmedī presented his own explicit comparative framework at the start of *Al-Muwāzanah*, his application of this to evaluate the relative merits of the two poets' work was generally inconsistent and often flawed. It was established that one of the key shortcomings of al-Āmedī's approach was his evident lack of objectivity in his critical practice which bore the traces of a number of external influences.

First and foremost, there was the impact of the broader cultural context in which the introduction of foreign ideas and the emergence of *al-Shu'ūbiyyah* was perceived as a threat to the purity of the Arabic language. In addition, his critical attitudes were also shaped by the main literary debates of his day, in particular *al-ṭab' wa al-ṣṣan'ah* (natural talent versus artful style), and *al-qadīm wa al-jadīd* (tradition versus modernity). Consequently, al-Āmedī's choice of examples for discussion, the imbalance in the distribution of these, his critical readings, and ultimately his evaluation of the work of the modernist poet Abū Tammām all reflect his clear bias towards the Classical technique and natural talent of his rival, al-Buḥturī.

More interestingly, close reading of the text of *Al-Muwāzanah* made it possible to recover further information relating to the implicit criteria employed by al-Āmedī. These shed light on the literary norms and conventions which were generally applied during the period, suggesting that *'amūd al-shi'r* constituted the basis for Classical literary reception, even though this was not formalised until later. There is evidence that the principles of *'amūd al-shi'r* made a significant contribution to the formation of al-Āmedī's horizon of expectations as an expert reader.

With respect to the second aim regarding the wider influence of *Al-Muwāzanah* on Arabic literary studies, it was argued that the impact of this work was two-fold. In terms of its immediate impact, al-Āmedī's comparative method served as a model for some Classical literary scholars who viewed this as an advance on the older form of impressionistic criticism which had previously been dominant. Beyond this, al-Āmedī's critical judgment on the work of the two poets continues to stimulate debate amongst critics to this day.

This chapter also aimed to explore what al-Āmedī's presentation of the imaginary debate between the two opposing groups concerning the relative merits of Abū

Tammām and al-Buḥturī reveals about the type of critical tools which Abbasid readers used to evaluate literary texts and to make critical judgments on their quality. Analysis showed that although al-Āmedī's representation of the viewpoints of these two groups is clearly one-sided. Nonetheless in his attempts to give voice to their respective opinions, he reveals the set of criteria which he believed should be applied when judging the quality of a poet's work. These were precedence, originality, clarity and awareness of poetic tradition.

Finally, the chapter analysed al-Āmedī's use of three key critical tools which he applied when evaluating the work of Abū Tammām and al-Buḥturī, namely *al-sariqāt al-shi'riyyah* (plagiarism), *al-'akhṭā'* (errors) and *al-ṣūrah al-shi'riyyah* (poetic imagery). His reading and interpretation of the examples which he selected were used to reveal the critic's personal horizon of expectations and the extent to which this was shaped by the literary norms and conventions of his day.

With regards to the concept of *al-sariqāt al-shi'riyyah*, it is clear from al-Āmedī's responses to the work of the two poets that for Classical literary scholars there was a fine line between what were judged to be acceptable and unacceptable levels and techniques of borrowing motifs from the work of other poets. In al-Āmedī's opinion, the ways in which an appropriated motif was incorporated into a composition and reworked by the poet determined whether it was a successful innovation or mere plagiarism.

The critic's treatment of *al-'akhṭā'* (errors) again provides a valuable insight into his ideological stance with respect to the need to maintain the purity of Arabic since all of the examples which he selected focus on Abū Tammām's inaccurate use of expression. Finally, the limitations of traditionalist poetic technique are reflected in al-Āmedī's division of *al-ṣūrah al-shi'riyyah* (poetic imagery) into either fitting or

far-fetched metaphor. He advocated the former as the acceptable literary model for aspiring poets whilst rejecting the modernist use of *al-badī*'.

## 6 Conclusion

The main objective of the concluding chapter of this thesis is to revisit the research questions which were presented in Chapter One, in order to review the main findings of this study. In addition, it will consider the limitations of this research, and discuss possible ideas for future research in this area. As noted in Chapter One, the main aim of this research was to explore the nature of literary reception in Classical Arabic rhetoric, in particular the concept of horizon of expectations, by focusing on al-Āmedī's *Al-Muwāzanah*. In order to achieve this aim, this study addressed a number of research questions, the first of which was:

- 1. Which disciplines, movements, schools and theories have made a major contribution to the development of Reception Theory in Western thought? How has Reception Theory been interpreted and used by contemporary critics of Classical Arabic literature?*

As noted in Chapter Two, various key individuals and schools of thought played a central role in the paradigm shift which ultimately led to a reassessment of the nature of the relationship between the author and the reader in Western thought. The ideas of Saussure, the Russian Formalists and later Barthes and Eco all challenged previous understandings of the centrality of the author. As a result, the literary text was no longer subject to the sole authority of the author but instead was viewed as the joint product of the author's creativity and the reader's own interpretative strategies based on his/her skills and knowledge.

This shift was also accompanied by increasing interest in reader response to the text and in those factors which helped to shape and limit the multiplicity of possible

interpretations. The emergence of Reception Theory, proposed by Jauss and Iser, acted as a counterbalance to other viewpoints which emphasised the infinite potential of reader interpretations by suggesting that reader reactions were to a certain extent conditioned by their horizon of expectations, which was informed by a range of factors including literary conventions and sociocultural circumstances.

These ideas took some time to make their way to the Arab world since many of the key texts of Reception Theory and Reader-Response Theory such as Iser's *Act of Reading* (1980) were not translated until the start of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. As argued in Chapter Three, although these literary theories began to impact on Arabic critical studies, initially reflected in the use of terminology relating to Reception Theory, Arab critics often faced difficulties in dealing with and understanding the elements and principles of these literary theories because they attempted to apply them without taking into consideration the differences between Arab and Western culture. More interestingly, this emphasis on the role of recipients led Arab scholars to search for evidence that similar theories were already present in Classical Arabic rhetoric. This prompted the researcher to focus on two issues relating to that period:

***2. How were the concepts of the literary recipient and literary reception understood in Classical Arabic rhetoric? Why did early interest in these concepts fail to develop into a fully-fledged theory of reception in Arabic literary criticism?***

In Chapter Three, analysis of work by authors including al-Jāhiz, ibn Qutaybah, and al-Jurjānī established that the existence of a number of terms referring to recipients such as *al-sāmi* ' and *al-mukhāṭab* indicated that the important role played by readers was acknowledged by scholars of Classical Arabic rhetoric. Moreover, they were also able to distinguish between different types of readers according to their

functions and their knowledge of language and literary conventions. There was evidence, too, that the concept of literary reception had developed over the course of the centuries, from the purely impressionistic reactions of pre-Islamic times, through to the linguistic emphasis of the Umayyad era into the complex rhetorical strategies which emerged as a result of a more open approach to foreign ideas.

Clearly, then, by the fourth century AH, Classical Arabic literature had evolved its own distinctive methods and reading strategies, which reflected a sophisticated awareness of the roles of both author and recipient. However, it was argued that three key factors served to prevent this initial interest in literary reception developing into a specifically Arab theory relating to the role of the reader.

Firstly, the methods which evolved for interpreting Qur'ānic text were intended to restrict the possible multiplicity of readings to those which were authorised and this technique became the recognised approach to textual interpretation. Secondly, the role of the reader has been influenced by a religiously oriented approach to literary texts which emphasises their function as a source of Islamic moral guidance and consequently, has tended to limit the potential for alternative readings. Thirdly, the evolving set of literary conventions and tradition awareness specific to Arabic literature known as *'amūd al-shi'r* effectively conditioned possible reader responses to literary texts and how these were evaluated by critics.

However, it is important to acknowledge that the Classical reader was not influenced by a literary framework of reference alone but also by a broader range of factors. Identifying these was a necessary precursor to determining al-Āmedī's horizon of expectations. Thus it was important to establish:

3. *What are the main sociocultural, historico-political and literary influences that contributed to the formation of the worldview of readers of Arabic literature during the Abbasid era?*

It was argued that the politically motivated decision to make Baghdad the capital of the Abbasid caliphate not only led to a shift in power relations but also impacted significantly on the sociocultural landscape. Three key sociocultural factors were found to have made a major contribution to the formation of the cultural frame of the Abbasid reader.

Firstly, the shift from oral culture to the codification of literary texts led to the emergence of the so-called authoring movement and the appearance of some critical works which had a major impact on the development of the rhetorical method during the Abbasid era. Secondly, this period also witnessed the start of a series of fiercely contested debates focusing on textual interpretation which were the result of differences between theological sects including the Kharijites, *al-Shu'ūbiyyah* and *al-Mu'tazilah*. Last but not least, this period marked the start of a new era of openness to non-Arab cultural influences, in particular Aristotelian ideas, and this exposure to different perspectives helped to form a new Arab worldview.

In addition, these political and sociocultural changes were seen to pose a challenge to received ideas about the reception of poetry which in turn were reflected in two key debates which divided readers at that time: the merits of traditional versus modern style and talent versus craftsmanship.

The combination of all these factors led to the formation of a number of different critical schools, with each group of readers adopting their own distinctive worldview and using this framework to establish the criteria which they employed to evaluate the quality of literary texts. These differing worldviews were captured in al-Āmedī's

*Al-Muwāzanah* which provides the contemporary scholar with a unique insight not only into the cultural clash between the two opposing camps supporting the poets Abū Tammām and al-Buḥturī respectively, but also into the horizon of expectations of an expert reader of the Classical period.

Thus, a detailed analysis of this text was carried out to determine:

- 4. *What are the principles underpinning al-Āmedī's critical method in Al-Muwāzanah and to what extent did he systematically and objectively apply these in his comparative assessment of the poetry of Abū Tammām and al-Buḥturī? What does close textual analysis of Al-Muwāzanah reveal about al-Āmedī's horizon of expectations, literary reception in the Abbasid era and his understanding of the concept of 'amūd al-shi'r?***

It was noted that although al-Āmedī presents an explicit comparative framework at the start of *Al-Muwāzanah*, analysis demonstrated that he failed to apply this in a consistent and unbiased manner in his critical practice. His lack of balance in his selection of examples for discussion, the way in which he interpreted these and his final verdict regarding the relative merits of the two poets all provided evidence of a clear bias towards the traditional technique and natural talent of al-Buḥturī.

This flawed critical approach revealed that he was influenced by the broader cultural context, in particular concerns about the need to defend the purity of the Arabic language which was perceived to be threatened by the ideas of *al-Shu'ūbiyyah*. The main literary debates of his day regarding *al-ṭab' wa al-ṣṣan'ah* (natural talent versus artful style), and *al-qadīm wa al-jadīd* (tradition versus modernity) can also be seen to have played a significant role in his critical attitudes.

More significantly, analysis also revealed that al-Āmedī employed a set of implicit criteria in *Al-Muwāzanah* and it is these which can be used to recover further information concerning the horizon of expectations of the Classical expert reader.

Although the principles of *'amūd al-shi'r* had not been formalised explicitly at the time al-Āmedī produced *Al-Muwāzanah*, it is clear that this set of literary norms and conventions implicitly conditioned his reading strategies and critical practice. This is reflected in the criteria which he applied to evaluate the work of the two poets, namely, precedence, originality, clarity and awareness of poetic tradition.

The critic's personal horizon of expectations is reflected in how he understood and applied three critical concepts which were held to be of key significance in judging poetic excellence at that time. The first of these was *al-sariqāt al-shi'riyyah* (plagiarism). Here al-Āmedī's readings suggest that appropriation of motifs from other poet's work was acceptable under specific conditions relating to the ways in which these poetic borrowings were reworked in the new composition. The second concept which he referred to as *al-'akhṭā'* (errors) can be seen to be linked to specifically linguistic concerns regarding accuracy and purity of the expression used by the poets whilst the third focuses on *al-ṣūrah al-shi'riyyah* (poetic imagery). In this case, al-Āmedī's division of metaphor into the acceptable (fitting) or unacceptable (far-fetched) highlights the rejection of the excessive use of *al-badī'* (rhetorical devices).

## **6.1 Limitations of the research**

As previously noted, al-Āmedī's *Al-Muwāzanah* is a lengthy work, occupying three volumes in its most recent published form. Inevitably, then, it was necessary to focus on some specific sections of the text in order to investigate these in sufficient detail. As a result, it could be argued that there is still more to be discovered

concerning the critic's methodology and what it can reveal about the horizon of expectations of his historical period. However, the critical concepts which were focused on in this study were carefully selected to reflect the key elements of the critic's work.

It is also important to comment on what some scholars may see as the mismatch in applying contemporary Western theory to Classical Arabic literature. This study has attempted to learn from the mistakes made previously by researchers who failed to pay sufficient attention to the differences between two worldviews by contextualising both the theoretical ideas themselves and the literary texts to which they have been applied in their respective cultural frameworks.

## **6.2 Future directions**

Given that reception theory and its related concepts have provided useful insights into al-Āmedī's work, the researcher's intention is to attempt to apply these to re-reading other Classical texts which are related to critical practice. The aim of these future studies would be to discover further aspects of the strategies which were used to read, interpret and evaluate literary texts from different historical periods.

This thesis highlighted the importance of the influence of Aristotelian ideas concerning the role of the reader in textual interpretation in Classical Arabic rhetoric. However, this interesting connection was not pursued in any great detail here since it was not thought to be of central relevance to the study's aims. It is hoped, therefore, that this topic can be explored further by undertaking a cross-cultural comparative analysis which would trace how this Greek philosopher's ideas contributed to the development of the Classical understanding of reading strategies.

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