

DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.19860830

BETWEEN CLASSICAL CRITICISM AND MODERN THEORIES: AN APPLIED STUDY OF SELECTED MODELS FROM ABBASID POETRY

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Received: 15/03/2026

Accepted: 17/04/2026

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ABSTRACT

This paper aims to the reflective dynamics of Abbasid Arabic poetry in both classical and modern literary schools addressing literary complexity, linguistic creativity, thematic variety, and artistic innovation. The study chooses to specifically highlight the Abbasid poetic literature as it marks a distinctive peak in the evolution of Abbasid poetry shaping the interaction between Arabic classical heritages and emerging schools of Abbasid philosophies. By analytically adopting a qualitative-comparative approach, the study stops at a set of classical-rhetorical criticisms along with modern literary theoretical frameworks based on categorical classifications relevant to the Golden Age of Arabs. The study explores three phases: (1) theoretical foundations in classical and modern criticism; (2) applied analytical models from selected Abbasid poems; (3) comparison of convergence and divergence between traditional and contemporary critical scholarly points of view. The results show that Abbasid poetry in particular still stands as an aesthetically profound medium for intellectual and cultural expressions, despite its ornate and artistic nature. Moreover, the dialogue between classical and modern frameworks cast more richness at interpretational levels of Abbasid rhetoric, revealing forms of circulations that transcend beyond cultural and temporal boundaries. Therefore, the study emphasizes that Arabic criticism as a well-grounded historical phase with modern literary critical approaches elevates the appreciation and literary reflections of Abbasid poetry, circulating its universal values and forms of convergence with both classical and modern discourses.

KEYWORDS: Poetry; Classical; Modern; Abbasid Era; Arabic, Qualitative.

1. INTRODUCTION

Abbasid poetry represents the pinnacle of artistic and literary development in the Arab cultural heritage, owing to its diversity and richness born of the confluence of various civilizations under the flourishing Islamic culture. With the emergence of modern literary criticism theories, it has become possible to reread this heritage through new lenses that focus on its social, psychological, and intellectual dimensions—thus opening wider horizons for understanding its role in expressing the spirit of its age.

Criticism, as one of the essential components of human life, has been intertwined with human existence since the dawn of creation, when the intellect was granted the ability to distinguish between what is good and bad, beneficial and superior. Criticism, therefore, emerged as a means to comprehend and evaluate texts, unveiling their value and impact on the recipient. When criticism became tied to Arabic literature, its importance was magnified as it served to reveal the merits of texts and identify their weaknesses—whether the text belonged to a contemporary writer, helping refine his craft, or was inherited from past eras, enabling a deeper understanding and offering insight to readers and scholars alike. Thus, criticism became the vital link between the writer and his text, and between the reader and his perception of literature.

Arabic literary criticism flourished notably during the Abbasid era, a time when the fields of literature expanded and its schools diversified. Criticism then became a fountain from which readers drank and a treasure scholars explored. Although modern and contemporary critical theories emerged from intellectual environments quite different from those of the Arab world, modern Arab criticism has witnessed numerous attempts to contextualize and reconcile these theories with the Arabic critical heritage. These attempts have ranged from rejection—on the grounds of preserving the distinctiveness of Arab intellectual principles—to moderation that balances authenticity with openness, and to enthusiasm that highlights how Arab critics had already broached many of the issues later developed by Western criticism.

Hence arises the need for a comparative approach—one that examines the foundations of classical Arabic criticism alongside their modern theoretical counterparts, revealing intersections and divergences, and demonstrating that there exist values, concepts, and themes of a universal human nature that transcend cultural boundaries.

From this perspective, the present study seeks to offer an applied comparative analysis between classical and modern critical approaches through the examination of selected examples from Abbasid poetry.

The significance of this study lies in its endeavor to bridge the gap between classical Arabic criticism and modern critical methodologies by analyzing selected poetic samples from the Abbasid period. It not only seeks to uncover the traditional mechanisms employed by Abbasid critics in evaluating texts but also ventures further by applying contemporary approaches—such as structuralism, semiotics, and deconstruction—to these poetic models. This synthesis opens new horizons for understanding poetic discourse and enriches the field of Arabic literary criticism by harmonizing authenticity with modernity. Ultimately, the research problem lies in the challenge of selecting poetic models that align with the content of modern critical theories and testing the applicability of such theories to them.

2. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

As a result, the study seeks to address a set of significant questions addressing various aspects of this era:

1. What traditional critical mechanisms were dominantly adopted by Abbasid critics in evaluating poetry?
2. What modern critical theories—such as structuralism, semiotics, and deconstruction—have been applied to selected poetic samples from the Abbasid period?
3. How convergent and divergent are the findings derived from classical and modern methodologies?
4. Is it possible to integrate classical and modern criticism in the study of poetry for a deeper and more comprehensive understanding?
5. What is the nature of the enrichment of literary studies through an applied model that combines classical tools with contemporary analytical approaches?

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Data Sample

The study selects a group of selected verse extracts from the Abbasid poetry qualitatively chosen from different Arab poets. The qualitative direction depends on relevance to theoretical relevance to classical and modern critical frameworks to apply comparative insights between

the two perspectives.

3.1.1. Sample Selection Justification

The study purposely chooses a group of Abbasid poets based on their intensive poetic representation of colossal dimensions of their themes, style, and their critical reflections. The study particularly targets Al-Mutanabbi, Abu Tammam, Bashar ibn Burd, Abu Nuwas, Al-Sharif al-Radi, and Du'ball al-Khuzai altogether for their shared consistent embodiment of panegyric-philosophical interplay with poetic expression to transcend major themes colliding with politics, aesthetics, and society.

These poetic models are adopted as they incorporate density of rhetorical usage and interpretational flexibility that turn them as fit to classical framework in terms of rhetoric, eloquence, and poetic make-up as well as to modern theories in terms of application of structuralism or semiotics, and even deconstruction, constituting a perfect sample study of interplay between the ancient and the contemporary. Additionally, these poets are suitable to apply analytically textual examination mirroring literary criticism as textual extracts constitute the traditional framework, paving way for its openness style to be intertwined with modern interpretive frameworks.

Therefore, the specific selection of poetic functions of the study corpus functions as a useful medium for literary convergence and divergence of both types of criticism traditions within coherent, contextual, and well-oriented fashion.

3.2. Data Analysis

The study adopts a comparative-based literary approach using modern conceptualization of structuralism, semiotics, and deconstruction of various literary intervals of the Abbasid Era. More specifically, the study captures three set of scopes: temporal (Abbasids), thematic (Abbasid poetry), and methodological (comparison between classical and modern criticism).

By adopting traditional and modern resources, literary criticism, and theoretical relevance, the study highlights works of early Arab critics, highlighting modern and contemporary Western critical theories, utilization of the core concept; poeticity examining a set of distinct features: artistic and aesthetic aspects of the poem, while crafting theoretical understanding to practical integration of both classical and modern concepts.

4. DISCUSSION

4.1. Criticism in the Abbasid and Modern Era

The early Abbasid period witnessed remarkable intellectual and cultural prosperity, particularly in the fields of literature and criticism. Several factors contributed to this flourishing movement—most notably, the Abbasid caliphs' patronage of science, their sponsorship of translation movements from Persian, Indian, and Greek sources, and their encouragement of arts and literature. This cultivated an environment highly conducive to the growth of literary criticism.

4.1.1. General Features of Abbasid Criticism

Criticism during this era was not confined to surface-level evaluation of form and diction; it extended to deep aesthetic appreciation of texts and an awareness of what distinguished one poet from another. Critics ranked poets according to their artistic mastery and paid keen attention to how environment and society influenced a poet's voice and linguistic expression. This critical consciousness also manifested in the accurate authentication of texts and the careful attribution of poems to their rightful authors.

Among the earliest critical works that have reached us from this period is *Tabaqat Fuhood al-Shu'ara'* (The Classes of Eminent Poets) by Ibn Sallam al-Jumahi (d. 231 AH), which laid the foundation for a hierarchically structured critical vision. Moreover, poets themselves often exhibited critical awareness, as reflected in Bashar ibn Burd's saying:

"The whales of the seas play about, and I have seen the souls of men run with their currents."

Critics like Sibawayh and al-Akhfash scrutinized such verses, objecting to Bashar's use of "ninān al-buhūr" ("whales of the seas") and correcting it to "tinān al-buhūr", arguing that "ninān" or "nūn" was not attested in authentic Arabic usage.

When this critique reached Bashar, he grew resentful; however, al-Akhfash sought to appease him, and in time began to cite Bashar's poetry in his own scholarly works—thus restoring their rapport.

Criticism during the Abbasid era was not confined to scholars and grammarians; it extended to the poets themselves, who often engaged in lively exchanges of artistic appraisal. Here we find Bashar ibn Burd praising Abu al-'Atāhiyah, saying:

"By God, I admire the sincerity of your emotion when you write:

How many a friend, when moved to tears by modesty,

Turns from me in reproach—yet I reply, 'It is not for weeping that I weep'".

In response, Abu al-'Atāhiyah graciously acknowledged his debt to Bashar's inspiration and supported his confession by quoting Bashar's own verses:

I complained to the maidens of what I endure,
And said to them, 'The end of my days is near.'

They said, 'You've wept!' I answered, 'No, indeed—Even ice may melt from the heat of yearning.'

Yet a tiny mote has struck the dark of my eye,
A splinter sharp enough to pierce its core.'

They said, 'Then why are your tears unequal?
Has one mote struck both your eyes the same?'

This poetic dialogue reveals that criticism among the Abbasid poets was anything but static. It was built upon comparison, analysis, and reasoning, and often took the form of artistic conversation that reflected a refined aesthetic sensibility and a profound depth of experience.

4.1.2. *Prominent Critics and Their Doctrines*

The term criticism (al-naqd) in Arabic has been used to denote multiple meanings, most notably those recorded in classical lexicons. In *Lisan al-'Arab*, under the root ن ق د (n-q-d), it is explained that naqd originally referred to the verification of coins—that is, examining them to distinguish the genuine from the counterfeit. Similarly, "criticism of prose and poetry" (naqd al-nathr wa naqd al-shi'r) means revealing their faults and merits to differentiate the superior from the inferior.

The poet Al-Farazdaq illustrated this concept in verse:

"Its hands scatter the pebbles in every village,
While coins are tested by money-changers."

It was said: "To critique something (naqd al-shay') is to distinguish its good from its defective; thus one may critique grain by examining the birds that eat it."

Criticism, therefore, is the art of studying literary texts, discerning their stylistic features, and identifying whether the creator demonstrates originality or falls short. It highlights the quality or weakness in a work. Viewed either as a science or as an art, criticism is not independent; it is intrinsically linked to literature as a shadow is to its source, drawing its forms from it, monitoring its directions, and correcting any errors or deviations.

Classical Arab critics have clearly defined both criticism and the critic in their writings, among them:

1. Ibn Sallam:

Ibn Sallam asserted that poetry is a craft and a discipline, known to scholars just like any other

branch of science or art. Some of these are discerned by the eye, some by the ear, some by touch, and some by the tongue. For instance, pearls and coral cannot be assessed for their quality by sight or weight alone; one must inspect them. Similarly, coins—whether dinars or dirhams—cannot be judged by color, touch, shape, or name; a critic, through careful examination, identifies their authenticity and distinguishes genuine from counterfeit. Likewise, the connoisseur is able to discern the rare and exotic among honey types and to classify commodities according to their origin despite similarities in color, texture, or planting.

2. Ibn Rashiq:

Ibn Rashiq expressed a similar concept, noting that one may distinguish the quality of poetry without composing it oneself. Just as a cloth merchant identifies fine fabrics he has not woven, or a money-changer appraises coins he has not minted or struck, a critic can discern subtle imperfections that diminish a poem's value.

3. Qudamah ibn Ja'far:

The book *Naqd al-Shi'r* (Criticism of Poetry) by Abu al-Faraj Qudamah ibn Ja'far is considered one of the most important sources of literary criticism in the Arab heritage. It encompasses a wide range of essential issues—from defining poetry, exploring its components and genres, to addressing exaggeration and hyperbole—sparking significant debate over his classifications, analyses, and critical propositions.

Qudamah begins by defining poetry as:

"Rhymed and metered speech that conveys meaning."

This definition reflects his conception of the fundamentals of poetry: meaning, diction, meter, and rhyme. He further divides these elements into distinct types of combination that form four main configurations:

1. The union of diction with meaning,
2. The union of meaning with meter,
3. The union of diction with meter,
4. The union of meaning with rhyme.

Among the most prominent issues addressed by Qudamah ibn Ja'far is the question of truthfulness and falsehood in poetry. He argues that "a poet is not necessarily required to be truthful; rather, what is expected of him is that, when engaging with a particular theme, he should master it fully in his present context." In other words, the emphasis lies on artistic expression and literary quality rather than on factual accuracy or realistic content.

Qudamah stresses that craftsmanship and refinement are the foundation of poetry. A poet must strive for perfection in any theme—whether

lofty or humble, obscene or virtuous, praiseworthy or blameworthy, extravagant or modest – so that the work achieves the required level of excellence, independent of the moral nature of the subject.

Regarding the issue of exaggeration in poetry, Qudamah supports and defends its use as the superior approach among two opposing trends. He distinguishes between acceptable exaggeration, which enhances description without departing from reality, and excessive exaggeration, which crosses acceptable limits, occasionally approaching the impossible in pursuit of rhetorical effect. He maintains that meanings are open to the poet's discretion and that praise should encompass the four cardinal virtues – intellect, courage, justice, and chastity – from which other virtues are derived. Eley (rithā'), in his view, extends the methods of praise through specific stylistic devices.

Thus, it becomes evident that a critic in the Arab tradition is one endowed with expertise and refined experience, enabling him to distinguish excellent expression from inferior, guided by cultivated taste and deep knowledge. Over time, criticism evolved from being a matter of individual judgment to a structured science with rules and principles, becoming a formalized field of knowledge that extends beyond mere aesthetic sensibility.

4.1.3. Modern Critical Approaches

Modern literary criticism encompasses a variety of approaches, each providing a distinct lens through which to study poetic and literary texts supported with translated versions (Farghal and Haider, 2025). Each methodology seeks to understand aesthetic beauty and the rhetorical impact of the work. Stylistics, for example, focuses on the study of style as the expressive tool that carries meaning and reveals the poet's skillful deployment of language, thereby establishing a dynamic relationship between form and content that generates significance.

Modern critical approaches have crystallized into two main directions:

1. The Contextual Approach: This approach links the text to its historical, social, and psychological environment. Its main representatives include historical, social, and psychological criticism, along with the integrated approach proposed by Sayyid Qutb, which synthesizes these perspectives.
 - Historical Method: figures like Ahmad Dayf, Muhammad Mandur, and Ahmad Amin have contributed significantly.
 - Social Method: Among Arab critics, Sayyid Qutb articulated this perspective in his book

Literary Criticism: Its Principles and Methods.

- Psychological Method.

2. Structuralist/Post-structuralist Methodology:

Core concepts include system, structure, binary oppositions, and signifier and signified.

3. Deconstruction:

Closely associated with Derrida's deconstruction, while in the Arab intellectual sphere, this approach sparked significant debate, notably through critics like Abdullah Al-Ghadami.

4. Reception Aesthetics:

The reader is thus seen as a co-creator of meaning.

Applicability to Classical Poetry

Modern critical methodologies pose certain challenges when applied to classical Arabic poetry. Originating in Western intellectual contexts with philosophical frameworks distinct from Arab-Islamic heritage, these approaches may not always align seamlessly with the texts' original cultural and doctrinal contexts (Debbas and Haider, 2020). Contextual approaches – such as historical and social criticism – link the text to its environment, rendering them somewhat suitable for analyzing classical poetry as a mirror of its age and concerns.

In contrast, systemic approaches like structuralism and deconstruction tend to treat the text as a closed structure or a space for limitless readings. Applying them to classical texts may risk detaching them from their original cultural, historical, and doctrinal significance, raising questions about the effectiveness of such methodologies in uncovering the intrinsic values of classical Arabic poetry without imposing alien concepts.

4.2. Applied Analysis Using Classical and Modern Criticism

Applying the methodological make-up on the study discussion, the study applies in this section multi-faceted examination upon the poetic models, as each extract goes through critical phases classically intertwined with modern approaches. At the beginning, the rhetorical principle (balāgha) such as eloquence (faṣāḥa), metaphor (isti'āra), simile (tashbīh) and compositional harmony (naẓm) are applied following Abd al-Qahir al-Jurjani and Qudamah ibn Ja'far, revealing linguistic-aesthetic literary features with poetic creativity within this era. Then, the examination integrates Saussure's structuralist analysis of patterns such binary oppositions, lexicon, motif, and syntactic style, highlighting meaning generation within their poetry relationally and textually.

The study applies semiotic interpretation

revealing nuances of symbolism of poetic expression in terms of images, metaphors and symbols as signified-signifier relation within cultural-literary meaning upon the target literary interpretational level. At last, in each extract of the following subsection of each poet, the discussion incorporates deconstruction analysis following Derrida highlighting paradoxes and tensions internally and in terms of stability within the multiplicity of interpretation of their poems, highlighting how language shows interesting modes of resistance to thematic close and immortal creative potential to universal re-interpretation and literary reviving.

By tracking this multi-functional progression, each poetic sample model is analyzed systematically as well as implicitly enabling interplay of integration between classical thought and modern approach paving way to clear-cut analytical comparison in perspective and interpretational power.

4.2.1. Al-Mutanabbi

Al-Mutanabbi represents a singular poetic phenomenon of the Abbasid era, blending philosophy, ambition, and self-expression in its most sublime forms. Although his poetry often assumes the guise of praise, its essence is a transcendent individual voice that surpasses temporal and spatial boundaries. Both classical and modern critics have examined the stature of his poetry, noting its existential depth and elevated rhetorical style. This is evident in the following verses by Al-Mutanabbi:

"If you venture toward a noble goal,

Do not settle for anything short of the stars."

"My steed and mare weep their grief,

As their tears pour down like sheets of water upon bodies."

In these verses, we encounter Abbasid-era poetry where traditional rhetorical analysis converges with modern stylistic critique. Viewed through the lens of classical criticism, as exemplified by Al-Jurjani and Al-Amidi, the poem adheres to the essential elements of poetic structure: eloquence of diction, strength of composition, and loftiness of meaning. Al-Mutanabbi selects words belonging to the semantic field of elevation and aspiration, such as "غامرت" (you ventured), "مروم شرف" (sought-after honor), "النجوم" (stars), "الجسوم" (bodies)—terms that evoke the pursuit of glory and the striving toward high ideals, perfectly aligned with the theme of pride and ambition, a central motif in classical

Arabic poetry. Moreover, the conditional structure "فلا... إذا" imparts logical coherence and precise reasoning, reminiscent of what Ibn Tabataba described as "harmony of placement in meaning and expression."

Al-Mutanabbi is a poet distinctive in sensibility and imagery, breaking away from the ornamental tendencies of his era to convey the full spectrum of human experience, including its darker and turbulent aspects. His poetry has received diverse critical attention: classical critics admired its sharpness, intensity, and rhetorical brilliance, while modern scholars discern profound psychological dimensions and bold imaginative deployment, marking him as an early architect of individual vision within the framework of traditional Arabic poetic forms.

From a modern stylistic perspective, the syntactic structure relying on the conditional ("غامرت إذا... فلا") reveals a cognitive and argumentative construction, reflecting a transcendent self-committed to surpassing limits. The poetic lexicon in these two lines forms a coherent semantic field (Ammari and Al-Ahmad, 2023) "مروم - شرف - غامرت" "مهري فرسي، - النجوم", all terms emphasizing elevation and self-aggrandizement, illustrating a prominent stylistic feature in Al-Mutanabbi: the soul's yearning for eminence and distinction. Notably, the word "النجوم" functions metaphorically rather than literally, symbolizing the ultimate goals—a phenomenon contemporary critics term "ascendant metaphor".

Thus, these lines exemplify the convergence of traditional rhetorical insight and modern stylistic analysis, as both approaches reveal the height of linguistic structure and intellectual elevation in Al-Mutanabbi, portraying him as a poet who crafted a central poetic discourse of selfhood, shaping glory both poetically and conceptually.

Other notable verses include:

"I shield her from your honest gaze,

Lest she judge the fat upon those whose bodies are hollow."

"What benefit does my brother derive from the world through his gaze,

If he measures all things by light and darkness alike?"

Classical critics admired this poetry for its quick wit and depth of meaning, likening Al-Mutanabbi's sharp perception of appearances to the poet's ability to detect deception: one might see a body as full when, in truth, it is hollow—a subtle and intelligent depiction. Ibn Rashiq cited it in Al-Umda as an

example of “achieving meaning in utmost brevity”, with blame concealed behind the guise of counsel. Rhetoricians considered it an example of “inverted simile”, prompting contrast to capture attention and evoke irony.

Al-Mutanabbi is known for his preference for metaphor and indirect depiction, distinguishing him as a master of ‘al-sana‘a’ (artifice) in Abbasid poetry. His intricate style occasionally drew criticism for exceeding conventional eloquence. Yet, this approach reflects deep intellectual vision rather than mere rhetorical ornamentation. He conveys meaning through layers of metaphor, allusion, and double entendre, offering rich material for analysis from both classical rhetoric and modern criticism.

From a modern critical standpoint, these verses transcend mere satirical description, symbolizing social anxiety and distrust of false appearances. The implied meaning critiques superficial judgments and questions the standards by which people assess one another. Modern critics such as Jabra Ibrahim Jabra have interpreted these lines as expressing “inner consciousness” in classical Arabic poetry, where the poetic self resists a duplicitous world. The simplicity of the image conceals a sharp vision of corruption in appearances, reflecting the poet’s estrangement from his environment. The simile not only surprises rhetorically but conveys an existential stance suffused with bitter irony.

Al-Mutanabbi also writes:

“The horse, the night, and the wilderness know me,
The sword, the spear, the paper, and the pen.
I roamed the desolate lands alone,
Till even the graves and the ridges marveled at me.”

Here, the poem condenses the identity of the warrior-poet, uniting battlefield and intellectual pursuit—he is a knight in both realms. The use of cumulative coordination creates rhythm and urgency, reflecting the multiplicity of the poet’s persona while unifying it under the first-person “know me”, integrating all facets of experience into a single point of selfhood.

Ibn Al-Atheer praised this verse as embodying manly virtue and intellect in a single context, noting its rarity in Arab speech, while Al-Thaalibi lauded it in *Yatimat al-Dahr* as a crowning achievement of Islamic poetry.

From the perspective of modern criticism, Adonis viewed the verse as mapping Arab consciousness in the Abbasid era, portraying the poet as a warrior with both word and sword; poetry becomes a vehicle not of praise or lament, but of

self-assertion in the historical struggle. Structuralist critics read it as a central verse contributing to the poetic construction of identity, where each element resonates with the “I” through the metaphorical deployment of objects as symbols of selfhood.

In this context, classical and modern perspectives intersect: the ancients emphasized eloquence and noble meaning, while modern critics see the verse as foundational for a form of collective subjective discourse, where the poetic self merges with national symbols and instruments of power.

4.2.2. *Abū Tammām*

Abū Tammām was a poet of exceptional intellect, masterfully weaving meanings into the fabric of words and reshaping reality through a highly abstract and conceptual approach to imagery. Critics have long been divided in their evaluation of his poetry: some deemed it obscure and affected, while others recognized in it a new horizon for Arabic poetry, reflecting the poet’s ability for rhetorical innovation and stylistic renewal. Certain verses stand at the intersection of these perspectives, where his genius manifests in portraying intangible states as if they were tangible scenes, imparting a unique emotional and artistic impact. Abū Tammām was keenly aware of the importance of structure and poetic form, especially in the openings of his compositions, where he experimented with variation and novelty, alternating between success and daring, reflecting his ability to merge artistic experience with stylistic innovation.

“The sword conveys truer tidings than books,

For at its edge lies the boundary between seriousness and play.”

“And knowledge, flashing in the spears,

Shines between two fateful days, not in the seven flashes.”

Classical critics praised these lines for their precision of composition and strength of meaning, considering them exemplary of direct, fact-based poetic expression rather than theoretical abstraction. Ibn Tabataba lauded them in *‘Iyar al-Shi‘r* as “perfect expression to which nothing may be added or subtracted”, while Abd al-Qahir al-Jurjani cited them as instances of reinforced meaning through structural repetition, noting the dual use of “الحدّ” (edge/limit) for both literal and metaphorical senses.

From a modern perspective, these verses are viewed as a symbolic structure intertwining the material and the conceptual in sharp contrast: the book symbolizes delayed theorizing, while the sword represents decisive action, creating an

existential rather than merely political discourse. Adonis interprets this as establishing a rhetoric based on paradox rather than mere statement, while Salah Fadl considers the verse a poetic paradox condensing historical experience into a binary image, where the word follows action rather than precedes it.

4.2.3. *Bashshār ibn Burd*

Bashshār ibn Burd believed poetry should reach every person and address diverse subjects, challenging the traditional restriction of poetry to predetermined topics. His innovation lay not in inventing a new poetic form, but in refreshing expression and achieving what is called the "popularity of poetry", allowing for broad audience engagement. At the same time, Bashshār epitomized Abbasid eloquence at its purest, combining rhetorical mastery with poetic instinct, shaping his metaphors within a carefully crafted philosophical and aesthetic framework. His short but potent verses became arenas of interpretive tension between classical and modern critics, who re-read these images as symbols rich in layered meanings, showcasing his genius in blending classical rhetoric with stylistic innovation.

"As if the mash of wine spills above our heads,
And our swords' night cascades its stars."

"We sent them the death of surprise, indeed,

For we, children of power, have their
strands fluttering above us."

Classical rhetoricians regarded these lines as complex representative similes, merging sensory scenes (wine and swords) with cosmic imagery (night and stars). Ibn al-Atheer cited them as exemplary of visual rhetorical excellence, while Qudama ibn Ja'far noted their integration of cosmic space into the battlefield scene.

Modern critics like Abdullah al-Ghadhami read these verses as semantic rhetoric rather than decorative rhetoric, creating a dynamic visual world that engages the reader in scene construction. Salah Fadl interprets the verses as generating visual-auditory correspondence symbolizing cosmic warfare, where imagery proliferates through movement of light, metal, and dust simultaneously.

4.2.4. *Al-Sharīf al-Raḍī*

Al-Sharīf al-Raḍī belongs to a category of poets whose noble lineage, passionate sentiment, and elevated language converge, producing a unique balance between pride and emotional expression. While certain classical Abbasid poetic conventions leaned toward rationality and stylistic restraint, al-

Raḍī's poetry inclined toward candid emotional revelation, fusing eloquence with heartfelt sentiment. His language is rich in musicality, and his imagery laden with psychological intensity and deep emotion, turning his poetry into a mirror of a sensitive soul, more reflective of pain and longing than exuberant joy, highlighting the dynamic interaction between human experience and refined artistic style in the Abbasid era.

"I would weep for you if my tears could affect
the rancor,

And say if speech could carry the affliction
away."

"And I seek solace in beautiful patience,

If only patience itself could console me."

In these lines, al-Raḍī expresses an internal struggle between memory and forgetfulness, reality and emotional freedom. The conditional clauses "if..." reflect a sense of inability rather than volition, while the phrase "I weep for you" conveys enduring devotion despite futility, blending emotional sincerity with rhetorical refinement. Ibn Rashiḳ remarked that such emotional sorrow reveals a depth of feeling found only in a fervent heart, while al-Thaalibi noted that his style is gentle, leaning toward lament rather than pride, representing the collective sentiment of the community rather than individual selfhood.

Modern criticism frames this as "poetic tension of emotion", where internal psychological forces contend, with Jabra Asfour describing it as a form of "self-explosion", making the self the focus of both experience and language. The poet resists loss and clings to memory, demonstrating that nostalgia for al-Raḍī is less a return to the past than a rebellion against the present. Rhythmic patterns, such as the sharp concluding pauses, amplify this tension, analogous to classical rhetoric's "effective closure", leaving the reader with a clear, unambiguous emotional impression.

4.2.5. *Du'ball al-Khazā'ī*

Du'ball al-Khazā'ī's poetry is not merely personal expression; it bears a distinct political and sectarian concern, often attracting official censure. His work reflects class and sectarian conflicts within the Abbasid state, lending it a protest and revolutionary tone.

"I see their spoils divided among others,

While their hands are empty of their own gains."

His political poetry demonstrates a fusion of verse and social reality, highlighting social expropriation. Classical critics, like Ibn Rashiḳ, noted that Du'ball "conveyed meanings from the

heat of his heart”, while al-Jurjani considered this an example of poetic truth grounded in lived experience.

From a cultural criticism perspective, the lines reveal language as a tool to expose power, highlighting wealth monopoly and social injustice. The contrast between “their spoils” and “empty hands” serves a protest function, transforming the poem into a literary space of resistance, turning Du’ball’s poetry into a cultural discourse that reproduces social meaning within the text.

4.2.6. *Abū Nuwās*

Abū Nuwās’s poem “Leave My Reproach” exemplifies the civilizational aspect of Abbasid poetry, moving away from traditional genres (panegyric, praise, invective) toward wine poetry, balancing sensual pleasure with radiant rhetorical imagery.

“Leave my reproach, for blame is temptation,

And treat me with that which was itself the disease.”

Classical critics, like Al-Jurjani and Ibn Qutaybah, note adherence to eloquence, meter, and structure, while introducing contradictory rhetorical inversion: blame becomes incitement. The second line, “treat me with that which was itself the disease”, relies on semantic antithesis (cure/disease), producing play of meaning and wordplay, exemplifying rhetorical craftsmanship.

“Yellow, yet sorrows do not touch its ground,

Even if a stone strikes, it becomes bright.”

In this verse, wine is transformed into a living being capable of dispelling sorrow—a personification that falls under the domain of representational metaphor, wherein wine is depicted as an entity endowed with agency and vitality. For Abu Nuwas, wine holds a sacred significance, reflecting his reverence for it as a symbol of his poetic creed. As Taha Hussein notes, “Abu Nuwas sought to legislate this new poetic doctrine for people, dedicating himself to it completely. He employed the description of wine and the pleasures surrounding it as a means to praise his modern approach and denounce the way of the ancients.”

For instance, the word “*ṣafrāʾ*” (“yellow”) belongs to the chromatic lexicon, employed by Abu Nuwas with symbolic precision. The golden hue of wine evokes purity, joy, and light—imagery that resonates with traditional Arabic rhetoric, particularly in the realm of intensive simile, where the effect of wine upon the soul mirrors joy so profound that it reflects even upon inanimate

objects, such as stone.

In his verse:

From the hand of one of heat, yet in the guise of a man,

Who has two lovers: a sodomite and an adulterer.

Here, Abu Nuwas defies convention, depicting the wine-server—a feminine boy—with boldness that fuses masculinity and femininity into a single image, mirroring the decadent atmosphere of Abbasid hedonism. Classical criticism would have deemed such descriptions a transgression against the norms of ‘*Amūd al-Shi’r*’ (the traditional poetic canon), whereas modern criticism reads them as expressions of fluid identity and blurred boundaries—reflecting the Abbasid spirit of rebellion against convention.

She raised her jug while night was thick with gloom,

Then from her face, a glow filled the room.

The imagery here relies on contrast: the darkness of night confronted by the brilliance of the jug’s reflection, resulting in “a gleam that fills the house.” According to al-Jurjani’s Theory of Nazm (syntactic harmony), this interplay between meaning and expression creates internal coherence—the words *layl* (night), *mu’takir* (murky), *falāḥ* (radiance), and *la’lā’* (glitter) all belong to opposing semantic fields of darkness and illumination, generating a richly sensory image.

In the final lines:

She poured from the mouth of the jug a crystal stream,

As if drowsiness had closed the eye that beheld it.

It thinned beyond the water’s essence, so refined,
That even water shunned resemblance to its kind.

Had it been mixed with light, they would have merged as one,

Till new rays and gleams were born, outshone by none.

Here, rhetorical escalation reaches its peak: wine transcends the material to become a cosmic element intertwined with light itself. The metaphor “it thinned beyond water” elevates it beyond the physical to the ethereal, approaching the very nature of radiance. The final verse marks the climax of semantic deviation—the wine is no longer mingled with water, but with light, making it of the same substance as luminosity. This imagery aligns with what modern criticism terms total metaphor or symbolic deviation, in which the drink becomes a symbol of absolute purity and sensuous revelation.

From the perspective of classical critics, Abu

Nuwas maintained eloquence and vivid imagery, though he clearly diverged from traditional poetic norms in both theme and moral tone. For modern critics, however, the poem emerges as a stylistic structure founded on dialectic—cure and ailment, pleasure and sin—alongside paradox and chromatic symbolism, revealing an early form of modern poetics where wine becomes a metaphor for clarity and illumination.

Thus, the poem fuses traditional rhetorical craftsmanship with stylistic innovation, as Abu Nuwas crafts a bold and individual vision—one that rebels against prevailing values while exalting aesthetic and sensual beauty.

4.3. Comparison and Conclusions

Points of Convergence Between Classical and Modern Criticism

Despite temporal and intellectual differences, both classical and modern criticism share fundamental objectives: analyzing literary texts and understanding their formal and substantive dimensions, highlighting aesthetic and intellectual values, and deepening the reader's engagement with literature. Classical criticism emphasized ethical and rhetorical values, embedding moral principles and artistic taste, while modern criticism expands to include psychological, social, and cultural contexts, emphasizing the reader's role in meaning-making.

Points of Divergence

1. Intellectual and Cultural Foundations: Classical criticism relies on Platonism, Aristotelian thought, Arabic rhetoric, and religious values, while modern criticism incorporates existentialism, structuralism, deconstruction, psychology, and semiotics.
2. Critical Tools: Classical tools centered on rhetoric, grammar, and poetic rules, whereas modern critics employ psychoanalysis, structural, deconstructive, and semiotic approaches.
3. Role of the Critic: Classical critics guided literature and public taste, modern critics explore social, cultural, and reader interaction.
4. Flexibility and Innovation: Classical criticism is rigid and rule-bound, modern criticism is flexible and multi-methodological.

Potential for Integration

1. Linking Tradition with Innovation: Classical aesthetic and ethical principles can anchor literary taste, while modern tools analyze psychological, social, and cultural dimensions.
2. Methodological Integration: Classical rhetorical analysis combined with modern contextual approaches, like structural and deconstructive analysis, reveals multiple layers of meaning and impact.
3. Expanding Understanding: Integration offers comprehensive literary reading, bridging traditional standards and contemporary analysis.
4. Practical Benefit: Scholars gain deep understanding while preserving originality and artistic value.

5. CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates the expressive richness of Abbasid poetry and confirms that conscious blending of classical and modern criticism effectively revives texts, offering multi-dimensional insights. The convergence of tradition and modernity shows the flexibility of Arabic texts, where classical critics focused on poetic quality, word precision, and imagery, while modern theories illuminate structure, semantics, and function. The result is a dynamic understanding, showing that Abbasid poetry is never exhausted in a single reading, but lives and renews itself with evolving readership and critical perspectives. This study contributes to revealing aspects of commonality between classical and modern criticism examining texts and addressing aesthetic and intellectual value. Also, the paper offers expanding methodological approaches in an interdisciplinary fashion incorporating psychology, sociology, cultural studies in additional rhetoric and ethical standards. Overall, this approach enables this paper to stand as a balanced and comprehensive critical perspective bridging between tradition and modernity, and thus, highlighting ultimately that literary criticism is vital for understanding literature, society, and humanity with evolving methods rather than methodological replacement of early values.

Author Contributions: The author confirms the sole responsibility for the conception of the study, presented results, and manuscript preparation.

Acknowledgements: This paper was funded by Al-Balqa Applied University - Deanship of Scientific Research.

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