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RHETORICAL CRITERIA FOR AESTHETIC PREFERENCE IN CLASSICAL ARABIC CRITICISM

المعايير البلاغية للتفضيل الجمالي في النقد العربي القديم

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ABSTRACT

This research examines the rhetorical criteria for aesthetic preference in poetry within classical Arabic criticism, using critical examples from the scholarly efforts of the 3rd and 4th Islamic centuries (9th-10th centuries CE), particularly those of Al-Mubarrad, Ibn Al-Mu'tazz, Al-Amidi, Abu Hilal Al-Askari, Al-Khattabi, and Al-Qadi Al-Jurjani. This was conducted through a descriptive-analytical approach. The research opens with an introduction outlining its objectives, significance, methodology, and a review of previous studies. It then proceeds to investigate the rhetorical criteria that critics relied upon in their judgments of preference, namely: lexical and stylistic excellence, clarity, conciseness, precision, hyperbole and comprehensiveness of meaning, and skill in artistic depiction. The research concludes with its findings.

KEYWORDS: Rhetorical Criteria, Aesthetic Preference, Arabic Poetry, Classical Arabic Criticism.

1. INTRODUCTION

Comparison is a critical method known to the Arabs since the pre-Islamic era. It is narrated that Imru' al-Qays and 'Alqama al-Fahl disputed over poetry and sought judgment from Umm Jundub, Imru' al-Qays's wife. She ruled in favor of 'Alqama al-Fahl, declaring him a better poet than Imru' al-Qays (see: Ibn Qutaybah, *Poetry and Poets*, vol. 1, p. 231).

This comparative approach then evolved at the hands of Arab critics, transitioning from a phase of oral judgments – such as "So-and-so is a greater poet than so-and-so," or "more skilled in praise" or "more skilled in satire" – to a more profound and specialized phase. Critics came to recognize the nuances of distinction between poets, particularly regarding a single poetic idea. Consequently, comparison (or preference judgment) between poets occupied a significant place in their critical works. Al-Khattabi states: "Two poets may vie over a single meaning, whereupon one reaches its zenith while the other falls short of matching his level" (*Bayan I'jaz al-Qur'an*, p. 64).

The scholar capable of making such a comparison, discernment, and judgment in this contention is none other than the one well-versed in the craft of poetry. For this reason, critics stipulated that whoever seeks to compare between poets must be an expert in poetry. Al-Amidi states: "Two rare and excellent verses may be close [in quality]; then those knowledgeable in the craft of poetry know which of them is superior if their meaning is the same, or which is superior in its meaning if their meanings differ." (*Al-Muwazana*, p. 1/413).

1-1- Research Objectives and Significance: This research aims to study the rhetorical criteria upon which critics relied in the process of comparison. The importance of this research lies in examining, compiling, and analyzing these criteria, because classical Arabic criticism is often accused of making arbitrary judgments that lack a clear and reasoned basis.

1-2- Research Methodology: This research adopted a descriptive-analytical approach, after examining critical and rhetorical sources from their origins up to the end of the fourth century. It extracted examples of preferred verses from these sources, then categorized them according to the rhetorical criteria used in the process of preference. These examples were then studied through description, analysis, and discussion.

1-3- Previous Studies: Several research papers and studies have addressed the issue of preference in classical criticism. Among them, which is relevant

to our research, is:

- The comparison between poets regarding the question of "the most poetic line ever uttered by the Arabs": by researcher Firas Al-Ahmad. This is a study published in the *Journal of the University of Al-Furat*, Issue 50, 2021. In it, the researcher examined the judgments of preference among the classical Arabs, namely: "the finest line of praise," "the finest line of satire," "the finest line of self-glorification," "the finest line of amorous poetry," etc. He sought to establish the foundations of these judgments and elucidate their criteria.
- Comparison between Poets according to Hazim al-Qartajanni: by researcher Rabih Zakiiyyah. This is a study published in the *Journal of Communicology (Al-Tawāsuliyah)*, Issue 15, Algeria, 2022. In it, the researcher sought to elucidate the foundations theorized by al-Qartajanni concerning the issue of comparison, based on the variation of times, the circumstances conducive to composing poetry, and the motives behind it.
- Criteria for Comparison between Poets in Classical Arab Criticism: by researcher Yousef Qasdi, a study published in the *Journal of Knowledge (Al-Ma'rifah)*, Issue 24, 2025. The criteria addressed by the researcher are: time and place, quantity and abundance, and ethics.

As for the present research, it is dedicated to studying the rhetorical criteria for comparison between poets according to Arab critics. Thus, it complements the aforementioned studies in a process of integration and expansion aimed at comprehensively covering the issue of comparison in classical Arab criticism and forming a clear conception of the criteria upon which it was based.

2. PRESENTATION, DISCUSSION, AND ANALYSIS

The researcher clearly observes that rhetorical criteria often govern the process of aesthetic preference between poets according to Arab critics. This is explicitly stated on many occasions in their works. Among these is Al-Baqillani's statement regarding the reason for favoring Al-Buhturi over Ibn Al-Rumi: "Although we prefer Al-Buhturi for the elegance of his poetry over Ibn Al-Rumi and others of his contemporaries, we give him precedence due to the beauty of his expression, the fluidity of his language, the sweetness of his diction, and the lack of complexity in his verse." (*I'jaz al-*

Qur'an, p. 243).

Relying on rhetoric as a criterion for differentiation and judgment is an ancient principle among the Arabs. This is indicated by Al-Qadi Al-Jurjani, who stated: "The Arabs only differentiate between poets in terms of quality and excellence based on the nobility and correctness of meaning, the robustness and propriety of wording, and they award precedence to the one who describes accurately, draws a simile that approximates [the intended meaning]..." (Al-Wasata, p. 33).

The research will endeavor to study the rhetorical criteria for aesthetic preference between poems according to Arab critics. These criteria, as it appears, revolve around wording, composition, meaning, and imagery. This we will elaborate upon as follows:

2.1. The beauty of diction and the quality of formulation:

Ancient critics elaborated on the effect of diction in shaping meanings in an artistic way that grants them distinctiveness, novelty, and uniqueness. This began with Al-Asma'i when he was asked who the most eloquent of people was. He said: "He who takes a base meaning and elevates it with his words or takes a base meaning and elevates it with his words, or whose speech ends before the rhyme, and then, when he needs it, adds meaning" (Qudama, Critique of Poetry, 64).

After al-Asma'i came al-Jahiz, who emphasized in his famous saying, "Meanings are readily available," that poetry is a literary genre whose essence lies in diction and expression. Its true value lies in: "establishing the meter, choosing the right words, the ease of expression, the abundance of flow, and in the soundness of the natural talent and the quality of the composition. For poetry is a craft, a kind of weaving, and a type of imagery" (Al-Hayawan, p. 3/131).

Then the efforts of scholars continued in demonstrating the effectiveness of diction and expression in the beauty of poetry; by making "The soul is more inclined to it, and quicker to grasp it. Do you not see – and this is Ibn Jinni speaking – that a poet may be a rough shepherd or a tyrannical slave, whose appearance is unpleasant and whose speech is repulsive, yet he still utters poetry? Because of its suitability, its eloquence, and the sweetness it evokes in the listener, it becomes a standard to which one refers and by which one is measured" (Al-Khasa'is, 1/216).

Furthermore, many scholars have expressed the opinions of scholars regarding the merit of diction

and its role in the superiority of poetry. This is an original and ancient form of criticism. Among them is Al-Qadi Al-Jurjani, who said, as we quoted earlier: "The Arabs differentiate between poets in terms of quality and beauty based on the nobility of their logic and sincerity, and the richness and stature of their diction..." (Al-Wasata, p. 33).

Based on this consideration of diction and phrasing, and their rhetorical value and effectiveness in conveying poetic meanings, critics have compared the meanings of poets based on the beauty of the diction and the strength of the phrasing. For example, Al-Qadi Al-Jurjani compared a group of poets on the theme of comparing cheeks to roses, ultimately favoring a verse by Abu Sa'd al-Makhzumi. He said: "The common people and the elite have continued to compare roses to cheeks, and cheeks to roses, in both prose and verse. Poets have said much on this subject, and it falls under the category in which plagiarism cannot be claimed except through the inclusion of an added element or an accompanying meaning – such as the verse of Ali ibn al-Jahm: [Al-Tawil meter]

عَشِيَّةَ حَيَانِي بِوَرْدٍ كَأَنَّه
خُدُودٌ أُضِيْفَتْ بَعْضُهُنَّ إِلَى بَعْضٍ

He added some of them to others, and if it is taken, it is taken from him and attributed to him. And as in the saying of Ibn al-Mu'tazz: [Al-Wafir meter]

بِيَاضٍ فِي جَوَانِبِهِ إِحْمِرَارٍ
كَمَا إِحْمَرَّتْ مِنَ الْخَجَلِ الْخُدُودُ

Then Abu Saeed al-Makhzumi said: [Al-Wafir meter]

وَالْوَرْدُ فِيهِ كَأَنَّمَا أَوْرَأَفَهُ
نَزَعَتْ وَرْدًا مَكَانَهُنَّ خُدُودُ

He did not add anything to that simple simile, but he clothed it in this elegant language, so that if you compare it to something else, you find the meaning the same, and then you feel a tremor within yourself, and you find a delight that makes you know that he has a unique virtue that no one disputes. (Al-Wasata, p. 187) Anyone who compares the verses of Ali bin Al-Jahm and Ibn Al-Mutazz on one hand, and the verse of Al-Makhzumi on the other, will notice a clear difference between them in terms of fluency, ease of expression, and quality of composition, in favor of the verse of Al-Makhzumi, which Al-Jurjani called "elegant expression," which made him prefer the saying of Al-Makhzumi over the other two poets, despite their sharing the basic meaning.

This is a fundamental approach among early critics in comparing poets when they shared similar themes. They preferred those whose diction and

expression were more elegant, even if the theme was already established. This is what al-Qadi expressed when he said: "When plagiarism occurs in this manner, it is no longer considered a fault, nor is it counted among the defects. Its perpetrator is more deserving of preference, and more worthy of praise and commendation." (Al-Wasata, p. 187).

Like al-Jurjani's comparison, al-Amidi compared Abu Tammam and al-Buhturi in the opening lines of their poems, which expressed the ruin and destruction wrought by time upon their homes. He cited two verses by Abu Tammam on this theme: [Al-Tawil meter]

لَقَدْ أَخَذْتُ مِنْ دَارِ مَاوِيَّةَ الْحُقْبُ
أُنْحَلُ الْمَغَانِي لِلْبَلْبَى هِيَ أَمْ نَهَبُ

His saying: [Al-Basit meter]

قَدْ نَابَتْ الْجَزَعُ مِنْ أَرْوِيَّةَ النَّوْبُ
وَاسْتَحَقَبَتْ جِدَّةً مِنْ رَبْعِهَا الْحُقْبُ

Then he quoted a verse by Al-Buhturi, in which he says: [Al-Kamil meter]

أَرْسُومُ دَارِ أَمْ سَطُورُ كِتَابِ
دَرَسَتْ بَشَائِشِهَا مَعَ الْأَحْقَابِ

Al-Amidi ultimately favored Al-Buhturi's verse for the beauty of its wording and composition, judging him to be a superior poet to Abu Tammam in this particular meaning. He stated: "This verse—referring to Al-Buhturi's verse—is more excellent than Abu Tammam's two verses in terms of wording, finer in construction, and possesses more luster and brilliance. It is among rare and wondrous openings, resembling the speech of the early masters; in this, he is a greater poet than Abu Tammam" (Al-Amidi, Al-Muwazana, p. 1/446).

And because of the beauty of the diction and the structure, Abu Hilal al-Askari preferred a verse by al-Buhturi to one by Abu Hayya, in which he described the beloved and the beauty of her speech and mouth, comparing them to pearls and coral. He said: "Al-Buhturi's saying: [Al-Tawil meter]

فَمِنْ لَوْلُو تَجْلُوهُ عِنْدَ ابْتِسَامِهَا
وَمِنْ لَوْلُو عِنْدَ الْخَدِيثِ تُسَاقِطُهُ

Is better in diction and structure than Abu Hayya's saying: [Al-Tawil meter]

إِذَا هُنَّ سَاقَطْنَ الْخَدِيثَ كَأَنَّهُ
سِقَاطُ حَصَى الْمَرْجَانِ مِنْ سَيْلِكَ نَاطِمِ

Among such examples is a comparison made by Abu al-Qasim al-Isfahani in his book *Al-Wāḍiḥ fi Mushkilāt Shi'r al-Mutanabbī* between verses by different poets on the theme of generosity and its allusion through a fire kindled for travelers and those seeking hospitality. This was done to demonstrate the merit of wording and its effectiveness in making one poet surpass another in that regard. He said: "I will present to you verses that share a single meaning, yet their disparity in

wording is immense. Al-A'sha said: [Al-Tawil meter]"

لَعْمَرِي لَقَدْ لَاحَتْ عَيْونُ كَثِيرَةٌ
إِلَى ضَوْءِ نَارٍ فِي بَقَاعِ نُحْرُقُ
تُشْتَبُ لِمَقْرورِينَ يَصْطَلِبِيَانِهَا
وَبَاتَ عَلَى النَّارِ النَّدى وَالْمُحَلَّقُ

Another said: [Al-Wafir meter]

لَهُ نَارٌ تُشْتَبُ بِكُلِّ وَادٍ
إِذَا النَّبْرَانِ أَلْبَسَتْ الْقِنَاعَا

He has a fire kindled in every valley when the fires are veiled.

Another said: [Al-Kamil meter]

وَقُلْتُ لَهُ أَقْبَلْ فَإِنَّكَ رَاشِدٌ
وَإِنَّ عَلَى النَّارِ النَّدى وَابْنَ ثَامِلِ

Al-Hutay'ah said: [Al-Tawil meter]

مَتَى نَأْتِيهِ تَعَشَوْا إِلَى ضَوْءِ نَارِهِ
تَجِدُ خَيْرَ نَارٍ عِنْدَهَا خَيْرُ مَوْقِدِ

The meaning is one and the poets are partners in it, except that Al-Hutay'ah outshone everyone with the quality of the system and the ease of the diction" (Abu Al-Qasim, Al-Wadih, p. 54). The meaning is almost identical, except that al-Isfahani preferred al-Hutay'ah's wording and favored his version over the others.

It seems that critics, in their rhetorical criteria for preference, particularly the criterion of elegant expression, reflect and base their judgments on popular taste. Evidence of this is the story of al-A'sha's famous verse among the public, to the point that al-Hutay'ah's verse surpassed it and eclipsed al-A'sha's. Abu Hilal al-Askari says: "Al-A'sha's verse, 'It is kindled for two cold ones...' was so well-received that al-Hutay'ah said, 'Whenever you come to him, you will be blind...'" (Diwan al-Ma'ani, p. 1/44).

2.2. Clarity

Undoubtedly, clarity is a necessary condition for any speech, because language was originally created for communication and understanding. Ibn Sinan says about speech: "It was needed so that people could express their intentions and convey the meanings in their hearts" (The Secret of Eloquence, p. 221).

This is what Arab rhetoricians worked to establish and solidify through numerous and consistent texts attributed to them. Al-Jahiz says: "The crux of the matter and the ultimate goal that the speaker and the listener strive for is understanding and being understood" (Al-Bayan wa al-Tabyeen, vol. 1, p. 76). Elsewhere, he explains that "the clearer and more eloquent the meaning, the more evident and illuminating the implication, and the more beneficial and effective it is" (Al-Bayan wa al-Tabyeen, vol. 1, p. 75).

Rhetoricians based their argument for the necessity of clear speech and the comprehension of its meanings on the eloquence of the Holy Quran, in which – as al-Baqillani says – "wisdom and decisive speech are presented to you in a delightful manner, elegant structure, and graceful presentation, neither difficult for the ears to hear nor obscure to the minds, neither forced in expression nor jarring in appearance." (The Miraculous Nature of the Quran, p. 302, See: Al-Fada'ous, Aesthetic Judgment in Arabic Rhetoric, p. 204).

Due to the importance of clarity in improving speech and making it more accessible, critics have relied on it as a criterion for comparing poets. For example, al-Amidi preferred al-Numayri to Abu Tammam in a particular form of praise, as in the following verse: "Mansur al-Numayri said, praising al-Rashid: [A-Tawil meter]"

وَعَيْنٌ مُحِيطٌ بِالزَّرِيَّةِ طَرْفُهَا
 سِوَاءٌ عَلَيْهِ قُرْبُهَا وَبَعِيدُهَا

Abu Tammam took this and said: [Al-Wafir meter]

أَطَّلَ عَلَى كَيْلِ الْإِنْفَاقِ حَتَّى
 كَأَنَّ الْأَرْضَ فِي عَيْنَيْهِ دَارٌ

The remainder of this verse is very good, but I prefer the verse of Al-Numayri because its meaning is clearer" (Al-Amidi, Al-Muwāzanah, vol. 1, p. 67). Thus, despite Al-Amidi's appreciation of the similitudinary image in Abu Tammam's verse, he favored Al-Numayri's verse for its clarity and the explicitness of its meaning in indicating the comprehensiveness of the patron's care and his compassion for people both near and far.

In a similar vein is a comparison conducted by Al-Amidi in the context of establishing foundational examples of poetic verses in which poets expressed the deep-seated nature of the beloved's passion in the soul and heart. For this meaning, he cited evidence from three poets: Abu Tammam, Kuthayyir 'Azza, and Ibn Al- Tathriyya. He then favored the latter's verse. It appears in his book Al-Muwazana: "Abu Tammam said: [Al-Kāmil meter]"

نَقَلَ فُؤَادَكَ حَيْثُ شِئْتَ مِنَ الْهَوَى
 مَا الْحُبُّ إِلَّا لِلْحَبِيبِ الْأَوَّلِ

He took it from Kuthayyir's saying:

إِذَا مَا أَرَادْتَ خُلَّةً أَنْ تُزِيلَنَا
 أَبِينَا وَقُلْنَا الْحَاجِبِيَّةُ أَوَّلُ

Muhammad ibn Dawud ibn al-Jarrah mentioned in his book that he took the meaning from Ibn Al-Tathriyya's saying: [from Al-Tawil meter]

أَتَانِي هَوَاهَا قِيلَ أَنْ أَعْرِفَ الْهَوَى
 فَصَادَفْتُ قَلْبًا خَالِيًا فَتَمَنَّنَا

This is the best that has been said on this meaning; because he mentioned the reason" (Al-Amidi, Al-Muwazana, p. 1/69).

The reason Al-Amidi preferred Ibn Al-Tathriyya's statement over others, as he explained, is that the poet revealed the reason that enabled the beloved's love to take root in his heart, which was the heart's emptiness of love, so the love crept into it and took root. Al-Amidi approved of this because explaining the meaning is a means of explanation and clarification, since explaining the reason in the meaning helps in revealing what the poetic text carries of significance and clarifies and explains it, and thus it helps the recipient to reach the poet's intention from it.

Abu Al-Abbas Al-Mubarred also compared verses of different meanings by the same poet, in order to highlight the effect of clarity and ease of expression on improving or detracting from meaning. He compared verses by al-Farazdaq in praise with others describing gray hair, saying: "Among the ugliest forms of necessity, the most distasteful expressions, and the most far-fetched meanings is his saying:

وما مثله في الناس إلا مملكا
 أبو أمه حي أبو يقره

... If he had placed the words in their proper context, he would have said: And there is none like him among men alive, who is close to him, except a king whose maternal grandfather is the father of this king, the father of this praised one. Thus, he showed that he mistook him for someone else with this far-fetched expression, and he distasteful him with the transposition he made... It is as if such a statement would not have occurred to anyone who says:

وَالشَّيْبُ يَنْهَضُ فِي السَّوَادِ كَأَنَّهُ
 لَيْلٌ يَصِيحُ بِجَانِبَيْهِ نَهَارٌ

This is the clearest meaning, the most eloquent expression, and the most accessible explanation. (Al-Kamil, Al-Mubarred, p. 1/28)

2.3. Brevity And Conciseness

Brevity is "reducing the number of words and increasing the meanings." (Al-Askari, Al-Sina'atayn, p. 195). Many scholars have defined eloquence as brevity and linked the two through various styles and forms that differ in structure but agree in meaning. They said: Eloquence is "indicating much with little." (Al-Shaybani, Al-Risalah Al-'Adhra', p. 81). They also said: "Eloquence is a telling glimpse" (Al-Baqillani, I'jaz Al-Qur'an, p. 90). Scholars have considered concise eloquence to be more eloquent than lengthy expression because the meanings conveyed through it are easier on the soul due to the shorter path to understanding them (see: Al-Rumani, Al-Nukat, 80).

As for the eloquence of poetry in particular, it

requires brevity and conciseness more than prose because the space of a poetic line, by its very nature, cannot accommodate many words, and because its meanings are supposed to be conveyed with subtlety and metaphor, not with detailed, declarative language.

Based on this criterion, Al-Mubarred transmitted to us a comparison from some critics of his era between two statements—one by Tarafah ibn al-'Abd and the other by Al-A'sha—regarding the depiction of the perfection of the beloved's physical well-being and radiance: its coolness and delicacy in summer, and its warmth in winter. Al-A'sha expressed this meaning in two verses, whereas Tarafah conveyed it in a single verse. His statement was given precedence over that of Al-A'sha due to the conciseness of his expression. It appears in Al-Mubarred's work: "Al-A'sha said:"

وَتَبْرَدُ بَرْدَ رِداءِ العَرُوسِ
رَقْرَقَتْ بِالصَّيْفِ فِيهِ العَيْبِيرا
وَتَسْخُنُ لَيْلَةً لَا يَسْتَطِيعُ
نُبأحاً بِهَا الكَلْبُ إِلَّا هَرِيرَا

This speech was accepted and deemed good, but it was criticized for being expressed in two verses and for prolonging the address. Superior to it is the saying of Tarafah: [in the Raml meter]

تَطْرُدُ البَرْدَ بِخَرِّ سَاخِنِ
وَعَكِيكَ القَيْظِ إِنْ جَاءَ بِفُرِّ

It was said: "This is more comprehensive and concise." (Al-Mubarred, Al-Balaghah, p. 83. Note: "Scorching heat" refers to the beloved's breath. "Stillness" refers to the stillness of the wind due to the intense heat. "Summer heat" refers to the heat. "Cold" refers to the cold.) We find this criterion in comparison present in Al-Amidi's comparison, as he made a comparison in the meaning of youth, old age and senility, between Al-Buhturi's saying: [Al-Mutaqarib]

وَلَا بُدَّ مِنْ تَرْكِ إِحْدَى ائْتِنْبِ
-نِ إِمَّا الشَّبَابِ وَإِمَّا العُمُرِ

And Zuhair ibn Abi Sulma said: [Al-Tawil meter]

رَأَيْتُ المَنَايَا خَبِطَ عَشْوَاءَ مَنْ نُصِبَ
نُيْمَتُهُ وَمَنْ نُحِطَى يُعَمَّرَ فِيهَرَمِ

And Umayya ibn Abi al-Salt said: [Al-Munsariḥ meter]

مَنْ لَمْ يَمُتْ عِبْطَةً يَمُتْ هَرَمًا
لِلْمَوْتِ كَأْسُ وَالمَرءِ ذَانِقُهَا

The gist of the poets' intention in these verses is that every living being must either grow old or die, and whoever does not die young will inevitably die old. After al-Amidi presented these verses, he concluded by preferring Ibn Abi al-Salt's verse because it encompassed and summarized the meaning in a single line of poetry. He said in his commentary on it: "This is better than the verse of

Zuhair and the verse of Al-Buhturi because it combines the two meanings in the first hemistich, and it is independent of the second hemistich." (Al-Amidi, Al-Muwazana, p. 2/200).

2.4. ACCURACY

Scholars have emphasized that the essence of eloquence lies in accurately conveying meaning, stating: "Eloquence is not about wit or excessive rambling, but rather about accurately conveying meaning and striking with compelling arguments" (Al-Shaybani, Al-Risalah Al-Adhra, p. 81). Ibn Wahb clarified the path to achieving this, explaining that the poet must understand: "the value of words, the value of meanings, the levels of expression, the levels of his audience, the rights of gatherings, and the rights of discourse within them, giving each its due" (Al-Burhan fi Wujuh Al-Bayan, p. 207).

Al-Suli presented a comparison between a group of poets regarding the theme of generosity, based on the opinions of some critics of his time. The basis of this comparison was the poet's accuracy. Al-Suli said: "Tarafa was criticized for saying: [Al-Raml meter]

أَسَدُ غَيْلٍ فَإِذَا مَا شَرِبَها
وَهَبُوا كَلَّ آمُونٍ وَطِيمِرِ

So, he began to give them gifts when they drank... Then Hassan ibn Thabit al-Ansari followed him, and he said, though he was clumsier than the first: [Al-Wafir meter]

تَوَلَّيْهَا المَلَامَةَ إِنْ أَلْمَنَا
إِذَا مَا كَانَ مَغْنً أَوْ لِحَاءَ
وَتَشْرَبُهَا فَتَنْزُرُ كُنَّا مُلُوكًا
وَأَسَدًا مَا يُنْهِنُنَا اللِّقَاءَ

Tarafa had a better saying than this because he said:

أَسَدُ غَيْلٍ فَإِذَا مَا شَرِبَها

So he attributed courage to them before drinking, while Hassān said: "We drink, then we become courageous and bestow, as if we are kings when we drink." For this reason, Tarafa's statement was superior, and 'Antara's was more excellent, because he guarded against the flaw of giving [generosity] while intoxicated, and [showed] that intoxication enhanced his generosity. He said: [Al-Kamil meter]

فَإِذَا شَرِبْتُ فَإِنِّي مُسْتَهْلِكُ
مَالِي وَعِرْضِي وَإِذَا لَمْ يُكَلِّمْ
وَإِذَا صَحَوْتُ فَمَا أَقْصِرُ عَنْ نَدْيِ
وَكَأْ مَا عَلِمْتَ شَمَائِلِي وَتَكْرُمِي

Zuhair said: [Al-Tawil meter]

أَخِي تَقَى لَا تُنَلِّفُ الحَمْرُ مَالَهُ
وَلِكِنَّهُ قَدْ يُهْلِكُ المَالَ نَائِلَهُ

This is among the finest expressions, meaning that he does not drink wine with his money, but rather spends it in charity. (Akhbar al-Buhturi, p.

185)

The essence of this comparison is... Tarafa described those he praised as courageous and generous, but he restricted their generosity to drinking. It is understood from this that if they drank, they were generous, otherwise no generosity would come from them. This is a failure to be correct because the correct thing is for them to be generous in all circumstances. Hassan ibn Thabit also fell into this error, except that Hassan placed their bravery after drinking, while Tarafa placed it before it. Therefore, Tarafa's statement was given precedence and preferred over Hassan's.

As for Antara, he placed generosity before drinking, and then this generosity increased with intoxication. This is better than Tarafa's statement and more accurate. Zuhair's statement surpasses all that came before it because generosity is present in his statement in every instance, and it has no connection to drinking since wine does not intoxicate him at all. This is the most accurate of all the preceding statements.

It is observed from this comparison that there is a hierarchy of quality and excellence. To the extent that a poet's statement is precise and accurate, it ascends and rises in the hierarchy of quality and excellence from the critic's perspective.

According to this criterion—by which we mean the criterion of precision—we find Al-Qadi Al-Jurjani in his *Al-Wasata* critiquing the meanings of poets and comparing between them. He compared the verse of Abu Tammam praising one of his patrons: [Al-Khafif meter]

عَرَبْتَهُ الْعُلَى عَلَى كَثْرَةِ النَّا
سِ قَاضِي فِي الْأَقْرَبِينَ جَنِيْبَا
فَلْيَطَّلْ عُمُرُهُ فَلَوْ مَاتَ فِي مَر
وَ مُقِيمًا بِهَا لَمَاتَ غَرِيْبَا

And Abu Al-Tayyib says, boasting: [Al-Basit meter]

وَ هَكَذَا كُنْتُ فِي أَهْلِي وَفِي وَطَنِي
إِنَّ النَّفْسَ غَرِيْبٌ حَيْثُمَا كَانَا

Al-Jurjani concluded by preferring Al-Mutanabbi's words because of their accuracy, while Tammam's fame was established by his mention of death in his verse, and death is among the things whose mention is considered distasteful in the context of praise. The judge said: "The house of Abu al-Tayyib is better and safer, and Abu Tammam has done wrong by mentioning death in praise, so there is no need for it; and the meaning is not disrupted by his loss, and whoever dies in his country as a stranger is also a stranger in his life, so what is the benefit in greeting the praised one with what he is superstitious about!" (*Al-Wasata*, p. 219).

2.5. Exaggeration and Full Expression of Meaning:

Among the definitions of eloquence given by the ancients is that eloquence lies "in conciseness of speech, while grasping the truth within it, and fully conveying the meanings therein" (Al-Qurtubi, *Al-Bayan wa Al-Tahsil*, p. 18/483).

The ancient critics praised exaggeration in poetry because it is a rhetorical device that enables the poet to fully express the meaning and take it to its furthest reaches and ultimate conclusions (Qudama ibn Ja'far, *Naqd al-Shi'r*, p. 146). This makes the meanings more impactful on the recipient than if they were presented literally.

The critics' interest in exaggeration was evident, and this interest is demonstrated and clarified by their preference for poetic meanings in which their authors adopted the path of exaggeration, thus giving them moral and artistic value. Among this is what came in Al-Jurjani's *Al-Wasata* regarding the superiority of a saying by Abu Nuwas over another saying by Abu Al-Tayyib Al-Mutanabbi in praise, in terms of expressing the majesty of the praised one, the strength of his presence, and the breadth of his influence. Al-Jurjani said: "Abu Nuwas said: [Al-Kamil meter]

مَلِكٌ تَصَوَّرَ فِي الْقُلُوبِ مِثْلَهُ
فَكَأَنَّهُ لَمْ يَخُلْ مِنْهُ مَكَانٌ

And Abu Al-Tayyib said: [Al-Kamil]

كَذَبَ الْمُخَيَّرُ عَنْكَ دُونَكَ وَصَفَهُ
مَنْ بِالْعِرَاقِ يَرَاكَ فِي طَرَسُوسَا

He fell short because he limited himself to those in Iraq, while Abu Nuwas included hearts and places. And between the two expressions there is a difference in eloquence and correctness." He repeated it and elaborated on it, saying:

هَذَا الَّذِي أَبْصَرْتُ مِنْهُ حَاضِرًا
مِثْلَ الَّذِي أَبْصَرْتُ مِنْهُ غَائِبًا

(*Al-Wasata*, p. 220).

It appears from Al-Jurjani's commentary that he preferred Abu Nuwas's verse to Al-Mutanabbi's. This is because Abu Nuwas was more exaggerated in his description and fully conveyed the meaning, making the awe-inspiring presence of the praised one and his influence pervade every place. Al-Mutanabbi, on the other hand, fell short by limiting the influence of the praised one to specific locations.

Al-Jurjani then went on to judge Abu al-Tayyib's verse as superior and more comprehensive, as he repeated the meaning and presented it in a new way. He exaggerated, making the praised one visible to people both in his presence and absence, thus achieving the ultimate expression of the praised one's exalted status and the extent of his

benevolence, which extended to every corner of the world.

Another example we present highlights the critics' reliance on exaggeration as a criterion for aesthetic preference among poetic meanings. This is Al-Khattabi's preference for verses by Al-A'sha describing wine over others by Al-Akhtal. He reported the following: "Al-Sha'bi entered upon Al-Akhtal and found him drunk and surrounded by perfumes and basil. He said: 'O Sha'bi, Al-Akhtal did this and mentioned the mothers of poets.' Al-Sha'bi said: 'With what, O Abu Malik?'" He said, in his poem: [Al-Kamil]

وَنَظَّلُ نَتَصَفُّنَا بِهَا قَرَوِيَّةً
إِبْرِيْفَهَا بِرِقَاعِهَا مَلْتُومٌ
وَإِذَا تَعَاوَزَتِ الْأَكْفُفُ رُجَاجَهَا
نَفَخَتْ فَنَالَ رِيَاخَهَا الْمَرْكُومُ

Al-Sha'bi said: More eloquent than you is he who says: [Al-Wafir]

وَأَدَكَنَّ عَاتِقِي جَحْلِي سَبِيحَلٍ
صَبَحَتْ بِرَاجِهِ شَرِبًا كِرَامَا
مِنَ اللَّاتِي حُمِلْنَ عَلَى الرَّوَايَا
كَرِيحِ الْمِسْكِ تَسْتَلُّ الرُّكَامَا

And a dark-colored, thick-necked, long-necked camel, I drank from its water, a generous drink.

From those who were carried on water skins, like the scent of musk, it draws out the cold.

He said to him: "Who says this, O Sha'bi?" He replied: "Al-A'sha." He said: "Quddūs, quddūs! Al-A'sha has done it, and he has mentioned the masters of poets." (Bayān I'jāz al-Qur'ān, p. 64. Notes: Adkan: a dark blackish color because it is coated with tar; ātiq: old, ancient; al-jaḥl: a large waterskin; sibaḥl: huge, bulky; šabaḥtu: I served, referring to morning wine; al-sharb: a group of drinkers; al-rawāyā: plural of rāwiyah, meaning a camel used for carrying water. The meaning of Al-Akhtal's statement "Quddūs, quddūs..." indicates his astonishment at Al-A'sha's two verses and his profound veneration of them.)

Then al-Khattabi continued and expressed his position in preferring al-A'sha's saying, explaining the reason that led al-Sha'bi to judge him to be a better poet than al-Akhtal. Al-Khattabi said: "Consider the difference in their standing. Al-Akhtal, in his boasting and pride, merely described the wine's aroma as so potent that it penetrated to the very head, reaching even the head of someone with a cold. Al-A'sha, on the other hand, described its sharpness and intense aroma as a cure for colds, driving them away, and a remedy for their ailment, a cure for their illness, and a means of their recovery and healing" (Bayan I'jaz al-Qur'an, p. 64).

Al-Sha'bi and his follower, Al-Khattabi, relied on exaggeration in their criticism, recognizing its

effectiveness in enhancing poetic meaning and bestowing upon it aesthetic and rhetorical value. Al-Akhtal, in his description of wine, limited himself to describing the intense aroma of the wine, even reaching someone with a cold who had lost their sense of smell. Al-A'sha, however, went further, attributing benefits and advantages to the wine. He did not merely describe its strong aroma and its pervasive scent but also portrayed it as a medicine that could cure the ailment.

2.6. SKILL IN ARTISTIC DEPICTION

The magnificence and beauty of artistic depiction are no secret, for it reveals what is hidden and brings near what is distant. It endows meanings with elevation and clarity, clothes them in nobility and pride—or in baseness and vulgarity—with intricate branches and precise context, driving the imagination to soar in order to illuminate the image and exhaustively explore its obscure features. (Al-Sabbagh, Al-Balaghah al-Shi'riyyah, p. 239).

Classical Arab critics recognized the importance of such depiction and its role in the aesthetic vitality of poetry, striving to articulate and elucidate it. This began with Al-Jahiz in his famous passage where he stated that "poetry is a craft, a mode of weaving, and a genre of depiction" (Al-Ḥayawan, vol. 3, p. 132). Therefore, critics paid great attention to artistic images, devoting special care to them—particularly simile, which they established as a primary criterion for distinguishing between poets and probing their artistic capabilities. This was articulated by Al-Qadi Al-Jurjani in his statement: "The Arabs would only differentiate between poets in terms of quality and excellence based on the nobility and correctness of meaning, the robustness and propriety of wording, and they would award precedence to the one who describes accurately, draws a simile that approximates [the intended meaning], and improvises with abundance" (Al-Wasata, p. 33).

Ibn Rashiq al-Qayrawani (d. 463 AH) eloquently expressed the poet's creative ability, which manifests itself in simile; that which led the Arabs to concede precedence to him, as he said: "The most difficult thing for a poet to undertake is simile, due to what it requires intellectual evidence and the demands of observation." (Al-Umda fi Mahasin al-Shi'r, vol. 1, p. 285).

Arab critics, in the stage of composition and documentation, followed the practice of the ancient Arabs, as recounted by al-Jurjani, in relying on the standard of artistic imagery and skill in its application as a criterion for comparing poems. Examples of this are too numerous to count,

including al-Khattabi's preference for verses by Imru' al-Qays over others by al-Nabigha al-Thubyani, in describing the length of the night and the worries and sorrows it evokes in the poet. As for al-Nabigha's verses, they are: [Al-Tawil meter]

كَلَيْبِي لَيْمَ يَا أَمِيمَةَ نَاصِبٍ
وَلَيْلِ أَقَاسِيهِ بَطِيءِ الْكَوَاعِبِ
تَطَاوَلَ حَتَّى قُلْتُ لَيْسَ بِمُنْقَضِ
وَلَيْسَ الَّذِي يَزْعَى النُّجُومَ بِأَيْبِ
وَصَدْرُ أَرَاخِ اللَّيْلِ عَازِبٌ هَمِيهِ
تَضَاعَفَتْ فِيهِ الْحُزْنَ مِنْ كُلِّ جَانِبِ

And Imru' al-Qays said: [Al-Tawil meter]

وَلَيْلِ كَمَوْجِ الْبَحْرِ أَرْخَى سُدُولَهُ
عَلَى بَأْتِوَاعِ الْهُمُومِ لِيَبْتَلِي
فَقُلْتُ لَهُ لِمَا تَمَطَّى بِجُوزِهِ
وَأَرَدَتْ أَعْجَازاً وَنَاءً بِكُلِّكَ
أَلَا أَيُّهَا اللَّيْلُ الطَّوِيلُ أَلَا أَنْجَلَ
بِصُبْحِ، وَمَا الْإِصْبَاحُ مِنْكَ بِأَمْتَلِ
فِيَا لَكَ مِنْ لَيْلٍ كَأَنَّ نُجُومَهُ
بِكُلِّ مَغَارِ الْفَتْلِ شَدَّتْ بِبَيْدَلِ

Al-Khattabi said: "I say: Al-Nabigha's opening of his poem with his verse—'Let me, O Umaymah, be consumed by relentless sorrow'—is of the utmost excellence and highly eloquent in describing the sorrow he complained of and the length of his night. It is said that no poet has ever opened a poem with words more beautiful than these. And his line—'And a chest whose distant sorrow the night brought to rest'—is a metaphor from a shepherd bringing his camels to their resting place; it is natural, flowing speech that combines eloquence with sweetness.

However, in Imru' al-Qays's verses, there is a refinement of craft, excellence of simile, and originality of meanings that is not found in Al-Nabigha's verses. For he gave the night a back, hindquarters, and a breastbone; he likened the accumulation of darkness to the surging of sea waves when they mount upon one another, wave upon wave; he depicted the stars as if they were tied with firm ropes, motionless, neither shifting nor departing. Then he did not stop at describing these matters but provided a rationale for them with affliction and drew attention to its meaning within them. He then expressed a wish for the night to pass with the dawn's return, seeking the relief he hoped for, only to retract what he had granted, correct what he had put forward and validated, asserting that affliction is too great to ever have any unveiling or dispelling, and that tribulation is too severe for its malady to ever find, in any state, both ailment and cure. Such elements as these are not collectively achieved in a small span of speech except by someone like him—one of the foremost in poetry, the winner of the race. ... It is by such elements that the meanings of comparison are assessed, and

through them the distinction is made between two statements—giving precedence to one, ranking the other lower, or declaring them equal." (Bayān I'jāz al-Qur'ān, pp. 62–63).

Al-Khattabi elaborated at length on the similes used by Imru' al-Qays in depicting the length of his night and the intensity of his sorrow and grief. This extensive explanation, interpretation, and detailed commentary on the artistic imagery is rarely seen among early critics. It demonstrates the critic's deep appreciation for these images, leading him to prefer Imru' al-Qays's verse to that of al-Nabigha, while acknowledging the latter's skill in expressing the meaning.

Another example of preferring poetry based on the poet's mastery of imagery can be found in al-Amidi's criticism. Despite his criticism of Abu Tammam in certain sections of his comparative work, he could not help but acknowledge Abu Tammam's excellence and mastery in the artistic imagery he employed in some of his poems.

Especially in expressing previously used meanings and presenting them in a new artistic form, he said: "Muslim ibn al-Walid said, and this is a meaning previously used: [Al-Basit meter]

لَا يَسْتَطِيعُ زَيْدٌ مِنْ طَبِيعَتِهِ
عَنِ الْمَرْوَةِ وَالْمَعْرُوفِ إِحْجَامًا

Abu Tammam took the meaning, clarified it, and perfected the wording, saying: [Al-Tawil meter]

تَعَوَّدَ بَسَطَ الْكَفِّ حَتَّى لَوْ أَنَّهُ
ثَنَّاها لِقَبْضٍ لَمْ تُجِبْهُ أَنَامِلُهُ

(Al-Muwazana, p. 1/83).

Both verses express the same meaning, which is that generosity is in the nature and origin of the one being praised. From Al-Amidi's perspective, Abu Tammam has a greater advantage over Muslim and other poets in revealing and conveying this meaning, thanks to his skill in the sensory depiction of the meaning "extending the hand... folding it," as a metaphor for his generosity. The metaphor in his statement "his fingers did not answer him" is to indicate that generosity is deeply ingrained in him and he is unable to respond to it, and that is why Al-Amidi judged him to be excellent and superior.

3. SEARCH RESULTS

After this search, we can record the following results:

- The rhetorical foundation was clear in the aesthetic comparisons made by early Arab critics between poems. This was achieved through their reliance on a set of rhetorical criteria, which, as the research revealed, included: elegant diction and skillful

phrasing, clarity, conciseness, aptness, hyperbole, fullness of meaning, and mastery of artistic imagery.

- The research revealed the diversity of the criteria used in early Arab criticism. Critics compared poets from different eras, from the pre-Islamic period to the Abbasid era. They also compared poets within the same era, and sometimes even the work of the same poet. This comparison was not based on favoritism towards the earlier poet simply because of their age, but rather on an objective basis that considered the poet's eloquence and ability to convey their poetry effectively.
- The research demonstrated the breadth of the ancient Arab critic's knowledge and expertise in poetry, as evidenced by his awareness of

the foundations of poetic meanings and his ability to identify parallels and similarities, compare them, and highlight their rhetorical strengths and weaknesses.

- Through their critical efforts in comparative analysis, critics contributed to demonstrating the effectiveness of aesthetic rhetoric in poetry. This can be applied in a practical way that can be used to establish a rhetorical critical methodology for studying and comparing ancient and modern poetic texts.

Finally, the research recommends studying the forms and terminology of comparative judgments used by critics, such as: (more poetic, better, more skillful, sweeter, and more excellent, etc.), in order to clarify the meaning of these judgments and reveal the aesthetic differences between them.

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