



The Dialectic of Rejection and Acceptance toward Modernist Critical Methodologies in Their Engagement with Arabic Poetry

Mahdia SIAD

University of Algiers 2 -

Abou EL Kacem Saâdallah - Algeria

Email: mahdia.siad@univ-alger2.dz

Abstract:

The article addresses the dialectic of rejection and acceptance of modernist critical methodologies in their engagement with Arabic poetry. It begins by defining the concepts of Arab modernity and metacriticism to highlight the ongoing debates surrounding them in the Arab cultural sphere. Arab modernity emerged as a revivalist movement aimed at transcending cultural, social, and political fragmentation. Metacriticism, by contrast, constitutes a process of reviewing critical activity itself from descriptive, interpretive, and evaluative perspectives. It surpasses direct criticism by rereading and assessing critical work to identify its strengths and weaknesses. The article surveys the procedural tools required for the practice of metacriticism, drawing on the perspective of Hamid Lahmidani, who emphasises the necessity for the metacritic to be equipped with comprehensive epistemological tools. He outlines a methodology for metacriticism that examines the objectives, the analysed corpus, and reading practices, with particular attention to instruments such as description, aesthetic evaluation, and validation. The article also addresses the question of the reception of modernist critical methodologies in the Arab world, where critics perceived them as innovative tools that transcended traditional criticism by focusing on the text itself. Within this context, figures such as Jaber Asfour, Salah Fadl, and Muhammad Muftah stand out. The article presents an example of Salah Fadl's application of structuralist methodology to the poetry of Amal Dunqul, with modifications adapted to the specific nature of Arabic poetry. Conversely, a stream of rejection emerged because these methodologies are

alienated from the Arab cultural context and neglect the contextual dimensions of texts. Prominent representatives of this perspective include Muhammad Abd al-Muttalib and Taha Husayn. The article further discusses an intermediary position that advocates for the utilisation of Western methodologies while simultaneously safeguarding cultural identity. In conclusion, Dr. Abd al-Aziz Hammuda introduces the idea of an alternative to Western modernity, underscoring the crisis of Arab modernists caught between authenticity and the imitation of the West, a tension that undermines their credibility. In response, he called for the development of a linguistic and literary theory deeply rooted in the Arab rhetorical tradition.

Keywords: *Metacriticism; Arab literary criticism; Modern critical methodologies; Structuralist analysis; Arabic rhetorical heritage; Poetic text interpretation*

La dialectique du rejet et de l'acceptation des méthodologies critiques modernistes dans leur approche de la poésie arabe

Résumé :

Cet article traite de la dialectique du rejet et de l'acceptation des méthodologies critiques modernistes dans leur approche de la poésie arabe. Il commence par définir les concepts de modernité arabe et de métacritique afin de mettre en lumière les débats actuels qui les entourent dans la sphère culturelle arabe. La modernité arabe est apparue comme un mouvement revivaliste visant à transcender la fragmentation culturelle, sociale et politique. La métacritique, en revanche, consiste à examiner l'activité critique elle-même d'un point de vue descriptif, interprétatif et évaluatif. Elle va au-delà de la critique directe en relisant et en évaluant les travaux critiques afin d'identifier leurs forces et leurs faiblesses. Cet article passe en revue les outils procéduraux nécessaires à la pratique de la métacritique, en s'appuyant sur le point de vue de Hamid Lahmidani, qui souligne la nécessité pour le métacritique de disposer d'outils épistémologiques complets. Il présente une méthodologie de la métacritique qui examine les objectifs, le corpus analysé et les pratiques de lecture, en accordant une attention particulière à des instruments tels que la description, l'évaluation esthétique et la validation. L'article aborde également la question de la réception des méthodologies critiques modernistes dans le monde arabe, où les critiques les percevaient comme des outils innovants qui transcendaient la critique



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traditionnelle en se concentrant sur le texte lui-même. Dans ce contexte, des personnalités telles que Jaber Asfour, Salah Fadl et Muhammad Muftah se distinguent. L'article présente un exemple de l'application par Salah Fadl de la méthodologie structuraliste à la poésie d'Amal Dunqul, avec des modifications adaptées à la nature spécifique de la poésie arabe. À l'inverse, un courant de rejet a émergé, car ces méthodologies sont éloignées du contexte culturel arabe et négligent les dimensions contextuelles des textes. Muhammad Abd al-Muttalib et Taha Husayn sont parmi les représentants éminents de ce point de vue. L'article aborde également une position intermédiaire qui prône l'utilisation des méthodologies occidentales tout en préservant l'identité culturelle. En conclusion, le Dr Abd al-Aziz Hammuda présente l'idée d'une alternative à la modernité occidentale, soulignant la crise des modernistes arabes pris entre l'authenticité et l'imitation de l'Occident, une tension qui sape leur crédibilité. En réponse, il a appelé au développement d'une théorie linguistique et littéraire profondément enracinée dans la tradition rhétorique arabe.

Mots clés : Métacritique ; Critique littéraire arabe ; Méthodologies critiques modernes ; Analyse structuraliste ; Héritage rhétorique arabe ; Interprétation des textes poétiques

Introduction:

Since the mid-twentieth century, Arab creativity, particularly in the field of poetry, has entered a new phase profoundly influenced by the emergence of poetic modernity. As a result, poetry shifted from a traditional stage, which had endured for a considerable length of time, to a new poetic phase in both form and content, aligning itself with the fast-paced rhythm of Arab reality in its diverse dimensions.

In terms of form, the poets of this phase succeeded in transcending the traditional poetic line, replacing it with harmonised rhythmic units that at times converge and at other times diverge, thereby producing a distinctive rhythm that fulfils the poets' desire to depict their experiences with greater authenticity. This poetic form came to be known as *shi'r al-taf'ila* (free verse or metrical foot poetry).

In terms of content, the poets of free verse drew upon the heritage of humanity at large, which appeared before them as an open book. They equally relied on myth, viewing it as a vital source for understanding the issues of reality, alongside popular heritage, which provided them with numerous historical and religious masks and symbols. This poetic development was accompanied by the emergence of a new language, one that did not rely exclusively on the lexicon of the old linguistic heritage but instead evolved through its interaction with everyday language and through the semiotic openness of its signifiers to meanings that transcended the lexical level.

It was essential for a modernist revolution to emerge in the field of criticism to correspond with the modernist revolution that arose in the field of creativity. Consequently,



since the late 1970s, new modernist critical methodologies have entered the Arab world, employed by Arab critics in reading Arabic poetry during the modern period and beyond. The most significant among these were structuralism and stylistics. Arab critics had to adapt these imported critical methodologies to suit the nature of poetic creativity within the Arab environment.

Since then, other postmodern methodologies have been adopted in Arab criticism, including semiotics, reception theory, deconstruction, feminist criticism, cultural criticism, and various other diverse approaches. Arab critics thus began reading Arab creativity, especially poetry, through these critical methodologies. Furthermore, some have attempted to apply these methodologies to poetic texts within their traditional Arab context.

As is familiar with the emergence of new currents across different fields, studies based on the procedural principles of these imported methodologies faced a vast wave of rejection and reservation because these methodologies were incapable of adequately reading poetic texts within their Arab context owing to differences in their practical principles from the intrinsic characteristics of Arabic poetry. On the other hand, these methodologies received considerable approval from others, who argued that they rely on advanced methods and techniques for studying and analysing texts, aiming at a deeper understanding and highlighting their literary and aesthetic value.

The dialectic of rejection and acceptance regarding these new critical methodologies in their engagement with Arabic poetry emerged during the modern period and beyond. This process is termed metacriticism, meta-critique, or criticism,

also referred to as the explication criticism, or the reading of the reading. Criticism in itself is considered a creative act equivalent to the creativity of literary arts. Consequently, modernist criticism necessarily had to examine and debate the procedural principles on which it was based, given its influence by these Western-origin critical methodologies. This led to the emergence of critical studies addressing this issue, both in theoretical and applied criticisms.

In light of the above, this article addresses the crucial issue and responds to the following question: How did Arab critics engage with the modern methodologies imported from the West that entered the Arab literary scene and asserted themselves forcefully? Why were some critics welcoming of them, and how did they utilise these methodologies in reading Arabic poetry? Conversely, what were the reasons behind other critics' rejection of these methodologies, and what justifications did they offer? Was there an intermediary position that recognised Arab heritage while benefiting from Western contributions? Finally, did Arab critics genuinely discover a literary and linguistic theory rooted in the Arab rhetorical heritage as an alternative to these Western methodologies?

1. The Concept of Arab Modernity

In his book *Al-Maraya al-Muhaddaba* ("The Concave Mirrors"), critic Abd al-Aziz Hammuda cites Elias Khoury's definition of Arab modernity, stating, "It is an attempt to seek the legitimacy of the future after the past had lost its historical legitimacy... The search for legitimacy is an endeavour to escape the threat of annihilation and to halt the destruction of the self through accepting its partial destruction, rescuing the language, starting from the



minimum in order to halt overall deterioration and attempting construction on the basis of that minimum” (Hammuda, 1998).

Khoury's definition, which is free from the usual linguistic ambiguity characteristic of Arab modernists, affirms the unique nature of the Arab version of modernity, with features that distinguish it from Western modernity. These features are linked to an Arab cultural reality with its own historical particularities. There was no obstacle to the spread of modernity as a purely artistic doctrine throughout the Arab world. Thus, modernity became an artistic creed among the educated elite and young artists in both the Levant and Maghreb. Consequently, modernity became a suitable means of escaping from the state of loss into which the revolutionary generation and subsequent generations had fallen.

The first question that may arise here is as follows: do we indeed have a distinct Arab version of Western modernity? Khoury asserts, “Modernity in contemporary Arab culture was only introduced within its own specific problematic. It was not a mere imitation of Western modernity; rather, it was an Arab attempt to formulate modernity within a cultural structure possessing its own historical particularities and experiencing the problems of its renaissance. Thus, Arab modernity is a modernity of renaissance; it is the framework of cultural, social, and political fragmentation, and an attempt to transcend this fragmentation by moving forward” (Hammuda, 1998).

The Concept of Metacriticism

Writing, whether creative or critical, as Todorov (1929) states, is nothing but an intertextual interaction to which

both parties adhere, even if each exemplifies it differently. The literature appears tied to literary heritage rather than nature; poetry can be produced only on the basis of other poems, and literature can be created only from other narratives. Every textuality is an intertextual overlap, meaning that criticism and metacriticism, as texts do not deviate from this and are akin to any creative work; both literary and critical production are processes of intertextual creation.

Al-Ghadami (1993) supports this idea in his book *Thaqafat al-As'ila* ("The Culture of Questions") through the concept of textual corporeality. He considers the text a living entity, stating, "This corporeality does not arise from isolating the text from its literary and intellectual contexts, as the literary work belongs to an extensive and noble lineage like the human being. It does not emerge from nowhere; it is a linguistic literary product of all preceding literary heritage. It is a fertile seed that produces subsequent texts. It is characteristic of the literary text to be fertile and productive, just like every living organism such as a human or a tree, although occasionally, there may be barren texts just as there are sterile humans" (Al-Ghadami, 1993).

To shed further light on metacriticism, the reader should not assume that its function is solely oppositional or aimed at identifying errors within literary criticism. Instead, it also illuminates the foundations of the critical school. It deconstructs the concepts of literary criticism to examine the ideological elements within theoretical claims, revealing the nature of the cultural, social, and political influences that shaped its contextual framework (Muhammad, 2009).

For a precise and direct definition of metacriticism, reference should be made to Jaber Asfour's definition in his



book *Modern Theories* (Asfour, n.d.). He describes metacriticism, or explicative criticism, as a body of writings that review critical activity in practice from descriptive, interpretive, and evaluative perspectives. This discourse does not depart from the mechanisms employed by critical discourse itself, but what distinguishes metacriticism is its evaluation of the critical corpus within a framework based on rereading the critical texts, which Ali Harb terms "reading the reading." Todorov's attempt in his book *Criticism and Criticism* represents one of the earliest endeavors in this field. Again, the reader should not assume that metacriticism functions only through opposition and the exposure of errors within literary criticism but rather also seeks to shed greater light on the origins of the critical school (Jouini, 2019).

It appears that this divergence and lack of agreement on a single term are due primarily to the absence of unified efforts and what Muhammad Amahwash termed "terminological criticism." He considers this criticism a central concept in the science of terminology and believes that it must be taken into account when critical terms are transferred. It enables the establishment of rules to regulate the terminological process, as it represents a field where concerns about terms and concepts converge within their general theoretical framework, relying on comprehensive critical frameworks to investigate terms and concepts within a specific scientific field. It is a study where theory and practice meet on a single level (Amahwash, 2008).

Metacriticism is criticism that regards literary criticism as a corpus in its own right, such as the criticism directed by Hamid Abu Ahmad at structuralism, alongside his

admiration for the Arabisation of modernist criticism through his reading of Dr. Abdullah al-Ghadami's *Culture of Questions*. Similarly, the criticism offered by Dr. Abd al-Aziz Hammuda in his books *The Concave Mirrors* and *The Convex Mirrors*, as well as *Exiting the Error*, discusses the procedural principles of these critical methodologies and his attempt to devise an Arab theory as an alternative to these Western methodologies that asserted themselves upon the Arab creator. Edward Said's criticism of structuralism and deconstruction is also notable, situating these within the framework of religious criticism that confines meaning within the rules of language and excludes all that relates to the social, political, and cultural realities that gave birth to the literary text.

Generally, contemporary Arab critical culture, especially in the field of metacriticism, has not gone beyond three models in analysing critical texts: the first model involves evaluating literary criticism without using the term metacriticism (unconscious practice); the second model includes works that examined critical texts while employing the term metacriticism (conscious practice without conscious theorisation); and the third, a relatively contemporary stage, involves attempts to present a clear conception of metacriticism and establish criteria for studying metacriticism as distinct from literary criticism (conscious practice with conscious theorisation). This stage can be considered the actual foundation of Arab metacriticism (Al-Shandudi, 2016).

2. Procedural tools in the process of metacriticism:

What Hamid Lahmidani presents in his book *The Magic of the Subject: On Thematic Criticism in Narrative and Poetry* can



be considered within this framework, which seeks to “establish a general methodology applicable to all practices of Metacriticism. According to Lahmidani, the metacritic is obliged to arm themselves with a set of epistemological tools enabling comprehensive mastery of the foundations of critical methodologies. The field in which the metacritic operates, while attempting to grasp the procedures of reading within literary criticism, is not only concerned with creative texts but also with what is called the ‘epistemological field.’ For this reason, Lahmidani deems it necessary to define methodological controls through which Arab metacritics can regulate their critical practices” (Jouini, 2019).

Metacriticism operates at a distinct level of epistemological inquiry, and anyone interested in it must thoroughly understand its principles and mechanisms, thereby distinguishing it from methodologies dedicated to the study of literature. Metacriticism is concerned with critiquing the process of creativity rather than the creativity itself. Therefore, this fact must be taken into account in any discussion of its specific methodology (Lahmidani, 2014).

The methodology of metacriticism generally revolves around three essential issues. The first principle requires the study of the "objectives," which aim to determine the method employed during the analysis of critical texts, especially those readings lacking methodological preambles, as Lahmidani expresses. This step also enables the assessment of the coherence of the methodological theory itself and its compatibility with the original foundations, considering that there might be modifications, additions, or omissions of some aspects derived from it.

The second principle involves identifying the "studied corpus," a fundamental process in metacriticism wherein the metacritic determines the nature and value of the literary texts under study and their suitability for the methodology applied by the critic to their critical corpus. Finally, the analysis process is defined by what Lahmidani calls "reading practices." This process should not be arbitrary so that the metacritic does not dominate the critical texts; instead, it must be governed by procedural mechanisms and tools (Jouini, 2019).

The first tool the metacritic must utilise when applying this mechanism is the "description tool." Lahmidani stated, "Metacriticism, owing to its specialised focus on reflecting upon literary critical methodologies both theoretically and applied, is compelled to use the tool of description; it is the primary means of examining critical works that study literary arts. The constructive descriptive aspect is the alternative that allows breaching the world of novel critical trends as well as penetrating the accompanying analytical practices" (Lahmidani, 2014).

The importance of description, according to Lahmidani, lies in the critic's selection of the appropriate perspective from which to approach the text. This choice later plays a fundamental role in the "hermeneutic process," which some critics adopting textual methodologies consider an unnecessary stage in their analysis of literary texts (Jouini, 2019).

Hamid Lahmidani also considers "aesthetic evaluation" an important tool for metacritics within this practice, especially in Arab culture, which places great emphasis on the artistic aspect when engaging with literary texts. This stage depends on the results previously produced by the



phases of description and interpretation. Following these three stages, Lahmidani terms "validation" a phase in which an idea is evaluated regarding the epistemic value generated from a particular analytical structure on the basis of its descriptive system and associated persuasive means. Ultimately, this leads to the interpretation or determination of the artistic value of the studied work. Lahmidani categorises the procedural steps used by the metacritic, objectives, corpus, and critical practice under the method of "thematic criticism." This method serves to study selected critical corpora by employing structuralism, psychoanalysis, and formalism while simultaneously emphasising the thematic critic's use of intuitive capacity and rejecting adherence to any particular ideology (Jouini, 2019).

Lahmidani states, "In reality, the thematic critic, owing to his employment of many outcomes from other methodologies, constantly attempts to evade restrictions. It can be said that the principle of freedom enjoyed by the practitioner of thematic criticism is the only constant in this method" (Lahmidani, 2014). He also asserts, "If we were to ultimately define the ideal of criticism, we would say it comprises methodological rigour (linked to techniques and their actualisation) and contemplative freedom (which allows one to be liberated from all methodological constraints)" (Lahmidani, 2014).

In my view, rereading critical efforts through another critical lens, known as metacriticism, is a crucial approach to shaping the trajectory of modern Arab criticism. This second approach (metacriticism) does not allow the first (criticism) to proceed unthinkingly, and it thus does not absolve critics of responsibility for the interpretations they offer of literary

creativity. Consequently, treating critical discourse as a form of creativity is a meaningful process that can achieve greater critical discipline. This has positive effects on the literary movement as a whole in the Arab world, as this approach (metacriticism) excludes what is alien to the monitoring of this movement, establishing what aligns with its aesthetics and deepening its roots (Ibrahim, 2022).

3. Acceptance of Modern Critical Methodologies:

As a result of the openness to Western thought, several modern critical methodologies emerged in the West, many Arab critics of which were found to be new tools and innovative approaches for analysing literary texts. One primary reason for the acceptance of these methodologies was their ability to transcend traditional criticism, which often concentrated on the historical, social, or biographical aspects of authors and was no longer sufficient to comprehend the complexities of modern literary texts. Modern methodologies offer more precise and in-depth analytical tools, allowing critics to focus on the text as an independent structure and on the mechanisms of meaning production within it. There was also a widespread sense that Arab criticism needed to keep pace with global developments in literary criticism; thus, these methodologies represented a step towards modernising Arab criticism and placing it on an equal footing with its Western counterpart.

Furthermore, these literary methodologies are distinguished by their possession of rigorous theoretical and conceptual frameworks, providing critics with clear methodological tools to engage with texts beyond impressionistic judgments. A group of prominent critics emerged who adopted these modern Western critical



approaches, applying them to Arabic texts or contributing to their adaptation and development. Among the most notable are Jaber Asfour, Abdel Fattah Kilito, Kamal Abu Deeb, Muhammad Muftah, and Salah Fadl, who are regarded as pioneers in introducing modern critical methodologies to Egypt and the Arab world. Fadl has made significant contributions to comparative criticism, structuralism, and stylistics, and one of his structuralist studies will be highlighted.

4. Salah Fadl's study of Amal Dunqul's poetry:

Salah Fadl applied structuralist methodology to the poetry of Amal Dunqul, although he modified its principles to suit the nature and artistic and poetic characteristics of Arabic poetry. Fadl proposed adjustments to two main principles: the substitutive axis and the contextual axis.

He argues that when these axes are applied to poetry, their concepts should not be confined to a simple linguistic level but instead extended to include several levels. From his perspective, the substitutive axis involves three aspects. First, referring signs are linked to the phonetic-musical dimension through what was once called suggestion, which fundamentally emerges from the transformation of sound into meaning, whereby the musical impact of the word determines its semantic rhythm. Second, replacing one contiguous word with another from a different system, which surprises and shocks the reader, even if no metaphor of any kind arises, because it involves the inclusion of the contrary and the breaking of the continuity. Third, ordinary direct expression is rejected, and embodied images are seized, considering each image a symbolic substitute for one

or more prose sentences that may partially convey its concept even if they do not convey its entire significance (Ibrahim, 2022).

The forms of contextual movement are classified into simple and complex forms as follows: First, the simplest form relies on an event based on a sequential temporal background, progressing through a simple narrative succession of this event; this is also the poorest form. Second, more commonly, it consists of various movements relying on the technique of relatively distant scenes, governed by a precise rhythm and a crystallised central objective that ensures the coherence of its composition. Third, the unity of this rhythm is sometimes unclear even upon intellectual contemplation, leaving the effect ambiguous (Ibrahim, 2022).

Salah Fadl's study is founded on two fundamental ideas from modern structuralist criticism. The first holds that the production of meaning in poetry depends on the conflict between narrative and lyrical structures, considering that the narrative structure relies on the contextual axis. In contrast, the lyrical structure relies on the substitutive axis. The second idea posits that the interaction between these two reveals the "mechanism" of the poetic text, manifested in the emergence of balanced elements from phonetic and semantic perspectives at corresponding points in the poem, ensuring the production of its meaning and guaranteeing its unity (Fadl).

To demonstrate this, Dr. Salah Fadl presents random excerpts from Amal Dunqul's *Commentary on What Happened*, selecting passages from various poems. In the poem "Excerpts from the Book of the Dead," Amal Dunqul writes:

Every morning



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I open the tap tired,
Washing in clear water,
Therefore, the water falls on my hand... blood,
When
I sit down to eat, reluctantly:
I see in the circles of the dishes
Clusters... clusters...
With wide-open mouths and eyes (Fadl).

The critic's reading of this passage relies on the substitutive axis, which ignites the conflict within the text. He stated, "The exchange between water and food on one hand, and blood and skulls on the other, each present simultaneously, is what triggers the dramatic conflict between the unconscious and conscious levels of life in the poetic situation" (Fadl). In other words, the critic exploited the element of substitution among words in their various groups to reveal the paradox between different realities of life. This constitutes true creativity: allowing the facets of life to permeate the fabric of the poem, but not as they are; instead, they are enveloped in the aesthetic veil whose logic contradicts the logic of lived reality (Ibrahim, 2022).

As an example under the contextual axis, Amal Dunqul's poem *Blacksmithing Befits Qutr al-Nada* is presented. Qutr al-Nada was Asma bint Khumrawiya, the daughter of Ahmad ibn Tulun, who was married by her father to the Abbasid Caliph al-Mu'tadid. The poem begins with the chorus:

Chorus:
Qutr al-Nada... O Egypt
Qutr al-Nada in captivity
Qutr al-Nada
Qutr al-Nada

Voice and chorus:

... Khumrawiya lay upon the lake of mercury

In his nap's sleep

Who will rescue this imprisoned princess?

Who, do you think, will rescue her?

With the sword

Or... with cunning? (Fadl)

The conflict here is based on the rhythmic opposition between the chorus and the voice, which is resolved only through the musical and visual integration of both elements. The poet effectively employs two expressive mechanisms to illustrate the eruption of this dramatic conflict between sounds: first, rhythm, and second, the multiplicity of voices within the poetic passage and indeed within the entire text. This interplay between multiple voices and music is a distinctive feature of Amal Dunqul's poetry, stemming from his reliance on the eruptive contextual axis (Ibrahim, 2022).

Salah Fadl did not limit himself to isolated excerpts but proceeded to apply the principles of the structuralist methodology to an entire poem. This was intended to ground these principles, consolidate them, and confirm their suitability for study. He emphasises the virtue of the fusion between the substitutive and contextual axes within the poetic fabric, stating: "Whenever a poem consists of a series of movements and allows an embrace of both the substitutive and contextual levels, it appears to achieve the greatest poetic performance strength. This occurs because such a poem produces productive contact with the deep structure. Conversely, if it follows a simple contextual pattern or completely lacks one, it fails to reach this level" (Fadl).



Critic Dusuki Ibrahim, in his reading of Salah Fadl's criticism of Amal Dunqul's poetry, noted that Dr Fadl derives his reading methodology from the text itself rather than imposing it externally. Each text, with its artistic aesthetics, possesses an appropriate methodology for its study. This quality is fundamental to the literary critic, who grants the text the ultimate authority in choosing its study method. Dr. Fadl affirms this by stating, "It suffices to pause here to establish the methodology and indicate its potential application, confident that each poem generates its own code, through which its unique message is embodied in its very structure" (Ibrahim, 2022).

Salah Fadl did not rely on all the procedural principles of the structuralist methodology in his reading but focused on two principles only: utilising the substitutive and contextual axes on the one hand and the idea of the interplay of linguistic elements on the other. This approach is valid, as it is impossible to apply all procedural techniques of any methodology to the study of a text; the aesthetics of the text determine which procedural application is favoured and which is excluded (Ibrahim, 2022).

This flexibility is among the reasons many critics have welcomed and adopted modern critical methodologies, as it enables them to adapt and modify these approaches to suit Arabic poetic texts, both modern and classical in character. For example, Dr. Salah Fadl opened broad avenues for diverse and distinctive studies through the significant modifications he introduced to the substitutive axis (Ibrahim, 2022).

Dr. Fadl was also able to interpret the text internally, reaching its external meaning. This is the correct critical

approach: for the critic to move from the inside out, allowing the linguistic fabric that organises the inner structure of the text to reveal its meaning without entering the text with preconceived notions. This approach is affirmed by structuralism (Ibrahim, 2022). Moreover, Fadl did not close the text onto itself as linguistic structuralism prescribes but interpreted many texts by also employing external factors in interpreting the poetic text (Ibrahim, 2022).

The crisis of the modernists:

Critic Abd al-Aziz Hammuda, in his book *The Concave Mirrors*, points to the ongoing oscillation experienced by these critics, characterised by their difficulty in reaching consensus on the identity of their modernity. They waver between claiming authenticity and constructing an Arab modernity distinct from Western modernity in its concepts and critical terminology. However, their writings consistently reveal an apparent influence, if not outright borrowing, from Western modernity, as understood in its original sense. This constitutes the core crisis of Arab modernists, a crisis affirmed by Shukri Ayad in his discussion of the phenomenon of Arab modernity (Hammuda, 1998).

5. Modernity that Rejects the Old and Arab Modernity that Reads Heritage Structurally:

Shukri Ayad asserts that Arab modernity possesses an ideological facet as a revolution of the elite. Both Arab and Western modernity aim to deliberately dismantle the old order, which entails a categorical rejection of previous artistic traditions and even the very notion of tradition itself, emphasising continuous movement in art akin to the perpetual revolution in politics. However, this stance places



some Arab structuralists, or rather most of them, in a position where they contradict the fundamental principles of modernity and themselves, as they champion both authenticity and contemporaneity. They attempt to reread heritage through a modernist lens or extrapolate modernity from some aspects of Arab cultural heritage (Hammuda, 1998).

The price paid by Arab modernists is high, chiefly costing them their credibility. Advocacy for authenticity undermines modernity, which is founded on a Renaissance and futuristic vision. More importantly, reading creative heritage and extrapolating linguistic and critical heritage to affirm modernist assertions in traditions returns us to the square, represented by the generality of defining modernity in its Arab version. Extrapolating modernist assertions from heritage disrupts the organic triangle of modernity, collapsing one of its sides—the new reality introduced by contemporary changes. If, through rereading heritage from the vantage point of authenticity, we claim that a poet from the first century AH and a thinker from the tenth century AH were modernist thinkers, then every writer throughout the eras of literature and critical thought becomes a modernist writer again. This begs the following question: why all the uproars then? (Hammuda, 1998).

In summary, the shift toward Western modernity and postmodernity created a void as much as it affirmed one. The slogan of epistemological rupture with heritage created a void filled by adopting Western thought as an alternative. Simultaneously, the modernist shift implied a lack of mature linguistic and critical thought in the Arab cultural arena. Moreover, the disorder that came with modernity and

postmodernity created and reinforced yet another new void (Hammuda, *The Concave Mirrors: Toward an Arab Critical Theory*, 2001).

Rejection of Modern Critical Methodologies:

With the widespread diffusion and diversification of modern critical methodologies emerging from the West, which focus extensively on the text itself and its internal structure, a current set of critics arose who either rejected or expressed reservations about these approaches for various reasons. These critics argue that such methodologies may be unsuitable for Arabic literature and its unique characteristics or that they overlook important aspects of literary work and its cultural context. The reasons for rejection by some critics can be summarised under the notion of methodological alienation: these modern methodologies, developed within Western cultural and philosophical contexts, may not align with the nature, values, and cultural and religious specificities of Arabic literature. Moreover, their neglect of the text's context leads to an incomplete understanding of the literary work. The complexity and ambiguity in their terminology and concepts can also alienate the general reader from comprehending the critical discourse.

This prompted Dr. Muhammad Abd al-Muttalib to state the following: "In our view, the real issue with this applied approach is that its foundations and tools were derived from non-Arabic texts, and thus it needs to be adapted to gain validity in dealing with poetic texts. I am a firm believer that each language has particularities that almost close in on themselves even if they share general principles" (Ibrahim, 2022).

Many voices have emerged in the Arab critical scene, expressing caution, rejection, or calls for careful engagement



and adaptation of modern critical methodologies to the Arab context. Among the most prominent are Abbas Mahmoud al-Aqqad, Muhammad Mandur, Taha Husayn, Jaber Asfour, and Abdel Malik Martaz. These critics and others did not always categorically reject modern methodologies. However, they held a variety of positions ranging from reservations and calls for scrutiny to emphasise the preservation of Arab cultural and literary identity in response to incoming intellectual currents.

6. Moderation in Engaging with Modern Methodologies:

Three main approaches have emerged for dealing with critical heritage: one calling for an epistemological break with the past as a prerequisite for achieving modernity and updating the Arab mind; a second rejecting this break and warning against being dazzled by Western intellectual achievements, viewing modernity and postmodernity as forms of new control; and a third moderate approach recognising that our relationship with heritage involves both connection and disconnection simultaneously. Some within this moderate group return to the past to establish the legitimacy of the present rather than that of the past, meaning that modernisation and modernity constitute the actual starting point for this faction (Hammuda, *The Concave Mirrors: Toward an Arab Critical Theory*, 2001).

Some critics have adopted a moderate stance toward modern critical methodologies. Abd al-Aziz Hammuda states in his book, *The Concave Mirrors*, that a healthy, moderate methodology, which rejects both breaking with the past and its sanctification, was affirmed by several Arab intellectuals at the height of the structuralist wave in the

Arab world. Among the most notable was Ezzedine Ismail, editor-in-chief of *Fosoul*, a journal closely associated with modernity and structuralism from its inception (Hammuda, 2001).

The dual rejection of both the epistemological rupture with heritage and its sanctification – meaning rejecting the closing of the door to independent reasoning – is the position adopted by the majority of modernists to varying degrees. In this respect, their stance is not fundamentally different from that of the New Criticism, founded by T.S. Eliot and his associates (Hammuda, 2001).

7. Alternative to modernity:

Dr. Abd al-Aziz Hammuda, in his book *Escaping Confusion: A Study in Textual Authority* (2003), called for the development of an Arab linguistic and literary theory rooted in full engagement with the cultural other, benefiting from all the achievements of advanced Western intellect while firmly adhering to our cultural roots. This stance rejects the binary of being either dazzled by all Western intellectual accomplishments or despising all Arab intellectual achievements. He emphasises that what comes from the West is not entirely good or entirely bad, and this balanced view equally applies to Arab rhetorical heritage (Hammuda, 2003).

Hammuda noted that the fascination of some with Western culture has led to an inability to perceive two essential truths: difference and danger. Many have overlooked the fundamental differences between much of Western modernist and postmodernist discourses, products of a specific Western civilisational and cultural context, and Arab culture, even though, for years, some have called for



the wholesale transfer of Western modernist and postmodernist concepts and terminologies, along with all their epistemological burdens, into Arab culture. The danger, the second truth unnoticed by those enamoured with Western modernity, has always been apparent: the complete transfer of Western culture was a prelude to cultural dependency and its consolidation, which was precisely planned by the West (Hammuda, 2003).

Consequently, intellectuals abandoned their leading role in enlightening the masses. They distanced themselves from the Arab street, leaving popular culture at the mercy of the dominant culture, which manipulates it as it wishes, implants its new values, and reshapes Arab consciousness. This reality has deepened Hammuda's principled apprehension about current events worldwide and his perception of what is being planned for Arab culture, some of which are already being implemented (Hammuda, 2003).

Critic Abd al-Aziz Hammuda attempted to define the time period from the beginning of the third century AH to the end of the seventh century AH as the golden age in the history of Arab rhetorical thought, as a sufficiently rich era from which to take a starting point for developing an Arab critical theory. He advocates developing a linguistic and literary theory that is no less impressive and rich than the Western theories that have captivated us. He acknowledges that this golden age of Arab rhetoric is far removed from modern scientific thought, spanning at least six--ten centuries. Therefore, while trying to establish theories in Arab rhetorical thought, we should not expect to find pure and complete theories free from impurities, contradictions, and overlaps; such a goal is impossible. The achievements of

Arab rhetoricians were often met with a mixture of wonder and admiration. However, the precedence of reason in linguistic and literary studies almost drove us to madness (Hammuda, *The Concave Mirrors: Toward an Arab Critical Theory*, 2001).

Notably, critical approaches, ranging from structuralism and new criticism to reception theory and deconstruction, have relied heavily on linguistic analysis of the text as a fundamental approach to engaging with literary creativity. This fact compels us to revisit the heritage of Arab rhetoric, which originated in the linguistic study of the Quranic text and later expanded to include poetic texts. It is not an exaggeration to say that linguistic analysis is the backbone of Arab rhetoric. Arab culture was never impoverished, nor was the Arab intellect ever backwards; what happened is that in our admiration for Western intellectual achievements, we held Arab rhetorical achievements up to concave mirrors that diminished their size and importance (Hammuda, 2001).

Conclusion:

In summary, metacriticism is a broad field where theoretical and practical aspects converge. The contributions of numerous critics have intellectually enriched this area, expanding the artistic boundaries that govern the text and opening it to new cultural horizons that aid in understanding and reconstructing the text. Arab critics engaged with modern methodologies imported from the West in two main ways: acceptance and adoption and rejection and reservation.



On the one hand, a segment of critics welcomed these methodologies with open arms, viewing them as advanced analytical tools that are compatible with the development of modern Arabic poetic creativity. These critics sought to adapt methodologies to suit the particularities of Arabic poetic texts and applied them to classical heritage texts as well. This level of acceptance stemmed from the perception that traditional criticism was no longer sufficient to grasp the complexities of modern literary texts and the need for more precise and in-depth analytical tools. Additionally, these methodologies provide rigorous theoretical and conceptual frameworks, offering critics clear methodological tools to analyse texts beyond impressionistic judgments.

They demonstrated skilful adaptation, exemplified by Salah Fadl's study of Amal Dunqul's poetry, where he modified structuralist principles (such as the substitutive and contextual axes) to suit the nature of Arabic poetry and its artistic characteristics, focusing on the conflict between the narrative and lyrical structures in producing meaning.

On the other hand, these methodologies faced rejection and reservations from other current critics, who argued that they were alien to the Arab cultural context and could lead to the neglect of important aspects of literary work and its context. Their reasons for rejection varied but centred mainly on the estrangement of the methodology. Some critics believe that these methodologies emerged within Western cultural and philosophical contexts that might not align with the nature, values, and specific cultural and religious characteristics of Arabic literature. They also criticised these methodologies for neglecting the context of the text, leading to an incomplete understanding of the literary work. Dr.

Muhammad Abd al-Muttalib expressed this reservation by affirming that every language has its own particularities, which require adapting analytical tools derived from other languages.

A moderate position also emerged in dealing with these methodologies, which rejects an epistemological rupture with heritage while simultaneously refusing sanctification. This approach views the relationship with heritage as one of both connection and disconnection simultaneously. It calls for benefiting from the achievements of the advanced Western intellect while remaining firmly rooted in Arab cultural heritage. Among the prominent advocates of this position are Ezzedine Ismail and Abd al-Aziz Hammuda, who diligently sought to develop an Arab critical theory as a direct alternative to Western methodologies. Although Hammuda was ultimately unsuccessful in fully achieving this, he emphasised the possibility of developing a linguistic and literary theory grounded in Arab rhetorical heritage that is no less impressive than Western theories. He noted that Arab rhetoric, with its linguistic analysis of the Quranic and poetic texts, contains strong foundations upon which to build. He asserted that Arab culture had never been impoverished and that the Arab intellect had never been backwards, but admiration for the West had led to an underestimation of our own achievements.



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