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Rhetoric and Literature in the Classical Arabic Tradition: From Stylistic Devices to the Literary Genres

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Abstract

This research highlights the position of rhetoric in the classical Arabic tradition, as well as several literary genres that developed during that period, particularly those with unique characteristics that distinguish them from the literature of other nations. The aim is to explain how the Arab people paid great attention to the importance of beauty and effectiveness in language to strengthen the message conveyed to the listener. In addition, this study also aims to explore the characteristics and uniqueness of several literary genres such as *asal-qasidah*, *al-khamriyyah*, *al-maqamah*, dan *al-amstal*. This research uses a descriptive qualitative approach with a text analysis method where data is taken from various references, especially those related to classical Arabic literature. The findings are as follows: 1) The Arabs have long emphasized the aspects of beauty and effectiveness in speech, even before rhetoric (*al-balagha*) became a formal academic discipline. 2) In the classical Arab tradition, there are several literary genres that are unique and distinct from those of other cultures, reflecting the creativity of Arab writers at that time.

Abstract

مستخلص

البحث

Keywords: *Rhetoric, Classical, Arabic, Literature, Literary Genres*

Keywords

كلمات

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INTRODUCTION (مقدمة)

Classical Arabic refers to the form of the Arabic language used from the pre-Islamic era until the fall of the Abbasid dynasty. Broadly speaking, historians divide this span into three periods. The first is the pre-Islamic period, commonly known as the *Jāhiliyyah*. The second is the Islamic period, which begins with the mission of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) and extends to the fall of the Umayyad dynasty in 132 AH/750 CE. The third is the Abbasid period, which is further subdivided into the First and Second Abbasid periods and concludes with the Mongol conquest of Baghdad in 656 AH/1258 CE.¹ During this period, the Arabic language was often regarded as a standard due to its distinctive strengths, both in its rich vocabulary and in the careful selection of syntactic structures that facilitate the effective conveyance of meaning, enabling it to be understood clearly and in detail by its audience.

The Arabs' concern for the aesthetic and effective use of language can be traced back to the pre-Islamic period, as evidenced by their strong appreciation for literary works such as poetry, prose, and expressive utterances that harmonize phonetic beauty with depth of meaning. Even in their daily lives, they frequently employed rhetorical techniques and metaphorical expressions, rendering communication more vivid and impactful. The principal themes of *'ilm al-balāghah* as known today can already be observed in their linguistic practices, including *tasybīh* (simile), *isti'ārah* (metaphor), and *ījāz* (conciseness). Thus, although a formalized discipline of rhetoric and stylistics had not yet emerged at the time, such elements were carefully cultivated by the Arabs to ensure that their expressions were both effective and engaging for their audience.

The revelation of the Qur'an—characterized by an exceptionally refined and aesthetically powerful style—to the Prophet Muhammad, who was renowned for his eloquence in Arabic, further intensified attention to the importance of rhetoric and linguistic beauty. This concern continued to grow and reached its peak during the Abbasid era, which witnessed the emergence of a wide range of Arabic linguistic sciences, from disciplines concerned with word and sentence structure to more advanced fields focusing on pragmatic aspects of language use. In addition to their linguistic proficiency, the Arabs—particularly in the classical period—demonstrated remarkable creativity in the literary works they produced. In general, many literary genres found in Arabic tradition can also be identified in other civilizations, such as

¹ Syaury Dhaif, *Taariikh Al-Adab Al-Araby, Al-Ashru Al-Jaahily* (Kairo: Daar Al-Maarif, n.d.), h. 14.

India, Greece, and Rome. However, several of these genres possess distinctive features that set Arab literary production apart. One such example is the *qaṣīdah*, a genre of long-form poetry that may extend to dozens or even hundreds of verses, characterized by a highly structured form and strict monorhyme scheme. Another example is *al-amthāl* (proverbs), which, although present in all cultures, exhibit a unique trait in the Arab context: a number of them originate from concrete historical events, unlike many proverbs in other traditions that emerge primarily from abstract reflection and inherited wisdom passed down through generations.

Based on the foregoing, this study undertakes an examination of rhetoric and the *adab* genre within the classical Arabic tradition. It aims to elucidate the position of rhetoric, with its diverse stylistic devices, in classical Arabic culture, as well as the sustained attention devoted by the Arabs to these aspects, which ultimately led to the development of a formal discipline of rhetoric known as *‘ilm al-balāghah*. In addition, this article seeks to introduce several genres of Arabic literature, along with their defining characteristics, stylistic features, and innovative elements. Through a comprehensive understanding of rhetoric and the literary genres of classical Arabic, this study aspires to contribute to enhancing readers’ appreciation of classical Arabic rhetoric and literature.

Several previous studies are relevant to the theme of this research. Among them is a study entitled “*Karakteristik Sastra Arab pada Masa Pra-Islam*” (Characteristics of Arabic Literature in the Pre-Islamic Period), written by Haeruddin and published in the journal *Nady Al-Adab*, Universitas Islam Negeri Hasanuddin, Makassar, in 2016. Broadly speaking, the study focuses on literary works of the pre-Islamic period, consisting of poetry and prose, with the former being more prominent at the time, although, as noted by historians of Arabic literature, only a limited number of poems from that era have been preserved in historical records. In addition, the author addresses the factors that motivated the pre-Islamic Arabs to cultivate linguistic beauty, concluding that language held a highly significant value in their society. Beyond serving as a means of communication, language was also employed to inspire martial spirit and to recount important events, particularly narratives celebrating the glory of their ancestors. The study further discusses the diversity of themes in pre-Islamic Arabic

literature, especially in the poems included in the *al-Mu‘allaqāt*, which reflect the conditions and way of life of the Arab people at the time.

Another relevant study is conducted by Cutri A. Tjalau, entitled “*Kajian Historis: Corak Sastra Arab (Zaman Jahiliyah, Shadr Islam dan Umawiyah)*” (A Historical Study of the Characteristics of Arabic Literature in the Jāhiliyyah, Early Islamic, and Umayyad Periods), published in 2023 in the journal *Assuthur*. This study examines the characteristics of Arabic literature from the pre-Islamic period through the end of the Umayyad era. Employing a historical approach, the author demonstrates that the stylistic features of both poetry and prose during this period tend to be comparable, both in terms of diction (*lafz*) and meaning. The study further highlights a notable development in both poetic and prose traditions across this period, particularly with respect to genre diversification and thematic variation.

In contrast, the present study, entitled “*Rhetoric and Literature in the Classical Arabic Tradition: From Stylistic Devices to the Genre of Adab*,” places greater emphasis on the role of rhetoric and on selected literary genres that exhibit distinctive characteristics within the classical Arabic traditions.

METHOD (طريقة \ منهج البحث)

This study employs a qualitative–descriptive approach with a text analysis method to elucidate the position of rhetoric in the classical Arabic tradition and to examine the literary genres that emerged during this period, which are considered to possess distinctive characteristics and uniqueness. The data are collected from various sources, particularly scholarly works on Arabic rhetoric and literature, including those authored by Shawqī Dayf, such as *Tārīkh al-Adab al-‘Arabī* (al-‘Aṣr al-Jāhilī), *Tārīkh al-Adab al-‘Arabī* (al-‘Aṣr al-‘Abbāsī), and *al-Balāghah: Taṭawwur wa Tārīkh*, as well as other works relevant to the research theme. The analysis is conducted through close reading of texts that address the use of eloquent and effective language in the classical Arabic tradition. Subsequently, the analysis extends to the genres of *adab* in order to identify their distinctive features, which are often shaped by the social and cultural contexts of the time.

RESEARCH RESULT (نتائج البحث)

A. Rhetoric and Its Position in the Classical Arabic Linguistic Tradition

The Arabs are renowned for their linguistic proficiency, which is not only aesthetically refined but also highly effective in captivating and persuading audiences. Their rhetorical skill and mastery of language are reflected both in everyday usage and in the literary works they produced. In Arabic, rhetoric is commonly associated with the term *al-balāghah*, which refers to the art of conveying meaning clearly and effectively in a manner that can be readily understood by the listener or reader, while taking into account the given context. The focus of *al-balāghah* extends beyond mere aesthetic beauty; it also emphasizes clarity of meaning and precision of expression.

Al-balāghah, as a formal scholarly discipline, began to develop during the Abbasid period, when a number of writers and poets—such as Ibn al-Muqaffa and Bashir ibn Burd—devoted considerable attention to key aspects of rhetoric and linguistic aesthetics. With the emergence of Muslim ibn al-Walid, efforts were made to systematize previously identified elements of stylistic beauty into an approach he termed *al-badī‘*, encompassing various forms of embellishment and stylistic variation.

At the same time, other philologists also began to compose works addressing these issues. Among them were Al-Asma'i and Abu Ubaydah. The former authored works discussing rhetorical devices such as *tajnīs* (paronomasia), *ṭibāq* (antithesis), and *iltifāt* (grammatical shift), while the latter provided analyses of sentence structures from a *balāghah* perspective, including *taqdīm wa ta'khīr* (foregrounding and postponement), *tashbīh* (simile), *kināyah* (metonymy), and *isti'ārah* (metaphor).²

Subsequently, a prominent figure, Ibn al-Mu'tazz, in his work *al-Badī‘*, undertook the task of compiling a wide range of stylistic devices that enhance texts both phonetically and semantically—elements that had previously been dispersed across the works of earlier authors. He also introduced several new features that had not been systematically recognized before. This work represents the first serious scholarly effort to document the science of *al-badī‘*, and indeed *al-balāghah* more broadly along with its various branches. During that period, the discipline of rhetoric was at times referred

² Syaḡy Dhaif, *Taarikh Al-Adab Al-Araby, Al-Ashru Al-Abbasy Al-Tsaany*, 10th ed. (Kairo: Daar Al-Maarif, 1996), h. 149–150.

to as *al-badī'* and at other times as *al-bayān*. From this, it can be understood that Ibn al-Mu'tazz's principal contribution in this work does not lie in introducing entirely unprecedented elements of *al-balāghah*, but rather in systematically gathering and organizing these elements into a single volume, whereas they had previously existed in a scattered and unsystematic form.³

The discipline of *al-balāghah* continued to develop and reached its intellectual culmination in the work of Abd al-Qahir al-Jurjani, who successfully formulated systematic theories of rhetoric, particularly in the fields of *al-ma'ānī* and *al-bayān*. His theories of *al-ma'ānī* are elaborated in his seminal work *Dalā'il al-I'jāz*, while his treatment of *al-bayān* is presented in *Asrār al-Balāghah*. It is important to note, however, that in its early stages the tripartite division of *balāghah* into *al-ma'ānī*, *al-bayān*, and *al-badī'* had not yet achieved broad scholarly consensus, particularly among scholars prior to the time of al-Jurjānī.⁴

Although *al-balāghah* as a formal discipline emerged during the Abbasid period, the Arabs of the pre-Islamic era had already attained a high level of rhetorical sophistication and linguistic artistry. In other words, they possessed exceptional skill in the art of eloquent speech, which became a defining feature of the Arabic literary tradition, as well as remarkable proficiency in articulating and defending their views. These qualities are reflected in several verses of the Qur'an. Moreover, the Prophet's miracle—the Qur'an—whose linguistic beauty is profoundly remarkable, was presented as a challenge to the Arabs of the time to produce something comparable, thereby reinforcing the view that they were masters of eloquence. A close examination of pre-Islamic poets further reveals their meticulous attention to diction, meaning, and imagery in their compositions. They extensively employed devices such as *tashbīh* (simile), *isti'ārah* (metaphor), and *muqābalah* (antithesis), along with other stylistic features that later became foundational to the systematic formulation of *'ilm al-balāghah* as it is known today.⁵

One of the pre-Islamic poets, Al-Nabighah al-Dhubyani, is renowned for his exceptional skill in composing poetry, as reflected in various aspects such as diction, the use of imagery, and the depth of meaning. In his works, each word is selected with great

³ Abdu Al-Qadir Husain, *Al-Mukhtashar Fii Taarikh Al-Balaghah* (Kairo: Daar Al-Ghariib, 2001), h. 93.

⁴ Syauby Dhaif, *Al-Balaghah Tathawwur Wa Taarikh*, 9th ed. (Kairo: Daar Al-Maarif, 1995), h. 160.

⁵ Dhaif, *Al-Balaghah Tathawwur Wa Taarikh*, h. 9–13.

care to ensure that no expression appears coarse or inappropriate to the context. Al-Nābighah also demonstrates a strong concern for meaning in every poem he composed, as evidenced by his ability to convey a wide range of ideas and reflections even when addressing relatively limited themes. His attentiveness to diction and meaning is complemented by his skillful use of imagery, particularly through stylistic devices such as *tashbīh* (simile) and *isti'ārah* (metaphor). Moreover, he was capable of introducing striking and innovative elements, often captivating his audience with vivid and imaginative expressions that left a lasting impression.⁶ The account of Al-Nabighah al-Dhubyani serves as a clear example of how the Arabs in the pre-Islamic period placed great emphasis on both the aesthetic quality and the effectiveness of speech.

Another indication that the pre-Islamic Arabs placed great emphasis on effectiveness in language use is their well-attested preference for *ījāz* (concise expression that conveys expansive meaning). As a result, their speech frequently exhibits the omission of letters, words, and even entire clauses, provided that the intended meaning remains intelligible. In other words, although *ījāz* was widely employed, its use was governed by an implicit principle: concision must not compromise the clarity or integrity of meaning.⁷

With the advent of Islam, this attention to rhetoric and linguistic beauty intensified further, owing to the eloquence of the Qur'an and the sayings of the Prophet Muhammad, which are marked by clarity, rhetorical force, and persuasive appeal. These features encouraged the Muslim community to develop an even deeper appreciation for the aesthetics of language. The language of the Qur'an itself possesses a level of eloquence that could not be matched by Arab literati of the time, while the Prophet's Hadiths contain numerous figurative expressions and employ highly refined stylistic forms, reaching the pinnacle of Arabic eloquence. This rhetorical power—so highly valued among the Arabs—was effectively utilized by the Prophet as a means of conveying his message to his audience.⁸

During the Umayyad period, social life underwent significant transformation, as people increasingly settled in major urban centers, a development that also influenced

⁶ Dhaif, *Taariikh Al-Adab Al-Araby, Al-Ashru Al-Jaahily*, h. 297–298.

⁷ Husain, *Al-Mukhtashar Fii Taariikh Al-Balaghah*, h. 7.

⁸ Abdu Al-Aziz Atiiq, *Taariikh Al-Balaghah Al-Arabiyyah* (Beirut: Daar Al-Nahdhah Al-Arabiyyah, n.d.), h. 13.

their intellectual life. This period witnessed the emergence of various political factions with differing viewpoints, such as the Kharijites, Shia Islam, Zubayrids, and supporters of the Umayyads. In addition, diverse theological groups arose, including the Murji'ah, Jabariyya, Qadariyya, and Mu'tazila. These developments led to widespread debates within society, ranging from political to theological issues.

Such factors significantly heightened public attention to rhetoric and linguistic refinement, as evidenced by the emergence of prominent figures renowned for their eloquence in oratory, such as Ziyad ibn Abihi and Al-Hajjaj ibn Yusuf. This heightened interest was not limited to the art of public speaking but also extended to poetry, which became particularly dynamic during this period. Poetic compositions—especially those centered on praise (*madh*)—flourished, driven by competition among poets to gain recognition before caliphs, governors, military commanders, and patrons. These patrons consistently rewarded poets for compositions distinguished by linguistic elegance and rhetorical excellence, thereby further stimulating the development of poetic art.⁹

B. Classical Arabic Literature Genres

In addition to their rhetorical proficiency and mastery of language, the Arabs also produced literary works distinguished by unique features and characteristics that set them apart from those of other cultures. Among these works are the following:

Al-Qaṣīdah

In the context of Arabic literature, *al-qaṣīdah* is defined as a collection of poetic verses that share a unified metrical pattern, a consistent rhyme scheme, and the same final consonant at the end of each line.¹⁰ In other words, *al-qaṣīdah* is a type of Arabic poetry composed of structured verses that maintain a consistent rhythmic flow from beginning to end, owing to the uniformity of *wazan* (meter), *qāfiyah* (rhyme), and *rawī* (final rhyme consonant). The length of *al-qaṣīdah* may extend to a hundred verses or even more.

The earliest figure credited with composing the *qaṣīdah* is Adi ibn Rabi'ah al-Taghlibi, known by al-Muhalhil and recognized as the uncle of Imru' al-Qais.

⁹ Dhaif, *Al-Balaghah Tathawwur Wa Taarikh*, h. 14–16.

¹⁰ Majdi Wahbah and Kamil Al-Muhandis, *Mu'jam Al-Mushthalahaat Al-Arabiyyah Fii Al-Lughah Wa Al-Adab*, 2nd ed. (Beirut: Maktabah Lubnaan, 1984), h. 293.

According to Al-Asma'i, he was the first poet whose work is reported to have reached thirty verses in length. Prior to this development, Arabic poetry largely took the form of *rajaz*, consisting of relatively short lines. Al-Muhalhil expanded this form into longer and more structured compositions, which were subsequently refined and rendered more artistically sophisticated by Imru' al-Qays. During the time of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), another poet, Al-Aghlab al-Ajli, further developed the *rajaz* form by extending it into longer compositions resembling the *qaṣīdah*. This tradition was later continued by Al-Ajjaj and his son Ru'ba ibn al-Ajjaj, who enhanced the aesthetic qualities of poetry in a manner comparable to the refinements introduced by Imru' al-Qays after al-Muhalhil. Thus, Arabic poetry underwent significant development, evolving from relatively simple forms into longer, more structured, and stylistically diverse compositions.¹¹

In composing a *qaṣīdah*, there exists a conventional structure that has become an established tradition, consistently applied from the opening, to the main theme, and finally to the conclusion. Each of these components possesses distinctive features that may be regarded as customary and widely accepted among poets. The following is an explanation of these elements:

a. *al-maṭla'* (Opening): As noted earlier, the *qaṣīdah* follows a distinctive and conventional structure, one of whose defining features is that it typically begins with a *maṭla'* (opening) before proceeding to the main theme, such as praise, satire, or the description of nature. This opening often evokes memories of the beloved's dwelling, now reduced to ruins and abandoned by its inhabitants. Standing amid these remnants, the poet expresses sorrow and invites the audience to share in this emotional experience. The poet then frequently recounts a journey across the desert under intense heat, for instance by vividly describing the camel that carries him. These elements of the *maṭla'* are carefully crafted and arranged with great precision before transitioning to the central theme of the poem. This careful construction is motivated by the fact that the *maṭla'*, as the opening section, constitutes the first part heard by the audience and must therefore be engaging and leave a favorable impression, as it can determine whether listeners will continue to attend to the rest of the poem. For this reason, literary critics have consistently held in high regard those poets who are able to compose an opening that is

¹¹ Mushtafa Shadiq Al-Rafi'i, *Taariikh Aaadab Al-Arab Juz 3*, 1st ed. (Beirut: Daar Al-Kutub Al-Ilmiyyah, 2000), h. 18–19.

both aesthetically refined and clear in meaning.¹² One of the most celebrated examples of a poetic opening (*maṭla'*) is found in a *qaṣīdah* by Imru' al-Qais, which reads as follows:

قفا نبك من ذكرى حبيب ومنزل * بسقط اللوى بين الدخول فحومل *

This *maṭla'* portrays how the poet is immersed in fond memories of his beloved and the dwelling that once held many shared experiences. Overcome with emotion, he calls upon his companions to weep with him, as if seeking to share his sorrow and find solace in their presence for the loss of his beloved and the desolate remains of the abandoned abode.¹³ The motif of recalling the past—often symbolized by the ruins of dwellings imbued with cherished memories—continued to be employed by poets well into the Abbasid period. However, it was not always positioned as the *maṭla'* of the *qaṣīdah*, but at times appeared in shorter poetic compositions. In addition, poets of this period introduced certain modifications by extending this imagery beyond the ruins of houses to include the remnants of palaces, which likewise evoked a sense of memory and nostalgia for the poet.¹⁴

b. Main Theme: The principal themes developed by poets in the *qaṣīdah* are highly diverse; however, they may generally be classified into three broad categories:

1. **Personal-interest *qaṣīdah*:** These are composed primarily for individual purposes and are often centered on a single theme, namely *al-madh* (praise). This is understandable, as many poets who adopt this theme aim to please the patron being praised in order to receive a reward.
2. **Social *qaṣīdah*:** In this category, the poet expresses responses to matters bearing social significance or communal values. Such themes include *al-fakhr* (boasting or pride), *al-rithā'* (elegy or lamentation), *wasf al-ḥarb* (depiction of war), as well as other topics related to social life.

¹² Yahya Al-Jabbur, *Al-Syi'ru Al-Jaahily Khasha'ishuhu Wa Funuunuhu* (Amman: Daar Majdalaway, 2015), h. 210

¹³ Ahmad Al-Zauny, *Syarh Al-Muallaqaat Al-Sab'ah* (Kairo: Daar Al-Thalaa', 2015), h. 13.

¹⁴ Syauqy Dhaif, *Taarikh Al-Adab Al-Araby, Al-Ashru Al-Abbasy Al-Awwal*, 14th ed. (Kairo: Daar Al-Maarif, 1996), h. 183.

3. **Personal *qaṣīdah*:** These compositions convey the poet's thoughts, emotions, and personal experiences. A prominent example is poetry centered on *al-ghazal* (love).¹⁵

c. Closing: Literary critics maintain that the closing section of a *qaṣīdah* holds significant rhetorical force, as it can leave a strong and lasting impression on the audience. It may be said that this final part often serves as a condensation of the poet's life experiences and reflects his broader outlook on life. Many poets—particularly in the pre-Islamic period—concluded their *qaṣīdahs* with verses containing wisdom and moral reflection. An example of this can be seen in the closing lines of a *qaṣīdah* by Imru' al-Qais, which read as follows:

هل النفس إلا متعة مستعارة * تعار فتأتي ربها فرط أشهر *

The essence of this verse is that the human soul is a transient trust, a pleasure temporarily bestowed, which, after a certain time, inevitably returns to its Creator.¹⁶

Al-Khamriyyat

Al-khamriyyah refers to a genre of poetry centered on wine, in which the poet expresses admiration for wine and its qualities, including its color, taste, effects, and the atmosphere it creates after being consumed. This theme became increasingly prominent toward the end of the Umayyad period, notably under the influence of Al-Walid II. It was further developed by poets of the Abbasid era, such as Bashar ibn Burd, Muti ibn Iyas, and Wabilah ibn al-Hubab, and later expanded more extensively by Abu Nuwas. In his hands, *al-khamriyyah* evolved into an independent poetic genre, appearing both in the form of *qaṣīdahs* and shorter poems, rather than merely constituting a subtheme within other poetic compositions.¹⁷

In fact, pre-Islamic poets also frequently incorporated wine (*khamr*) into their works; however, it was typically associated with positive values such as bravery, generosity, and self-sacrifice, as can be observed in the *Mu'allaqah* of Tarafah ibn al-Abd. When discussing this poetic theme, the name Al-A'sha cannot be overlooked, as

¹⁵ Abdu Al-Halim Hifny, *Mathla' Al-Qashidah Al-Arabiyyah* (Kairo: Al-Haiah Al-Mishriyyah, 1987), h. 37.

¹⁶ Al-Jabbur, *Al-Syi'ru Al-Jahily Khasha'ishuhu Wa Funuunuhu*, h. 221.

¹⁷ Wahbah and Al-Muhandis, *Mu'jam Al-Mushthalahaat Al-Arabiyyah Fii Al-Lughah Wa Al-Adab*, h. 163.

many of his *qaṣīdah* openings—following the *ghazal* prelude—feature extended descriptions of wine and its effects on the soul and emotions of those who consume it. Owing to the quality of his poetry, literary scholars have greatly admired his verses, and some have even regarded him as the finest pre-Islamic poet when composing under the influence of wine and portraying it poetically. One example of his verse describing the effects of wine is as follows:

لا يستفقون وهي راهنة * إلا بهات وإن علوا وإن نهلوا *

The verse above depicts a group of individuals who never tire of indulging in wine; their awareness does not return from its effects except when they ask the attendant for another serving. In other words, they remain insatiable and unwilling to cease, regardless of how much they have already consumed.¹⁸

The advent of Islam, with its noble teachings, also influenced the themes addressed in literary works. As noted by scholars of Arabic literary history, the development of poetry in the early Islamic period generally appeared to slow, due to a relative decline in attention to poetry compared to the pre-Islamic era. This, however, does not imply the absence of poetic production during this time. Even poems dealing with wine can still be found, including those composed after its prohibition. The account of Abu Mihjan al-Thaqafi—a poet well known for his fondness for wine, which he vividly expressed in his poetry—serves as evidence that this theme continued to persist among poets of the period.¹⁹

As noted earlier, the presence of wine poetry (*khamriyyāt*) became prominent once again during the time of Al-Walid II; however, it was Abu Nuwas, an Abbasid-era poet, who developed this theme more extensively. The relatively permissive social climate and the hedonistic tendencies that characterized the period contributed significantly to the widespread circulation of wine poetry. This trend reached its peak during the reign of Al-Amin, who transformed the caliphal court into a setting devoted to the enjoyment of wine and other worldly pleasures, often in the company of Abu Nuwās.

¹⁸ Dhaif, *Taarikh Al-Adab Al-Araby, Al-Ashru Al-Jaahily*, h. 355–356.

¹⁹ Mahmud Al-Azab, *Al-Hubb Wa Al-Khamar*, 1st ed. (Giza: Hallaa, 2005), h. 23.

Al-Amīn's fascination with wine and entertainment led him to encourage poets to depart from the conventional opening of Arabic poetry—which typically began with evocations of the beloved and abandoned dwellings—and to replace it with vivid depictions of intoxicating wine. This shift marked a significant turning point in the development of classical Arabic poetic tradition.²⁰

Despite his unconventional and often hedonistic lifestyle, Abu Nuwas is regarded as one of the most gifted poets of his time. He was endowed with exceptional skill in crafting highly refined poetry, the result of his sustained and rigorous engagement with classical Arabic language and poetic traditions. In his works, Abu Nuwās is considered to have successfully balanced tradition and innovation, introducing significant developments in both thematic content and stylistic expression while continuing to respect and draw upon established classical conventions. His innovations are particularly evident in poems dealing with *al-hijā'* (satire), *al-ghazal* (love), and *khamriyyāt* (wine poetry).²¹ Among the innovations introduced by Abu Nuwas, poetry centered on wine (*khamriyyāt*) stands out as the most prominent. Given the breadth and quality of his contributions to this theme, it would not be an overstatement to regard him as the leading figure of *khamriyyāt* in Arabic literature.

As an intellectually astute poet, Abu Nuwas recognized the necessity of change and innovation in poetry, which he regarded as no longer fully relevant to the social realities of his time. He sought to encourage a shift toward new poetic directions that corresponded more closely to contemporary life, viewing poetry as a genuine reflection of lived experience. In his view, the conventions of earlier poets—who frequently depicted tents, deserted dwellings, camels, and goats—had lost their relevance in the context of Baghdad's urban civilization and its opulence. Accordingly, he advocated for poetry that instead portrayed palaces, gardens, wine, and female singers, aligning literary expression with the cultural and social milieu of his era.²² The following is an example of a wine poem (*khamriyyah*) by Abu Nuwas:

واشرب على الورد من الحمراء كالورد * لا تبك ليلي ولا تطرب إلى هند *
أجدته حمرتها في العين والحد * كأسا إذا انحدرت من حلق شاربها *

²⁰ Dhaif, *Taarikh Al-Adab Al-Araby, Al-Ashru Al-Abbasy Al-Awwal*, h. 179.

²¹ Dhaif, *Taarikh Al-Adab Al-Araby, Al-Ashru Al-Abbasy Al-Awwal*, h. 227.

²² Toha Husain, *Hadits Al-Arbi'a' Juz 2*, 12th ed. (Kairo: Daar Al-Maarif, 1993), h. 90.

* في يد الجارية ممشوقة القد
 * فالحمر ياقوتة والكأس لؤلؤة
 * خمرًا فما لك من سكرين من بد
 * تسقيك من يدها خمرًا ومن فمها
 * شيء خصصت به من بينهم وحدي
 * لي نشوتان وللندمان واحدة

The poem above demonstrates how Abu Nuwas deliberately departs from the classical convention of opening with nostalgic recollections of a beloved and the ruins of an abandoned dwelling, even going so far as to reject such lamentation altogether. It also attests to his boldness in addressing themes that had previously been considered taboo. Commenting on this poem, Taha Hussein observes that it is in fact difficult to explicate in detail the aesthetic qualities of Abu Nuwās's work. Nevertheless, one can perceive a harmonious integration of diction and meaning: at the level of expression, the poem is free from foreign or awkward lexical elements, while at the level of meaning, it avoids obscurity and remains readily intelligible.²³

Al-Maqāmah

The art of *al-maqāmah* first emerged during the Abbasid period, specifically in the fourth century AH. Nevertheless, the term *al-maqāmah* itself had been known much earlier. In the pre-Islamic period, it referred to a *majlis*, or a gathering place where people assembled. During the Islamic period, its meaning developed further, coming to denote a setting in which an individual would stand before a caliph or another prominent figure to deliver counsel or exhortation. Subsequently, the term underwent a broader semantic expansion and came to signify a formal discourse of an instructive and admonitory nature, delivered before a public audience.²⁴

As a genre of prose, *al-maqāmah* may be described as a form of short narrative that recounts the adventures of a fictional protagonist, typically presented through the voice of an equally fictional narrator. The central character is often portrayed as a cunning trickster who employs various stratagems to secure modest gains, and thus the narratives frequently revolve around themes such as begging, deception, and manipulation. Although *al-maqāmah* does not necessarily adhere to a tightly unified

²³ Husain, *Hadits Al-Arbi'a' Juz 2*, h. 91.

²⁴ Syauqy Dhaif, *Al-Maqamah*, 3rd ed. (Kairo: Daar Al-Maarif, n.d.), h. 7.

theme and its characters are not intended to represent historical reality, it relies heavily on linguistic virtuosity and stylistic variation to captivate its audience.²⁵

Dr. Umar Farrukh outlines several characteristics of *al-maqāmah*, as follows:

- a. The events narrated in *al-maqāmah* are usually confined to a single setting and rarely involve changes in location.
- b. Each collection of *maqāmāt* is narrated by a single transmitter, creating an impression of authenticity and narrative continuity.
- c. Each collection features one main protagonist, a fictional character often portrayed as a skilled trickster who is eloquent in speech and possesses considerable knowledge in religion, language, and literature.
- d. The central ideas or themes of *al-maqāmah* are typically unique, engaging, and sometimes bold, but they often do not align strictly with conventional moral values.
- e. Each *maqāmah* functions as an independent narrative unit; individual stories are not directly connected in terms of plot, despite sharing the same author, narrator, and main character.
- f. The themes of *al-maqāmah* are diverse, including literary topics, jurisprudential discussions (*fiqh*), humorous elements, expressions of enthusiasm, and even references to wine.
- g. The titles of individual *maqāmāt* are usually derived from geographical locations or place names where the events occur, such as *al-Maqāmah al-Dimashqiyyah*, *al-Maqāmah al-Kūfiyyah*, and *al-Maqāmah al-Baghdādiyyah*.
- h. *Al-maqāmah* involves two distinct entities: the fictional protagonist within the story and the author who constructs the narrative. The latter demonstrates extensive knowledge of Arabic linguistic sciences, mastery of various literary arts, sharp intellectual ability, and an optimistic attitude toward challenges.
- i. The art of *al-maqāmah* is characterized by an extensive use of ornate language, often perceived as excessive, including devices such as *saj'* (rhymed prose), *jinās* (paronomasia), *ṭibāq* (antithesis), and other rhetorical features associated with *'ilm al-balāghah* that emphasize stylistic beauty and syntactic elegance.

²⁵ Hanna Al-Faakhury, *Ta'rikh Al-Adab Al-Araby*, 10th ed. (Beirut: Al-Maktabah Al-Buulisiyyah, 1980), h. 731

- j. Although *al-maqāmah* is written in prose form, it is sometimes interspersed with poetic excerpts, either composed by the author of the *maqāmah* himself or quoted from other poets.²⁶

Among the most prominent names associated with the art of *al-maqāmah* are several literary figures who are regarded as its most influential practitioners. Foremost among them is Badi' al-Zaman al-Hamadhani, who is considered the pioneer of *al-maqāmah* in the fourth century AH and the first to employ this term for the narratives he composed and delivered in the Mosque of Nishapur. His full name is Abu al-Faḍl Aḥmad ibn al-Ḥusayn ibn Yaḥyā. He was born in 358 AH in Hamadhān, a city located in western Iran. He lived a life of travel, moving from one place to another, and eventually died in 398 AH. As a literary figure, al-Hamadhānī produced works in various genres, including *rasā'il* (epistles) and poetry collections. Nevertheless, it is *al-maqāmah* that secured his lasting fame, as he composed no fewer than fifty-one *maqāmāt*. These narratives are largely dominated by themes of deception used as a means of survival by the main character, Abu al-Faḥ al-Iskandarī, and are narrated by 'Īsā ibn Hishām.²⁷

Although *al-maqāmah* is a prose narrative form, the works of Badi' al-Zaman al-Hamadhani do not primarily focus on plot development. Rather, their main objective is to showcase a style of expression capable of captivating listeners through linguistic elegance and rhetorical beauty, thereby producing a strong aesthetic effect on the audience. His *maqāmāt* are typically embellished with popular rhetorical devices of the time, including poetic insertions. Although he does not employ verse consistently in every instance, he rarely omits it entirely. The verses he incorporates are characterized by their natural fluency and aesthetic harmony, without any sense of artificiality, which allows them to flow smoothly and effortlessly within the prose narrative.²⁸

Another renowned figure in this genre is Al-Hariri of Basra, who composed a number of *maqāmāt* toward the end of the fifth century AH. His works are widely known and have received extensive acclaim, with some literary scholars even considering them superior to those of Badi' al-Zaman al-Hamadhani. Al-Ḥarīrī's full

²⁶ Umar Farruukh, *Al-Rasaail Wa Al-Maqamaat*, 2nd ed. (Beirut: Munaymanah, 1950), h. 22–24.

²⁷ Hannaa Al-Faakhury, *Al-Jaami' Fii Taarikh Al-Adab Al-Araby, Al-Adab Al-Qadiim*, 1st ed. (Beirut: Daar Al-Jail, 1986), h. 614.

²⁸ Dhaif, *Al-Maqamah*, h. 32–33.

name is Abū Muḥammad al-Qāsim ibn ‘Alī ibn Muḥammad ibn ‘Uthmān al-Ḥarīrī al-Baṣrī al-Ḥarāmī. He was born in Musyān, on the outskirts of Basra, in 446 AH, and passed away in 516 AH, according to several historical sources.²⁹ Al-Ḥarīrī composed fifty *maqāmāt*, Al-Hariri of Basra, which revolve around themes of deception and various strategies of earning a livelihood through different means. The central character of these narratives is Abū Zayd al-Sarūjī, who is renowned for his eloquence and mastery of language, while the narrator who recounts his stories is al-Ḥārith ibn Hammām.³⁰

Similar to Badi' al-Zaman al-Hamadhani, the focus of Al-Hariri of Basra in composing *al-maqāmah* is not primarily on narrative plot development. As a scholar of the Arabic language, he had a strong commitment to preserving the purity of Arabic and transmitting it to younger generations, considering it not only the language of the Qur'an but also the language of ancestral heritage. Accordingly, his collection of narratives is rich in classical vocabulary, serving as evidence of the breadth and expressive capacity of the Arabic language, particularly in meeting the stylistic and artistic needs of literary scholars.³¹

Al-Hariri of Basra is also renowned for his remarkable precision in word and sentence selection, which has left both literary scholars and critics deeply impressed by his vivid and highly engaging stylistic expression. His use of rhyme patterns is remarkably natural, appearing seamless and without any sense of artificiality. His ability to position words with exacting precision and to harmonize them with surrounding expressions can be likened to a skilled musician who masterfully arranges musical notes into a coherent and harmonious composition.³²

Al-Hikam and Al-Amsāl

In the classical Arabic linguistic tradition, two terms are commonly recognized, namely *al-ḥikam* and *al-amsāl*, both of which can be understood as proverbs. Proverbs are considered an important component of Arabic literature because, like poetry, they are widely used in everyday life and contain moral values and wisdom that serve as

²⁹ Ahmad Amin Mushtafa, *Abu Muhammad Al-Hariry Shaahib Al-Maqamaat* (Kairo: Daar Al-Mishriyyah Al-Lubnaaniyyah, 2012), h. 9.

³⁰ Al-Faakhury, *Taarikh Al-Adab Al-Araby*, h. 731.

³¹ Mushtafa, *Abu Muhammad Al-Hariry Shaahib Al-Maqamaat*, h. 81.

³² Dhaif, *Al-Maqamah*, h. 66.

profound counsel. The content of proverbs generally derives from long life experiences combined with careful reflection, resulting in wisdom that functions as guidance for living. In general, every culture possesses proverbs that are transmitted across generations. However, the Arab tradition is distinctive in that some of its proverbs are rooted in specific historical events, rather than merely being abstract expressions of advice and wisdom. From this perspective, proverbs in the Arab tradition can be categorized into two types:

a. Al-ḥikam: it refers to proverbs that are not based on specific historical events. This type of proverb is often adopted by the Arabs from sources such as the Torah, as well as from other civilizations including India, Persia, and Rome. In addition, the Arabs also possess proverbs inherited from their own ancestors and from figures known for their wisdom, such as Aksum ibn Saifi.

b. Al-amsāl: It refers to proverbs that are uniquely found in Arab culture and are typically born out of well-known historical events among the Arabs.³³

The following is an example of *al-amthāl* in Arabic tradition: It is narrated that a young boy once saw his father planting something in a garden, which after several months produced delicious and sweet grapes. This led the boy to assume that anything planted would inevitably yield grapes. One day, he found a thorny plant seed and planted it. After a few days, thorns began to grow from its branches. His father then said to him:

إنك لا تجني من الشوك العنب

This means, “You will never harvest grapes from a thorny plant.” This story became well known among the Arabs and was subsequently established as a proverb used to address those who expect goodness from people who do not possess such qualities. It is also directed at individuals who commit wrongdoing while still hoping to receive a good reward in return.³⁴

Another example of *al-amthāl* is as follows: It is narrated that there was once a king from Himyar who was extremely cruel to his subjects and would constantly seize their possessions. A female soothsayer warned him that his people would soon kill him, but the king paid no attention to her warning. One day, the king’s wife heard the voice

³³ Jurjy Zaidan, *Taarikh Aaadab Al-Lughah Al-Arabiyyah* (UEA: Muassasah Hindawy, 2017), h. 62.

³⁴ Waalid Naashif, *Asyhar Al-Amtaal Al-Arabiyyah* (Damaskus: Daar Al-Kitab Al-Araby, 2011), h. 16.

of a beggar and told her husband that she felt compassion for the man, even though they themselves lived in comfort and prosperity. She also expressed fear that one day their subjects, who had once been loyal followers, might turn against them. In response, the king said:

جوع كلبك يتبعك

The statement above means, “Let your dog remain hungry, and it will continue to follow you.” This proverb is commonly used to illustrate that a person’s dependence on others can be used as a means of control or influence over them.³⁵

In the classical Arabic linguistic tradition, *al-amsāl* are regarded as having reached the highest level of linguistic beauty and rhetorical excellence (*al-balāghah*). This is due to four distinctive features: concise and non-redundant phrasing, precise meaning that makes the intended message easily comprehensible, the use of elegant similes, and the employment of figurative expressions that convey profound and layered meanings.³⁶

CONCLUSION (خلاصة \ خاتمة)

From the discussion above, several important points can be concluded as follows:

1. Although *ilm al-balāghah* (rhetoric) only emerged as a formal academic discipline during the Abbasid period, this does not imply that earlier Arabs were indifferent to linguistic beauty and communicative effectiveness. On the contrary, they demonstrated remarkable skill in selecting appropriate words, meanings, and stylistic expressions, both in everyday speech and in their literary compositions.
2. The creativity of classical Arabic writers is reflected in the diversity of literary genres that developed during that period. One example is the *qaṣīdah*, a form of poetry consisting of dozens or even hundreds of verses with a consistent rhyme scheme from beginning to end. In addition, other distinctive genres also emerged, such as *al-khamriyyah*, *al-maqāmah*, and *al-amthāl*, each possessing its own unique stylistic and thematic characteristics.

³⁵ Naashif, *Asyhar Al-Amtsaal Al-Arabiyyah*, h. 38.

³⁶ Al-Maidany, *Majma' Al-Amtsaal Juz 1* (Beirut: Al-Maktabah Al-Ashriyyah, 2023), h. 12.

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