

Presence of the Reader in the Construction of Ancient Arabic Poetic Texts: A Foundational and Communicative Approach

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Abstract:

This research paper aims to forge a nuanced reception framework within the realm of traditional Arabic criticism, marked by a profound exploration of the historical depths of Arab intellectual heritage. By adopting both a methodological and systematic approach, devoid of undue reverence, this research aims to firmly anchor an Arabic critical inquiry upon its foundational cognitive principles, essential pillars, and communicative objectives. Originating from an epistemological critical consciousness, it seeks to actively participate in contemporary critical discourse through its theoretical underpinnings and procedural instruments. This is achieved by examining the pivotal role of the reader in traditional poetics, which facilitates a meaningful engagement with modern critical questions and reaffirms the validity of the methodologies used in traditional Arab criticism. Such an approach not only fosters cognitive intersections with diverse scholarly perspectives but also promotes a dialogic exchange of knowledge, enriched by interdisciplinary support and integration.

Keywords: Ancient Poetic Text, Reader, Construction, Foundational and Communicative Approach.

1. Introduction:

The intrinsic quality of the ancient Arabic poetic text emerges distinctly through the voice and creative symbolism of the poet, preserving the poetic legacy across generations and evoking an aesthetic resonance within the reader's consciousness. This process not only immortalizes the text but also enriches the Arab critical landscape, inspiring a profound engagement with reading that bridges historical memory and modernity. It cultivates a critical reception rooted in the traditional Arab critical "paternity." Against this backdrop, critical questions arise:

How was the construction of the poetic text conceptualized in traditional Arab criticism? How did luminaries such as Ibn Tabataba and Hazim Al-Qartajanni articulate the dynamics of creative expression? To what extent was the reader envisioned within the poet's creative process, and what role does the reader assume in the context of contemporary critical practices?

Literary and critical sources document the vibrant critical dialogues among ancient poets, particularly within the "literary markets of the pre-Islamic era," which served as dynamic forums for poets from various tribes. In these gatherings, orations were pronounced, poetry was recited, and poets articulated their poetic critiques, either praising or disparaging works, often employing comparative analysis to elevate certain poems.

In this milieu, the poet also assumed the role of a critic, attentively considering the social, psychological, and ideological needs of the audience, and meticulously crafting texts that honored established creative conventions (Belmahjoub, n.d.). The pre-Islamic poets typically initiated their intricate compositions with conventional introductions, notably those involving ruins and romantic themes, which dominated the poetic landscape of the era. (El Sadd, 1995, p. 6)

The audience's reception was central to these poetic interactions, with the text explicitly crafted for their engagement. The Arab tribes placed significant emphasis on the appreciation of literary works through a meticulous process of savoring, listening, reciting, promoting, and subsequently analyzing and critiquing them. The literary assemblies conducted at the Souk Okaz and later at the Marbad in Basra epitomized the continuation of this vibrant poetic tradition, deeply embedded in the desert heartlands of the Arab tribes. (Mortad, 1992, p. 14)

Wahb Ahmad Rumiya articulates in "The Ancient Arabic Poetic Text," that poetry, in its most profound form, is inherently suited for diverse interpretations. Its symbols, a testament to its rich heritage, allow for multiple readings, each safeguarded by various constraints that prevent them from descending into absurdity or delirium. (Romeih, 2007, p. 6)

This perspective underscores a rigorous critical approach that eschews mere linguistic interpretation, arbitrary inquiry, and ideological posturing. Similarly, Mohammed Shukri Ayyad emphasizes the necessity of interpreting ancient texts through a contemporary lens, asserting that our understanding is invariably shaped not only by present-day issues but also by the tools of modern thought, thereby enriching our cultural heritage. (Majid, 2012, p. 112)

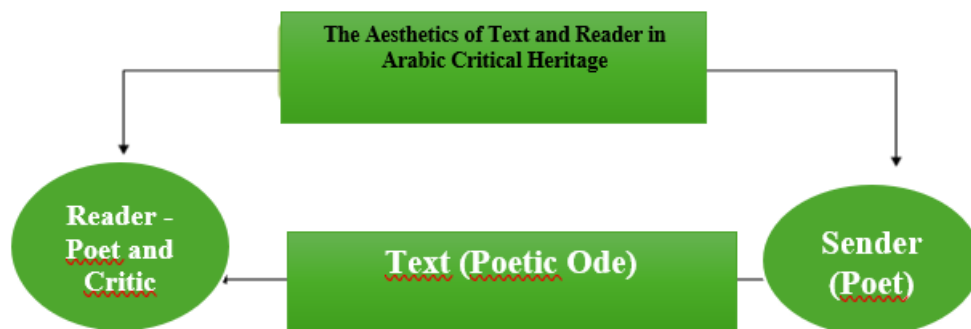
The interaction between the poet and the reader in the realm of ancient Arabic poetry is significantly highlighted within traditional Arab critical frameworks. This interaction demonstrates the acute awareness of the creator and the text for the audience, embodying a transfer of roles from the sender (the poet) to the receiver (encompassing both poet and critic). This dynamic mirrors a modern critical approach where the interpretive roles are continually engaged and redefined.

The attunement of pre-Islamic poets to their readers is evident in the practice of revising poems during annual reviews to preempt critical feedback, thereby cultivating a literate audience that symbolizes the presence of structured reading communities within society. The acceptance and appreciation of poetry among the ancient Arabs were not dictated by a singular aesthetic preference. Instead, each literary taste was shaped by a rich tapestry of knowledge, scientific understanding, and doctrinal beliefs, leading to a vibrant critical landscape characterized by debates, mediations, and comparative analyses.

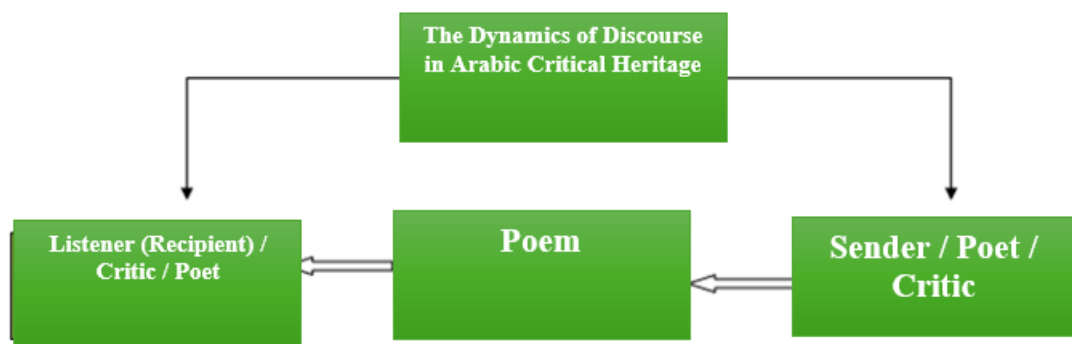
These interactions were instrumental in exploring the aesthetics of the poetic text and rendering judgments based on its merit or lack thereof. (Belmahjoub, n.d., p. 8) The ancients' critical evaluations were deeply rooted in the text's essence, the critics' convictions, and their

diverse cultural backgrounds. This process of critical examination reflects the structured architecture of the ancient poetic text and the creative traditions of the era. Such a reflective approach is indicative of a "critical spirit" that poets themselves practiced prior to any external critique, as observed in historical records from poetic schools like the School of Zuhayr.

This school illustrates the dynamic interplay within the discourse system from the sender (the poet) to the receiver (who embodies both critic and poet), where the former revisits the text with a critical eye, and the latter encompasses the dual roles of critic and poet (Sanbawi, 2011, p. 94), as illustrated in the following diagram:



The rich diversity of literary markets underscores the deep engagement of poets within these forums, capturing a persistent poetic memory that has been meticulously documented in literary texts and the annals of Arab criticism (Matloub, 1973, p. 15). The robust exchanges among poets, particularly evident in their interactions with the courtly music of the Ghassanid era, laid the groundwork for what can be considered an early form of Western criticism. These critical discussions and evaluations were central to shaping the nascent critical landscape.



The reception of pre-Islamic poetic texts is intricately linked to a refined taste, utilizing critical tools whose efficacy remains undisputed in contemporary criticism. (Belmahjoub, n.d., p. 9) The discerning judgments and impactful assessments of poets like Nabigha Al-Dhubyani and Zuhair bin Abi Salma were far from impressionistic, given their adeptness in evaluating and appreciating the nuances of poetry. (Belmahjoub, n.d., p. 9)

Their expert critiques facilitated the development of poetic forms and styles, enriching the literary canon as seen in the works from the Mu'allaqat to the Mufaddaliyat, including poems by Imru' al-Qais, Antara, and Al-Asha, among others. Robert Jauss articulates that engagement with a creative work is initially characterized by enjoyment, with reflective interpretation emerging subsequently. (Belmahjoub, n.d., p. 9)

This initial interaction with the text through a lens of 'taste' is critical, as Ibn Tabataba posits, for without tasting and understanding, no valid critique can be formulated. Thus, taste is a pivotal element in the critical process, enabling deeper exploration of a text's implications, aesthetic qualities, and artistic value.

The perception of traditional critical efforts among contemporary Arab readers as impressionistic stems from a lack of foundational depth and superficial inquiries. However, a meticulous examination reveals their substantial productivity, akin to the critical works of scholars like Ibn Tabataba, Ibn Qutayba, Al-Qartajanni, and Ibn Rashiq. Their endeavors established a contextually rooted critical practice, highlighting that critical work is both a cognitive endeavor and a production that emerges alongside artistic creation, gaining significance as it engages with the artistic tastes and sensibilities of a specific community. (El Omari, n.d., p. 150)

Serious critical engagement with poetry not only enhances its strength but also aligns with the creative depth of the poet-critic, fostering a deconstructive approach. This interaction suggests that a dynamic critical movement, possibly surpassing the artistic endeavors it critiques, has historically accompanied and propelled poetry to its artistic zenith. (Yahya, 2008, p. 78)

The literary tools employed by ancient poets produced texts that sharpened wits, refined thoughts, smoothed the articulation of speech, and facilitated clarity of expression, reflecting a comprehensive concern for the reader. Shawqi Daif notes that the pre-Islamic poet was bound by creative traditions that required adherence to established themes and structures, ensuring that the audience remained engaged and that the desired impact was achieved. In this dialogue, the reader is an integral partner, not just a passive recipient, actively shaping the text and its meaning. (Belmahjoub, n.d., p. 13) Indeed, without a reader, the fundamental question arises: for whom, then, is the text written?

Reception within the framework of traditional criticism serves as compelling evidence for the development of a reception theory rooted in Arab heritage criticism. This approach delves into significant models where theorists endeavored to establish foundational concepts centered around the listener (the receiver) and their active role in the reception and dialogue of the text. Indeed, the creative text forms a dynamic interaction between the creator and the receiver (Belmahjoub, n.d., p. 14), showcasing the participation of the poet-listener (poet/critic) and their discerning taste as a testament to the deep concern of ancient Arab criticism for the reader.

This recognition of the reader's crucial role in the dialogic nature of the text and the appreciation of creativity is highlighted by Nabigha Al-Dhubyani's remark: "By Allah, had not Abu Basir recited to me just now, I would have declared you the most poetic of jinn and men." This statement underscores the absence of arbitrariness in Nabigha's assessment when

he compares the poetry of Al-Asha and Khansa, reflecting the critical traditions that governed such judgments. (Bakar, 1982, p. 63)

Moreover, the notion that critical practices evolve with changing data underscores that "there is no final critical work, for criticism is an ongoing endeavor," as articulated by Abdul Malik Mortad. He further notes that "The Arabs are among the nations that have historically approached the literary text with a spirit of openness and generosity, as evidenced by the extensive scholarly attention to major texts like the poetry of Al-Mutanabbi, which has been subjected to more than thirty traditional commentaries or readings." (Daif, 1969, p. 18)

Prominent among these are the works of Ibn Al-Athir, Ibn Jinni, and Ibn Saida. Similarly, the Maqamat of Al-Hariri, which has prompted exhaustive scholarly efforts to elucidate, exceeds the usual level of critical engagement. (Belmahjoub, n.d., p. 14)

The extensive exploration of Al-Mutanabbi's works is also highlighted by critic Adnan Obeidat, who references Ibn Khallikan's remarks and notes that scholars have extensively analyzed his divan, with one of his mentors recounting, "I have encountered more than forty explanations of it, ranging from extensive to concise, and this level of engagement is unprecedented for any other divan. Undoubtedly, he was a fortunate man, blessed in his poetry."

This extensive and varied critical engagement with Al-Mutanabbi's poetry not only illustrates the depth of analytic tradition but also the enduring respect and admiration for his literary contributions within the Arab critical heritage.

The aesthetics of reception represent a comprehensive practice, intertwining the influence exerted by the text with the reception by the reader. This relationship is inherently conditioned by the structural directives of the text and the unique mental and psychological makeup of each reader (Hu, 1973, p. 10).

Consequently, the reception of the text manifests as a critical act that materializes through the act of reading, an event in which "the destiny of the text is realized," according to Joëlle Gardes Tamine. Without a reader, a text cannot independently form or shape its meaning; rather, the literary corpus emerges from a dialectic "encounter between the text and the reader, marked by their interaction and interplay during the reading process." (Mortad, 2001, p. 16)

In this dynamic, the reader is both a producer of meaning and an examiner of textual data. Wolfgang Iser's concept of the 'implicit reader' underscores this interaction, which is shaped by the cognitive disputes between the reader and the text. This interaction reveals how the text exercises its directives and influences, guiding the reader's construction of meaning. The critical journey from text to receiver and back to text is therefore integrative, involving "a dynamic interaction between the data of the text and the mental schema of the receiver, which encompasses his desires and reactions." (Obeidat, 2002, p. 17)

This theoretical framework was notably developed in the 1980s by the Konstanz School in Germany, led by scholars such as Robert Jauss and Wolfgang Iser. They viewed reception as a process wherein the text serves as a springboard for a secondary creation that enriches critical practice, thereby generating diverse texts across different levels of understanding. It posits that "the reader is the one who writes the book, for reading should not be merely consumption but a form of creation." This perspective requires a deep, penetrating

understanding and a visionary insight that grasps the intentions of the author as originally intended. (Charki, n.d., p. 145)

Roland Barthes further elaborates on this concept, stating that "the true reader is not merely a consumer but a producer of new meanings that did not exist before, which compels him to rewrite the text to preserve its immortality." According to Barthes, a text does not achieve immortality by imposing a single meaning on various people; instead, it attains this status because it offers different meanings to a single person over different times, consistently speaking the same symbolic language. This suggests that while "the work proposes, the human disposes," highlighting the dynamic and ever-evolving interaction between the text and its readers, which perpetuates its relevance and continuity across generations. (Rikur, 2004, p. 110)

In Roland Barthes' vision, the text, which opens up to multiple readings and various interpretations, echoes the German philosopher Nietzsche's statement: (Charki, n.d., p. 145) "There are no facts, only interpretations" of the text. Every reading is tied to its reference, as a univocal reading of the literary text is an illusion, as the literary text is a product of multiple circumstances, meant to be read in numerous ways, producing various meanings and significances. In our belief, reading and examining the literary text from multiple angles adds depth upon depth, like a tree whose roots, the more they branch out and deepen in the soil, beget the sturdiness of its trunk, the greenness of its leaves, and the multiplied yield of its fruits.

The reception process is an approach and "a dynamic interaction between the data of the text and the mental schema of the receiver (Charki, n.d., p. 181), including his desires and reactions," and this interaction – undoubtedly – moves according to a cognitive system that seeks to serve the text, enrich its meanings, and deepen the meanings resulting from the literary work's ongoing relationship with the successive readings of generations of readers.

2- The Status of Heritage Arab Critical Reception:

2.1 Ibn Tabataba and Reception:

Reflecting on some of the heritage critical achievements epistemologically confirms their distinctive nature, which calls for archaeological efforts to affirm the foundational and communicative aspects we proposed in the research problem. Muhammad Mandour (1907-1965) notes, "The old Arabic books, specifically, the books of criticism, are treasures. If we return to them and approach them with minds educated in modern European culture, we can extract many truths that still stand, awaiting a reader who keeps pace with the critical question." (Charki, n.d., p. 181)

This cannot be achieved without the cross-cultural engagement that has become a necessary part of knowledge and cannot be dispensed with. Hussein Bekar believes that "all those who have approached criticism in Arabic literature from its inception until modern times were merely superficial linguists who knew of poetry only that it consisted of metered and rhymed words," (Lahmadani, 1992, p. 101) without considering the poet's strategy and his poem.

A quick glance at the heritage critical achievements and a lack of "depth in our ancient criticism, historically, developmentally, and characteristically, leads us to overlook the real beginnings and flourishing maturity of criticism. However, when we look beyond the criticism of the pre-Islamic and early Islamic periods, we find in it insightful observations, clever subtleties, and issues that can be considered true representations of many modern European critical directions," as indicated by Ibn Tabataba (864-934) and his followers, who stated, "For meanings, there are words that resemble them, beautifying in some contexts and marring in others, just as a beautiful maiden at a showcase who becomes more beautiful in some settings than in others."

We observe that the metaphor of the maiden is linked to the perception of the receiver, suggesting the multiplicity of interpretations. (Tamine et al., n.d., p. 176) Thus, for Ibn Tabataba, the text, like the maiden, differs from one reading to another, with the first reading not being the same as the second, even if based on the same model.

Therefore, the heritage critical project is founded on the concept of the productive reader, who is always subject to rational scrutiny. Abdul Malik Mortad comments on Ibn Qutayba's critical perspective, stating that it is "based on talent and genius rather than on time and tradition. (Darwish, 2007) " In Mortad's view, may God have mercy on him, the depth of the text does not adhere to spatiotemporal limits but is subject to the foundational beauty and its ongoing inquiries, evidenced by the immortality of the Arabic text with its endless questions as affirmed by specialized critical studies.

In Ibn Tabataba's perspective, the reader is posited as the definitive arbiter of the text's value, asserting that "The measure of a poet is to inherit fixed understanding. What he accepts and selects is sufficient, and what he rejects and denies is deficient." This declaration elevates the reader to the core of the critical process, underlining their pivotal role in the text's immortality and the perpetuation of the critical act.

Ibn Tabataba Al-Alawi's critique situates the reader at a crucial intersection "between the text and its reader, beginning from a point in reading that moves from the text to the reader and focuses on the text's impact on its listeners aesthetically, psychologically, and behaviorally. (Darwish, 2007, p. 78)" This highlights his acute awareness of the reader's essential status and critical function within the realm of textual interaction.

2.2 The Concept of Reception according to Hazim Al-Qartajanni

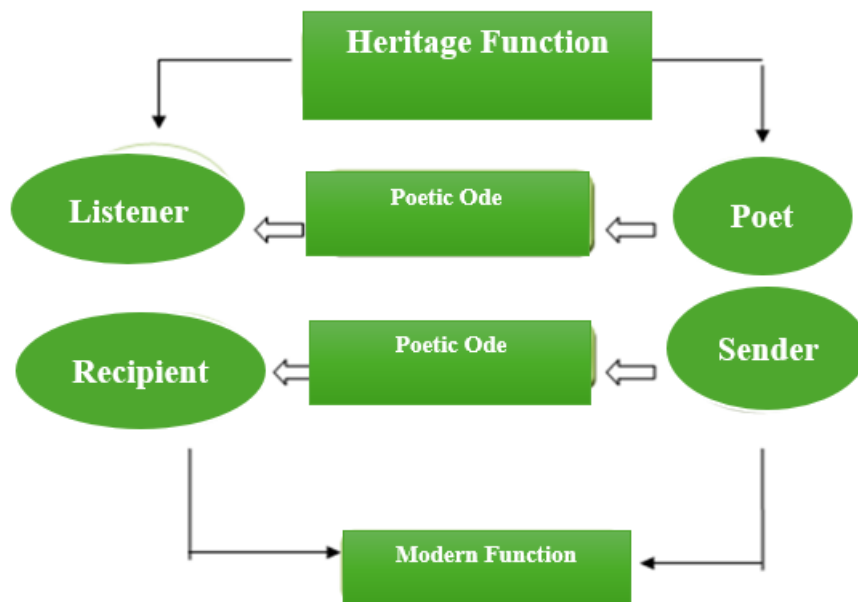
Poetry, as articulated by Hazim Al-Qartajanni, transcends mere structural components of meters and rhymes to embody a profound form of expression that conveys genuine emotions. May Ziadeh (1886-1941) encapsulates this sentiment, stating, "poetry is a melting emotion, a glowing idea, or a profound thought" that coalesces in the depths of the poet's soul to craft a discourse of enduring relevance (Mostafa, 2008, p. 12). Historically, poetry has occupied a distinguished place in literary tradition, meriting significant critical attention as it encapsulates societal memory, expressing collective pains and hopes, and reflecting the emotional and circumstantial realities of its time.

Poets are often seen not merely as individuals but as beacons whose works illuminate for others, living through the emotions and aspirations of their contemporaries. Al-Qartajanni illustrates this by depicting the poet as someone who "lives for his compatriots, and his vision may extend to an ideal, living for humanity." In this capacity, the poet does not exist in

isolation but is integrally connected to a broader societal fabric, resonating with and reflecting the collective human experience. (Sharki, n.d., p. 149)

The creation of poetic texts involves a synthesis of "imprint, motives, will, craft, and effort," all aimed at profoundly impacting the psyche of the audience. (Bakar, n.d., p. 13) Hazim Al-Qartajanni emphasizes the significant role of poetry in influencing the psychology of the receiver, regarding the poet's work as a service to enrich and stimulate the listener's mental and emotional state.

Mohammad Karim Al-Kawaz elaborates on Al-Qartajanni's methodological approach, noting that "Al-Qartajanni's method was based on three elements: poetry, the poet, and the receiver." These components, derived from the author's discussions throughout his works, underscore a triadic relationship essential to understanding the communicative power of poetry (Bakar, n.d., p. 13). This dynamic is aimed to be visualized in the following diagram:



Reflecting on the provided diagram and analyzing it from a contemporary perspective underscores a fundamental principle: every text is inherently crafted for a receiver. The existence of a text is inextricably linked to that of a receiver, without whom, what purpose would the text serve, and who would engage with it? This interdependence highlights the essential nature of the reader in the literary equation, reaffirming the notion that there is no text without a receiver, and conversely, no receiver without a text.

Hazim Al-Qurtajani articulates the function of poetry primarily in terms of its profound impact on the soul and its capacity to evoke questions that foster critical dialogue. This dynamic ensures the preservation of the text and the perpetuation of critical engagement. In crafting poetry, the poet must embed deep meanings within the text, with acute awareness of the reader, who is seen as an extension of the text itself. Both the poet and the listener participate in the moment of creativity, with the poet meticulously refining his work before presentation.

This process involves careful consideration of how the poetic meanings will resonate within the psyche of the receiver, which lies at the heart of poetry in general and is particularly pivotal in Hazim's theoretical framework.

4-Conclusion:

In conclusion, this study aims to synthesize the insights gathered through its various phases, focusing on the role of the reader in the construction of traditional poetic texts and how ancient critics perceived this role. Our findings reveal that the creation of poetic texts in ancient Arab criticism was conceptualized as a dialogue between the sender (poet) and the reader (who also serves as critic). The critical discourse of our heritage moves fluidly between these roles, reinforcing the central position of the reader in heritage Arab criticism and their active participation in shaping the text. This relationship adds an epistemological dimension to traditional critical practices, bridging foundational and communicative approaches.

The approach adopted by the ancients, particularly through Hazim Al-Qurtajani's focus on the interplay among the poetry, the poet, and the receiver, establishes a profound communicative process that integrates the creator, the text, and the reader within traditional Arab poetics. This is based on the aesthetic reception ideas of Ibn Tabataba and underscores the modern relevance of heritage Arab criticism. Its enduring connection with contemporary critical practices is attributed to the depth of understanding in defining the concept of the text in light of modern theoretical propositions.

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