

RELIGIOUS TEXT AND PROBLEMS OF CONTEMPORARY CRITICISM

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Abstract

The article explores and discusses the methodical formation of some questions raised by contemporary Arab critics who have worked to reject the sanctification of traditional texts. They deny the idea of historical perpetuity associated with these texts and call for a reevaluation and study of all aspects of Arab heritage without exclusion. This is achieved through the use of various Western analytical methods and mechanisms without consideration for their cultural and religious specificity. This approach is either an attempt to break free from the authority of understanding or an effort to elevate the comprehension of contemporary reality over revisiting the past. The article attempts to answer the following questions: What are the reference points for Arab texts? How is contemporary criticism formulated? How have Westerners constructed their understanding of the text? What challenges have postmodern critics faced? How do we balance the objectives of traditional texts with Western analytical methods?

We have concluded that most critics have not been able to present a methodical alternative for a suitable analysis of traditional texts. Their intellectual foundations are predominantly marked by an emotionally charged critical influence from Western achievements. The Arab critical mind cannot be separated from its cultural and religious identity. The inherent identity within the fabric of traditional texts serves as a necessary foundation for understanding and formulating the contemporary Arab intellectual reality. This foundation encompasses cultural, religious, and social references that reflect the true nature of thought and understanding.

Keywords: Literary Identity, Critical Accomplishment, Western Criticism References, Epistemological Obstacle, The Limits of the Western Text.

Introduction

The Arab and Islamic nation is a textual nation, built upon the acceptance of the purposes of beliefs and the Quranic and authentic Prophetic traditions, alongside the witnessed and reality-conforming certitude. Therefore, many scholars, jurists, and scholars studying the evolution of Islamic thought, in its literary and philosophical dimensions, argue that the comprehensive Islamic view of the universe stems from existence (the world of testimony and the unseen) to knowledge, not the other way around. For them, this approach has led to the establishment of rules and principles in various human sciences, meeting the conditions for the integrity of their overarching subjects. Their sources of knowledge are derived from revelation, reason, and sense or experience, and they find these sources to be compatible with each other, not negating or excluding one another. Each source complements the others, as they are perpetually in a complementary relationship aimed at an Islamic understanding directed towards the path of monotheism in comprehending the essence of existence. This understanding is broader than materialism and deeper than perceived and temporal phenomena. In light of this understanding, the Islamic intellectual vision was founded based on three main axes: God, humanity, and existence. It became a constant that the Islamic mind distinguished itself from the exclusionary Western intellectual vision. The Western perspective,

limited by the narrow and confined human viewpoint, disregards various tools of knowledge, whether material or ideal. This perspective revolves around two axes: nature and humanity.

Arabic rhetorical intellect has evolved to reach its current form, encompassing various conceptual fluctuations regarding the Arab's perception of the text as a human achievement. This includes the standard text defined by the manifestations of miracles embedded in the language of the Holy Quran and the noble Prophetic tradition. Their initial attempt was to harmonize between the written and oral, focusing on the poetic challenge to the unseen texts, as poetry was their realm of knowledge. However, they soon conceded the impossibility of comparing the sensory-human literary achievement with the textual rhetorical miracle of the Quran. The Quranic style tends towards a triadic referentiality: the reference of the signifier to its sender, the text resembling its sender; the reference of the signified to its recipient, the text resembling its receiver; and finally, the text's self-reference, being a signifier and signified, creating its own temporal realm and encompassing the recipients throughout ages. In all this, the distinct characteristic is that each reference stands independently and yet simultaneously demands the others (Munther Ayyashi, 1990, p.220). They conceded entirely, after a scientific, linguistic, and juristic discussion, that its linguistic and cognitive value is elevated and realized by the elevation of divine purposes, wholly different from human realism based on sensory perception and intellect. The Quranic text transcends the individual: it was revealed by God, transmitted by an angel to the Prophet, conveyed by the Prophet to humanity, and compiled into the Book of Revelation. It is a divine-human cosmic work, infinite in its imaginative capacity. It might be the most complex form of writing, contrary to what might appear superficially, as it is a continuation of what preceded it and a completion: it is both the seal of prophecy and the seal of writing. It is not the trace generated by a thing, as expressed by Mallarmé; rather, it is the thing itself. Thus, the Quranic text does not pose the question of what poetry or prose is but rather asks: what is writing, what is a book? The Quranic text is read as a text that encompasses all forms of writing, as if it reinstates the alphabet to its nature, before the diversification of writing genres. Its language is not just vocabulary and structures; it carries a specific vision of humanity, life, and the universe, both in essence and in the unseen realms (Adonis on Ahmad Sa'id, pp.20-34).

This impossibility resulted in linguistic and rhetorical disputes over the sacred Quranic text, forming an Arab-human textual intellect parallel to it. It adorned its crown with pearls of both poetry and prose, deriving its linguistic foundations from the pre-Islamic literary achievement. Al-Jahiz (d. 255 AH) expressed this by stating "The evidence that the Arabs articulated, and their language is more extensive, their expressions are more eloquent, and the divisions in composing their speech are more numerous. The proverbs they crafted include the finest and most abundant. This is evidence that intuition is restricted, and improvisation and brevity are specific to it. As for the non-Arabs, they elongate words, compress and expand them until they fit into the rhythm of melody, placing a measure on what is not measured." (Al-Jahiz, Abu 'Uthman 'Amr ibn Bahr, 1998, pp. 384-385). They then drew inspiration from the spirit of Islamic objectives, and their fundamental paths evolved, transferring their knowledge in the arts of the Arabic language to a new conceptual form. This form became a "single spiritual form or a single spiritual structure, consisting of the mysterious that cannot be known by humans and the evident that is directly known from the outward expression. It is an open horizon, but on the unseen." (Adonis on Ahmad Sa'id, Op.cit). Their cognitive specificity was shaped by taste, eloquence, pure human endeavor, and the enhanced status of linguistic sciences, particularly after Islam. The pursuit of knowledge in linguistics took on a systematic dimension, and their intellectual writings became entirely distinct from the conventions of the eloquent and learned figures of their earlier era. They established the fabric following the patterns of the sacred models (the Quran and the Sunnah), considering it essential to adhere to them as

the primary references in the standards of eloquence and mastery. Adopting them as a written and cognitive approach became a cognitive challenge for some advocates of renewal. Consequently, they began to narrow down the rigid laws of these models and called for employing human rationality as a means to develop Arab rhetorical discourse. They urged the exploration of alternative methods to free themselves from the authority of inflexible rules and rigid preconceptions, arguing that they live in the dilemma of contemporary Arab individuals searching for their cultural position within the broader human context. In this context, all forms of diversity and difference dissolve, emphasizing the necessity of accepting the thoughts and achievements of others who differ from them in concepts of possibility and probability.

Study Challenges

In this article, we attempt to discuss the following questions: Did the ancient Arab critics and rhetoricians truly complete texts with the passage of time and place? Did they distinguish between discourse and text? Were the interpretations and religious textual exegeses hindrances to the development of Arabic criticism? Can the Western critical approach, with its ideological contradictions, serve as a modern solution to revitalize Arabic rhetoric from its stagnation? What are the essential mechanisms that we can employ to present a new critical and rhetorical perspective?

Study Methodology

I employed some elements of the descriptive-analytical approach, allowing me the freedom to describe the phenomenon. I began by presenting the Arab poetic intellect in its entirety, then moved on to the concept of the text among Western thinkers with their various intellectual orientations. Subsequently, I clarified how some contemporary critics are connected to the Western achievement, illustrating their conditions for elevating Arab critical intellect. This was supported by their citations and their method of critiquing both Arab heritage and criticism.

Study Objectives

I aim to provide a descriptive reading of the challenges of modernity and contemporaneity in their critical aspect towards heritage texts. I will elucidate the methods that can contribute to advancing the contemporary critical understanding, playing its cultural role in addressing both heritage and contemporary texts. The goal is to build bridges for methodological understanding, contributing to bridging the gap between these contradictions.

Literary Identity

For the Arabs in their pre-Islamic era, poetry was spontaneous and improvisational. "The Arabs did not conceive of poetry as an artistic experiment in this way... They were content with the meanings of the verses revolving around the subject, but without focusing on themselves, and without feeling a deep sense that they were creating an emotional and intellectual event that would become a complete creative experience." (Shauqi Dhaif, p. 141). They used to celebrate their poets and orators everywhere, considering pre-Islamic poetry "as a testimony. The poet's aim was not to change or transcend the world or create another world; their goal was to speak with reality, describe it, and bear witness to it. They loved things around them for their own sake and what they represented, placing everything where it pleased and benefited them. They didn't try to see more in reality than what it contained but rather aimed to see it in all its aspects. This way, everything in the canvas of the desert gained its value and meaning... like the sun that illuminates the things of the world without distinction, without differentiation between the great and the trivial." (Adonis, 1979, p.24). They likened the one who excels in inventing styles of speech to someone who comprehends prophetic revelation because, "The most significant feature of poetry lies in suggesting truths and sensations, not in explaining matters and bringing them closer to the minds.

Therefore, it exhibits intentional ambiguity and a tendency towards ambiguity. Imagination dominates its styles, and it abounds in similes and the use of words and phrases in ways other than originally intended, through metaphor and figurative language. It reflects a reluctance to analyze truths and a dislike for delving into explanations and arguments” (Ali Abdelouahad, 2004, p. 178). They also considered his words as inspiration and embodiment of the extraordinary genius that distances from their souls the images of suffering and struggling with the harshness of the wilderness. This is because it suggests their awareness of life and things. They see it responding to their aspirations and sensual perception of everything that is concealed from their minds. Al-Jahiz, for instance, states “For they claim that with every poet, there is a devil who speaks those poetries on his tongue.” (1956, p. 432).

Poetry was their repository of knowledge, a field that demonstrated their excellence over neighboring Persians and Romans. Ibn Jinni stated, The Arabs, as they express themselves, refine and embellish their language. The meanings are stronger, more noble, and more valuable in their souls." (Ibn Djenni, p.215). However, the language of the Quran emerged as a form of writing, breaking away from the oral tradition based on memory. It brought with it linguistic and doctrinal critical regulations, addressing their genuine worldly questions. The Quran redefined their understanding of the unseen, the linguistic criteria for organizing language, and the principles of communication among themselves. As Abu Bakr al-Baqillani expressed “With distinctive styles and a unique approach, it transcends the established norms of their language, and it has a method that distinguishes it. It has a style that is different from their ordinary way of expression. It has an approach that is specific to it, and it stands out in its arrangement from the conventional styles of their speech.” (Abu Bakr al-Baqillani, 1954, pp. 51-52). The Quran served as a comprehensive linguistic and cognitive guide, introducing a new rhetorical understanding for the Arab mind and their ethics, both in terms of knowledge and expressive forms. It presented meanings that broke away from their pre-Islamic practices, rejecting their view of existence as pagan and chaotic, and disapproving their disordered approach to self-presentation. It put an end to the dominating improvisation in poetic rhetoric, as Abu Ubaydah stated, "God spoke to the Arabs according to the extent of their speech. As for the saying of Imru' al-Qais..."

"Has the past stripped me of my rest,

And leveled me in my bed, blue like the fangs of a snake." (Muhammed Salah Essedik, 1994, p. 236)

They had not witnessed the ghoul at all, and the mere mention of it terrified and frightened them. Thus, the alternative model for what should be said or compared with came with the advent of the Quran. “It unintentionally made the Quranic text a new literary model that confronted and surpassed the pre-Islamic model. This caught the attention of poets and literary critics, leading them to draw inspiration from the Quran, especially those who did not consider pre-Islamic oral tradition as an example for poetry or a model for taste and criticism.” (Adonis, 1985, p 36). This is confirmed by Taha Hussein, who stated, “The Quran is neither prose nor poetry. It is a Quran, and it cannot be called by any other name. It is not poetry because it is not bound by the constraints of poetry, nor is it prose because it is bound by its own constraints, unique to it. These constraints are related to the endings of verses and a specific musical tone.” (Muhammed Salah Essedik, Op.Cit.p. 232). In other words, its language was never poetry, nor was it prose, a message sent or conveyed through speech, or eloquent discourse that could be compared to what humans could achieve; “In this way, it can be said that the Quranic text, considered as a denial of poetry in one way or another, indirectly paved the way for the emergence of unknown and limitless poetic horizons. It contributed indirectly to the establishment of poetic criticism in its true sense.” (Adonis,

Op.Cit. p. 42). This opened up extensive possibilities for those who attempted, even in disguise, to find a connection between writing about the unseen and writing about reality. The unity of the instrument was language itself, common between the language of the sacred and the worldly language of humans. The Jahiz expressed this by saying, "The small world is the descendant of the big world, as it portrays every image with its hands and narrates every story with its mouth. The story was made accessible to all nations when God gave humans the ability and empowerment. He preferred humans over all animals with speech, intellect, and uprightness." (Jahiz, Op.Cit. p. 70). Our discussion of poetry was aimed at highlighting it as a medium that encompasses rhetorical language and methodology among the Arabs.

2- Critical Accomplishment

The Arab individual is a historical and cultural being. The conditions of history were associated with the completion of his critical achievement in texts. The first conditions of the judgments of tradition's requirements were linked to the emergence of the first critical taste. Its rules reached us saturated with its Arab identity on the theoretical side, along with all the analyses of literary texts that reached us. It often subjected itself to natural taste and the specificity of understanding the nature of Arab psychological developments, the extent to which it achieved its material and cognitive needs. It transitioned from the purity of the desert environment in its early stages to the richness of its cultural presence in the subsequent eras. This transition included a complete shift from orality to writing. "The pre-Islamic poetry was a witness. The poet's goal was not to change the world or transcend it or create a world. His goal was to speak with reality, describe it, and bear witness to it. He loves things around him for themselves and for what they represent, placing everything where it brings joy and benefit. He does not try to see more in reality than it contains but tries to see it with all that it contains. Thus, everything in the desert landscape gains its value and meaning, like the sun that illuminates the things of the world without distinction and without differentiation between the great and the trivial" (Adonis, Op.Cit. p. 24). However, due to the descent of the Quranic text and its positive embodiment of their reality, the Arab individual transitioned from the narrow concept of individual and tribal heroic discourse to the concept of textuality. In that sacred text, he occupied a central position in all aspects of their lives. Al-Baqillani expressed this, saying: "When you contemplate it, it becomes clear that it departs from the types of their speech and the methods of their discourse. It is extraordinary and miraculous. This specificity is attributed to the Quran as a whole, and there is a distinction that occurs in all of it." (Al-Baqillani, Op.Cit. p. 35).

The construction of the Arab rhetorical and critical edifice contributed to its establishment by many scholars and writers with various ideas and jurisprudential doctrines. It took shape in accordance with the developments of Islamic history and the changes in the locations where numerous clashes occurred. These clashes, ignited by the diversity of jurisprudential doctrines, were influenced by the winds of Greek philosophy, Indian enlightenment, Persian logic, Syriac heritage, and, as Abu Hamid al-Ghazali states "Between the rational and the transmitted, there is a collision in the initial view and the apparent thought. Those who delve into it tend to extremes, either excessively abstracting the view to the transmitted or excessively abstracting the view to the rational, or having a moderate desire for synthesis and synthesis." (Abu Hamid al-Ghazali, 1988, p. 132). So, their efforts yielded in the books of criticism they wrote, examining their approach to finding the optimal in analyzing poetic and prose texts. They engaged in the theorization of the foundations upon which literary art (poetry and prose) is based. "The Arab individual has shown interest in poetry as a part of the structure of their consciousness, a principal source of their thought, and a striking factor in the facets of their emotional presence. It emanates from them in expressing the depths of their self, emotional belonging, or human connections. They attribute it to the affirmation of their existence, the declaration of their adherence to what they belong to, and the

establishment of what is not present in life before them. This is because poetry is considered a necessary expression of action, authentic and more severe in its impact than the wound inflicted by action.” (Rahmane Gherkane, 2004, p. 9). Their foundational efforts in this art originated from the core of their complete nature and the practices they were raised upon. Which developed further with the progression of temporal events, the flourishing of places, and eloquence in that became the art of expression. Because “there is no literary discourse without eloquence, but merely focusing on its formal aspect or treating it as an artificial act will rob it of its expressive effectiveness. However, if the speaker (the real) considers it, he expresses himself and, at the same time, expresses himself securely, safeguarding the effectiveness of his expressions and the evidence he brings up, even when using improvisation and spontaneity.” (Adnane Iben Deril, 2000. P. 56). Thus, Arab poetic thought became a fundamental building block in shaping their language awareness and eloquence. It became a significant source among the sources of their thoughtful expressions, indicative of their emotional and cultural presence. It serves as an explicit consolidation of both, and a strong adherence to what they belong to. This cultural and linguistic transition brought about a rapid intellectual development in the collective Arab mind. It began to showcase images of openness to the influence of others' philosophies and cultures that were introduced to them. They relied on their critical artistic accomplishments, evident in the emergence of a culture specializing in literary criticism and rhetorical composition. With this, their perspective on literary texts from various angles was almost complete. They critiqued the expressions and methods of conveying meanings, discussed the different layers of poets, and explored rhetorical differences among them. Additionally, they formulated laws that manifested in specialized books in the field of criticism. They asserted that "criticism reveals, in literature, the human being in a normal social environment, whether in the family, his private society, or various aspects of his life. It thus exposes the nature of the individual within himself." "And in his struggle to realize his destiny, whether this struggle is against nature, against the constraints of a certain society, or against individuals standing in his way," (Hallal Muhammed Ghunaymi, 1973, p. 14). This action led to the completion of a critical identity and progress in achieving a comprehensive image of the rhetorical applied model. They elucidated the linguistic and rhetorical foundations that should distinguish the poet from the critic, the literary figure, the orator, drawing explicit inspiration from the form of Quranic scripture and the rhetorical spirit of the authentic traditions of the Prophet. These traditions provided a view of the style of ethical, scientific, and aesthetic writing, thereby regulating the principles of mastering expression and revealing the keys to the analysis and criticism of texts.

Western Criticism References

The shaping of the definition of the text and its critique, and the clarification of the distinguishing feature from discourse in search of the approach missing in meaning or in search of complete signification among Western critics. Michel Foucault sees that what differentiates between text and discourse is the presence of the production conditions of purposes. Therefore, he presents this equation: "Discourse = Text + Production Conditions, and Text = Discourse - Production Conditions." (Marie Anne Paveau, 2012, p. 315). This duality has attracted many critics and thinkers who have surpassed or explicitly abandoned the sanctity of all texts. Among them is Umberto Eco, who says, "The open text remains a text, giving rise to endless readings. This does not mean that it allows any possible reading." (Eco, 1992. p 130). However, upon revisiting these ideas, we will inevitably find that Western critical thought has clarified its vision more with the presence of the dialectics of mind and experience for philosophers like Immanuel Kant, the proponent of critical rationalism. Kant states, "Reason must encounter nature while holding in one hand its principles, by which similar phenomena can obtain the power of laws. With the other hand, it holds experimentation designed according to these principles to learn from it (i.e., from nature), not as a student

accepting everything his teacher wants, but as a judge who works and urges witnesses to answer the questions he poses to them." (Immanuel Kant, n.d.). Also, René Descartes, the proponent of pure reason, asserts, "I acknowledge that I was born with an intellectual disposition that makes me find the utmost pleasure in discovering arguments by myself, not in listening to the arguments of others." (2001, p. 73). These two philosophers laid a new foundation for what the Western self, knowledgeable about the truth and receptive to the nature of things under the rule of critical reason, should be. They departed from their empirical knowledge based on the prerequisite of the objective equivalence of the text and its conformity to reality, aiming to achieve communication between the self, itself, the world, and the other. For them, understanding became "related to the task of removing idols," meaning that understanding involves a critical awareness of ourselves when we project our desires and mental constructs onto texts. With this critical awareness, our projections no longer address us as final or ultimate" (Adel Mustapha, 2007, p. 462).

So, they formulated appropriate definitions to reflect their ethnic, religious, and intellectual orientations, laying the groundwork for each subsequent intellectual direction with their arguments and evidence. These definitions defend the existence of each within the conceptual space of the text itself.

The idea of Enlightenment emerged from a textual and intellectual critique that accompanied the growth and advancement of knowledge and reason in Western societies. It flourished in the wake of profound transformations that affected it, giving rise to a state of conflict that later transformed into a demand for radical changes in the approach to Western critical thought. Their understanding is based on the idea that present reason takes the place of obsolete reason. It represents an intellectual awakening, embodying a process of reconstructing and redefining Western critical thought for distinctly reformative purposes, emphasizing diversity and difference. These ideas vary in their calls for independence and liberation from all forms of authority for individuals, currents, and positions. In studying texts, these approaches require separating them from their sources. They draw more support from experimental philosophical definitions laid out by John Locke. Hegel, who attributed all significance to reason in shaping intellectual orientation, stated, "Reason governs the world, and thus, it has judged and continues to judge the entire history. Everything remains subject to this comprehensive and essential reason, a tool and means in its hands. This reason is latent in historical reality, forming and being formed by it. The only truth is the unity that occurs between the comprehensive reason existing in itself and for itself and the individual or the self." (2007, pp. 80-85). And it evolved further with the arguments of Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche, who raised the issue of human existence itself apart from the authority of religious texts. Even proponents of the phenomenological approach in literary criticism see the literary text as having multiple levels. Paul Ricœur, in his book "From Text to Action," sought to establish a theory of the text based on critical hermeneutics. On the other hand, Roman Ingarden believes in the existence of various non-homogeneous levels in the literary text, such as phonetic, semantic, and structural levels. Therefore, the literary text cannot be read except through a set of stylistic analyses that analyze all these levels. Additionally, a comprehensive structural reading is needed to highlight the relationships between these levels. (Muhammad Azzam, 2001, p. 14).

As a result, Western critical studies evolved further, opening up to the linguistic achievements of Ferdinand de Saussure and the subsequent works of Russian formalism that dealt with language as a system, either through direct interaction with it or through translation. The ideas of Bakhtin, Roman Jakobson, Shklovsky, Eikhenbaum, Tomasevsky, and the emergence of Marxist thought embodied in the novel by George Lukács, the author of "History and Class Consciousness," and Goldmann, who focused more on the formal (external) aspect of texts. This was followed by significant intellectual debates that

gave rise to another opposing call for a return to the study of the internal and secretive aspects of texts. This trend emerged in the 1950s through the works of T. S. Eliot, Cleanth Brooks, Richards, Leo Strauss, and a subsequent explicit call for deconstruction that challenges every concept in itself. This movement is championed by Jacques Derrida, who "aims through deconstruction to undermine Western metaphysics and the metaphysics of presence, and the centrality of logos." (Abd al-Mun'im Ajab al-Fayya, 2017, p. 31). Without exception, for all forms of thought or theoretical philosophies, whether idealistic or materialistic in direction, "Western thought is based on an antagonistic binary duality that it relies on and exists only through this duality. Such binaries include: mind/emotion, mind/body, self/other, orality/writing, man/woman, and so on. This thought always grants privilege and superiority to the first party and throws subordination and inferiority onto the second party. This bias towards the first at the expense of the second is what Derrida calls logocentrism." (Saad Al-Bazai and Megan Al-Ruayli, 2002, p. 108). Therefore, he called for giving prominence to the reader, who plays a role equivalent to that of the author, as previous methodologies prevented the reader from producing meaning. "The Russian formalism, the New Criticism, and structuralism emphasized the need to exclude all external contextual elements, including the reader, from the scope of discussion and analysis" (Abd al-Mun'im Ajab al-Fayya, Op.Cit. p. 172). He advocated for the multiplicity of readings for a single text because the surface and deep structures it forms are in a continuous, infinite motion, with no stability of meaning. Each reading has its own justifications linked to pre-existing ideological values towards the world and society. Due to the absence of absolute truth, "the goal of deconstruction is to demonstrate that there is no objective truth or objective meaning, and that the meaning of the text is nothing but an endless sliding of signs without reaching or stabilizing at a specific meaning." (Abdul Aziz Hamouda, 1998, p. 291). The text in this regard is composed of a dynamic union between form and content in itself, and it inevitably carries traces of previous texts. His concepts revolved around terms such as Difference, Critique of Centricity, Theory of Play, Grammatology, Presence and Absence. His ideas influenced various critical schools, especially in America, resulting in the destruction of everything that is a text and a historical achievement. In this context, Hamouda states: "Contemporary deconstruction, as a form of text theory and analysis, subverts almost everything in traditions, casting doubt on inherited ideas about signs, language, text, context, authorship, the reader, the role of history, the process of interpretation, and forms of critical writing. In this project, the material collapses to reveal something dreadful." (Abdul Aziz Hamouda, 1998, p. 291).

3- Epistemological Obstacle:

Some modern Arab critics, who study the trajectory of cultural transformations in Arab society, attribute the decline in current thinking among Arab writers and critics to a vertical extension into the goals of religion and its complete integration, distancing it from its humanistic domain. They argue that it has become imitative and repetitive, producing what the predecessors left behind. Hashem Saleh, for instance, enumerates those who preceded him in divergent understanding and emphasizes the necessity of considering the ideas of others with different critical thinking and philosophical orientations. He states, 'We are nothing but a continuation of Gibran Khalil Gibran, Mikhail Naima, Farah Anton, Yakub Sarouf, Salama Musa, Taha Hussein, Tawfiq al-Hakim, and dozens of others.' (Hashem Saleh, 2010, p. 7).

Their problem lies in the presence of the traditional authority based on the eternal nature of the text, and the lack of clear distinction between religious reason and irrational mental concepts. This has resulted in the stagnation of critical thinking and a halt in creative activity. "They find the renewal of the authority of tradition to be an obstacle to their ideas and cultural project, or a hindrance to the role they have assigned themselves in promoting it" (Lqziz Abdelilah, 2014, p. 11). They believe it is necessary to elevate the

status of modern critical thinking against tradition and initiate a new intellectual revolution that negates everything that preceded it. According to them, the flaw is in the dominance of traditional concepts in every field, making the sanctification of ancient texts a characteristic feature in literary and critical creations. Additionally, they lack differentiation between the duality of the text and reality, and reality and the text. Consequently, they lack a comprehensive vision of life and the world as a whole, as the old concepts of the mind have settled in their subconscious, as Azaddin Ismail states: 'It is not reasonable but perhaps illogical that the ancient language expresses a new experience. They have realized that every experience has its language, and the new experience is nothing but a new language or a new approach to dealing with language.' (Az al-Din Ismail, 1966, p. 174). So, often, the shortcomings of their critical writings lie in their constant attempts to distance the reader from the realistic truth of the contemporary world with its cultural burdens. They persist in adhering to the paths of the ancient past in their productions or in reading modern literary and critical texts. Consequently, they methodologically rely on the idea of invoking everything that is old or heritage in their analyses, as if trying to build a new ship with old wood. "This stance towards religious texts suggests an impression from this period that is manifested in the strong religious reluctance of the predecessors, showing respect and veneration for the Quranic text' (Sayyid Ahmed Abdel Ghaffar, 1998, p. 32). This made them reluctant to express personal opinions as it might be deemed following one's desires. The religious text during that period was surrounded by a barrier that they hesitated to cross out of caution and fear.

Perhaps among those who prominently advocated for the liberation of Arab thought from the authority of eternal concepts and the necessity of transitioning to the stage of critical scrutiny, followed by the demand for scientific experimentation and cultural interpretation of all open and closed texts, is Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd. He focused on language and the issue of interpretation in its traditional and contemporary context. He believed in the inevitable gradual liberation from the dominance of the concept of sanctity derived from the jurisprudential interpretations of the Quranic text. He emphasized the need for critics and writers to reclaim their cultural awareness and the necessity of distinguishing between what is a text and what is discourse. Islam, according to him, "is like any other religion, and Muslims are humans like all others, not imprisoned in the eternal uniqueness that cannot be reduced to anything else." (Mohammed Arkoun, 2000, p. 174). He took this path due to the uniqueness of the contemporary period that the Arab world is going through as a whole. He believed in the necessity of creating a liberating critical writing that could construct a modern understanding and craft a new reading in harmony with its present. He stated: 'The time has come for a review and a transition to the liberation phase, not only from the authority of texts alone but from all authority hindering the progress of humanity in our world. We must do this now, immediately, before we are swept away by the flood.' (Nasr Hamed Abu Zaid, 1992, p. 146). This demand for radical changes in the process of Arab critical thinking in the field of studying or critically analyzing texts was aimed at facilitating its understanding for the recipient in light of the scientific and cultural developments experienced by contemporary Arab individuals. It sought to completely rid itself of historical authority and preconceived understanding of all texts based on pre-existing metaphysical presence. He supported his opinion by referring to the critical European mind's approach to concepts of revelation and religion, considering them products of the imaginations of ancient societies and culturally backward environments. He stated: 'In reality, the text is a cultural product.' (Nasr Hamed Abu Zaid, 2014, p. 24). Therefore, he attempts to convey his ideas to the recipient in the Islamic world, stating: 'However, claiming that the text is a cultural product signifies, for the Quran, a stage of formation and completion. It is a stage where the text has become a producer of culture, meaning it has become the dominant and controlling text against which other texts are measured, and their legitimacy is determined by it. The

difference between the two stages in the history of the text is the difference between its derivation from culture and its expression of it, and between its provision to culture and its transformation of it. However, we must always be aware that asserting the existence of two stages in the history of the text does not mean that they are opposing and conflicting stages. In its first stage, expressing culture, the text was not merely a passive carrier of it; it had its own effectiveness as a text in embodying culture and reality. This effectiveness does not mechanically reflect them inversely but embodies them constructively, meaning it reconstructs their data in a new framework. In the second stage, stating that the text is a product of culture does not mean transforming culture into a negative echo of the text. Culture also has its own mechanisms for dealing with the text by re-reading and interpreting it.' (Ibid. pp. 24-25).

Hamed Abu Zaid distinguished historically between the stage of time and place following the descent of the text as a miracle and the stage after its descent, which produced a literary culture carrying a new understanding of the duality of reason and transmission. He emphasized that "the text does not prove anything but requires proof, while nothing mysterious stands before reason. Reason can either prove or deny everything before it. Therefore, there is no escape from starting with rational evidence, as reason is the foundation of transmission, and the existence of transmission is the beginning of rationality" (Hassan Hanafi, 1988, p. 373). He focused more on criticizing the dominance of concepts of complete commitment to the form of writing and interpretation of the exemplary heavenly text. Since it carries the elevated form of the Arabic language and its eloquence, he rejected all models of contemporary or different human interpretations from it in the form of writing and the resulting interpretations. He stated: "To avoid falling into what the ancients fell into, the credibility of the text in the method of text analysis does not arise from external evidence but from the culture's acceptance and celebration of it. The ancients differed on this issue, and their dispute focused on a minor point: Does the text need external evidence to prove its credibility, or does it contain this evidence within itself? Although they all agreed on the necessity of an external standard, they differed in the nature of this standard. Is it reason or the miraculous event that occurs at the hands of the Prophet? Ancient religious thought concluded that the greatest miracle is the text itself. In the method of text analysis, the credibility of the text arises from its role in culture. What culture rejects and denies does not fall within the circle of texts, and what culture receives as a significant text is considered as such. The orientation of culture in choosing texts may vary from one historical stage to another, rejecting what it had previously accepted or accepting what it had previously rejected from texts." (Nasr Hamed Abu Zaid, pp. 27-28). So, his idea was based on the necessity of re-reading everything that has been accomplished in the past, elucidating its orientations and construction methods, and understanding the reasons that led to a unidirectional interpretation of texts. He rejected every attempt to interpret them because "sufficing with the explanations of the early generations of the text, and limiting the role of the modern interpreter to narrating what the ancients said, leads to a result more dangerous than that in society's life. Either people adhere to the literalism of these interpretations and turn them into a creed, considering these eternal truths as final facts, abandoning the experimental method in studying natural and human phenomena. Or science turns into a religion, and religion, in turn, becomes mere myths. Both positions have a presence in our cultural reality, and their effects are evident in the debate between secularists and religious figures." (Ibid. p. 251).

Some modernist critics have adopted a completely contrasting idea to the traditional way of dealing with and venerating heritage texts that do not distinguish between the describing discourse and the described. They advocated a complete reliance on reason as an alternative to understanding the nature, reasons, and purposes of narrative revelation texts, emphasizing the necessity of adopting the logic of Western empirical criticism to discuss all issues of texts, including the sacred text. "The origin and beginning are

the authority of reason, the authority upon which revelation itself is based. Reason is not merely a formal dialectical mechanism but rather a dynamic social-historical agency. This authority is fallible, but equally capable of correcting its mistakes, and most importantly, it is our only means of understanding. Understanding the world, reality, ourselves, and texts," (Abu Zaid, Nasr Hamed, 1994, p. 131). redirecting Arab thought towards the humane understanding it should have. This has led to "a split among the intellectuals of the nation between the Islamic and secular directions, theoretically attributed to the adequacy represented by the emphasis of the former group on the cognitive source of revelation and its value reference, and the insistence of the latter group on the sufficiency of reason in generating perceptions and creating values." (Luay Saffi, 1998, pp. 49-50). Because they envisioned the success of the Western model based on the critical approach and the philological approach that discusses all the mechanisms of traditional thinking and contradicts them in its cognitive keys. "One of the most important of these acquisitions is the distinction that linguistics makes between oral text and the text itself after it becomes written, as there are things that are lost or liberated during the transition from the oral stage to the written stage." (Arkon Mohammed, 1999, p. 53). Therefore, reality necessitates following them in order to transition from a state of backwardness to a level of civilizational development, without considering the presentation of other conditions for progress. This is what Hassan Hanafi expressed by saying, "The mind has reached its perfection, and man can, with his direct perception, as well as with his action, change his reality. Man no longer needs an external mind or will to support him or defeat his enemies; everything in him is natural." (Hasan Hanafi, 1983, p. 91).

Therefore, they relied on the idea that the mind, which does not base its characteristics on experimentation and does not accept diversity, remains merely a dialectical mind living in the circle of debate, using the pretext that the heritage discourse is biased and pre-conditioned, opposing anything new and different from it, and a source of truth; because it obscures knowledge and operates on temporally and spatially limited theories.

The Limits of the Western Text

Many Western critics agree that finding a single definition for a text is one of the greatest errors the mind can make. Therefore, their statements tend to fall within this context. For example, "The issue of having a universal definition inhibiting the text is illogical from a linguistic perspective. This is confirmed by the differences among linguists belonging to different linguistic schools regarding the boundaries of the terms they base their research on," (Saeed Bahiri, 1977, p. 107). So we find, Lotman, who sees that the text depends on three components: - Expression: the linguistic aspect. And specification: meaning that the text has an indivisible significance. "It achieves a specific cultural significance and conveys its complete meaning," (Salah Fadel, 1992, p. 216). While, Louis Hjelmslev believes that the smallest word can constitute a text for us. "So, the phrase 'stop,' meaning halt, is, in Hjelmslev's view, a text." (Yasseri Nofal, 201, p. 18). As for Tzvetan Todorov, he says, "The text is a linguistic production closed in on itself, independent in its meanings, and it may be a sentence or an entire book." (Muhammad Azzam, 2001, p. 14). On the other hand, Van Dijk, who does not distinguish between the concepts of text and discourse, states, "The text is a product of action and a production process on one hand, and the basis for actions and processes of reception and use within the communication and interaction system on the other hand." (Ibid. p. 16). He also believes that "the text and the context depend on each other." (Van Dijk, 2001, p. 156). Meanwhile, both M. Halliday and R. Hassan argue that the text is a "linguistic unit in the usage stage, not related to sentences but realized through them. They focus on unity and coherence in the text by pointing out that it is a semantic unit with three functions: the ideational function highlighted in the content of use, the interpersonal function related to the social dimension between individuals for

expressive language functions, and the textual function involving the principles from which language is composed to create the text as a semantic unit" (Ibid). On the other hand, Dressler asserts that "the text is a statement that is self-sufficient and complete in its meaning," (Salah Fadel, p. 215). While Robert De Beaugrande sees the text as consisting of elements that do not have the conditions of a sentence, such as punctuation marks, advertisements, telegrams, etc. (Robert de Beaugrand, 1998, p. 97). He adds that "the text should be connected to a situation in which a set of orientations, expectations, and knowledge interact, and this broad environment is called the situational context. (Ibid. p.91). Due to the multitude of definitions and differences in perspectives, Julia Kristeva proposes a new critical vision, affirming the openness of literary text to linguistic and non-linguistic elements (signs and symbols), thereby surpassing the structuralist conception (Abdul Qadir Bqchi, 2007, p. 19). From another perspective, Geoffrey Hartman sees the text as having a communicative function similar to discourse, as it requires a sender, a receiver, and circulation. He states that the text is "a meaningful and functional piece, and therefore, it is a productive piece of speech." (Saeed Bahiri, pp. 101-102).

Conclusion

The understanding of a text is not primarily related to the success of carrying out mechanical and technical operations on it. Criticism, at its core, is a relative mental process aimed at approaching meaning for clarification, interpretation, and foresight. It possesses the quality of highlighting values in the form of aesthetics and then critiquing them. Criticism is inevitably governed by the factors of time and place. In other words, it is an acquisition resulting from an attempt to understand what the creator is experiencing. Therefore, it evolves proportionally according to what the critic wants to comprehend or reach with their consciousness. It is a social and cultural act, discussing the self-development method and the utilization of images within certain limits. It is influenced by circumstances in which various contexts converge, all contributing to shaping the specificity of individual and collective identity and the thought that emerges and evolves within them.

The recourse to Western criticism among Arab modernists served as an outlet, providing an alternative to the authority of sacred texts and traditional interpretations that they believe have become obsolete over time. Consequently, they adopted various critical approaches in an attempt to address the problems of Arab critical thought and contribute to societal progress. However, like any endeavor, their project suffered from shortcomings, and some aspects were overlooked, such as:

1. The Arab literary heritage, a product of intellectual craftsmanship that encapsulates the history of individual human experiences, societal developments, and the nuanced meanings of things in their surroundings. In its general form, it reflects a fabric of intertwined reference points that transcends time, does not remain fixed in a specific place, and is not confined to a single reader providing the definitive interpretation.
2. The modernists influenced by Western thought found themselves in a predicament when it came to distinguishing the overall function of the Quranic vision of writing, based on conveying the message, and the references for its interpretation, and the relative nature of its interpretation. They firmly believed that it lacked knowledge, did not engage in contemporary existential discussions, and that subsequent texts were merely enrichments of its meanings in a juristic manner. They asserted that using it as a measure in the literary aspect was a stumbling block in the path of intellectual advancement, ignoring the fact that every reading or interpretation is a construction of another cognitive approach.

3. The sacred text among Muslims is multi-vocal, summarizing the world and encapsulating the purposes of rituals and preceding sacred texts. Therefore, it carries historical readings for understanding comprehension and ethical values. It is a text that brings together all forms and cosmic symbols in the form of a complete written language. It does so because it addresses the history of human truth and its future destinies, revealing the secrets of understanding existence in a way that transcends human sensory perceptions confined by time and place, and the understanding derived from them.
4. - Human criticism is the product of a contextual formulation of a purely social act resulting from human behaviors. Consequently, it engages in sensory and descriptive functions, and its semantic dimensions evolve according to this understanding.
5. - The Western human perspective in criticism has its historical contexts that have never been independent of its conflicts with nature. Through these contexts, interpretations arise, and within them, the Western critic crafts his theses that concern him, justifying his relationship with them. These perspectives cannot be simply replicated or employed in different societies due to the diversity of experiences, contexts, and intellectual ideologies.
6. - The exclusion of historicism, which deals with evolution and social change, from Western criticism led to the emergence of various deconstructive approaches. However, these did not answer existential questions, forcing a recurring return to historical accomplishments and interpretations because ancient texts carry answers, reveal the meanings, and unveil the secrets of understanding existence.
7. - Ancient heritage texts have formulated an ideal portrayal of high human values. Through their contents, they manifest in character depictions or refer to cosmic entities, allowing for possible semantic analysis to produce genuine knowledge within the realm of symbolism and the functions they perform.
8. - The meaning, according to classical critics, is part of a forming process because the beginning of knowledge involves tracing the causes of its occurrence. Any claim of the finality of reference to an ultimate signified is a clear denial of meaning and lacks evidence in the text.
9. - Structural analysis of texts, observing their components, and categorizing their forms as stylistic techniques aims to put an end to creative work and negate any external significance. However, this does not lead to the production of self-related human knowledge because the true creation of the text lies in its spiritual meanings, not in a horizontal arrangement of words devoid of emotions.
10. - Meaning is not achieved through strict adherence to interpretive mechanisms. Merely confining the domains of reference eliminates all purposes, revealing a different endpoint than the textual process.
11. - A critic of heritage texts must be knowledgeable, active, and responsive. Understanding is not an end in itself but an accomplishment of self-knowledge. Each interpretation remains incomplete until the interpreted self is also interpreted to better understand and differentiate it.

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