



Civilizational Perspective on Literary Genres

(A comparison between the origins of literary genres among Arabs and their Western counterparts)

Pr. Abdelmalek Boumendjel ¹

¹: Mohamed Lamine Debaghine University – Sétif 2, a.boumendjel@univ-setif2.dz

Abstract:

The subject of this research is the influence of historical and civilizational factors on the emergence and development of literary genres, and on the similarity or difference between their forms and characteristics in the Arab cultural environment compared to their counterparts in the Western cultural environment.

The research addressed this topic cognitively from a cultural and civilizational perspective, relying on a comparative historical approach, examining the factors influencing the emergence of literary genres and directing their characteristics, and explaining the similarities and differences that occur between literary genres among Arabs and their counterparts among Westerners.

The research reached a pivotal conclusion: literary criticism must take into account the cultural specificity of literary genres. It must not demand that Arab poets ignore the merits of Arabic poetry in order to identify with the poetry of other nations, nor should they be asked to belittle ancient Arabic narrative achievement on the pretext that it does not meet the conditions upon which the modern story is based. Rather, it must believe in its uniqueness and the value of its literary heritage within the framework of that uniqueness. It also believes in the interaction of civilizations and is keen to benefit from various forms of literature in a way that does not harm the aesthetic and human values that distinguish the nation to which it belongs.

Key words: Literary Genres, Civilizational Perspective, Arabic poetry, Arabic narrative, cultural specificity.

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Introduction

Literature is connected to life in various ways. It is the best expression of human emotion, the fruit of intellectual activity, and is closely linked to the nature of the language it embodies in its discourse. It is the tongue of the community to which the writer or author belongs, and it witnesses the development taking place in various aspects of life.

Because human life encompasses commonalities and differences, constants and

changes, the literature that expresses it bears the same nature. Some of it is shared by all of humanity, while others manifest in one civilization or cultural environment in a way that is different from how it manifests in another. Some of it is fixed on characteristics that it does not exceed, and conditions that it cannot neglect. Some of it changes in response to the influence of time or in response to the interaction between civilizations and cultures.

Literary genres are subject, in their emergence and development, to this natural law: the law of influence by the environment, in terms of people and urbanization, knowledge, and language. It is not appropriate to read this or that genre in isolation from the environment in which it originated, grew, and developed. Nor is it appropriate to take the characteristics of this or that genre, in this or that cultural environment, as a standard for what its characteristics should be in another environment.

The purpose of this article is to examine the problematic nature of Arabic literary genres in comparison to Western literary genres, in light of this law. This is to distinguish between commonalities and differences, to affirm the right of Arabic literature to have its own history, arts, and the intrinsic characteristics that distinguish each art form, and to evaluate the practice of many researchers of adopting Western literature, both traditional and contemporary, as a standard for what our Arabic literature should be, in order to liberate the collective Arab conscience from the hegemony of a Western-centric globalization.

Our approach is historical and comparative, examining the historical and cultural influences on the emergence and development of literary genres among Arabs, and comparing them with the factors influencing their emergence and development among Westerners. The article addresses two main topics: the common humanity in literary genres, and the cultural specificity in the manifestation of literary genres. The second topic branches into two sections: the first addresses the idea of distinguishing between Arabic poetry, Greek poetry, and then modern Western poetry with its cultural specificities. The second addresses narrative art as it is formed within the framework of two different civilizations.

This research is distinguished by its civilizational approach to the problem of literary genres: their origin, development, and characteristics. It is an approach close to cultural criticism, but it is concerned with the formal aspect of the literary phenomenon in terms of the influence of historical and civilizational factors in directing it, and thus distinguishing literary genres in a particular civilizational environment with characteristics that differ slightly or greatly from their characteristics in another cultural environment. This is a relatively new approach, as we hardly find it except in limited places in studies that chronicle Arabic literature and its literary genres in terms of their influence by foreign literatures or their distinction from them. The study that most intersects with this research in terms of its methodology and concept is Anwar Al-Jundi's book "Characteristics of Arabic Literature in the Face of Modern Literary Criticism Theories." The idea of this book is that culture influences content and forms, and that

Arabic literature should not abandon its civilizational specificities.

1. The Human Commonality in Literary Genre

Literature is the beautiful expression of human life.

Human life is governed by the law of diversity; a human being is a body and a soul; emotions, feelings, spirit, and mind. If a person expresses themselves and their life, their expression will reflect all of these components; either through their combined presence within the structure of a single literary art, or through the dominance of some literary genres in one literary genre over another. Accordingly, it is natural for literary genres in all human societies to be divided into genres that address the emotional side of the human being, genres that address the intellectual side, and genres that address the sensory-motor side. Because the human soul is inherently susceptible to a variety of sources of influence, stimulating its interest, emotion, and aesthetic sense, it has also become natural for literary arts to branch out into more than one genre, with some focusing on one source of influence, while others focus on another. Aristotle stated that souls are naturally inclined to delight in rhythmic melodies and beautiful imitation (Aristotle, 1953, p. 12). Perhaps this is the reason for the emergence of poetry, distinguished from other literary genres by its rich rhythm, and the emergence of representation, distributed across stories, novels, and plays, as well as dramatic poetry, especially among the Greeks. Furthermore, the human need to express one's emotions, to convey the fruits of one's intellect, and to persuade others of one's opinions, ideas, and positions, was behind the emergence of genres specifically targeting emotional arousal, genres specifically targeting persuasion, and genres that combine both goals in one way or another. This is a shared human quality, not unique to one nation over another. Rather, these genres manifest in one nation in a form that may differ slightly or greatly from its form in another nation, for reasons related to the influence of other unique factors. For example, Arabic poetry differs in some of its characteristics from Greek poetry, and the narrative style of Arabs may differ from that of other civilizations or cultures.

2. Cultural Specificity in the Manifestation of Literary Genres

The unity of the human species produces a unity in natures, motives, and the elements that constitute the human entity—instinct, emotion, reason, and spirit. This unity, in turn, results in a unity in the need for diverse literary genres that address the need for all these elements to express themselves, opening a path for them to move from the realm of potentiality to the realm of action.

However, this single human species will take various paths in history, in terms of the language it uses to express itself, the vision it uses to interpret existence, the religion it embraces, which dictates its rituals, tendencies, and mode of interaction with the universe, and the manner in which its innate powers, individual and social energies, interact in managing the affairs of its life, directing its culture, and shaping its civilization.

Therefore, literary genres move from a state of shared common origins to a state of

difference in certain structural or moral characteristics. This requires viewing them, understanding and evaluating them, from the perspective of their specific cultural conditions, and not adopting other forms, in different cultural environments, as a standard for them. It is not right for a nation to be devoid of poetry expressing its emotions, nor of stories describing the events of its life or occupying its free time and conveying the lessons of its days, nor of sermons connecting its ruler and his commander, or its preacher and his preached, nor of letters conveying news, a request, an emotion or a sermon between those distant in space and perhaps in time, nor of articles revealing an aspect of knowledge, conveying a fruit of the fruits of thought, or a thought of the thoughts of the conscience; but who imposes on the Arab that his poetry be like the poetry of the Greek, and on the Westerner that his narration be like the narration of the Arab, and on the Indian that his sermon be like the sermon of the Persian, and on the Chinese that his message be like the message of the African?

Nothing dictates this except the interaction and overlap that can occur in the history of peoples, cultures, and civilizations. This interaction does not proceed in a uniform manner, nor does it occur all at once; rather, multiple factors intervene to direct and color it. Comparative literature must consider this without believing in the superiority of a center over a margin, or the subordination of a margin to a center. Nor must it ignore the movement of history, which is active in the development of genres, forms, minds, tastes, and temperaments, and the influence of each on the other.

2.1. Arabic poetry differs from Greek poetry and modern Western poetry

It is appropriate to begin with the linguistic and cultural specificity of Arabic poetry, the factors that distinguish it from the poetry of other nations, and the necessity of taking this specificity into account in any conceptualization, aesthetic study, or creative practice.

What is poetry among the Arabs? How did it originate? Why is it eternally linked to meter and rhyme? Can it dispense with this formal characteristic at any stage of its ongoing history? Perhaps Ibn Rasheeq was the first to attempt to imagine a reason for the emergence of Arabic poetry when he said: "All speech was prose. The Arabs needed to sing about their noble morals, the goodness of their races, and the remembrance of their good days, their displaced homelands, their noble knights, and their generous men; this would move them toward generosity and guide their children to good character. They imagined meters that they made into scales for speech. When they had perfected their meter, they called it poetry because they felt it..." (Al-Qayrawani, 1981, p. 20).

Whether or not Ibn Rasheeq's hypothesis is correct regarding the social motivation to write poetry, it captures an essential characteristic of Arabic poetry: singing. This singing, to which poetry has come to be attributed and called "lyrical poetry," is an internal, emotional impulse that drives the soul to express its innermost emotions, which shake the being and search for an outlet to channel those waves of feelings that overflow with pride in noble morals, or boasting about illustrious days, or sadness over parting from one's homeland, or longing for a time, a homeland, or a person. This outlet is the specific

expression, distinct from prose. This characteristic lies in the musical rhythm expressed by Ibn Rashiq in the metre (meters) used for metre. These metre (meters) are the result of the strong emotional drive they felt; therefore, they called this type of speech poetry.

Hence, Arabic poetry is linked to meter. As for rhyme, Ibn Rasheeq did not mention it, but it can be visualized in the term "al-'aaridh." Poetry is linked to singing, singing is linked to feeling, and feeling calls for meter and rhyme. Modern criticism provides a valid explanation for this close, natural relationship between poetry and meter.. In modern criticism, a valid explanation for this close, natural relationship between poetry and meter is found in the words of Ibrahim Al-Mazini: "The explanation for this, as we know, is that every emotion that takes hold of the soul and flows smoothly continues to seek an expression that is as smooth as its flow. Either it satisfies it and is reassured, or it senses a need or a deficiency that might impede its natural flow, perhaps pushing it into an unnatural direction, harming both body and soul, just as a pregnant woman continues to labor until she gives birth. This is the reason for the relief and lightness that a poet finds after composing his feelings into poetry. Deep, long-lasting emotions—since the beginning of humankind—have always sought an outlet and required measured language. The deeper the feeling, the more apparent, clearer, and more impactful the meter becomes. However, for this to happen, the feeling must combine depth with longevity, for the onset of anger, despite its intensity, has no natural relationship to meter or music." (Al-Mazini, 1915, p. 37)

Arabic poetry is lyrical. Arabs did not know another type of poetry, such as dramatic poetry, except in later eras, and only reluctantly. Singing requires, above all, an enchanting rhythm and vibrations that match and mimic the emotional vibration that prompted it. Meter and rhyme provided this rhythm perfectly. Arabs, both commoners and specialists, poets, critics, and philosophers, understood that poetry is a genre of speech distinguished by its meter and rhyme, completely different from prose in form but not in content. In this regard, it is noteworthy that when Muslim philosophers wanted to provide a universal definition of poetry that included the poetry of other nations, they relied on imagination and meter as the essence of the poetic art. However, they distinguished Arabic poetry by the increase in rhyme. Ibn Sina defined poetry as "imaginative speech composed of equal, measured sayings, and among the Arabs, it has a rhyme" (Aristotle, 1973, p. 161). Al-Qartajani took this approach, saying: "Poetry is imaginative, rhythmic speech, distinguished in the Arabic language by the addition of rhyme, and its being composed of imaginative premises, whether true or false. It does not require anything other than imagination as poetry." (Al-Qartajani, 1986, p. 89).

Awareness of linguistic and cultural specificity was deeply rooted among ancient Arab critics and philosophers. The neglect of rhyme they found among the Greeks did not prompt them to dispense with the rhyme component in defining Arabic poetry. However, many modern Arab critics have fallen into the error of comparison and the tendency to resemble without regard for the law of specificity. Some of them called for the necessity of liberation from the restrictions of meter and rhyme, and some called for limiting themselves to meter without rhyme. It is noteworthy that a balanced critic like Al-Aqqad

called for "free verse," free of rhyme and meter, for a period. Then, a failed experience led him to acknowledge the illegitimacy of dispensing with rhyme in Arabic poetry, saying:

"Rhyme delights when it arrives in its expected place, and neglecting rhyme shocks the ear, unlike what is expected when it is surprised by a note that deviates from the previous note. The intermediate position between the two is one that neither delights nor shocks, but rather meets the ear with a middle ground, neither longing nor aversion." (Al-Aqqad, 1981, p. 309)

Because the experience of free verse was a complete failure, it seemed to him that he could extract a benefit from it, namely the empirical certainty that Arabic taste cannot dispense with rhyme. So he added:

"Therefore, we do not consider that the years that have passed since the beginning of thinking about free verse have passed in vain. Because during this period, we know what we can and cannot weave. Poets abandoned the experience of free verse, which has a different rhyme in each verse, and experimented with adhering to the rhyme equal sections, or in double and monosyllabic poems and the like, then it is permissible and sufficient for the purpose we intend to achieve by thinking about free verse, because it preserves the musicality and helps the poet expand the meaning and move the subject wherever he wishes. Therefore, it is correct to say: The problem of rhyme in Arabic poetry has been solved in the best possible way, and we no longer need to use it in this general way, after this generality we have tried and become accustomed to" (Al-Aqqad, 1981, p. 73).

The Western example was present in Al-Aqqad's mind as he embarked on this experiment. He examined the state of Western poetry and found in it a richness of content and a diversity of genres that motivated him to bring these advantages to Arabic poetry. Initially, it became clear to him that the barrier to these advantages was the restrictions of meter and rhyme. He said: "Our meters and rhymes are too narrow to accommodate the aims of a poet who has opened his soul and read Western poetry. He saw how their meters welcome lengthy narratives and diverse themes, and how poetic forms become flexible in their hands, allowing them to express what no Arab poet is capable of except in prose" (Al-Aqqad, 1924, p. 279). He then added: "There is nothing between Arabic poetry and its branching out and growth except this barrier. When the rhymes expand to accommodate various meanings and purposes, and the scope of expression expands, poetic talents of all kinds will emerge" (Al-Aqqad, 1924, p. 279).

Arabic poetry has been accused of an unbearable charge: meter and rhyme restrict poets from delving into diverse topics, themes, and ways of expressing life. Just as the comparison between Arabic lyric poetry and Greek dramatic poetry was fundamentally flawed, as it compared two different poetic styles, so too is the comparison between what Western poetry has become, abandoning meter and rhyme, and Arabic poetry, which adheres to them.

"Poetry" in Western culture is tied to Greek conceptual roots that link poetry to action and composition, not to feeling. Regarding Aristotle's book "Poetics," Jean-Michel Goffard

says: "Poetics is not an essay or a study dealing with poetry or poetic creation in the sense we understand it today. The term 'poetics' comes from the Greek *poiètikos*, which comes from the root *poièn*, meaning 'to make, to construct, to compose.' The poet (Greek: *poiètes*) is above all 'one who makes, one who works, one who composes,' and poetry (*poièsis*) is the art of composition. Thus, Aristotle's work does not stop at this particular type of categorical product that we today call 'poetry,' but extends beyond it to every artistic product that is the result of a particular authorial activity." (Goffard, 2008, p. 8)

The poetry that Aristotle was concerned with in his famous book is not of the kind of Arabic poetry, which is based on singing (the rhythm of emotions), but rather of the kind of Greek epic poetry, which is based on composing events and imitating actions. Poetry, in the linguistic and lexical sense of the Greeks, is linked to craftsmanship, construction, and composition, not to feeling, as is the case with the Arabs." (Boumendjel, 2022, p. 15). This ancient comparison led Muslim philosophers to fall into many errors in translation and theorizing about poetry, such as calling tragedy praise and comedy satire, even though the difference between the two is qualitative and not substantive. As for the modern comparison, it has almost uprooted Arabic poetry and destroyed the essence of its nature and its greatest advantages, were it not for the remnant that continues to multiply among its loyal followers who believe in its linguistic, artistic, and cultural specificity.

Here, it is worth noting two important factors that have a profound impact in distinguishing Arabic poetry from Western poetry or the poetry of any other nation: the linguistic factor and the religious and cultural factor (the style of the Holy Qur'an). As for the linguistic factor, the Arabic language is essentially a poetic language, as described by Al-Aqqad (Al-Aqqad, 1995). The meaning of "poetic" here is that it possesses musical, morphological, phonetic, and lexical characteristics that enable it to flow with music without much effort on the part of the poet, or even the prose writer. Its lavish lexical richness, its generative derivational morphology, and its overall phonetic characteristics make it always ready to respond to the demand for beautiful, elegant artistic expression for any purpose sought by the prose writer or poet, unless the prose writer is weak and the intellect is dull. While the greatest struggle for poets as they strive to adhere to meter and rhyme is adapting the musical form to the emotional wave and moral content, the Arab poet—unless, as I mentioned, he is weak in stature and talent—suffers little difficulty in adapting purposes, feelings, and meanings to his meter and rhyme. Rather, he finds in his language, with its poetic nature, a source of relief, and even in the constraints of rhyme, an outlet for forms of linguistic and artistic creativity that would never have occurred to him were it not for the constriction of restrictions.

Butrus al-Bustani, despite his strong belief in the necessity of openness to and benefiting from the literatures of other nations, believed in this linguistic-musical specificity of Arabic poetry. He noted the Arabic poet's ability to enrich his poetry with music, without requiring any effort to do so. Al-Aqqad was the first to speak of the poetic nature of the Arabic language when he said: "The Arabic language is poetic by nature, due to the branching of its vocabulary and the diversity of its standard derivations in a style

that has no parallel in the Aryan languages, and the rhymes are crowded in it in a way that facilitates composition. It is - contrary to what some foreigners claim - well-structured and tightly woven, and it has methods of deletion, estimation, advancement and delay that open up the scope for the poet to formulate his expressions in various molds, and that is an advantage for which the language is praised in poetry." (Al-Bustani, 1904, p. 192) However, the claim of restricting meter and rhyme to the talents of Arab poets has become widespread in modern Arab critical discourse, and has been used as a pretext to tamper with the ancient concept of poetry among the Arabs, in order to achieve similarity with the Western concept of poetry; a concept built on the example of representative poetry more than it was built on the example of lyrical poetry, and expresses the struggle of the Western poet with the restrictions of meter and rhyme, and does not express the situation of the Arab poet; Even though many Western critics themselves see in these restrictions aesthetic virtues that the poet should not dispense with (Drew, 1971, p. 45)

As for the civilizational (Quranic) factor, it is that the first book of the Arabs, their holy book, the Holy Quran, is rich in phonetic balances, and similar in this richness to metered and rhymed poetry. Because of this similarity, the Arab polytheists at the dawn of Islam attempted to attribute the label of poet to the Prophet Muhammad, peace and blessings be upon him, accusing him of composing the Quran on his own. This was not only because of the Quran's powerful influence and appeal, but also because they found in it a high tonal charge and a captivating rhythmic sweetness, with a fluidity resembling the fluidity of meter and a resonance of intervals resembling the harmony of rhyme. Thus, the Arab who recites this book and listens to it morning and evening, its melodies echoing in his ears at all times, cannot develop a musical taste that does not require this harmony and sweetness in the poetry he receives. He expects the verses to end with rhyme, just as he is accustomed to Quranic verses ending with pauses. He expects poetry to come in meter, just as he is accustomed to receiving the Quran, with its own rhythmic effects and exquisite arrangement, resembling meter. We can add to this civilizational factor that Arabs have become accustomed to preserving meter's merits, viewing it as a factor in preserving speech, protecting it from slipping, being forgotten, and disappearing, and attracting the reader to the meanings, stories, values, and even knowledge it contains. He has adopted it as a template for composing many sciences and narrating many stories, and has found no reluctance or disdain in it. So how can he dispense with it or be restricted by it in what is its core domain and intimate subject: depicting emotions? Not far from this aspect of the uniqueness of Arabic poetry, some modern Arab critics wonder about the absence of epic, representative poetry from our literary heritage. The truth is, there is no justification for this question, which sometimes harbors a tinge of blame. It is as if the absence of epic genres in our literature, whether poetry or prose, indicates a mental deficiency, or a decline in our innovative sense (Murtad. 1968, pp. 9-10); whereas the issue has another, completely different aspect; which is that the epic arose in cultural and religious circumstances different from the cultural circumstances in which literary genres arose among the Arabs: they are the circumstances of the prevalence of

superstitions and myths in pagan societies whose minds did not rise to comprehend the realities of existence, or deviated from the heavenly messages that call for monotheism; the multiplicity of gods in Greek culture, and the belief in the outbreak of conflicts between them, or between them and humans, had a great impact in supplying their literary imagination with this epic breath that responds to the human instinct for love of imagination, imitation and storytelling, as it responds to the need to fill the mental void related to the realities of existence. This is a state that the Arab did not experience, and Islam filled the voids in his mind and guided him to the greater realities of existence; He did not need to travel long distances on the wings of mythical imagination to pursue the struggle between the gods and the demigods and to represent that struggle.

Hazem al-Qartajani was aware of this cultural situation. When discussing the differences in poetic styles between Arabs and Greeks, he mocked the Greek imagination, which reaches the point of imagining the impossibilities that old women among us use to lull children into sleep, saying: "It would never occur to Arabs to invent the impossible in any field of poetry. Greek poets invented what they built their poetic imagination upon, turning it into manifestations of their sayings. They made what never happened into examples of what did happen, and built stories on it, just like old women tell children in their conversations about impossibilities." (Al-Qartajani, 1986, pp. 77-78). He praised the various types of manipulation of meanings and structures in Arabic lyric poetry, which are lacking in Greek poetry. He said in this regard: "If this wise man, Aristotle, had found in Greek poetry what he finds in Arab poetry in terms of the abundance of wisdom, proverbs, and inferences, and the diversity of creative forms of speech, both verbal and in meaning, and their deep knowledge of various meanings, and their skill in crafting them and matching words, and in the perfection of their structures and conjunctions, and the subtlety of their allusions, completions, and digressions, and the beauty of their arguments and disputes, and their manipulation of imaginative sayings as they wished, he would have added to the poetic laws he established." (Al-Qartajani, 1986, p. 69) This is a type of comparative literature whose correct path we need to emulate, rather than adopting the literatures of other nations, especially those shaped by particular cultural conditions, as a standard and model. Discussion of the absence of the epic, and of representative poetry in general, from the Arab literary heritage leads us to another comparison between Arab literary genres and their Western counterparts; this concerns narrative genres.

2.2. The Art of Narrative Between Two Civilizations

The question of the story in Arabic literature is one that modern Arabic criticism has repeatedly addressed, often lacking in its models a cultural awareness of the origins of the arts and the influence of the cultural environment on their forms, structures, content, and development. It has previously been noted that storytelling is deeply rooted in human nature, and that it is something that human beings are naturally inclined to enjoy, gravitate toward, and desire to practice or listen to. Therefore, it cannot be claimed that

any particular nation has specialized in composing stories to the exclusion of others. Rather, it is necessary to distinguish between the forms of storytelling and the types of narrative art and the extent of their development in one nation compared to another.

In Greek literature, storytelling initially took a poetic, mythical form, influenced by the aforementioned dominance of the pagan interpretation of the universe, and its construction on myths and legends that attributed various forms of conflict to the gods. This provided a warm incubator for the emergence of the epic narrative art of Greece: tragedy, comedy, and epic, which take poetic art and theatrical performance as their manifestations, similar to Homer's *Iliad*. The connection between storytelling and poetic form was also known to the Arabs since the pre-Islamic era. It was embodied in numerous poems and odes, which contain a narrative structure that recounts the poet's romantic, travel, or hunting adventures, as is the case with Imru' al-Qais's ode and Labid's ode. Or they narrate another type of story that glorifies certain human values, such as loyalty, courage, generosity, and bravery, as is the case with Samual and Antarah. However, this type of storytelling was not epic in spirit, but rather short or medium in length. It was not purely narrative and had a purely narrative structure, but rather had a lyrical bent and formed part of a lyrical poetic fabric that focused on personal or social values, not on the narrative events themselves. This type of storytelling responded to the needs of poetic art, expressing powerful moments of human emotional experience, both individual and social, without finding any incentive to extend it into an epic, or develop it into an independent story with a complete narrative structure. Such is the nature of things.

After the revelation of the message of Islam, the Arabs became acquainted with a type of storytelling that was explicit, clear, unique, and exciting, in the Holy Qur'an. The preaching sessions of Arab Muslims, for education, upbringing, and advocacy to the new religion, also featured various types of storytelling that did not rise to the level of a new literary genre in their own right. However, the cultural development experienced by the Arab Islamic nation, with its geographical expansion and diverse cultural tributaries, brought about by the conversion of neighboring countries and peoples to Islam and their integration into Islamic civilization, brought to the forefront of established literary genres such as poetry and rhetoric, narratives and epistles, debates, and essays, a new literary genre with a predominant and clear narrative character: the *maqama*. Another narrative genre was the tale told by animals. A third narrative genre, more purely storytelling and distinct from other literary genres, was the symbolic imaginary story with a philosophical or religious dimension, embodied in Ibn Tufayl's *Hayy ibn Yaqzan* and Abu al-Ala al-Ma'arri's *The Epistle of Forgiveness*. With this evolving trajectory of Arab narrative practice, Arabic literature has acquired a unique storytelling history, some of which is purely Arab, and some of which is the result of cross-pollination and cultural interaction that has fused cultures, tastes, artistic experiences, and creative tendencies into a single cultural basin.

If we take the *Maqama* and the modern Arab critical stance toward it as an example of

the debate over specificity and dependency in the conception of literary genres, comparing their origins and characteristics between one nation and another, we find abundant material for discussion, ranging from objectivity to bias. We will refer to it here as much as space allows.

The Maqama was not a purely Arab literary genre; it was created by Badī' al-Zamān al-Hamadhānī, who was Persian in origin, Arabic in language, and Muslim in religion and civilization. Persian storytelling has its own spirit and roots, influenced by the Indians' own storytelling. In both civilizations and cultures, there are factors that tend toward mythical or imaginary stories, which drive the emergence of this type of narrative practice. The Arabs also have narrative experiences and a natural inclination towards storytelling and narration, which prepares the atmosphere for merging all of this into a distinct literary and cultural mixture, which is the Maqama. It draws its events from reality, not myth, and draws its eloquence from the Arabic rhetorical heritage and the Abbasid rhetorical style, not from the epic mythical style.

The maqama is distinguished by "three formal characteristics: a narrative structure, elegant, rhyming language, and the inclusion of diverse literary forms, including prose, poetry, wisdom, proverbs, and anecdotes. It also has one substantive characteristic: the central theme of the maqama is based on fraud and begging for money." (Boumenjel, 2011, p. 211).

An objective critical examination of the art of the maqama views it as it is, with the formal and substantive characteristics we have mentioned, without focusing on one characteristic and neglecting another. Nor does it adopt a later narrative literary genre as a standard. It is a new literary genre, completely independent of any other literary genre that preceded it or emerged after it. This is how early observers of the maqama of Badī' al-Zaman al-Hamadhānī and later the maqām of al-Hāriri received it. "They received it as a literary prose production that is the epitome of elegance of language, eloquence of style, mastery of imagery, captivating spirit, and the magic of excitement. They received it as a sublime Arabic literary prose model that contrasts with the sublime poetic model represented by pre-Islamic poetry and the great poetry that followed it. They received it as an unbroken whole, an integrated, undivided entity. They celebrated the elegance of the wording and the eloquence of the expression, the diversity of the magical elements, and the abundance of reasons for excitement; these are the rhetorical components that have given it the highest place among the arts of ancient Arabic prose." (Boumendjel, 2011, p. 212).

However, modern Arabic criticism has not taken into account this formal specificity related to the cultural specificity of the novel, when comparing it with the modern story, distinguishing between them, and questioning the degree of similarity and contrast between the formal characteristics and artistic virtues of each.

Al-Khalidi compared the two narratives, finding that they share the narrative of events based on realistic, not mythical, human characters with mythical abilities, and the representation of a specific human archetype: hypocrisy, miserliness, fraud, or begging.

Conversely, he saw that the Maqama is inferior to the modern Western dramatic novel in that its sophisticated, difficult, artificial, and rhyming language prevents it from fulfilling the function of representation, which requires ease of understanding and acceptance by the common people, and a focus on "studying the morals of men and explaining the special qualities of individuals or social groups" (Al-Khalidi, 1984, p. 166) so that speech can fulfill its original function, which is "explaining the meanings hidden in the soul" (Al-Khalidi, 1984, p. 60), rather than "adorning speech with the jewels of rhetoric and embellishing it with metaphors and similes" (Al-Khalidi, 1984, p. 163).

Here, Al-Khalidi does not differentiate between the Maqama and the novel only in terms of representational ability, but also in terms of fulfilling the purposes of speech. For him, the function of speech is to clarify meanings, not verbal elegance. This is a matter for consideration, and takes us from a discussion of literary genres to a discussion of eloquence in general and linguistic functions in particular. Al-Khalidi did justice to the writers of the Maqama and praised their talents and skills, pointing out that "these distinguished men did not intend, by composing the Maqama, to portray a funny novel in the style of comedy, nor a sad novel in the style of tragedy. Rather, they intended to demonstrate the ability to classify speech, to embellish it with the brocade of metaphors, to dress it in the garb of similes, and to adorn it with pearls of rhetoric (...). If one of those distinguished men were to devote his attention to portraying his novel in the style of Greek, Roman, or Frankish novels, he would give us the best and highest-class wines from a transparent glass cup." (Al-Khalidi, 1984, p. 97).

This rhetorical and literary ability, which is evident in the language of the maqama, will be addressed by critics of the Romantic period in our modern Arabic criticism, who consider it a stylistic flaw with negative implications for the nature of Arabic taste and rhetoric, compared to the style of creativity and writing in modern Western literature. "Modern Arab criticism has mostly become embroiled in the dilemma of comparing the art of maqama and the art of storytelling on the one hand, and between Arabic rhetoric and modern Western rhetoric on the other. This has resulted in the maqama being treated unfairly by those who despise it and those who are proud of it alike. Taha Hussein, Al-Aqqad, Al-Manfaluti, Mikhail Naimy, Ahmad Amin, Muhammad Haykal, Ahmad Dayf, Yahya Haqqi, Muhammad Mandur, and Shawqi Dayf... each of them turned their face towards Western standards of literary style and believed in the emotional expressive tendency of poetry and prose alike. This led many of them to reject the Arabic style and ancient Arabic rhetoric, and to adopt the art of maqama as evidence of the accusation of artificiality, formalism, emptiness, vulgarity, and sterility." (Boumendjel, 2011, pp. 214-215) This is the natural result of a comparison built on a tasteful and theoretical basis influenced by Western literature. "A reader who was formed in a horizon founded on aesthetic values that elevate subjectivity, individualism, modernity, expressionism, and imagery cannot be expected to be familiar with, admire, or appreciate a text that comes from a horizon that lies at the opposite end of these values and standards." (Nader, 2013, p. 172)

Arab critics at that time aspired to a narrative literary genre capable of depicting social

life, representing “the farmer in his field, the merchant in his shop, the prince in his palace, the scholar among his students and books, the sheikh among his family, the worshipper in his mosque and monastery, and the young man in his debauchery and love” (Ayyad, 1993, p. 84), as Ahmed Deif put it. This aspiration can only be met by the novel, the story, and the play, and cannot be met by the maqama, or any other ancient Arabic literary genre, as Muhammad Haykal warned, asking: “If we are content with ancient Arabic literature, will it be possible for us to innovate in these genres as the West has?” (Heikal, n.d., p. 32).

This view may be correct, and the emerging narrative art in modern Arabic literature may be the result of influence from Western narratives, rather than a development of ancient Arabic narrative experiences. Yahya Haqqi emphasized this, noting that “what is available is limited to some biographies, stories from One Thousand and One Nights, and maqamat that have been studied only as linguistic documents steeped in the treasures of grammar and rhetoric” (Haqqi, 1978, p. 21). However, the flaw in critical consideration of the issue lies in adopting a negative, and sometimes derogatory, stance toward the Arabic art of maqama, focusing on its linguistic characteristics rather than its narrative aspects, and exaggerating in denigrating its linguistic embellishments, stripping it of its human artistic values. This is in line with what Ahmad Hasan al-Zayyat argued when he stated that the purpose of maqama is not “the beauty of stories, nor the beauty of preaching, nor the benefit of knowledge, but rather it is an artistic literary piece intended as ‘art for art’s sake,’ bringing together stray linguistic fragments and rare structures in an elegantly rhymed style that impresses more than it influences, and delights more than it benefits.” (Al-Zayyat, 1985, p. 458) Then he went too far in denying its narrative nature, saying: “He who worked to include the Maqamat in the category of stories made a mistake, and he who considered the Maqamat a tale or a short story went astray, and he who found in the Maqamat a basis for modern drama went even further in error.” (Al-Zayyat, 1985, p. 540) This assertion in denying its connection to the art of storytelling, and denying the possibility of its influence on the development of this art among the Arabs, and perhaps among Westerners as well, as other critics see, is not objective at all, as it overlooks or ignores the idea of the gradual development of the arts, and the prevalence of the narrative tendency among all peoples, especially the Eastern ones, due to their ancient connection to religions, and the establishment of the dissemination of teachings on storytelling (Khorshid, n.d. a. pp. 9-11), as Farouk Khorshid noted, adopting a civilizational point of view that rejects diminishing the value of Arab literary achievement, and paving the way for psychological and literary dependence on the West; He went on to say that the claim that Arabic literature did not know the story until its late eras when it came into contact with Western literature is a mistake and a dangerous claim, “because it attempts to link us to European civilization, linking the follower to the leader and the beggar to the one who gives generously and liberally, and makes our modern Arabic literature not a natural extension of an authentic heritage that was brought to it by the development of generations and the efforts of artists from the sons of Arabic throughout the centuries.” (Khorshid, (n.d.) p. 10)

This nationalistic, civilizational approach to conceptualizing the origins of literary genres was adopted by a group of Arab critics with a nationalist tendency, as part of a wave of rooting critical theories and literary phenomena. Perhaps the most prominent and most defensive of the art of the maqama and the most appreciative of its position on the scale of literary genres was Abdelmalek Mortad, from his first book, "The Story in Arabic Literature," through his book, "The Art of Maqamat in Arabic Literature," to his book, "The Maqamat of Al-Suyuti," which witnessed some retreat from his ideas in the two previous books. He insisted on considering the maqama a complete story, and on stating that it "represents the narrative peak in ancient Arabic literature." (Mortad, 1965, p. 189) The most important aspect mentioned in Mortad's defense of the maqama, after insisting on its narrative essence, was praise for its artistic value, and he considered its linguistic characteristics with a rhetorical tendency among its enjoyable artistic advantages, contrary to what many Arab critics with a romantic tendency went for. In commending the Maqama of Al-Mudhiriyya, he wrote:

"We are faced with a sublime, sublimely sophisticated, mature, and magnificent artistic writing. If we seek pleasure for our minds in reading the most beautiful, enjoyable, and immortal literature, then this Maqama, in the language of the ancients, and the short story in the language of the moderns, is one of those types. If we seek relief from toil, a smile from a frown, optimism from pessimism, joy and liberation from boredom and confusion, then Al-Mudhiriyya has what we are looking for. Despite its antiquity, its deep antiquity, and its inclusion of some strange words, it never ceases to delight us and inspire in us the spiritual beauty, inspiration, and imagination that living, refined literature should arouse." (Murtad, 1965, p. 220).

This is a position not without scholarly merit and a defense that supports the fervor of nationalist sentiment with the power of critical theory. However, this nationalist tendency, shared by other critics, did not escape the pitfall of subjective comparison into which those who belittled the value of the maqama fell, and exaggerated in denying its narrative nature and its connection to the modern novel fell. This starting point of comparison led them to adopt the narrative structure as the criterion for the artistic value of the maqama, even though this structure is prominent in some maqama and absent in others. The second group erred in that they "did not view the maqama as a set of linguistic and rhetorical components, and a system of essential and qualitative elements that give it a literary identity and artistic specificity. They did not view it as a unique phenomenon in the history of Arabic literature and literary history as a whole, with structural components present in all maqama and not confined to a limited number of them. Or, to put it very briefly: they viewed it as a story and did not view it as a maqama." (Boumendjel, 2011, p. 222)

Abdelmalek Mortad admitted his involvement in this nationalist fanaticism, which did injustice to both the story and the maqama (Mortad, 1996, p. 12). He adopted an opinion regarding the maqama, considering it merely a maqama, without comparing it to modern stories. His conclusion was that it is a literary genre in its own right, "which takes narrative form as its fabric, and characters with repeated faces, different roles, and

charming natures as its basis.” (Murtad, 1996, p. 13) He should have added “and elegant rhyming language as its style” to complete the picture. I believe that this is the correct approach to dealing with an issue that lies at the heart of comparative literature. However, comparison should be viewed on objective foundations that examine the emergence of new literary genres, their civilizational conditions, formal peculiarities, and artistic advantages, without adopting their modernity as a criterion for the suitability of the old, nor asserting that their old is the origin upon which the modern literary form was built. Civilizations, and thus their cultural and artistic achievements, are similar and divergent, and interact as they differentiate. It is not far-fetched that the modern Western story was influenced in its emergence by some form of Arab narrative experiences, especially the “fabulo” stories of the Middle Ages, and then the stories of the clever ones in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. In Spain, where Muhammad Ghanimi Hilal (Hilal, 1953, pp. 189, 199) sees the possibility of its being influenced by Arabic maqamat due to the similarity between them in form and subject, and because historical evidence indicates its popularity in Spain and the translation of some of them into Hebrew. Perhaps the contribution of Arabic stories to the art of storytelling in general was its transformation from a mythical, legendary nature to a realistic, humane one; a major development that should not be underestimated on the scale of intellectual advancement and human values.

The modern Western story, after benefiting from all these Greek, Arabic, and Latin influences, has reached a high level of sophistication, maturity, and independence from other literary genres, with its structural and formal characteristics. There is no doubt that writers of the modern Arabic story have examined and adapted it more than they have examined ancient Arabic narrative models, due to their strong connection with Western literature at the beginning of the twentieth century, and due to the development and advancement that has taken place there. This is the way of literatures, cultures, and civilizations; some influence each other and take from each other, with the center often having a stronger influence than the periphery. Therefore, researchers should always take these principles into consideration when comparing one literary environment with another, so as not to neglect the cultural specificity of a particular literary stock and not to deny the influence of literatures on each other due to the influence of civilizations.

Conclusion

Literature, in its expression of human life, takes many forms, varying according to the elements that constitute the human entity and differing from one cultural environment to another, depending on the linguistic, religious, cultural, and civilizational factors that interact within those environments. Therefore, literary genres appear in one environment and not in another. A particular literary genre emerges and then develops in one way in one environment, while it appears and develops in another in another, producing what we call the cultural specificity of literary genres. Just as cultural achievements vary and differ, so do similarities and interactions. A great deal of similarity

and intersection emerge, due to the unity of human nature, on the one hand, and to the communication and interaction that occurs between nations and peoples, on the other.

The Arabs wrote poetry and were famous for it. They also wrote prose, distinguishing it strictly from poetry. The Greeks also wrote poetry, but they connected it to prose through the epic form and narrative content, which in modern Western literature evolved into the novel and the play. Among the Arabs, the story was found in many forms: included in poetry, as a major theme in the Holy Quran, in folk fairy tales, in symbolic literary stories, and in the maqama, combining narrative narration with the elegance of language. Perhaps some of this influenced the emergence of the modern Western story, transforming from the world of myth and legend to the world of human reality. Because modern Western literature has its strength and influence derived from the strength of the civilization to which it belongs, it is natural for it to have an impact on the reality of modern Arabic literature, both poetry and prose.

The message of the responsible literary critic is to call upon writers and researchers to take into account the civilizational specificity of literary genres. The Arab poet is not asked to neglect the advantages of Arabic poetry in order to identify with the poetry of other nations, nor is he asked to belittle the ancient Arabic narrative achievement on the grounds that it does not meet the conditions upon which the modern story is based. Rather, he believes in his own uniqueness and the value of his literary legacy within the framework of that uniqueness. He also believes in the interaction of civilizations and is keen to benefit from different forms of literature in a way that does not harm the aesthetic and human values that characterize the nation to which he belongs.

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