



La-Net

ARA 313

INTRODUCTION TO CLASSICAL ARABIC CRITICISM



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Course code: ARA 313

Course title: Introduction to Classical Arabic Criticism

Course credit load: 2 Units

Series 1: Historical Evolution of Classical Arabic Criticism

- **1.1 Origins of Classical Arabic Criticism**
 - 1.1.1 Oral traditions and poetic gatherings
 - 1.1.2 Role of poets in society
 - 1.1.3 Informal judgements in early literary culture
- **1.2 Development Across Historical Periods**
 - 1.2.1 Pre-Islamic influences on literary judgement
 - 1.2.2 Early Islamic contributions to criticism
 - 1.2.3 Abbasid era and flourishing of criticism
- **1.3 Key Themes in the Evolution of Criticism**
 - 1.3.1 Focus on poetry and eloquence
 - 1.3.2 Role of language and rhetoric in criticism
 - 1.3.3 Ethical and cultural dimensions of criticism
- **1.4 Transition Towards Systematic Criticism**
 - 1.4.1 Movement from informal judgements to structured criticism
 - 1.4.2 Preparation for later scholars such as Al-ʿĀmidī
 - 1.4.3 Legacy of early criticism in shaping Arabic literary studies

Introduction

The study of Classical Arabic criticism opens a window into the intellectual and cultural life of the Arab world across centuries. From the vibrant oral traditions of pre-Islamic poetry to the refined scholarly debates of the Abbasid era, criticism has always been central to how literature



was valued, preserved, and transmitted. By tracing its historical evolution, you will gain insight into the foundations of Arabic literary thought and understand how early practices shaped the discipline that continues to inform scholarship today.

The aim of this Series is to guide you through the historical development of Classical Arabic criticism, enabling you to define its origins, explain its progression across different periods, and evaluate the themes and transitions that prepared the ground for systematic approaches in later scholarship.

We shall commence this Series by examining the origins of Classical Arabic criticism, focusing on oral traditions, poetic gatherings, and the role of poets in society. Next, we will explore its development across historical periods, beginning with pre-Islamic influences, continuing with early Islamic contributions, and moving on to the flourishing of criticism during the Abbasid era. Afterwards, we will consider key themes in the evolution of criticism, such as the focus on poetry, eloquence, language, and rhetoric. Finally, we will conclude by studying the transition towards systematic criticism, highlighting how informal judgements gradually gave way to structured approaches that paved the way for later scholars like Al-ʿĀmidī.

Series Learning Outcomes

Upon completing this Series, you should be able to:

- **SLO 1.1** define the origins of Classical Arabic criticism by identifying oral traditions, poetic gatherings, and the role of poets in society,
- **SLO 1.2** explain how informal judgements shaped the early literary culture of the Arabs,
- **SLO 1.3** describe the influence of pre-Islamic practices on the development of literary evaluation,
- **SLO 1.4** analyse the contributions of early Islamic scholarship to the growth of Arabic criticism,
- **SLO 1.5** examine the flourishing of criticism during the Abbasid era and its intellectual significance,
- **SLO 1.6** evaluate key themes in the evolution of criticism, including poetry, eloquence, language, and rhetoric,



- **SLO 1.7** distinguish between informal and structured approaches in the historical development of criticism, and
- **SLO 1.8** assess how the transition towards systematic criticism prepared the ground for later scholars such as Al-‘Āmidī.

1.1 Origins Of Classical Arabic Criticism

1.1.1 Oral traditions and poetic gatherings

The earliest roots of **Classical Arabic criticism** can be found in the oral traditions of the Arabs. **Oral tradition** refers to the practice of transmitting cultural knowledge, poetry, and stories through spoken word rather than written texts. Poetry was the dominant literary form in pre-Islamic Arabia, and poets were regarded as the voice of their tribes, preserving history, values, and identity. Public gatherings, especially at markets such as ‘**Ukāz**, provided platforms for poets to recite their works before audiences who judged them immediately. These spontaneous evaluations formed the foundation of literary criticism, even though they were informal.

Fill in the blank: The pre-Islamic market of _____ was a central venue for poetic recitation and evaluation.



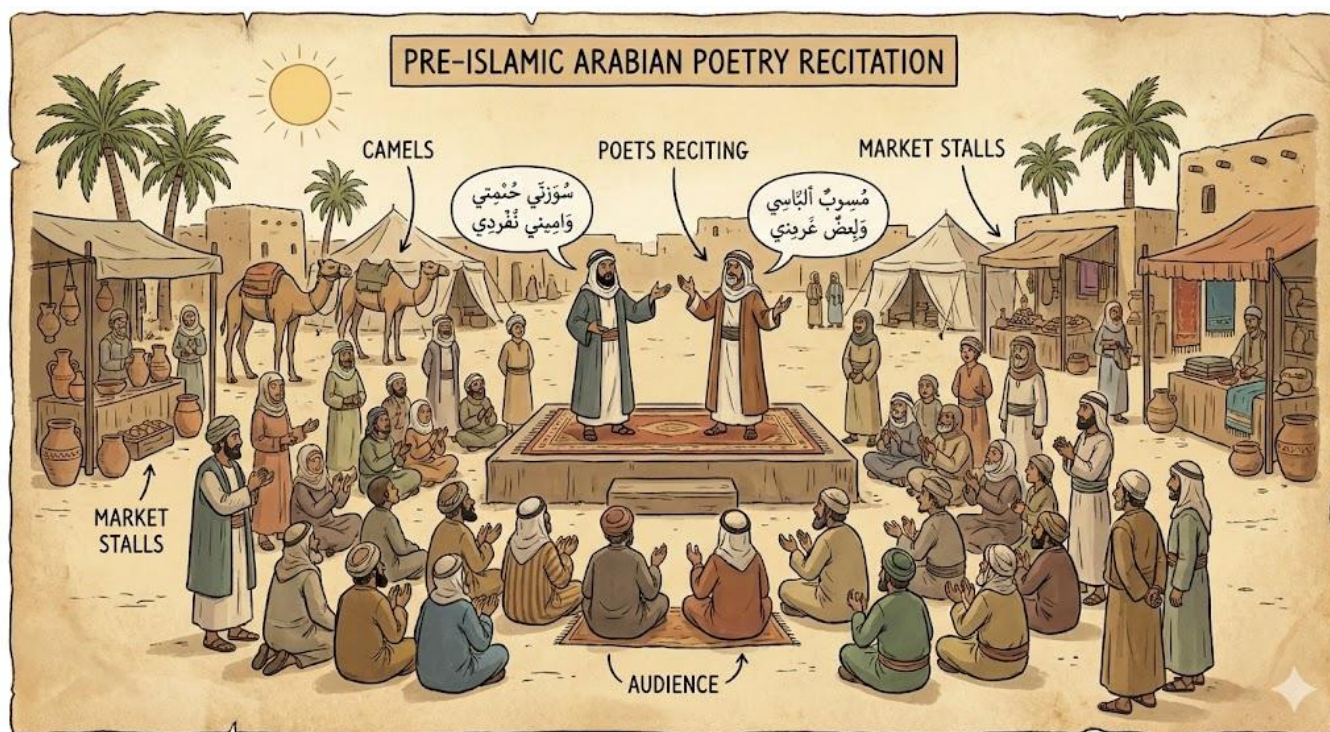


Figure 1.1: Public recitation of poetry in pre-Islamic Arabia

1.1.2 Role of poets in society

The **poet** in pre-Islamic Arabia was more than an artist; he was a custodian of tribal honour and a commentator on social life. **Custodian** means someone who preserves and protects values or traditions. Poets were expected to compose verses that celebrated bravery, generosity, and wisdom, while also criticising rivals. Their influence extended beyond entertainment, shaping public opinion and reinforcing cultural norms. This elevated status meant that their works were subject to scrutiny, and audiences often debated the quality of their expression.

Fill in the blank: In pre-Islamic Arabia, poets were considered custodians of _____ and tribal identity.





Plate 1.1: The poet as custodian of tribal honour

1.1.3 Informal judgements in early literary culture

Before the rise of formal scholarship, literary evaluation was based on **informal judgement**, meaning spontaneous and unstructured assessments of poetry and prose. Audiences compared poets by listening to their recitations, praising eloquence, or criticising weaknesses. These judgements were not codified into rules but were influential in shaping reputations. Over time, repeated comparisons and debates created a shared sense of what constituted good poetry. This collective practice laid the groundwork for later systematic criticism.

Fill in the blank: Early literary evaluation was based on _____ judgements rather than codified rules.

Feature	Description	Example / Practice
Oral Tradition	Literary criticism was conducted orally in tribal gatherings and markets.	Poets recited verses at Sūq 'Ukāz , where audiences judged quality and style.



Community-Based Evaluation	Criticism was collective, shaped by tribal values and audience reactions.	Praise or ridicule from listeners determined a poem's prestige.
Focus on Eloquence (Balāgha)	Emphasis on clarity, rhetorical beauty, and emotional impact.	Poets were admired for vivid imagery and powerful metaphors.
Comparative Judgments	Verses were compared against rivals to establish superiority.	Poetic duels highlighted skill in word choice and rhythm.
Pragmatic Function	Criticism was tied to social, political, and tribal identity.	A strong poem could elevate a tribe's honor or defend its reputation.
Absence of Formal Theory	No codified rules; criticism was intuitive and situational.	Evaluations relied on taste, tradition, and communal resonance.

Box 1.1: Features of informal literary criticism in pre-Islamic Arabia

Pilot questions 1.1

1. What role did oral traditions play in the origins of Classical Arabic criticism?
2. Why was the market of 'Ukāz significant in the development of literary evaluation?
3. How did poets serve as custodians of tribal honour in pre-Islamic Arabia?
4. What is meant by informal judgement in early literary culture?
5. How did repeated comparisons of poets contribute to the foundations of criticism?

1.2 Development Across Historical Periods

1.2.1 Pre-Islamic influences on literary judgement

The **pre-Islamic period** was marked by the dominance of poetry as the highest form of artistic expression. **Poetry** refers to a literary form that uses rhythm, imagery, and eloquence to convey meaning and emotion. Poets were considered the spokesmen of their tribes, and their verses preserved history, celebrated victories, and criticised rivals. The evaluation of poetry was immediate and public, often taking place in gatherings such as the market of 'Ukāz, where



audiences compared poets and judged their skill. These practices established the earliest standards of literary judgement, focusing on eloquence, clarity, and emotional impact.

Fill in the blank: The market of _____ was a central venue for comparing poets and judging their works.

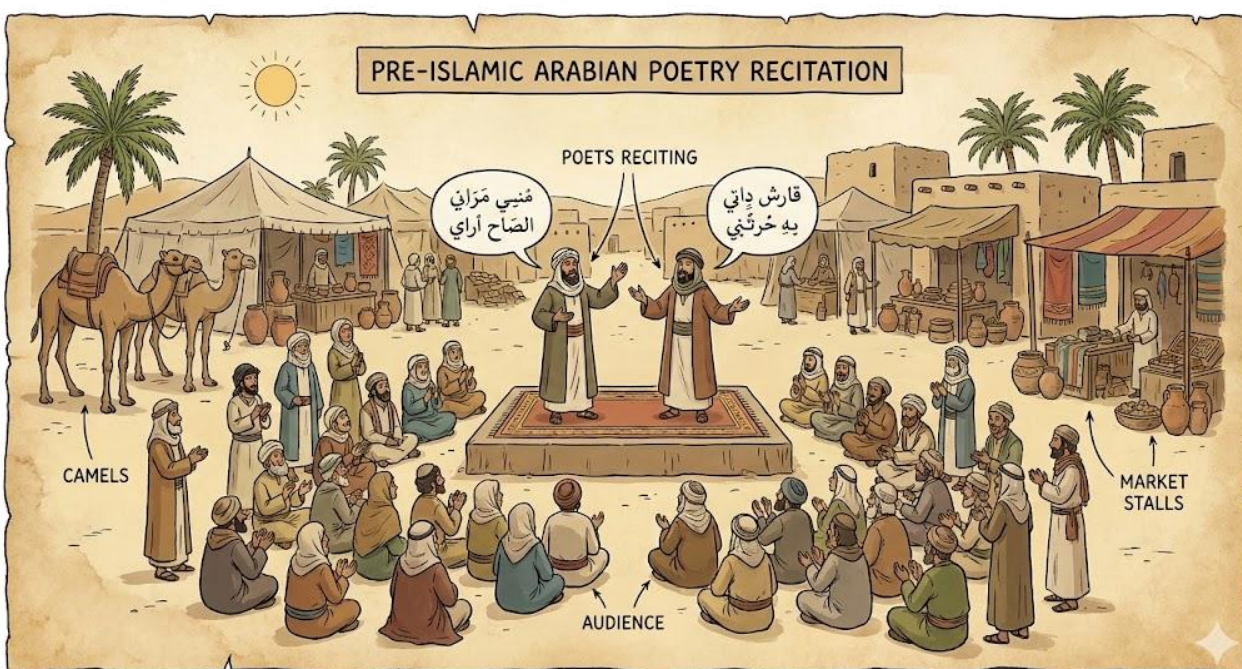


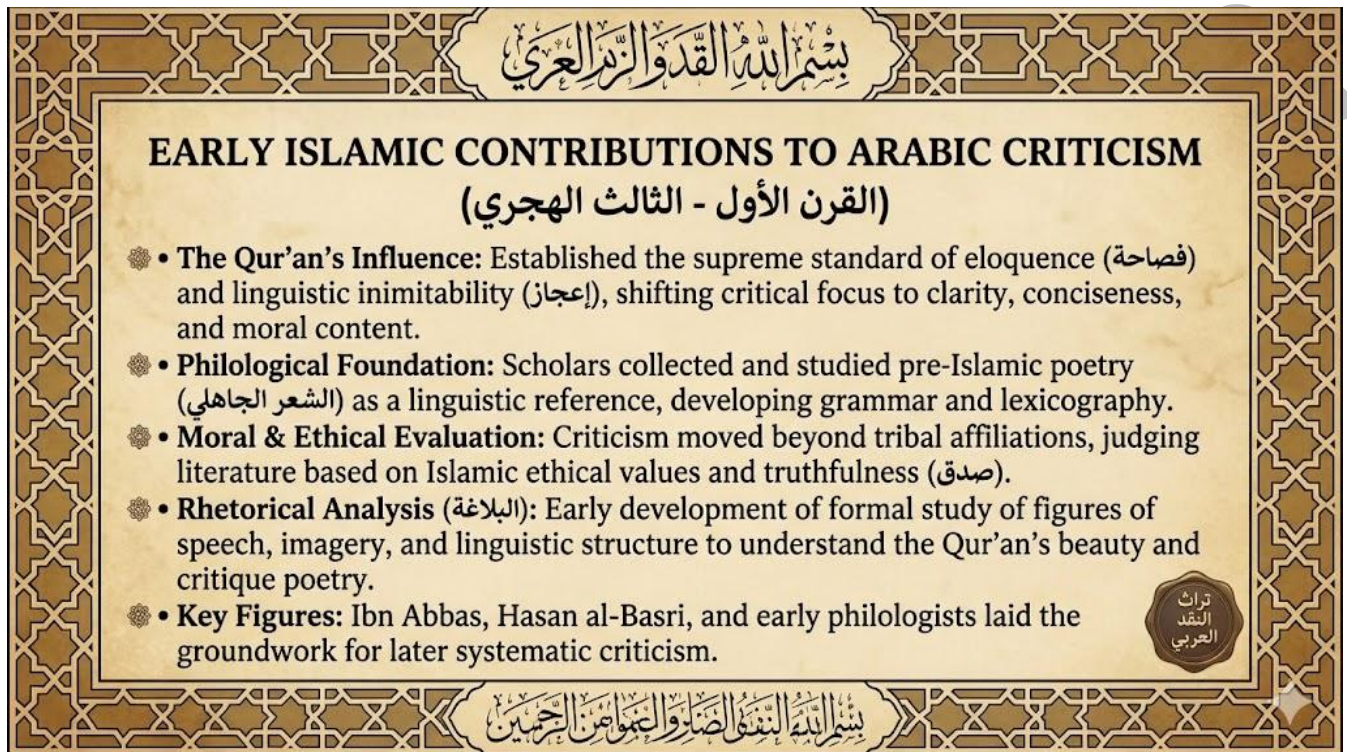
Figure 1.2: Poetic competitions in pre-Islamic Arabia

1.2.2 Early Islamic contributions to criticism

With the advent of Islam, the Arabic language gained new prestige as the medium of the **Qur'ān**, which was revered for its eloquence and rhetorical excellence. **Rhetoric** is the art of effective or persuasive speaking and writing, often involving stylistic devices. The Qur'ān's style inspired scholars to reflect on the nature of language, meaning, and beauty. Early Muslim scholars began to analyse poetry and prose not only for aesthetic qualities but also for moral and religious appropriateness. This introduced new dimensions to criticism, linking literary evaluation with ethical and spiritual values.



Fill in the blank: The _____ was revered for its eloquence and became a model for reflection on language.



EARLY ISLAMIC CONTRIBUTIONS TO ARABIC CRITICISM
(القرن الأول - الثالث الهجري)

- **The Qur'an's Influence:** Established the supreme standard of eloquence (فصاحة) and linguistic inimitability (إعجاز), shifting critical focus to clarity, conciseness, and moral content.
- **Philological Foundation:** Scholars collected and studied pre-Islamic poetry (الشعر الجاهلي) as a linguistic reference, developing grammar and lexicography.
- **Moral & Ethical Evaluation:** Criticism moved beyond tribal affiliations, judging literature based on Islamic ethical values and truthfulness (صدق).
- **Rhetorical Analysis (البلاغة):** Early development of formal study of figures of speech, imagery, and linguistic structure to understand the Qur'an's beauty and critique poetry.
- **Key Figures:** Ibn Abbas, Hasan al-Basri, and early philologists laid the groundwork for later systematic criticism.

تراث النقد العربي

Box 1.2: Features of early Islamic contributions to criticism

1.2.3 Abbasid era and flourishing of criticism

The **Abbasid era** marked a golden age of Arabic literary criticism. **Golden age** refers to a period of great cultural, intellectual, and artistic flourishing. Scholars such as Al-Jāhiz and Ibn Qutaybah produced systematic works that analysed poetry, prose, and rhetoric in detail. Literary salons and scholarly circles encouraged debate, comparison, and refinement of critical methods. The Abbasid period also saw the codification of rules for evaluating texts, moving criticism from informal judgements to structured scholarship. This era laid the foundation for later critics, including Al-Āmidī, who advanced systematic approaches.

Fill in the blank: The Abbasid era is often described as the _____ age of Arabic literary criticism.





Plate 1.2: Scholarly debates during the Abbasid era

Pilot questions 1.2

1. What role did poetry play in shaping literary judgement during the pre-Islamic period?
2. Why was the Qur'ān significant in the development of Arabic literary criticism?
3. How did moral and ethical values influence early Islamic criticism?
4. Which scholars contributed to the flourishing of criticism during the Abbasid era?
5. How did the Abbasid period mark a transition from informal to structured criticism?



1.3 Key Themes In The Evolution Of Criticism

1.3.1 Focus on poetry and eloquence

One of the most enduring themes in Classical Arabic criticism is the emphasis on **poetry** as the highest form of literary expression. **Poetry** is a literary form that uses rhythm, imagery, and eloquence to convey meaning and emotion. Critics often judged the quality of a poet's work by its ability to move audiences, preserve cultural values, and demonstrate mastery of language.

Eloquence refers to the art of expressing ideas clearly, persuasively, and beautifully. In Arabic criticism, eloquence was considered a hallmark of excellence, and poets were praised for their ability to combine meaning with aesthetic appeal.

Fill in the blank: In Classical Arabic criticism, _____ was regarded as the highest form of literary expression.

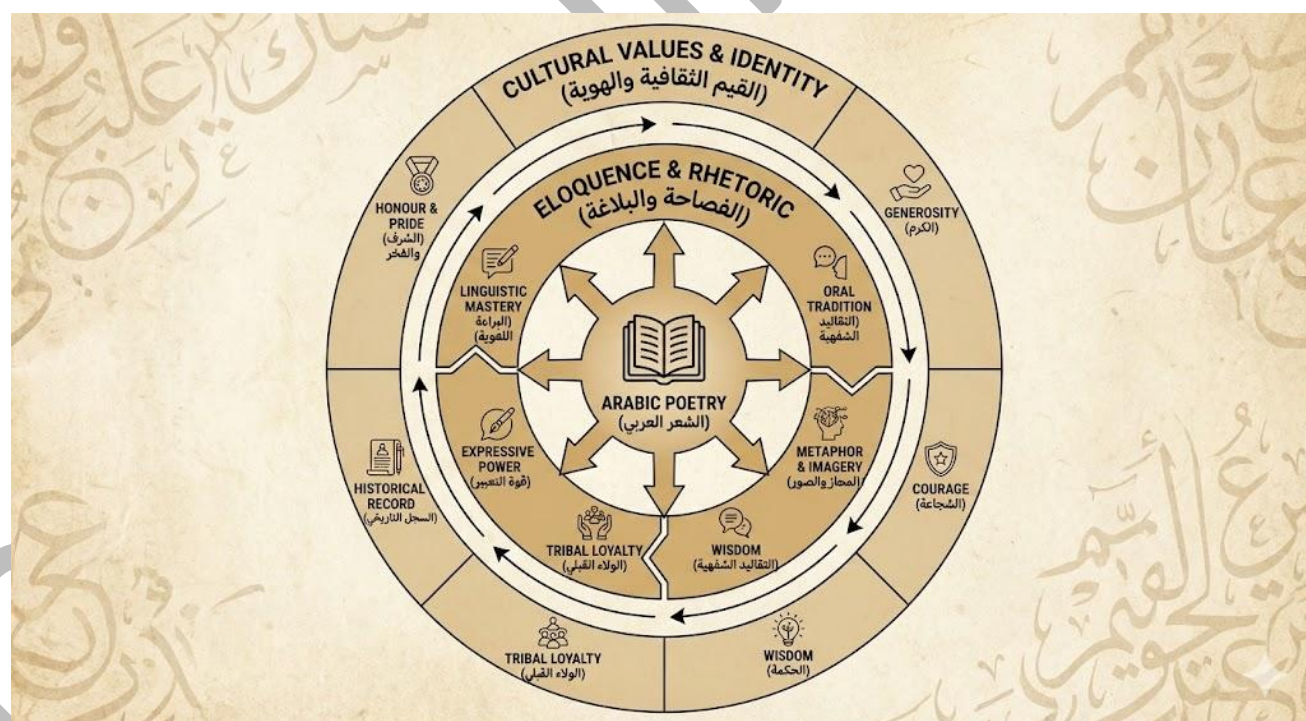


Figure 1.3: Poetry as the foundation of Arabic criticism



1.3.2 Role of language and rhetoric in criticism

Another key theme is the focus on **language** and **rhetoric**. **Language** refers to the structured system of communication used to convey meaning, while **rhetoric** is the art of persuasive and effective expression. Arabic critics paid close attention to the choice of words, the arrangement of sentences, and the use of stylistic devices such as metaphor and simile. These elements were seen as indicators of a writer's skill and the text's overall impact. The Qur'ān, admired for its rhetorical excellence, set a benchmark for literary standards and inspired scholars to analyse how language could achieve clarity, beauty, and persuasion.

Fill in the blank: The Qur'ān was admired for its _____ excellence and became a model for literary standards.

<i>Feature</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>Example / Application</i>
<i>Eloquence (Balāgha)</i>	<i>Central to Arabic criticism, focusing on clarity, beauty, and persuasive power of language.</i>	<i>Evaluating metaphors and similes in classical poetry for vividness and impact.</i>
<i>Imagery & Symbolism</i>	<i>Rich use of figurative language was a key criterion in judging literary quality.</i>	<i>نور العلم (light of knowledge) as a metaphor for enlightenment.</i>
<i>Rhythm & Sound</i>	<i>Criticism emphasized phonetic harmony, rhyme, and cadence in verse.</i>	<i>Preference for flowing meter in qaṣīda poetry.</i>
<i>Semantic Precision</i>	<i>Careful attention to word choice and meaning to avoid ambiguity.</i>	<i>Distinguishing between بيت (house) and منزل (dwelling) for stylistic accuracy.</i>
<i>Pragmatic Function</i>	<i>Language was judged by its social and rhetorical effect, not just aesthetics.</i>	<i>A poem defending tribal honor valued for its persuasive force.</i>



<i>Intertextuality</i>	<i>Critics compared works to established models, highlighting continuity and innovation.</i>	<i>Referencing earlier poets like Imru' al-Qays to measure stylistic excellence.</i>
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Box 1.3: Features of language and rhetoric in Arabic criticism

1.3.3 Ethical and cultural dimensions of criticism

Criticism in the Arabic tradition was not limited to aesthetics; it also reflected **ethical** and **cultural dimensions**. **Ethics** refers to principles of right and wrong behaviour, while **culture** encompasses the values, beliefs, and practices of a community. Critics evaluated works not only for their artistic merit but also for their alignment with moral values and social norms. Poetry that celebrated virtues such as generosity and bravery was praised, while works that promoted immorality or undermined communal values were condemned. This integration of ethics and culture ensured that criticism served both artistic and societal purposes.

Fill in the blank: Arabic critics often judged works by their alignment with _____ values and social norms.



Plate 1.3: Ethical and cultural dimensions in Arabic criticism



Pilot questions 1.3

1. Why was poetry considered the highest form of literary expression in Classical Arabic criticism?
2. What role did eloquence play in evaluating the quality of poetry?
3. How did language and rhetoric influence Arabic literary standards?
4. Why was the Qur'ān significant in shaping rhetorical analysis?
5. How did ethical and cultural values affect the way critics judged literary works?

1.4 Transition Towards Systematic Criticism

1.4.1 Movement from informal judgements to structured criticism

In the early stages of Arabic literary culture, evaluation was largely based on **informal judgements**, meaning spontaneous and unstructured assessments of poetry and prose. These judgements reflected audience reactions during recitations and debates but lacked codified rules. Over time, scholars began to recognise the need for **structured criticism**, which refers to organised and systematic methods of evaluating literary works. This shift was driven by the desire to preserve standards, compare texts more objectively, and establish criteria that could be applied consistently.

Fill in the blank: Early Arabic literary evaluation was based on _____ judgements rather than codified rules.



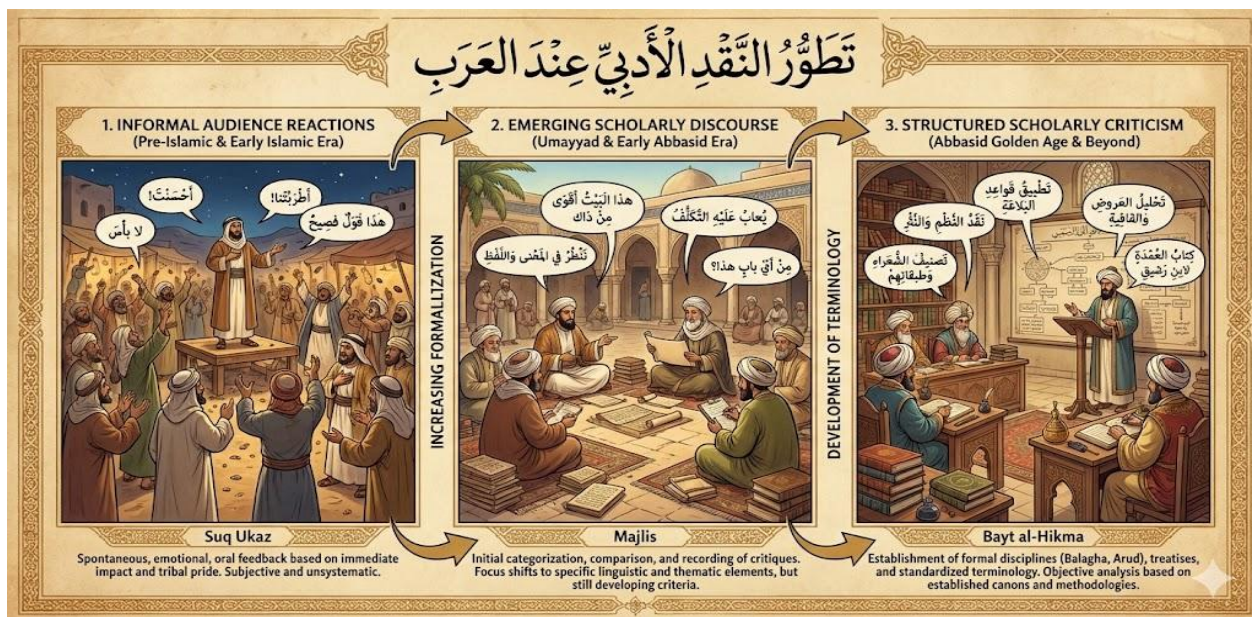


Figure 1.4: Transition from informal to structured criticism

1.4.2 Preparation for later scholars such as Al-‘Āmidī

The gradual move towards systematic criticism prepared the ground for scholars like **Al-‘Āmidī**, who is recognised for his analytical and comparative approach to poetry. **Systematic criticism** refers to the use of defined principles, categories, and methods to evaluate texts. Al-‘Āmidī and his contemporaries built upon earlier traditions by formalising criteria such as eloquence, meaning, and rhetorical devices. Their works demonstrated how criticism could move beyond subjective impressions to become a discipline with intellectual rigour.

Fill in the blank: Scholars such as _____ advanced systematic approaches to Arabic literary criticism.

Contribution	Description	Example / Impact
Systematic Approach	Al-‘Āmidī emphasized structured, analytical methods in literary criticism rather than purely intuitive judgments.	His work <i>al-Muwāzana bayna Abī Tammām wa al-Buḥturī</i> compared poets using clear criteria.



Comparative Criticism	He pioneered side-by-side evaluation of poets, highlighting strengths and weaknesses.	Balanced analysis of imagery, diction, and rhetorical devices in Abū Tammām vs. al-Buḥturī.
Focus on Rhetoric (Balāgha)	Paid close attention to eloquence, metaphor, and stylistic devices as measures of literary excellence.	Identified how metaphor enriched meaning and distinguished poetic skill.
Objectivity & Standards	Sought to establish norms for evaluating poetry beyond tribal or personal bias.	His criticism reflected scholarly detachment and rational argumentation.
Integration of Linguistics & Aesthetics	Combined linguistic precision with aesthetic appreciation in judging texts.	Examined semantic clarity alongside artistic beauty.
Influence on Later Critics	His systematic methods shaped the trajectory of Arabic literary theory.	Inspired later scholars to adopt comparative and structured approaches.

Box 1.4: Contributions of Al-Āmidī to systematic criticism

1.4.3 Legacy of early criticism in shaping Arabic literary studies

The transition towards systematic criticism left a lasting **legacy**, meaning an enduring influence on future generations. By codifying standards and methods, early critics ensured that Arabic literary studies developed into a recognised scholarly discipline. Their efforts provided a framework for later scholars to refine and expand upon, making criticism an essential part of Arabic intellectual history. This legacy continues to shape modern approaches to Arabic literature, where both aesthetic and cultural dimensions are considered.

Fill in the blank: The transition towards systematic criticism created a lasting _____ for Arabic literary studies.





Plate 1.4: Manuscript representing the legacy of systematic criticism

Pilot questions 1.4

1. What is the difference between informal judgements and structured criticism in Arabic literary culture?
2. Why was the move towards systematic criticism important for Arabic literature?
3. What contributions did Al-ʿĀmidī make to the development of systematic criticism?
4. How did early systematic criticism create a legacy for later Arabic literary studies?
5. In what ways does this legacy continue to influence modern approaches to Arabic literature?

Series Summary

This Series has guided you through the historical evolution of Classical Arabic criticism, showing how literary evaluation developed from oral traditions into a structured scholarly



discipline. Its purpose was to help you appreciate the relevance of criticism to Arabic literary studies and to equip you with the ability to trace its growth across different periods.

We began by exploring the origins of criticism in pre-Islamic oral traditions and poetic gatherings, before moving on to its development across historical periods, including pre-Islamic influences, early Islamic contributions, and the flourishing of scholarship in the Abbasid era. We then examined key themes such as the centrality of poetry, the importance of eloquence, and the role of language and rhetoric, while also considering ethical and cultural dimensions. Finally, we studied the transition towards systematic criticism, highlighting the contributions of scholars like Al-ʿĀmidī. By completing this Series, you should now be able to define the origins of Classical Arabic criticism, explain its development, analyse its themes, and evaluate the shift from informal judgements to structured approaches, in line with the Series Learning Outcomes.

Glossary of Terms

Abbasid era – A period in Islamic history (750–1258 CE) known as a golden age of culture, scholarship, and literary criticism, during which systematic approaches to evaluating poetry and prose flourished.

Audience – The group of listeners or readers who respond to a poet's or writer's work, often providing immediate feedback in oral traditions.

Custodian – A person who preserves and protects values or traditions. In pre-Islamic Arabia, poets were seen as custodians of tribal honour and identity.

Eloquence – The art of expressing ideas clearly, persuasively, and beautifully. It was considered a key standard in Arabic literary criticism.

Ethics – Principles of right and wrong behaviour. In Arabic criticism, works were judged not only for artistic merit but also for their alignment with moral values.



Golden age – A period of great cultural, intellectual, and artistic flourishing. The Abbasid era is often described as the golden age of Arabic literary criticism.

Informal judgement – Spontaneous and unstructured evaluation of poetry or prose, usually based on audience reactions during recitations.

Language – A structured system of communication used to convey meaning. Arabic critics paid close attention to word choice and sentence arrangement.

Legacy – An enduring influence or impact left by earlier practices or scholars, shaping future generations of Arabic literary studies.

Oral tradition – The practice of transmitting cultural knowledge, poetry, and stories through spoken word rather than written texts.

Poetry – A literary form that uses rhythm, imagery, and eloquence to convey meaning and emotion. It was regarded as the highest form of expression in Classical Arabic criticism.

Qur'ān – The holy book of Islam, revered for its eloquence and rhetorical excellence, which set a benchmark for Arabic literary standards.

Rhetoric – The art of persuasive and effective speaking or writing, often involving stylistic devices such as metaphor and simile.

Systematic criticism – Organised and structured methods of evaluating literary works using defined principles and criteria, developed during the Abbasid era and advanced by scholars such as Al-Āmidī.

Tribal honour – The collective dignity and reputation of a tribe, often celebrated and preserved through poetry in pre-Islamic Arabia.



Concept Check Questions [Series 1]

Objective Questions

1. Identify the pre-Islamic marketplace where poets recited and were judged by audiences.
(Linked to SLO 1.1)
2. Define the term *eloquence* as used in Classical Arabic criticism. (Linked to SLO 1.6)
3. Name one Abbasid scholar who contributed to the flourishing of systematic criticism.
(Linked to SLO 1.5)
4. State whether early literary evaluation was based on informal judgements or structured rules. (Linked to SLO 1.7)

Short-Answer Questions

5. Explain how oral traditions shaped the origins of Classical Arabic criticism. (Linked to SLO 1.1)
6. Describe the influence of the Qur'ān on the development of Arabic literary criticism. (Linked to SLO 1.4)
7. Analyse why poetry was considered the highest form of literary expression in Classical Arabic criticism. (Linked to SLO 1.6)
8. Distinguish between informal judgements and structured criticism in Arabic literary culture. (Linked to SLO 1.7)

Long-Answer Questions

9. Evaluate the contributions of the Abbasid era to the flourishing of Arabic literary criticism. (Linked to SLO 1.5)
10. Assess how the transition towards systematic criticism prepared the ground for later scholars such as Al-ʿĀmidī. (Linked to SLO 1.8)

Answers to Concept Check Questions [Series 1]

Objective Questions



1. The market of ‘Ukāz.
2. Eloquence is the art of expressing ideas clearly, persuasively, and beautifully.
3. Al-Jāḥiẓ or Ibn Qutaybah.
4. Informal judgements.

Short-Answer Questions

5. Oral traditions preserved poetry and cultural values through recitation, allowing audiences to judge and compare poets.
6. The Qur’ān’s eloquence set a benchmark for literary standards and inspired reflection on language and rhetoric.
7. Poetry combined meaning, rhythm, and beauty, making it the most valued form of expression in Arabic culture.
8. Informal judgements were spontaneous audience reactions, while structured criticism involved codified rules and systematic analysis.

Long-Answer Questions

9. *Basic response:* The Abbasid era was a golden age of Arabic criticism, marked by scholarly works, literary salons, and codified rules. Scholars such as Al-Jāḥiẓ and Ibn Qutaybah advanced systematic approaches.

Value-added response: Beyond the Series, learners may note that the Abbasid era also benefited from translation movements, exposure to Greek philosophy, and cross-cultural exchanges, which enriched critical methods and broadened intellectual horizons.

10. *Basic response:* The transition from informal judgements to structured criticism created consistent standards and prepared the way for scholars like Al-‘Āmidī, who formalised comparative analysis.

Value-added response: Outstanding learners may add that this transition reflects a broader intellectual trend in Islamic civilisation towards systematisation in sciences, philosophy, and theology, showing how literary criticism was part of a wider scholarly movement.



Part 1.1 Origins of Classical Arabic Criticism

- The practice of oral traditions and public recitations of poetry.
- The market of 'Ukāz.
- Poets served as custodians of tribal honour and identity.
- Informal judgement.
- Repeated comparisons and debates helped establish shared standards of good poetry.

Part 1.2 Development Across Historical Periods

- Poetry was the dominant form of artistic expression and shaped literary judgement.
- The Qur'ān.
- Moral and ethical values became central to literary evaluation.
- Scholars such as Al-Jāḥiẓ and Ibn Qutaybah.
- The Abbasid period marked the shift from informal to structured criticism.

Part 1.3 Key Themes in the Evolution of Criticism

- Poetry was considered the highest form of literary expression.
- Eloquence was a key measure of quality in poetry.
- Language and rhetoric influenced standards of Arabic criticism.
- The Qur'ān was significant for its rhetorical excellence.
- Ethical and cultural values shaped how works were judged.

Part 1.4 Transition Towards Systematic Criticism

- Informal judgements were spontaneous, while structured criticism involved codified rules.
- The move towards systematic criticism ensured consistency and objectivity.
- Al-Āmidī advanced systematic approaches through comparative analysis and structured criteria.
- Early systematic criticism created a lasting legacy for Arabic literary studies.
- This legacy continues to influence modern approaches to Arabic literature.



Textual Sources

- Allen, R. (2000). *An Introduction to Arabic Literature*. Cambridge University Press.
- Al-Jāhiz. (1980). *Selections from Kitāb al-Bayān wa al-Tabyīn*. Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya.
- Ibn Qutaybah. (1953). *Kitāb al-Shi‘r wa al-Shu‘arā’*. Cairo: Dār al-Ma‘ārif.
- Kennedy, P. (2005). *The Court Poetry of Abū Tammām*. Oxford University Press.
- Montgomery, J. (2010). *The Vagaries of the Qasida: Arabic Poetry and Its Critics*. Brill.

Illustrations (Figures, Plates, Boxes)

- *Figure 1.1: Public recitation of poetry in pre-Islamic Arabia*
 - AI-generated using prompt: “Generate a simple diagram of poets reciting verses in a pre-Islamic Arabian marketplace with an audience.”
 - Suggested OER search string: “pre-Islamic poetry recitation diagram OER.”
- *Plate 1.1: The poet as custodian of tribal honour*
 - AI-generated using prompt: “Create an artistic illustration of a pre-Islamic Arab poet reciting verses to his tribe.”
 - Suggested OER search string: “pre-Islamic Arab poet tribal honour OER image.”
- *Box 1.1: Features of informal literary criticism in pre-Islamic Arabia*
 - AI-generated using prompt: “Generate a text box summarising features of informal literary criticism in pre-Islamic Arabia.”
 - Suggested OER search string: “informal literary criticism pre-Islamic Arabia OER.”
- *Figure 1.2: Poetic competitions in pre-Islamic Arabia*
 - AI-generated using prompt: “Create a diagram of poets reciting verses in a pre-Islamic Arabian marketplace with an audience.”
 - Suggested OER search string: “pre-Islamic poetry competition diagram OER.”
- *Box 1.2: Features of early Islamic contributions to criticism*
 - AI-generated using prompt: “Generate a text box summarising features of early Islamic contributions to Arabic criticism.”



- Suggested OER search string: “early Islamic Arabic criticism features OER.”
- *Plate 1.2: Scholarly debates during the Abbasid era*
 - AI-generated using prompt: “Create an artistic illustration of Abbasid scholars debating literature in a scholarly salon.”
 - Suggested OER search string: “Abbasid literary salon scholars OER image.”
- *Figure 1.3: Poetry as the foundation of Arabic criticism*
 - AI-generated using prompt: “Create a diagram illustrating poetry at the centre of Arabic literary culture, surrounded by themes of eloquence and cultural values.”
 - Suggested OER search string: “Arabic poetry criticism diagram OER.”
- *Box 1.3: Features of language and rhetoric in Arabic criticism*
 - AI-generated using prompt: “Generate a text box summarising features of language and rhetoric in Arabic criticism.”
 - Suggested OER search string: “Arabic rhetoric criticism features OER.”
- *Plate 1.3: Ethical and cultural dimensions in Arabic criticism*
 - AI-generated using prompt: “Create an illustration of a poet addressing a tribal audience, emphasising honour, bravery, and cultural values.”
 - Suggested OER search string: “Arabic poetry ethics cultural values OER image.”
- *Figure 1.4: Transition from informal to structured criticism*
 - AI-generated using prompt: “Create a diagram showing informal audience reactions evolving into structured scholarly criticism in Arabic literature.”
 - Suggested OER search string: “Arabic literary criticism transition diagram OER.”
- *Box 1.4: Contributions of Al-‘Āmidī to systematic criticism*
 - AI-generated using prompt: “Generate a text box summarising contributions of Al-‘Āmidī to systematic Arabic criticism.”
 - Suggested OER search string: “Al-‘Āmidī Arabic literary criticism contributions OER.”
- *Plate 1.4: Manuscript representing the legacy of systematic criticism*
 - AI-generated using prompt: “Create an illustration of a classical Arabic manuscript page symbolising the legacy of systematic criticism.”
 - Suggested OER search string: “Arabic literary criticism manuscript OER image.”



Series 2: Early Scholarly Efforts in Arabic Criticism

Part 2.1 Emergence of Scholarly Criticism

- 2.1.1 Transition from oral judgements to written analysis
- 2.1.2 Early attempts at codifying literary standards
- 2.1.3 Influence of cultural and intellectual contexts

Part 2.2 Contributions of Key Early Scholars

- 2.2.1 Al-Jāhiz and his analytical approach
- 2.2.2 Ibn Qutaybah and systematic categorisation of poets
- 2.2.3 Other notable figures in formative criticism

Part 2.3 Methods and Themes in Early Criticism

- 2.3.1 Criteria for evaluating poetry and prose
- 2.3.2 Role of rhetoric and eloquence in scholarly analysis
- 2.3.3 Ethical and cultural considerations in early criticism

Part 2.4 Legacy of Early Scholarly Efforts

- 2.4.1 Establishment of criticism as a discipline
- 2.4.2 Influence on Abbasid and later scholarship
- 2.4.3 Continuities and changes in critical approaches

Introduction

In the last Series, we explored the historical evolution of Classical Arabic criticism, tracing its journey from oral traditions and poetic gatherings to the beginnings of structured evaluation. That foundation now leads us naturally into the next stage, where criticism moved from informal judgements to the deliberate



efforts of scholars who sought to codify and refine literary standards. Understanding these early scholarly contributions is essential, as they represent the first attempts to transform criticism into a recognised discipline within Arabic intellectual history.

The aim of this Series is to examine the formative scholarly efforts in Arabic criticism, highlighting the contributions of pioneering figures and the methods they employed. By doing so, the Series intends to equip you with the ability to analyse how criticism matured into a systematic practice and to appreciate the legacy of these early scholars.

We shall commence this Series by studying the emergence of scholarly criticism, focusing on the transition from oral judgements to written analysis and the influence of cultural contexts. Next, we will explore the contributions of key early scholars such as الجاحظ (*Al-Jāḥiẓ*) and ابن قتيبة (*Ibn Qutaybah*), followed by an examination of the methods and themes they employed, including criteria for evaluating poetry, the role of rhetoric, and ethical considerations. Finally, we will conclude by assessing the legacy of these early efforts, showing how they established criticism as a discipline and influenced later scholarship.

Series Learning Outcomes

Upon completing this Series, you should be able to:

- **SLO 2.1** define the emergence of scholarly criticism by explaining the transition from oral judgements to written analysis,
- **SLO 2.2** describe early attempts at codifying literary standards within Arabic criticism,
- **SLO 2.3** analyse the influence of cultural and intellectual contexts on the development of early criticism,
- **SLO 2.4** explain the contributions of الجاحظ (*Al-Jāḥiẓ*) to analytical approaches in Arabic criticism,
- **SLO 2.5** identify the systematic categorisation of poets introduced by ابن قتيبة (*Ibn Qutaybah*),
- **SLO 2.6** evaluate the methods and themes employed in early criticism, including criteria for poetry and prose,
- **SLO 2.7** examine the role of rhetoric and eloquence in shaping scholarly analysis,
- **SLO 2.8** assess the ethical and cultural considerations embedded in early Arabic criticism,



- **SLO 2.9** demonstrate how early scholarly efforts established criticism as a recognised discipline, and
- **SLO 2.10** appraise the legacy of these efforts in influencing Abbasid and later scholarship.

2.1 Emergence Of Scholarly Criticism

2.1.1 Transition from oral judgements to written analysis

The earliest forms of Arabic criticism were based on **oral judgements**, meaning spontaneous audience reactions to poetry recited in public gatherings. These judgements were immediate but lacked structure. As Arabic culture advanced, scholars began to record their observations in writing, marking the beginning of **written analysis**, which refers to the deliberate documentation and study of literary works. This transition allowed criticism to move from fleeting impressions to enduring scholarly discourse.

Fill in the blank: Early Arabic criticism shifted from _____ judgements to deliberate written analysis.



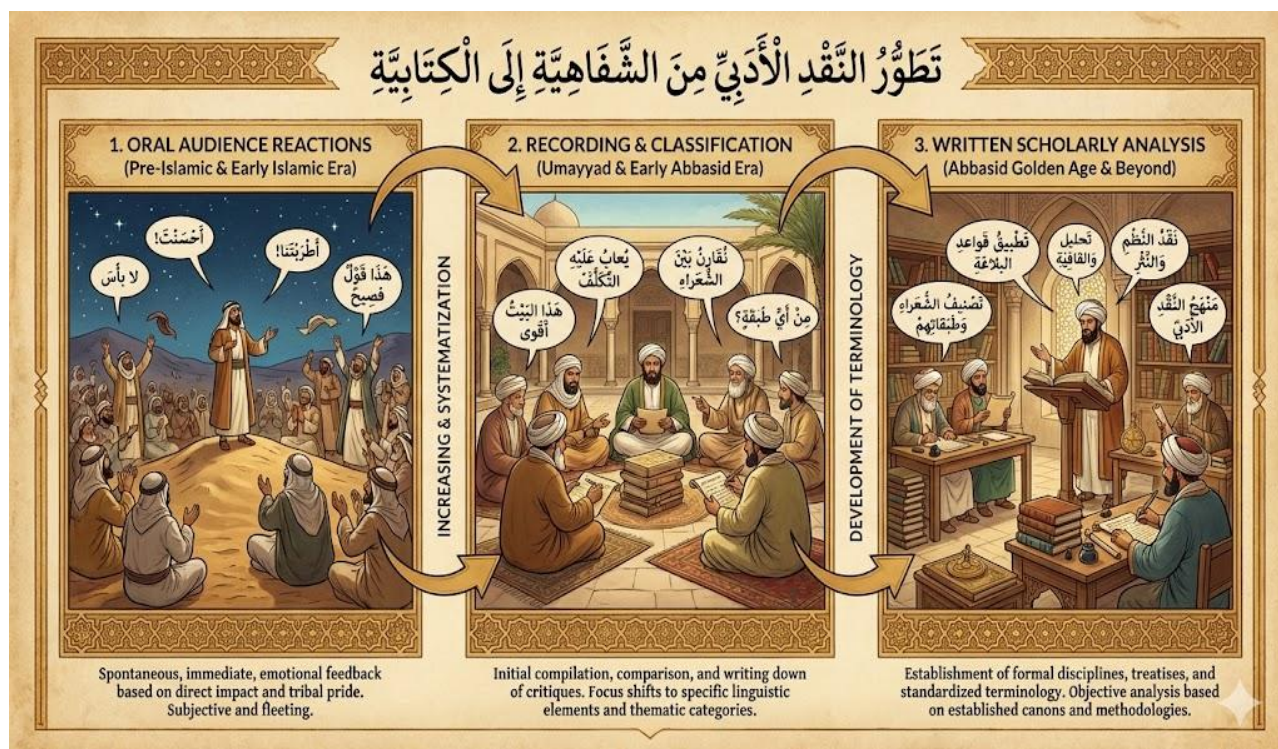


Figure 2.1: Transition from oral to written criticism

2.1.2 Early attempts at codifying literary standards

As scholars began to write about literature, they sought to establish **literary standards**, meaning agreed criteria for evaluating poetry and prose. These standards included clarity of expression, strength of imagery, and adherence to cultural values. Early critics attempted to move beyond subjective taste by identifying consistent features of good poetry. For example, they emphasised **بلاغة** (*balāgha*), which means eloquence and rhetorical excellence, as a key measure of literary quality.

Fill in the blank: Early critics considered _____ (*balāgha*) a central criterion for evaluating poetry.

Standard	Description	Example / Application
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<i>Eloquence (Balāgha)</i>	<i>Central measure of literary quality, focusing on clarity, beauty, and persuasive power.</i>	<i>Poets praised for vivid metaphors and elegant phrasing in qaṣīda poetry.</i>
<i>Imagery & Symbolism</i>	<i>Rich figurative language was valued for its ability to evoke emotion and meaning.</i>	<i>Use of desert imagery to symbolize endurance and tribal pride.</i>
<i>Rhythmic Harmony</i>	<i>Meter and rhyme were key standards in evaluating poetry.</i>	<i>Preference for flowing, balanced cadences in oral recitation.</i>
<i>Tribal & Social Function</i>	<i>Literature was judged by its ability to uphold honor and identity.</i>	<i>A poem defending tribal reputation was considered superior regardless of style.</i>
<i>Emotional Impact</i>	<i>The ability to move audiences was a critical standard of excellence.</i>	<i>Verses that stirred pride, grief, or admiration gained prestige.</i>
<i>Comparative Evaluation</i>	<i>Poets were often judged against rivals in public gatherings.</i>	<i>Competitions at Sūq ‘Ukāz highlighted skill in diction and imagery.</i>

Box 2.1: Early literary standards in Arabic criticism

2.1.3 Influence of cultural and intellectual contexts

The emergence of scholarly criticism was shaped by wider **cultural and intellectual contexts**. **Culture** refers to the values, traditions, and practices of a community, while **intellectual context** refers to the broader scholarly environment in which ideas are debated and developed. The rise of Islam and the reverence for the القرآن الكريم (*al-Qur’ān al-Karīm*, the Noble Qur’ān) inspired reflection on language and style, while the Abbasid era’s translation movement exposed scholars to Greek and Persian thought. These influences encouraged critics to adopt more systematic approaches and to integrate moral, aesthetic, and philosophical dimensions into their evaluations.



Fill in the blank: The translation movement of the Abbasid era exposed scholars to _____ and Persian thought.

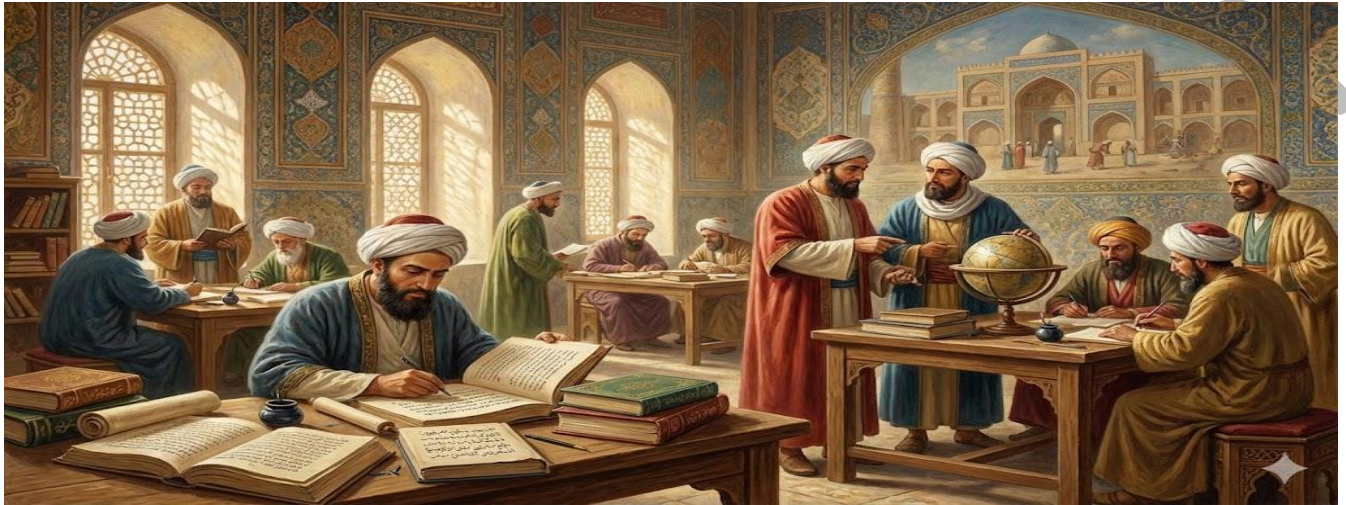


Plate 2.1: Cultural and intellectual influences on Arabic criticism

Pilot questions 2.1

1. What marked the transition from oral judgements to written analysis in Arabic criticism?
2. Which literary standards did early scholars attempt to codify?
3. Why was بلاغة (*balāgha*) considered central to early criticism?
4. How did the Qur'ān influence the emergence of scholarly criticism?
5. What role did the Abbasid translation movement play in shaping Arabic literary criticism?



2.2 Contributions Of Key Early Scholars

2.2.1 Al-Jāḥiẓ and his analytical approach

One of the most influential figures in early Arabic criticism was **الجاحظ** (*Al-Jāḥiẓ*, d. 868 CE). He was a prolific writer whose works combined literary analysis with observations on society, culture, and philosophy. His book **البيان والتبيين** (*al-Bayān wa al-Tabyīn*) is considered a cornerstone of Arabic rhetoric and criticism. **Rhetoric** refers to the art of persuasive and effective expression, and Al-Jāḥiẓ explored how language could be used to achieve clarity, beauty, and impact. He analysed poetry and prose not only for their aesthetic qualities but also for their ability to influence audiences.

Fill in the blank: Al-Jāḥiẓ's book _____ (*al-Bayān wa al-Tabyīn*) is regarded as a cornerstone of Arabic rhetoric.

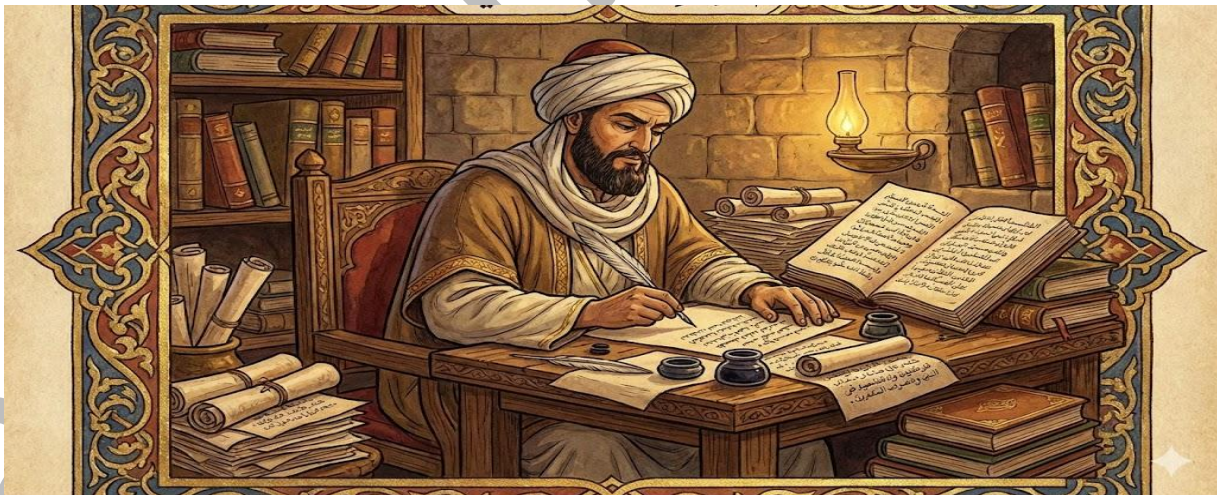


Plate 2.2: Al-Jāḥiẓ and his contributions to Arabic criticism



2.2.2 Ibn Qutaybah and systematic categorisation of poets

Another key figure was ابن قتيبة (*Ibn Qutaybah*, d. 889 CE), whose book الشعر والشعراء (*al-Shi‘r wa al-Shu‘arā*) provided one of the earliest systematic attempts to categorise poets.

Categorisation means organising subjects into defined groups based on shared characteristics. Ibn Qutaybah classified poets according to their styles, themes, and historical periods, offering critical commentary on their strengths and weaknesses. His work demonstrated a move towards **systematic criticism**, where literary evaluation was based on structured criteria rather than subjective impressions.

Fill in the blank: Ibn Qutaybah’s book _____ (*al-Shi‘r wa al-Shu‘arā*) categorised poets and offered critical commentary.

Contribution	Description	Example / Impact
Systematization of Criticism	<i>Ibn Qutaybah introduced structured principles for evaluating literature, moving beyond purely oral or intuitive judgments.</i>	<i>His work Kitāb al-Shi‘r wa al-Shu‘arā classified poets and their styles systematically.</i>
Historical Perspective	<i>He emphasized the importance of contextualizing poets within their cultural and historical settings.</i>	<i>Distinguished between pre-Islamic and Islamic poets, noting shifts in themes and values.</i>
Balanced Evaluation	<i>Advocated fairness in criticism, recognizing both strengths and weaknesses of poets.</i>	<i>Compared poets like Imru’ al-Qays and al-Mutanabbī with attention to imagery and eloquence.</i>
Focus on Language & Rhetoric	<i>Paid close attention to diction, metaphor, and stylistic devices as measures of excellence.</i>	<i>Highlighted how word choice shaped meaning and emotional impact.</i>



<i>Integration of Tradition & Innovation</i>	<i>Preserved earlier oral standards while introducing more analytical methods.</i>	<i>Bridged tribal oral criticism with emerging scholarly approaches of the Abbasid era.</i>
<i>Influence on Later Critics</i>	<i>His systematic and historical approach became a model for subsequent Arabic literary scholarship.</i>	<i>Inspired critics like al-‘Āmidī and Ibn Rashīq to adopt structured frameworks.</i>

Box 2.2: Ibn Qutaybah’s contributions to Arabic criticism

2.2.3 Other notable figures in formative criticism

Beyond Al-Jāhiz and Ibn Qutaybah, several other scholars contributed to the formative stages of Arabic criticism. Figures such as ابن سلام الجمحي (*Ibn Sallām al-Jumahī*) with his work طبقات فحول الشعراء (*Ṭabaqāt Fuḥūl al-Shu‘arā’*) offered classifications of poets based on their excellence and influence. These efforts reflect the growing interest in establishing hierarchies and standards within Arabic literary culture. Such works helped to consolidate criticism as a discipline, ensuring that literary evaluation became more consistent and scholarly.

Fill in the blank: Ibn Sallām al-Jumahī’s book _____ (*Ṭabaqāt Fuḥūl al-Shu‘arā’*) classified poets according to their excellence.



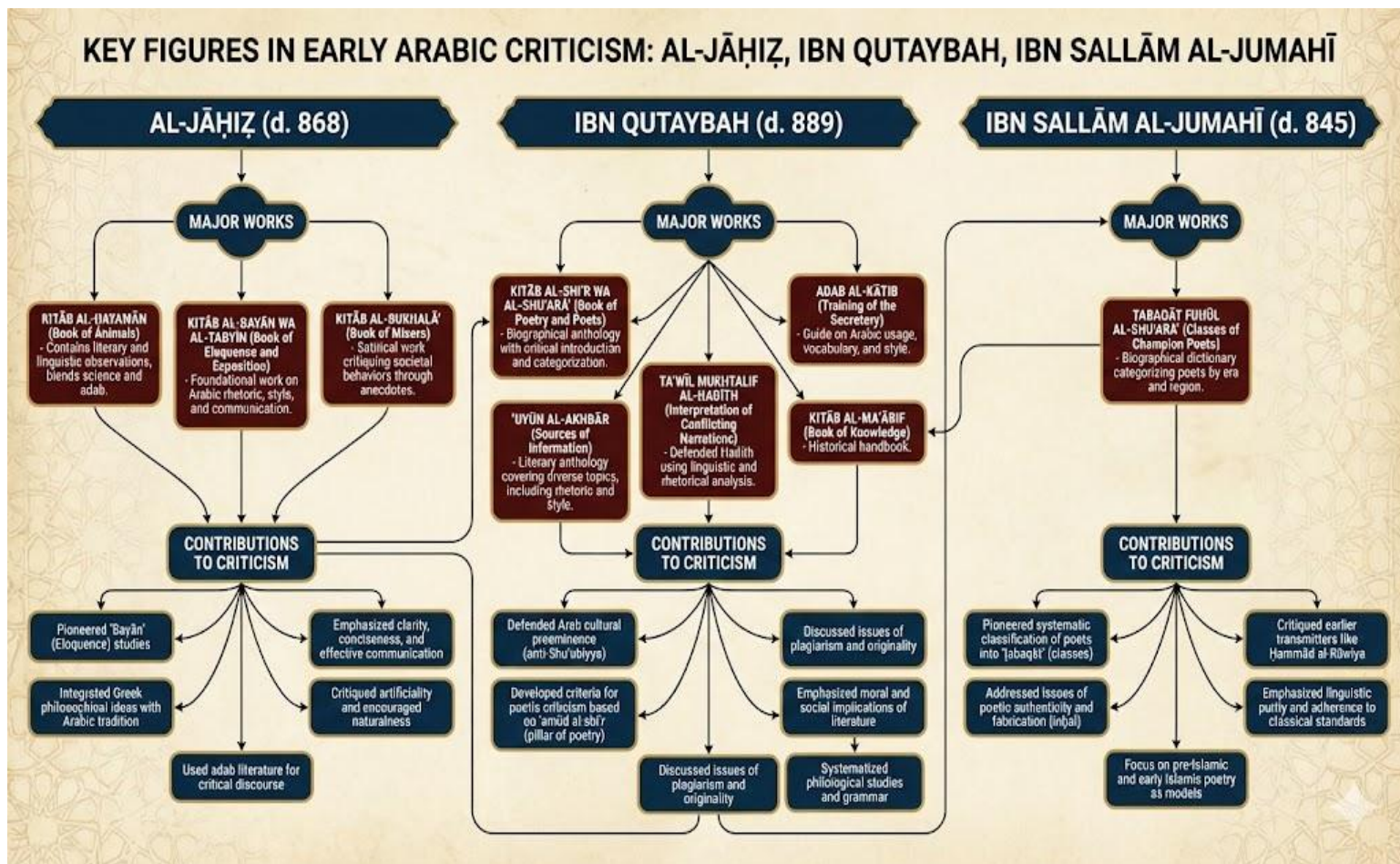


Figure 2.2: Key early scholars in Arabic criticism

Pilot questions 2.2

1. What was the significance of Al-Jāḥiẓ's *البيان والتبيين* (*al-Bayān wa al-Tabyīn*)?
2. How did Ibn Qutaybah contribute to systematic categorisation of poets?
3. Why is *الشعر والشعراء* (*al-Shi'r wa al-Shu'arā'*) considered important in Arabic criticism?
4. What role did Ibn Sallām al-Jumahī play in formative criticism?
5. How did these scholars collectively shape the foundations of Arabic literary criticism?



2.3 Methods And Themes In Early Criticism

2.3.1 Criteria for evaluating poetry and prose

Early Arabic critics developed specific **criteria** for judging literary works. **Criteria** are standards or principles used to assess quality. These included clarity of meaning, strength of imagery, and adherence to cultural values. For instance, critics valued **جزالة اللفظ** (*jazālat al-lafẓ*, strength of expression) and **حسن المعنى** (*ḥusn al-maʿnā*, beauty of meaning) as essential qualities of poetry. Prose was also evaluated for its ability to convey ideas effectively and persuasively.

Fill in the blank: Early critics considered _____ (*jazālat al-lafẓ*) and beauty of meaning as essential qualities of poetry.

Criterion	Description	Example / Application
Eloquence (Balāgha)	Clarity, beauty, and rhetorical power were central measures of literary excellence.	Poets admired for vivid metaphors and elegant phrasing in <i>qaṣīda</i> poetry.
Imagery & Symbolism	Rich figurative language was valued for its ability to evoke emotion and meaning.	Desert imagery symbolizing endurance, pride, and tribal identity.
Rhythm & Harmony	Meter, rhyme, and cadence were key standards in oral performance.	Flowing, balanced verses praised in recitations at tribal gatherings.
Emotional Impact	Literature was judged by its ability to move audiences.	Verses stirring pride, grief, or admiration gained prestige.
Social & Tribal Function	Works were evaluated for their role in defending honor and reinforcing identity.	A poem glorifying a tribe's bravery considered superior regardless of style.
Comparative Evaluation	Poets were judged against rivals in public competitions.	Duels at Sūq ʿUkāẓ highlighted skill in diction and rhetorical devices.

Box 2.3: Criteria for evaluating poetry and prose



2.3.2 Role of rhetoric and eloquence in scholarly analysis

A central theme in early criticism was the role of **rhetoric** and **eloquence**. **Rhetoric** refers to the art of persuasive and effective expression, while **eloquence** (بلاغة, *balāgha*) is the ability to communicate ideas with clarity and beauty. Scholars such as الجاحظ (*Al-Jāḥiẓ*) emphasised how rhetorical devices like metaphor, simile, and parallelism enhanced the impact of poetry and prose. Eloquence was not only an aesthetic quality but also a measure of intellectual and cultural refinement.

Fill in the blank: The Arabic term for eloquence, _____ (*balāgha*), was considered a hallmark of literary excellence.

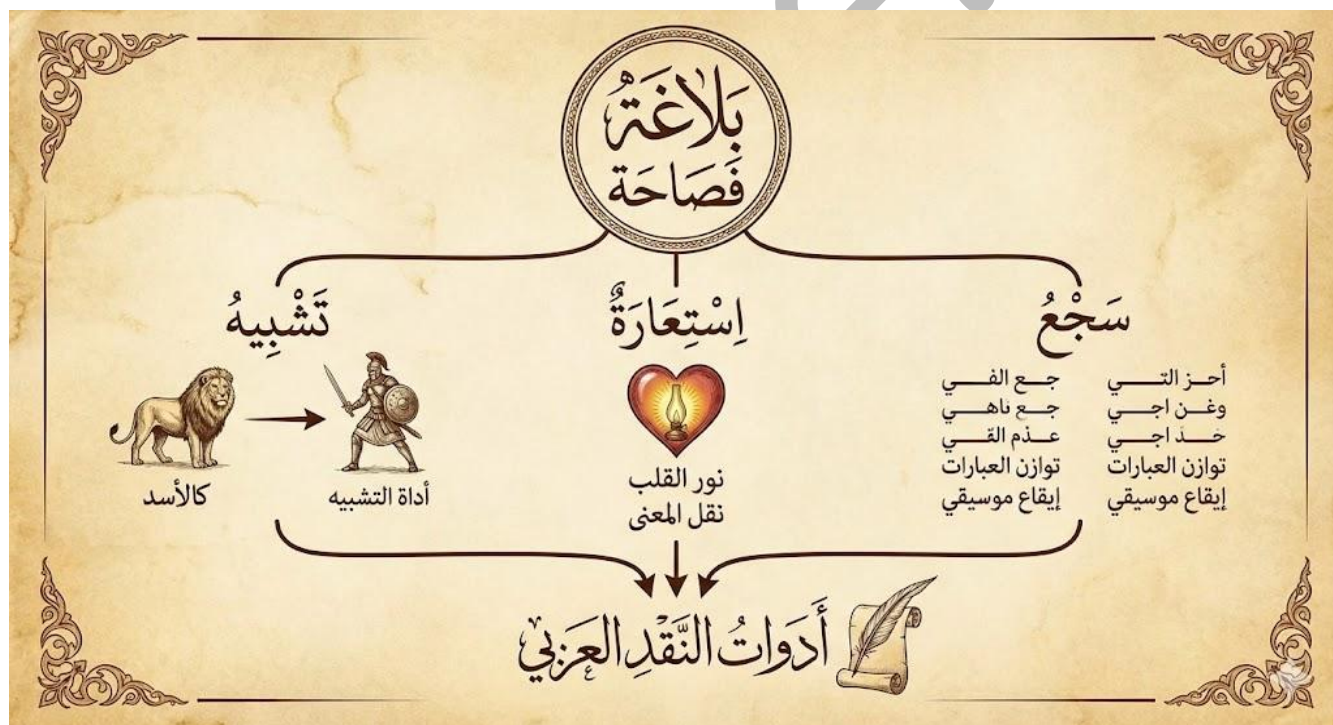


Figure 2.3: Rhetorical devices in Arabic criticism

2.3.3 Ethical and cultural considerations in early criticism

Early critics also integrated **ethical** and **cultural considerations** into their evaluations. **Ethics** refers to principles of right and wrong behaviour, while **culture** encompasses the values and



practices of a community. Poetry that celebrated virtues such as generosity (الكرم, *al-karam*) and bravery (الشجاعة, *al-shajā'a*) was praised, while works that promoted immorality or undermined communal values were condemned. This shows that criticism was not only about aesthetics but also about reinforcing social norms and moral ideals.

Fill in the blank: Poetry that celebrated virtues such as _____ (*al-karam*) and bravery was highly valued in early criticism.



Plate 2.3: Ethical and cultural dimensions in Arabic criticism

Pilot questions 2.3

1. What criteria did early critics use to evaluate poetry and prose?
2. Why was بلاغة (*balāgha*) considered central to scholarly analysis?
3. Which rhetorical devices were emphasised by early critics?
4. How did ethical and cultural values influence literary criticism?
5. Why was poetry that celebrated generosity and bravery praised in Arabic culture?



2.4 Legacy Of Early Scholarly Efforts

2.4.1 Establishment of criticism as a discipline

The early scholarly efforts in Arabic criticism laid the foundation for **criticism as a discipline**, meaning a recognised field of study with defined methods and standards. By moving beyond oral judgements and documenting structured approaches, scholars such as الجاحظ (*Al-Jāḥiẓ*) and ابن قتيبة (*Ibn Qutaybah*) ensured that literary evaluation became part of the intellectual tradition of the Arab world. Their works demonstrated that criticism could be systematic, analytical, and enduring, rather than dependent on immediate audience reactions.

Fill in the blank: Scholars such as _____ (*Ibn Qutaybah*) helped establish criticism as a recognised discipline.

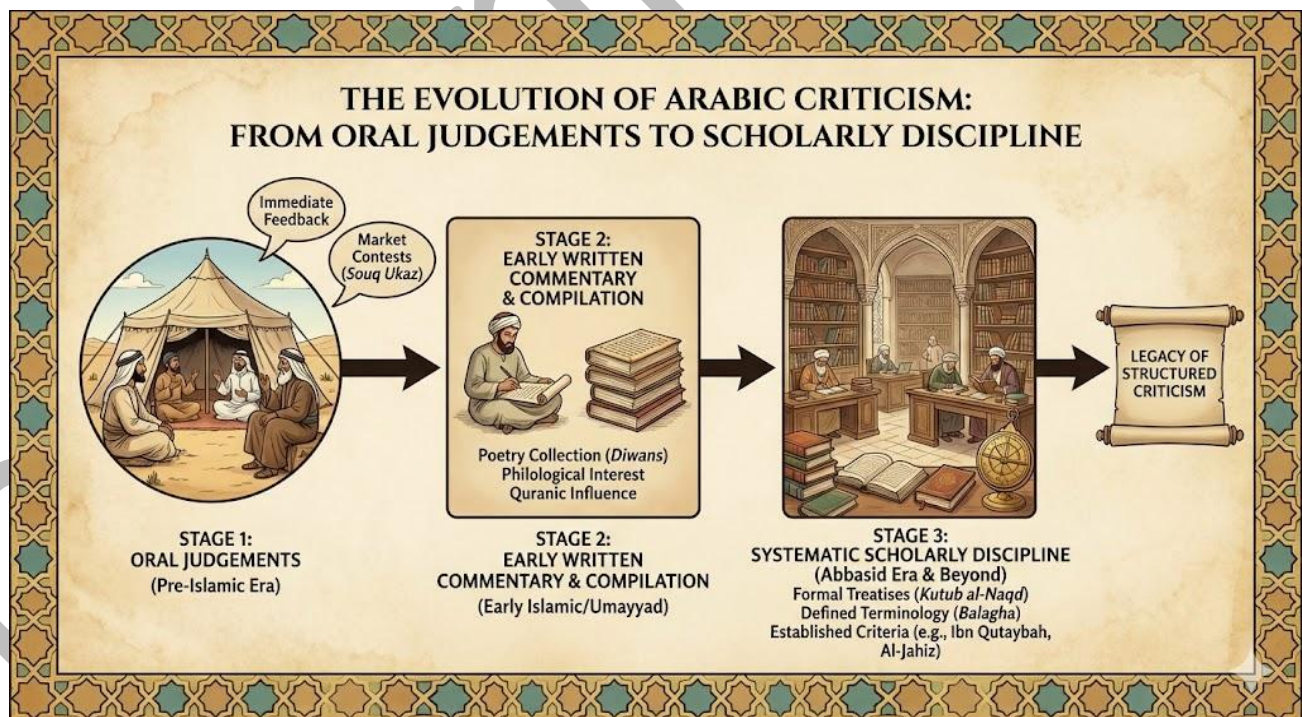


Figure 2.4: Establishment of criticism as a discipline



2.4.2 Influence on Abbasid and later scholarship

The contributions of early scholars strongly influenced the **Abbasid era**, which is often described as the golden age of Arabic literary culture. **Influence** here refers to the lasting impact of earlier works on subsequent scholarship. Abbasid critics built upon the foundations laid by Al-Jāhiz, Ibn Qutaybah, and Ibn Sallām al-Jumahī, refining methods of categorisation, analysis, and rhetorical study. Later scholars, including **الآمدي** (*Al-ʿĀmidī*), advanced these approaches further, demonstrating how early efforts shaped the trajectory of Arabic criticism for centuries.

Fill in the blank: The Abbasid era is often described as the _____ age of Arabic literary culture.



Plate 2.4: Influence of early criticism on Abbasid scholarship

2.4.3 Continuities and changes in critical approaches

The legacy of early criticism can be seen in both **continuities** and **changes**. **Continuities** refer to aspects that remained consistent, such as the emphasis on eloquence (**بلاغة**, *balāgha*) and the



moral dimension of literature. **Changes** refer to developments that introduced new perspectives, such as more rigorous categorisation, comparative analysis, and philosophical reflection. This balance of continuity and change ensured that Arabic criticism remained dynamic, adapting to new intellectual contexts while preserving its cultural roots.

Fill in the blank: The Arabic term for eloquence, _____ (*balāgha*), remained a central theme across generations of critics.

<i>Dimension</i>	<i>Continuities</i>	<i>Changes</i>
<i>Eloquence (Balāgha)</i>	<i>Eloquence and clarity have always been central to evaluating literature.</i>	<i>Later critics developed systematic rhetorical theories, codifying rules of metaphor, simile, and style.</i>
<i>Imagery & Symbolism</i>	<i>Figurative language remained a key measure of literary excellence from pre-Islamic poetry onward.</i>	<i>Expanded into more complex literary devices in Abbasid and later periods, with deeper theoretical analysis.</i>
<i>Oral Performance</i>	<i>Early criticism relied on oral recitation and communal judgment.</i>	<i>Shifted toward written treatises and scholarly discourse, enabling more formalized frameworks.</i>
<i>Social Function</i>	<i>Literature consistently served tribal, cultural, and moral purposes.</i>	<i>Later criticism emphasized aesthetics, philosophy, and universal literary values beyond tribal identity.</i>
<i>Comparative Evaluation</i>	<i>Poets were judged against rivals in public gatherings.</i>	<i>Scholars like Ibn Qutaybah and al-ʿAmidī introduced structured comparative methods in written criticism.</i>
<i>Authority of Tradition</i>	<i>Classical models (e.g., Imruʿ al-Qays) remained benchmarks for excellence.</i>	<i>Critics began integrating innovation, acknowledging evolving styles and new literary genres.</i>

Box 2.4: Continuities and changes in Arabic criticism



Pilot questions 2.4

1. How did early scholarly efforts establish criticism as a discipline?
2. Why was the Abbasid era influenced by the contributions of early critics?
3. What role did Al-‘Āmidī play in advancing criticism beyond the foundations of earlier scholars?
4. Which aspects of criticism remained continuous across generations?
5. What changes made Arabic criticism a dynamic and evolving discipline?

Series Summary

This Series has examined the early scholarly efforts in Arabic criticism, highlighting how the discipline moved from oral judgements to structured and documented analysis. Its purpose was to show the importance of pioneering scholars and their methods in shaping criticism into a recognised field of study. By engaging with this material, you have seen how early attempts to codify standards and integrate cultural and intellectual influences laid the groundwork for systematic approaches.

We began by exploring the emergence of scholarly criticism, focusing on the transition from oral to written analysis and the codification of literary standards. Then we studied the contributions of key figures such as الجاحظ (*Al-Jāḥiẓ*), ابن قتيبة (*Ibn Qutaybah*), and ابن سلام الجمحي (*Ibn Sallām al-Jumāhī*), before moving on to the methods and themes they employed, including criteria for evaluating poetry, the role of rhetoric and eloquence, and ethical considerations. Finally, we assessed the legacy of these efforts, noting their influence on Abbasid scholarship and the balance of continuity and change in critical approaches. In line with the Series Learning Outcomes, you should now be able to define the emergence of scholarly criticism, explain the contributions of early scholars, analyse their methods and themes, and evaluate the legacy of their work in shaping Arabic literary studies.



Glossary of Terms

Abbasid era – A period in Islamic history (750–1258 CE) often described as the golden age of Arabic literary culture, marked by flourishing scholarship and systematic criticism.

al-Bayān wa al-Tabyīn (البيان والتبيين) – A major work by الجاحظ (*Al-Jāḥiẓ*) that explores rhetoric, eloquence, and the power of language in Arabic criticism.

al-Shi‘r wa al-Shu‘arā’ (الشعر والشعراء) – A book by ابن قتيبة (*Ibn Qutaybah*) that systematically categorises poets and provides critical commentary on their works.

balāgha (بلاغة) – Eloquence; the ability to communicate ideas with clarity, beauty, and persuasive power. Considered a central quality in Arabic literary criticism.

Categorisation – The process of organising poets or literary works into defined groups based on shared characteristics such as style, theme, or historical period.

Criteria – Standards or principles used to judge the quality of poetry and prose, including clarity of meaning, strength of expression, and alignment with cultural values.

Ethics – Principles of right and wrong behaviour. In Arabic criticism, works were judged not only for artistic merit but also for their moral and cultural values.

Ibn Qutaybah (ابن قتيبة) – An early Arabic scholar (d. 889 CE) known for his systematic categorisation of poets in *al-Shi‘r wa al-Shu‘arā’*.

Ibn Sallām al-Jumhī (ابن سلام الجمحي) – An early critic whose work *Ṭabaqāt Fuḥūl al-Shu‘arā’* classified poets according to their excellence and influence.

jazālat al-lafẓ (جزالة اللفظ) – Strength of expression; a valued quality in poetry that reflects powerful and dignified language.

Legacy – The lasting influence of early scholarly efforts, which shaped later Arabic criticism and established it as a recognised discipline.



Prose – Written or spoken language in its ordinary form, evaluated by early critics for clarity, persuasiveness, and intellectual depth.

Rhetoric – The art of persuasive and effective expression, often involving stylistic devices such as metaphor, simile, and parallelism.

Systematic criticism – Organised and structured methods of evaluating literary works using defined principles and categories, developed by early scholars and refined in later periods.

Ṭabaqāt Fuḥūl al-Shu‘arā’ (طبقات فحول الشعراء) – A work by ابن سلام الجمحي (*Ibn Sallām al-Jumahī*) that classifies poets into ranks based on their excellence and influence.

Written analysis – The deliberate documentation and study of literary works, marking the transition from oral judgements to structured scholarly criticism.



Concept Check Questions [Series 2]

Objective Questions

1. Identify the book written by الجاحظ (Al-Jāḥiẓ) that is considered a cornerstone of Arabic rhetoric. (Linked to SLO 2.4)
2. Define the term بلاغة (balāgha) as used in Arabic criticism. (Linked to SLO 2.7)
3. Name the scholar who authored الشعر والشعراء (al-Shi'r wa al-Shu'arā'). (Linked to SLO 2.5)
4. State whether early criticism was based on oral judgements or written analysis. (Linked to SLO 2.1)

Short-Answer Questions

5. Explain how early scholars attempted to codify literary standards. (Linked to SLO 2.2)
6. Describe the influence of the Qur'ān on the emergence of scholarly criticism. (Linked to SLO 2.3)
7. Analyse why جزالة اللفظ (jazālat al-lafẓ) was considered an essential quality of poetry. (Linked to SLO 2.6)
8. Distinguish between continuities and changes in Arabic criticism across generations. (Linked to SLO 2.10)

Long-Answer Questions

9. Evaluate the contributions of ابن قتيبة (Ibn Qutaybah) to systematic categorisation of poets. (Linked to SLO 2.5)
10. Assess the legacy of early scholarly efforts in shaping Abbasid and later criticism. (Linked to SLO 2.9, SLO 2.10)

Answers to Concept Check Questions [Series 2]

Objective Questions

1. البيان والتبيين (al-Bayān wa al-Tabyīn).
2. Eloquence; the ability to communicate ideas clearly, beautifully, and persuasively.



3. ابن قتيبة (*Ibn Qutaybah*).
4. Oral judgements initially, later transitioning to written analysis.

Short-Answer Questions

5. Early scholars codified standards by identifying consistent features of good poetry such as clarity, eloquence, and cultural alignment.
6. The Qur'ān's eloquence set a benchmark for literary excellence and inspired reflection on language and style.
7. *Jazālat al-lafẓ* was valued because strong and dignified language conveyed authority and enhanced poetic impact.
8. Continuities included emphasis on eloquence and moral values, while changes involved systematic categorisation, comparative analysis, and philosophical reflection.

Long-Answer Questions

9. *Basic response:* Ibn Qutaybah categorised poets in *al-Shi'r wa al-Shu'arā*, offering structured commentary on their strengths and weaknesses.

Value-added response: Outstanding learners may note that his work also reflected broader intellectual trends of systematisation in the Abbasid era, aligning literary criticism with developments in theology and philosophy.

10. *Basic response:* Early scholarly efforts established criticism as a discipline, influenced Abbasid scholarship, and ensured continuity of themes such as eloquence and ethics.

Value-added response: Learners may add that these efforts also encouraged cross-cultural intellectual exchange, integrating insights from Greek and Persian traditions, and laid the groundwork for later comparative and philosophical approaches in Arabic criticism.



Part 2.1 Emergence of Scholarly Criticism

- The transition from oral judgements to written analysis.
- Early critics codified standards such as clarity of meaning, strength of imagery, and cultural alignment.
- بلاغة (*balāgha*, eloquence) was considered central to evaluation.
- The Qur'ān influenced criticism through its eloquence and rhetorical excellence.
- The Abbasid translation movement exposed scholars to Greek and Persian thought.

Part 2.2 Contributions of Key Early Scholars

- البيان والتبيين (*al-Bayān wa al-Tabyīn*) was significant for its study of rhetoric and eloquence.
- Ibn Qutaybah contributed by systematically categorising poets.
- الشعر والشعراء (*al-Shi'r wa al-Shu'arā'*) is important for its structured commentary on poets.
- Ibn Sallām al-Jumhī classified poets in طبقات فحول الشعراء (*Ṭabaqāt Fuḥūl al-Shu'arā'*).
- Collectively, these scholars shaped the foundations of Arabic literary criticism.

Part 2.3 Methods and Themes in Early Criticism

- Criteria included clarity of meaning, strength of expression, beauty of meaning, and cultural values.
- بلاغة (*balāgha*, eloquence) was central to scholarly analysis.
- Rhetorical devices such as metaphor, simile, and parallelism were emphasised.
- Ethical and cultural values strongly influenced literary criticism.
- Poetry that celebrated generosity (الكرم) and bravery (الشجاعة) was highly valued.

Part 2.4 Legacy of Early Scholarly Efforts

- Early efforts established criticism as a recognised discipline.
- The Abbasid era was influenced by these contributions and became the golden age of Arabic literary culture.
- Al-Āmidī advanced criticism through comparative and systematic approaches.



- Continuities included emphasis on eloquence and moral values.
- Changes included systematic categorisation, comparative analysis, and philosophical reflection, making criticism dynamic.

References and Attributions [Series 2]

Textual Sources

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- Ibn Qutaybah. (1953). *al-Shi‘r wa al-Shu‘arā’* (الشعر والشعراء). Cairo: Dār al-Ma‘ārif.
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- Allen, R. (2000). *An Introduction to Arabic Literature*. Cambridge University Press.

Illustrations (Figures, Plates, Boxes)

- *Figure 2.1: Transition from oral to written criticism*
 - AI-generated using prompt: “Create a diagram showing oral audience reactions evolving into written scholarly analysis in Arabic literature.”
 - Suggested OER search string: “Arabic literary criticism oral to written transition diagram OER.”
- *Box 2.1: Early literary standards in Arabic criticism*
 - AI-generated using prompt: “Generate a text box summarising early literary standards in Arabic criticism.”
 - Suggested OER search string: “early Arabic literary standards OER.”
- *Plate 2.1: Cultural and intellectual influences on Arabic criticism*
 - AI-generated using prompt: “Create an illustration of Abbasid scholars studying Greek and Persian texts in a scholarly setting.”
 - Suggested OER search string: “Abbasid translation movement scholars OER image.”
- *Plate 2.2: Al-Jāhīz and his contributions to Arabic criticism*



- AI-generated using prompt: “Create an illustration of Al-Jāhiz writing in a scholarly setting with manuscripts around him.”
- Suggested OER search string: “Al-Jāhiz Arabic criticism scholar OER image.”
- *Box 2.2: Ibn Qutaybah’s contributions to Arabic criticism*
 - AI-generated using prompt: “Generate a text box summarising Ibn Qutaybah’s contributions to Arabic criticism.”
 - Suggested OER search string: “Ibn Qutaybah al-Shi’r wa al-Shu’arā’ OER summary.”
- *Figure 2.2: Key early scholars in Arabic criticism*
 - AI-generated using prompt: “Create a diagram showing Al-Jāhiz, Ibn Qutaybah, and Ibn Sallām al-Jumahī with their major works and contributions.”
 - Suggested OER search string: “Arabic literary criticism early scholars diagram OER.”
- *Box 2.3: Criteria for evaluating poetry and prose*
 - AI-generated using prompt: “Generate a text box summarising criteria for evaluating poetry and prose in early Arabic criticism.”
 - Suggested OER search string: “criteria for evaluating Arabic poetry prose OER.”
- *Figure 2.3: Rhetorical devices in Arabic criticism*
 - AI-generated using prompt: “Create a diagram showing rhetorical devices such as metaphor, simile, and parallelism as tools of eloquence in Arabic criticism.”
 - Suggested OER search string: “Arabic rhetoric eloquence diagram OER.”
- *Plate 2.3: Ethical and cultural dimensions in Arabic criticism*
 - AI-generated using prompt: “Create an illustration of a poet reciting verses about honour and bravery to a tribal audience.”
 - Suggested OER search string: “Arabic poetry ethics cultural values OER image.”
- *Figure 2.4: Establishment of criticism as a discipline*
 - AI-generated using prompt: “Create a diagram showing the progression from oral judgements to structured scholarly discipline in Arabic criticism.”
 - Suggested OER search string: “Arabic criticism discipline development diagram OER.”
- *Plate 2.4: Influence of early criticism on Abbasid scholarship*



- AI-generated using prompt: “Create an illustration of Abbasid scholars debating literature in a scholarly circle.”
- Suggested OER search string: “Abbasid literary criticism scholars OER image.”
- *Box 2.4: Continuities and changes in Arabic criticism*
 - AI-generated using prompt: “Generate a text box summarising continuities and changes in Arabic criticism.”
 - Suggested OER search string: “continuities and changes Arabic literary criticism OER.”



Series 3: Methods and Approaches of Early Critics

Part 3.1 Analytical methods in early criticism

- 3.1.1 Comparative analysis of poets and prose writers
- 3.1.2 Use of rhetorical devices in evaluation
- 3.1.3 Criteria for distinguishing excellence and weakness

Part 3.2 Historical and cultural approaches

- 3.2.1 Contextualising poetry within tribal and social values
- 3.2.2 Influence of the Qur'ān on critical approaches
- 3.2.3 Integration of foreign intellectual traditions (Greek, Persian)

Part 3.3 Ethical and philosophical approaches

- 3.3.1 Moral dimensions in literary evaluation
- 3.3.2 Philosophical reflections on meaning and beauty
- 3.3.3 Balancing aesthetics with ethical responsibility

Part 3.4 Legacy and influence of early approaches

- 3.4.1 Continuities in later Abbasid criticism
- 3.4.2 Shifts towards systematic and codified approaches
- 3.4.3 Enduring relevance of early methods in modern scholarship

Introduction

In the last Series, we examined the early scholarly efforts that transformed Arabic criticism from oral judgements into a structured discipline. Building on that foundation, this Series turns our attention to the specific methods and approaches employed by those early critics. By studying how they analysed,



categorised, and evaluated literary works, you will gain insight into the intellectual tools that shaped Arabic literary culture and continue to influence modern scholarship.

The aim of this Series is to introduce you to the principal methods and approaches of early Arabic critics, enabling you to identify, explain, and evaluate the analytical, cultural, and philosophical dimensions of their work.

We shall commence this Series by exploring the analytical methods used in early criticism, including comparative analysis and criteria for distinguishing excellence. Next, we will examine historical and cultural approaches, focusing on how poetry was contextualised within tribal values, the influence of the Qur'ān, and the integration of foreign traditions. Following that, we will consider ethical and philosophical approaches, highlighting the moral dimensions of literary evaluation and the balance between aesthetics and responsibility. Finally, we will conclude by assessing the legacy of these approaches, noting their continuities, changes, and enduring relevance in later and modern scholarship.

Series Learning Outcomes

Upon completing this Series, you should be able to:

- **SLO 3.1** analyse the comparative methods used by early critics in evaluating poets and prose writers,
- **SLO 3.2** explain how rhetorical devices were applied in literary evaluation,
- **SLO 3.3** identify the criteria employed by early critics to distinguish excellence and weakness in literary works,
- **SLO 3.4** describe how poetry was contextualised within tribal and social values,
- **SLO 3.5** evaluate the influence of the القرآن الكريم (*al-Qur'ān al-Karīm*) on critical approaches,
- **SLO 3.6** examine the integration of foreign intellectual traditions, such as Greek and Persian thought, into Arabic criticism,
- **SLO 3.7** assess the moral dimensions embedded in early literary evaluation,
- **SLO 3.8** analyse philosophical reflections on meaning and beauty in early criticism,
- **SLO 3.9** explain how critics balanced aesthetic appreciation with ethical responsibility,
- **SLO 3.10** evaluate the continuities in later Abbasid criticism that stemmed from early approaches,



- **SLO 3.11** distinguish the shifts towards systematic and codified approaches in Arabic criticism, and
- **SLO 3.12** appraise the enduring relevance of early methods in modern scholarship.

3.1 Analytical Methods In Early Criticism

3.1.1 Comparative analysis of poets and prose writers

One of the most important methods used by early critics was **comparative analysis**, which refers to the practice of evaluating poets and prose writers by setting their works side by side. This allowed critics to highlight differences in style, imagery, and rhetorical strength. For example, a critic might compare the **جَزَالَةُ اللَّفْظِ** (*jazālat al-lafz*, strength of expression) of one poet with the **حُسْنُ الْمَعْنَى** (*husn al-ma'nā*, beauty of meaning) of another. Such comparisons helped establish hierarchies of excellence and provided a structured way of judging literary quality.

Fill in the blank: Early critics often compared poets by examining strength of expression (____) and beauty of meaning.



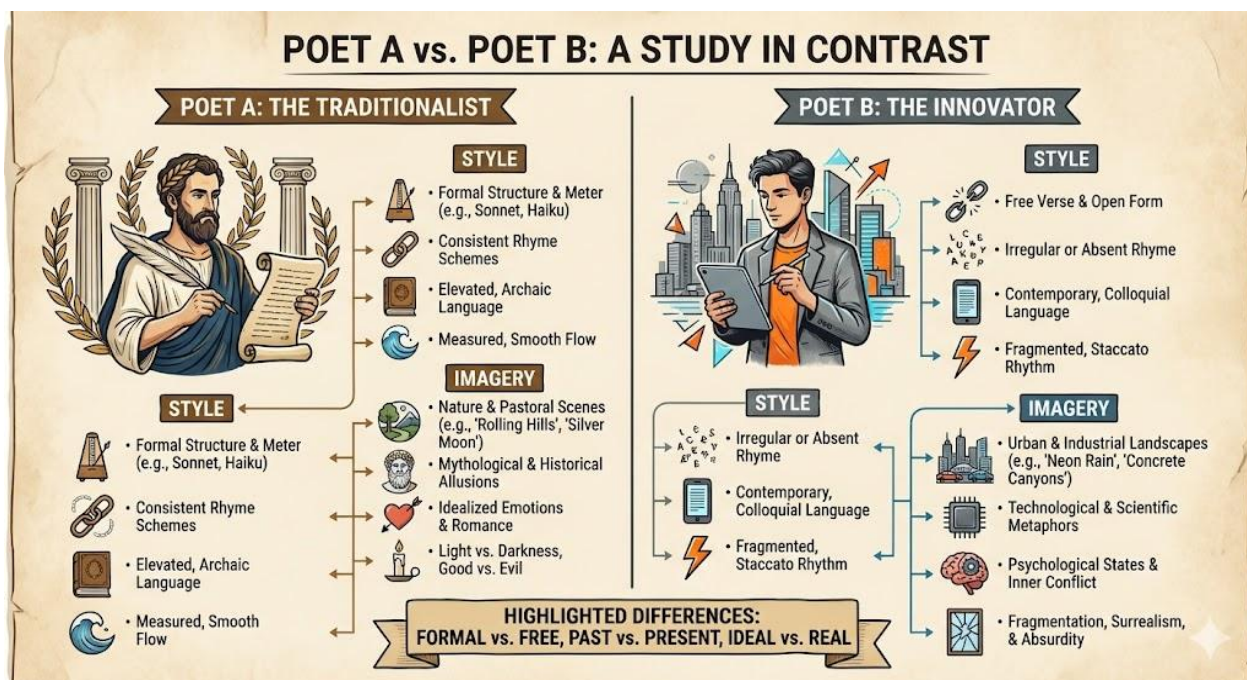


Figure 3.1: Comparative analysis of poets and prose writers

3.1.2 Use of rhetorical devices in evaluation

Early critics paid close attention to **rhetorical devices**, which are techniques used in language to enhance persuasion and beauty. Examples include *استعارة* (*isti 'āra*, metaphor), *تشبيه* (*tashbīh*, simile), and *موازنة* (*muwāzana*, parallelism). These devices were seen as markers of eloquence (*بلاغة*, *balāgha*) and were carefully analysed to determine the artistic merit of a text. Critics argued that the effective use of rhetorical devices elevated a poem or prose work beyond ordinary language, making it memorable and impactful.

Fill in the blank: The rhetorical device known as _____ (*isti 'āra*) refers to the use of metaphor in Arabic criticism.

Rhetorical Device	Description	Example / Application
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Metaphor (<i>Isti'āra</i>)	Using figurative language to convey deeper meaning and beauty.	نور العلم (light of knowledge) → metaphor for guidance and wisdom.
Simile (<i>Tashbīh</i>)	Explicit comparison using markers like ka- (like/as).	كالأسد في الشجاعة (like a lion in courage).
Parallelism	Balancing phrases or verses for rhythm and emphasis.	Repetition of structure in <i>qaṣīda</i> openings to enhance flow.
Antithesis (<i>Muqābala</i>)	Juxtaposing opposites to highlight contrast.	الحياة والموت (life and death) in poetic duels.
Hyperbole (<i>Mubālagha</i>)	Exaggeration to intensify emotion or praise.	أكرم من المطر (more generous than rain).
Alliteration & Rhyme	Sound patterns used to create musicality and memorability.	Repetition of consonants in tribal praise poetry.
Imagery (<i>Taṣwīr</i>)	Vivid descriptive language to evoke sensory experience.	Desert landscapes symbolizing endurance and pride.

Box 3.1: Common rhetorical devices in early criticism

3.1.3 Criteria for distinguishing excellence and weakness

Critics also developed **criteria** to distinguish between strong and weak literary works. **Criteria** are standards or principles used to assess quality. These included clarity of meaning (وضوح المعنى, *wuḍūḥ al-ma'nā*), originality of imagery, and adherence to cultural values. A poem that lacked clarity or repeated clichés was considered weak, while one that demonstrated originality and eloquence was praised. This systematic approach ensured that literary evaluation was not arbitrary but based on identifiable features.

Fill in the blank: A poem that lacked _____ (*wuḍūḥ al-ma'nā*) was considered weak by early critics.



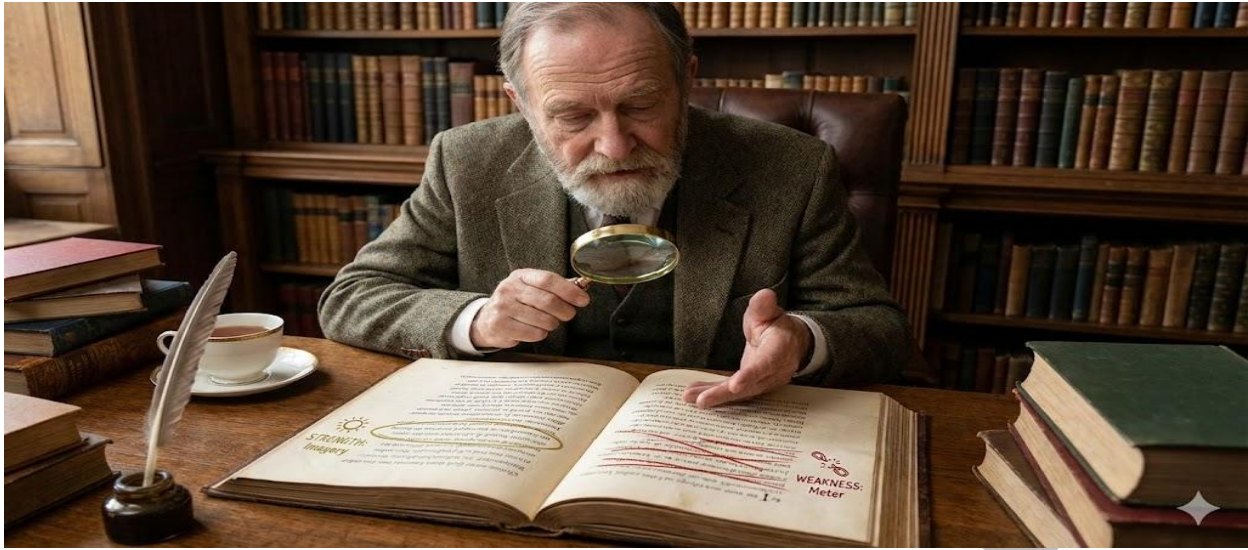


Plate 3.1: Criteria for distinguishing excellence and weakness

Pilot questions 3.1

1. What is meant by comparative analysis in early Arabic criticism?
2. Which rhetorical devices were commonly examined by critics?
3. Why was بلاغة (*balāgha*) considered central to evaluation?
4. What criteria did critics use to distinguish strong from weak literary works?
5. How did clarity of meaning influence the judgement of poetry?



3.2 Historical And Cultural Approaches

3.2.1 Contextualising poetry within tribal and social values

Early Arabic criticism was deeply influenced by **tribal values**, which refer to the customs, traditions, and honour codes of Arab tribes. Poetry was not only an artistic expression but also a reflection of social identity. Critics evaluated poems based on how well they upheld values such as الكرم (*al-karam*, generosity), الشجاعة (*al-shajā'a*, bravery), and loyalty to the tribe. These cultural dimensions ensured that poetry was judged not only for its aesthetic qualities but also for its ability to reinforce communal pride and moral standards.

Fill in the blank: Poetry that celebrated _____ (*al-shajā'a*) was praised for reflecting tribal honour and courage.



Plate 3.2: Poetry contextualised within tribal and social values



3.2.2 Influence of the Qur'ān on critical approaches

The **القرآن الكريم** (*al-Qur'ān al-Karīm*, the Noble Qur'ān) had a profound impact on Arabic criticism. Its unmatched eloquence and rhetorical excellence set a benchmark for literary quality. Critics often compared poetry and prose to the Qur'ān's style, noting its clarity, rhythm, and persuasive power. The Qur'ān also introduced moral and spiritual dimensions into literary evaluation, encouraging critics to consider whether works aligned with ethical and religious values.

Fill in the blank: The _____ (*al-Qur'ān al-Karīm*) set a benchmark for eloquence and rhetorical excellence in Arabic criticism.



Figure 3.2: Influence of the Qur'ān on Arabic criticism

3.2.3 Integration of foreign intellectual traditions (Greek, Persian)

During the Abbasid era, Arabic scholars encountered **foreign intellectual traditions**, particularly Greek and Persian thought, through translations. **Intellectual traditions** refer to systems of knowledge and methods of reasoning developed in different cultures. Greek philosophy introduced concepts of logic and aesthetics, while Persian literature contributed



narrative styles and cultural themes. Early critics integrated these influences into their approaches, enriching Arabic criticism with comparative and philosophical perspectives. This blending of traditions demonstrated the openness of Arabic scholarship to external ideas while maintaining its cultural identity.

Fill in the blank: The Abbasid translation movement exposed scholars to _____ and Persian intellectual traditions.

<i>Influence</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>Example / Impact</i>
<i>Greek Rhetoric & Poetics</i>	<i>Arabic critics absorbed concepts of rhetoric, logic, and poetics from Greek sources (especially Aristotle).</i>	<i>Adoption of systematic categories like metaphor, simile, and analogy into balāgha (Arabic rhetoric).</i>
<i>Philosophical Frameworks</i>	<i>Greek emphasis on rational analysis shaped Arabic approaches to evaluating literature.</i>	<i>Ibn Qutaybah and later critics integrated logical reasoning into literary judgments.</i>
<i>Persian Literary Traditions</i>	<i>Persian culture contributed stylistic and thematic richness, especially in courtly and didactic literature.</i>	<i>Influence seen in ornate prose (saj') and moral storytelling traditions.</i>
<i>Comparative Criticism</i>	<i>Exposure to Greek and Persian models encouraged structured comparison of poets and texts.</i>	<i>Al-ʿĀmidī's al-Muwāzana reflects this comparative method.</i>
<i>Integration with Arabic Heritage</i>	<i>Arabic criticism blended foreign influences with indigenous oral and tribal standards.</i>	<i>Classical qaṣīda forms retained while enriched with philosophical and stylistic analysis.</i>
<i>Transmission through Translation</i>	<i>Greek and Persian works were translated into Arabic during the Abbasid era, fueling intellectual exchange.</i>	<i>The Bayt al-Ḥikma (House of Wisdom) in Baghdad preserved and transmitted critical theories.</i>

Box 3.2: Foreign influences on Arabic criticism



Pilot questions 3.2

1. How did tribal and social values shape the evaluation of poetry?
2. Why was the Qur'ān considered a benchmark for eloquence in criticism?
3. What moral and spiritual dimensions did the Qur'ān introduce into literary evaluation?
4. Which foreign traditions influenced Arabic criticism during the Abbasid era?
5. How did Greek philosophy and Persian literature enrich Arabic critical approaches?

3.3 Ethical And Philosophical Approaches

3.3.1 Moral dimensions in literary evaluation

Early Arabic critics often considered the **moral dimension** of literature, meaning the ethical values and social responsibilities reflected in poetry and prose. Works that praised virtues such as الكرم (*al-karam*, generosity) and الوفاء (*al-wafā'*, loyalty) were celebrated, while those that encouraged immorality or undermined communal values were criticised. This shows that criticism was not only about aesthetics but also about reinforcing ethical standards within society.

Fill in the blank: Poetry that promoted virtues such as _____ (*al-wafā'*) was praised for its moral value.





Plate 3.3: Moral dimensions in Arabic literary evaluation

3.3.2 Philosophical reflections on meaning and beauty

Critics also engaged in **philosophical reflections**, which refers to deep thinking about abstract concepts such as meaning, truth, and beauty. They asked questions about what makes poetry beautiful, whether beauty lies in the words themselves or in the ideas they convey, and how literature relates to human experience. These reflections were influenced by exposure to Greek philosophy, which introduced concepts of aesthetics and logic. By combining philosophy with literary analysis, critics elevated Arabic criticism into a more intellectual and reflective discipline.

Fill in the blank: Greek philosophy introduced concepts of _____ and logic into Arabic literary criticism.



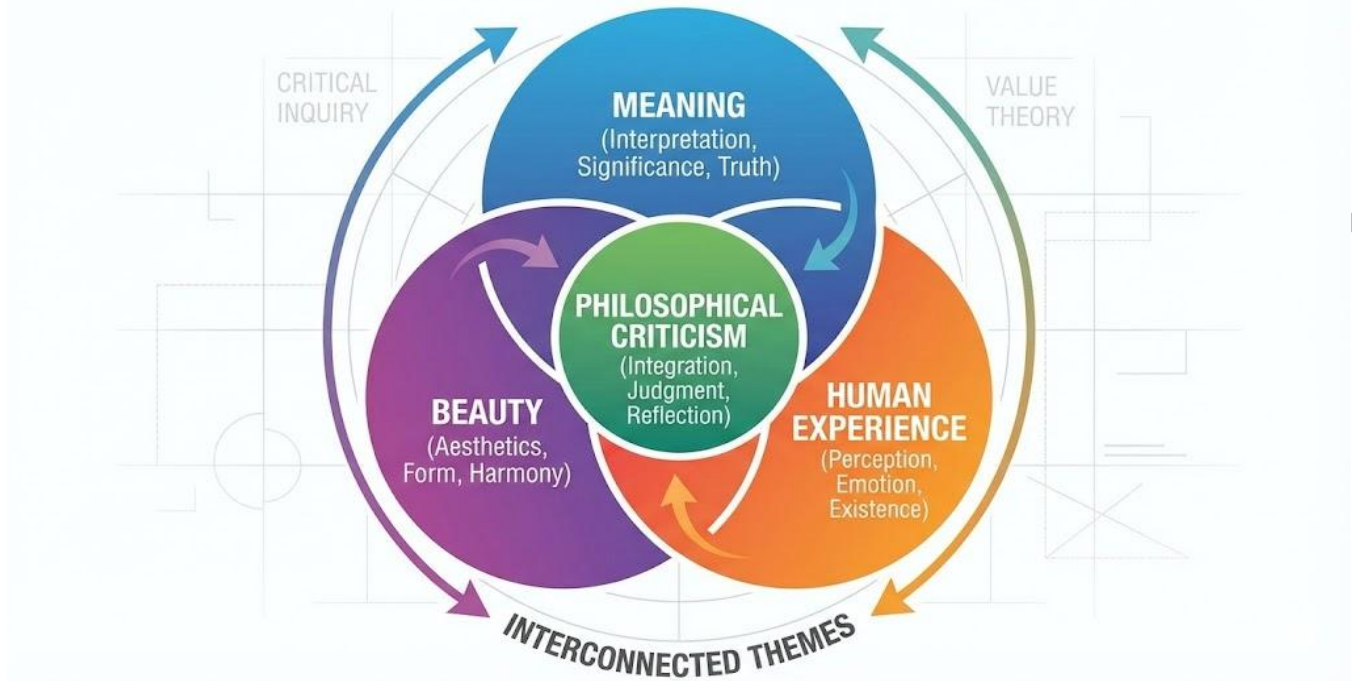


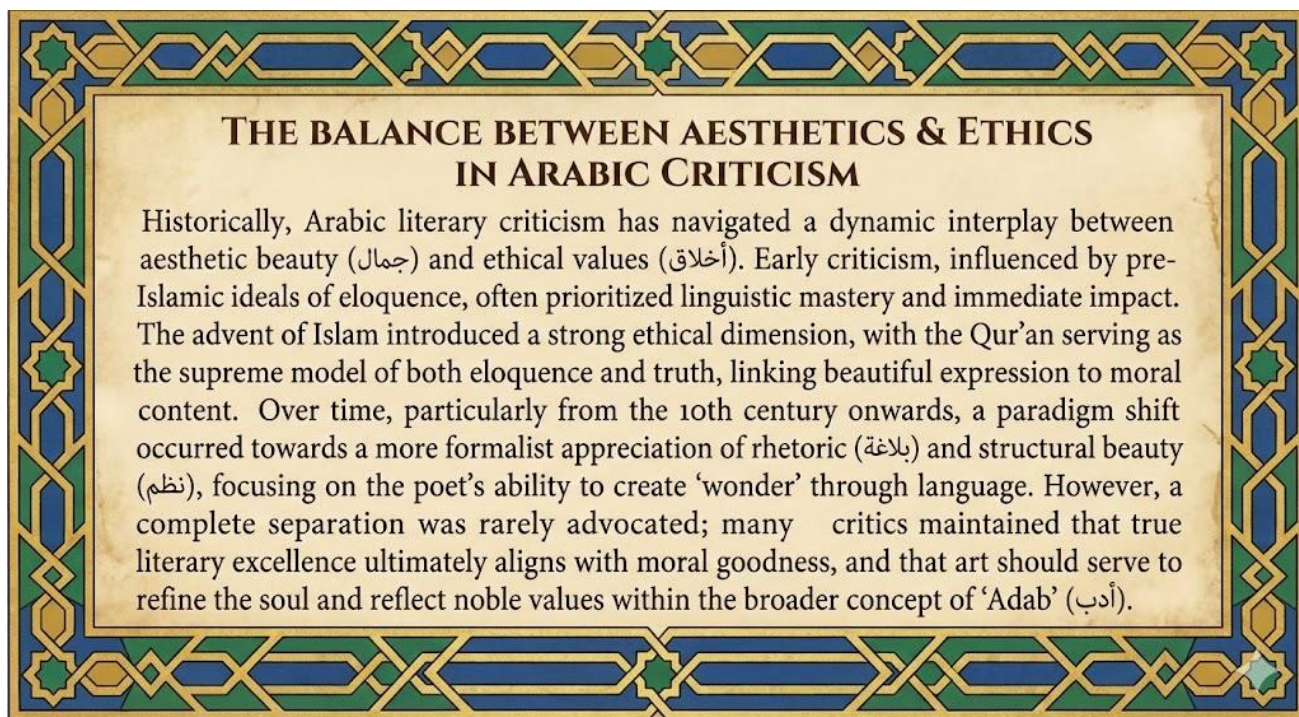
Figure 3.3: Philosophical reflections in Arabic criticism

3.3.3 Balancing aesthetics with ethical responsibility

A distinctive feature of early criticism was the effort to balance **aesthetics** and **ethical responsibility**. **Aesthetics** refers to the appreciation of beauty in art and literature, while **ethical responsibility** refers to the duty of literature to uphold moral and cultural values. Critics argued that a poem could be artistically impressive yet morally questionable, and therefore true excellence required harmony between beauty and virtue. This balance ensured that literature was both pleasing to the senses and beneficial to society.

Fill in the blank: True excellence in literature required harmony between beauty (aesthetics) and _____ responsibility.





Box 3.3: Balancing aesthetics and ethics in Arabic criticism

Pilot questions 3.3

1. What moral values were emphasised in early Arabic criticism?
2. How did philosophical reflections shape the study of meaning and beauty?
3. What role did Greek philosophy play in enriching Arabic criticism?
4. Why was balancing aesthetics with ethical responsibility considered essential?
5. How did critics ensure that literature was both pleasing and socially beneficial?

3.4 Legacy And Influence Of Early Approaches

3.4.1 Continuities in later Abbasid criticism

The methods developed by early critics created **continuities**, meaning aspects that remained consistent across generations of scholarship. These included the emphasis on بلاغة (*balāgha*,



eloquence), the moral dimension of literature, and the importance of cultural identity. Abbasid critics inherited these principles and applied them in their own evaluations, ensuring that the foundations of Arabic criticism remained stable even as new ideas emerged.

Fill in the blank: The emphasis on _____ (*balāgha*) continued to be a central theme in Abbasid criticism.

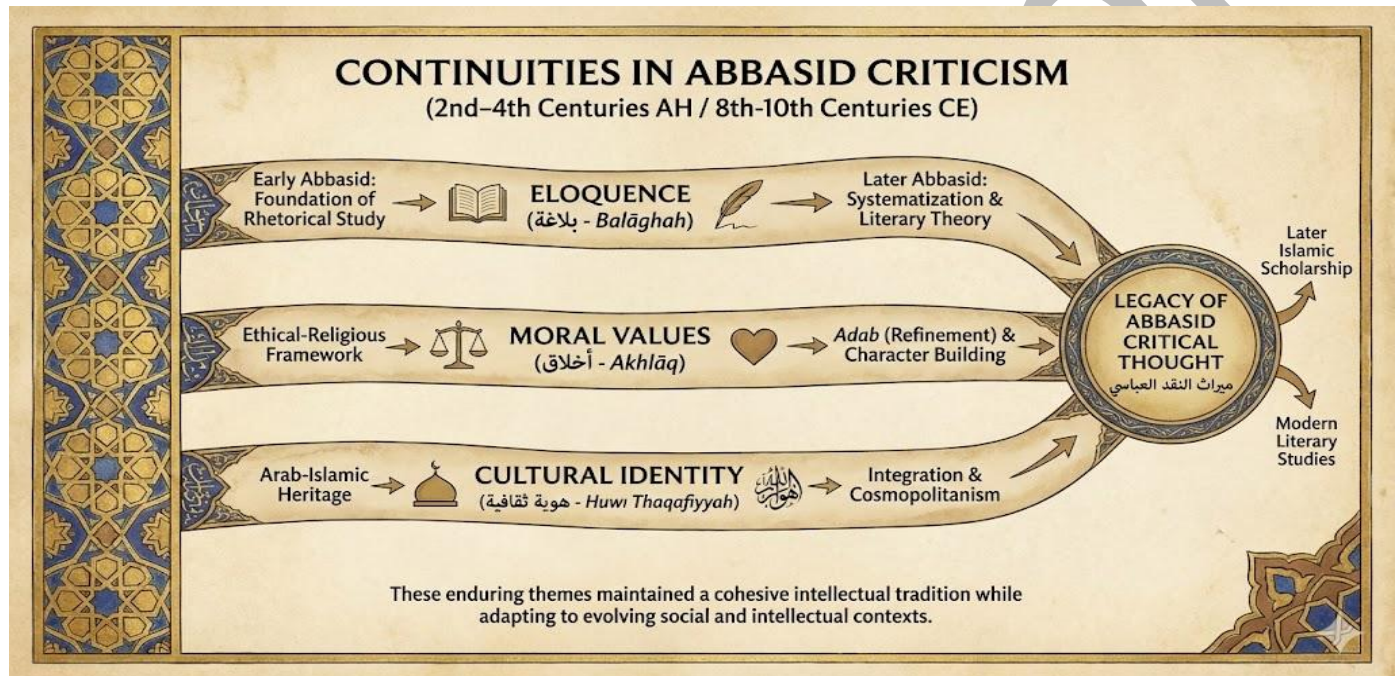


Figure 3.4: Continuities in Arabic criticism

3.4.2 Shifts towards systematic and codified approaches

While some elements remained constant, there were also **shifts** in criticism. **Shifts** refer to changes or developments that introduced new perspectives. Later critics moved towards more **systematic** and **codified approaches**, meaning structured methods with clear rules and categories. For example, scholars began to classify poets into ranks, compare literary schools, and apply philosophical reasoning more rigorously. These shifts demonstrated the dynamic nature of Arabic criticism, which adapted to intellectual and cultural developments while retaining its core values.



Fill in the blank: Later critics introduced _____ approaches, making literary evaluation more structured and rule-based.

Shift	Description	Example / Impact
From Oral to Written	Early tribal criticism was oral and communal; later scholars codified standards in treatises.	Transition from <i>Sūq 'Ukāz</i> performances to works like Ibn Qutaybah's <i>Kitāb al-Shi'r wa al-Shu'arā</i> .
Structured Criteria	Eloquence, imagery, and rhythm became formalized into analytical categories.	Al-ʿĀmidī's <i>al-Muwāzana</i> compared poets using systematic rhetorical benchmarks.
Comparative Method	Critics began evaluating poets side by side, highlighting strengths and weaknesses.	Balanced analysis of Abū Tammām vs. al-Buḥturī.
Integration of Philosophy	Greek logic and rhetoric influenced codified frameworks of Arabic literary theory.	Adoption of Aristotelian categories into <i>balāgha</i> (Arabic rhetoric).
Historical Awareness	Critics contextualized poets within cultural and historical settings.	Ibn Qutaybah distinguished pre-Islamic from Islamic poets, noting thematic shifts.
Institutionalization	Criticism became part of scholarly discourse in Abbasid intellectual circles.	The Bayt al-Ḥikma (House of Wisdom) fostered translation and literary theory.

Box 3.4: Shifts in Arabic criticism



3.4.3 Enduring relevance of early methods in modern scholarship

The legacy of early criticism continues to influence modern scholarship. **Legacy** refers to the lasting impact of past efforts on later generations. Contemporary researchers still draw on early methods such as comparative analysis, rhetorical study, and ethical evaluation. These approaches provide valuable insights into the cultural and intellectual history of Arabic literature. By recognising the enduring relevance of early criticism, learners can appreciate how foundational ideas remain useful in understanding both classical and modern texts.

Fill in the blank: Modern scholars continue to use early methods such as _____ analysis and rhetorical study.



Plate 3.4: Enduring relevance of early methods in modern scholarship

Pilot questions 3.4

1. Which continuities from early criticism were carried into Abbasid scholarship?



2. How did later critics shift towards systematic and codified approaches?
3. Why was categorisation of poets considered a significant development?
4. What makes the legacy of early criticism relevant to modern scholarship?
5. How do contemporary researchers apply early methods in studying Arabic literature?

Series Summary

This Series has focused on the methods and approaches employed by early Arabic critics, showing how their practices shaped the discipline into a structured and reflective field of study. Its purpose was to highlight the analytical, cultural, ethical, and philosophical dimensions of criticism, helping you appreciate how these approaches provided both intellectual depth and social relevance.

We began by examining analytical methods such as comparative evaluation, rhetorical devices, and criteria for distinguishing excellence. Then we explored historical and cultural approaches, including the role of tribal values, the influence of the Qur'ān, and the integration of Greek and Persian traditions. Following that, we considered ethical and philosophical approaches, where critics balanced aesthetics with moral responsibility and reflected on meaning and beauty. Finally, we assessed the legacy of these approaches, noting continuities, shifts towards systematic methods, and their enduring relevance in modern scholarship. In line with the Series Learning Outcomes, you should now be able to analyse comparative methods, explain rhetorical devices, evaluate cultural and ethical influences, and appraise the lasting impact of early criticism on later and contemporary studies.

Glossary of Terms

Aesthetics – The appreciation of beauty in art and literature, focusing on how words, imagery, and style create pleasing effects.



al-karam (الكرم) – Generosity; a moral value often celebrated in Arabic poetry and praised by early critics.

al-Qur'ān al-Karīm (القرآن الكريم) – The Noble Qur'ān; regarded as the highest standard of eloquence and rhetorical excellence, influencing Arabic criticism.

al-shajā'a (الشجاعة) – Bravery; a virtue frequently highlighted in poetry and valued in literary evaluation.

al-wafā' (الوفاء) – Loyalty; a moral quality praised in poetry for reinforcing social and ethical responsibility.

Balāgha (بلاغة) – Eloquence; the ability to communicate ideas with clarity, beauty, and persuasive power, considered central to Arabic criticism.

Comparative analysis – A method of evaluating poets and prose writers by comparing their styles, imagery, and rhetorical strength.

Criteria – Standards or principles used to judge the quality of poetry and prose, such as clarity of meaning, originality, and cultural alignment.

Intellectual traditions – Systems of knowledge and reasoning from other cultures, such as Greek philosophy and Persian literature, integrated into Arabic criticism.

Isti'āra (استعارة) – Metaphor; a rhetorical device where one thing is described in terms of another to enhance meaning.

Jazālat al-lafz (جزالة اللفظ) – Strength of expression; a valued quality in poetry that reflects powerful and dignified language.

Legacy – The lasting influence of early criticism on later generations, including Abbasid scholarship and modern studies.

Moral dimension – The ethical values reflected in literature, such as generosity, loyalty, and virtue, which critics considered alongside aesthetics.



Muwāzana (موازنة) – Parallelism; a rhetorical device that balances phrases or ideas to create rhythm and emphasis.

Philosophical reflections – Deep thinking about abstract concepts such as meaning, truth, and beauty, often influenced by Greek philosophy.

Rhetorical devices – Techniques used in language to enhance persuasion and beauty, including metaphor, simile, parallelism, and wordplay.

Simile (تشبيه, tashbīh) – A rhetorical device that compares two different things using words such as “like” or “as.”

Systematic approaches – Structured methods of literary evaluation with clear rules and categories, developed by later critics to make criticism more rigorous.

Wuḍūḥ al-ma‘nā (وضوح المعنى) – Clarity of meaning; a criterion used by critics to judge whether a poem or prose conveyed ideas effectively.

Concept Check Questions [Series 3]

Objective Questions

1. Identify the rhetorical device known as استعارة (*isti‘āra*). (Linked to SLO 3.2)
2. Define the term بلاغة (*balāgha*) in the context of Arabic criticism. (Linked to SLO 3.7)
3. State whether early critics judged poetry primarily by oral judgements or written analysis. (Linked to SLO 3.1)
4. Name the foreign traditions that influenced Arabic criticism during the Abbasid era. (Linked to SLO 3.6)

Short-Answer Questions

5. Explain how comparative analysis was used to evaluate poets and prose writers. (Linked to SLO 3.1)
6. Describe the influence of the Qur’ān on critical approaches. (Linked to SLO 3.5)



7. Analyse why **جزالة اللفظ** (*jazālat al-lafẓ*) was considered an essential quality of poetry. (Linked to SLO 3.3)
8. Distinguish between continuities and shifts in Arabic criticism across generations. (Linked to SLO 3.10, SLO 3.11)

Long-Answer Questions

9. Evaluate the ethical and philosophical approaches of early critics, focusing on how they balanced aesthetics with moral responsibility. (Linked to SLO 3.7, SLO 3.9)
10. Assess the legacy of early methods and approaches in shaping later Abbasid criticism and their relevance to modern scholarship. (Linked to SLO 3.10, SLO 3.12)

Answers to Concept Check Questions [Series 3]

Objective Questions

1. *Isti'āra* refers to metaphor, where one thing is described in terms of another.
2. *Balāgha* means eloquence, the ability to communicate ideas with clarity, beauty, and persuasive power.
3. Early critics initially relied on oral judgements but later transitioned to written analysis.
4. Greek philosophy and Persian literature.

Short-Answer Questions

5. Comparative analysis involved setting poets and prose writers side by side to highlight differences in style, imagery, and rhetorical strength.
6. The Qur'ān set a benchmark for eloquence and rhetorical excellence, influencing standards of clarity, rhythm, and moral values.
7. *Jazālat al-lafẓ* was valued because strong and dignified language conveyed authority and enhanced poetic impact.
8. Continuities included emphasis on eloquence and moral values, while shifts involved systematic categorisation, codified rules, and philosophical reasoning.



Long-Answer Questions

9. *Basic response:* Early critics emphasised moral values such as generosity and loyalty, while also reflecting on meaning and beauty. They argued that literature should be both aesthetically pleasing and ethically responsible.

Value-added response: Outstanding learners may note that these approaches were influenced by Greek philosophy, which introduced concepts of aesthetics and logic, thereby enriching Arabic criticism with deeper intellectual reflections.

10. *Basic response:* Early methods established criticism as a discipline, influenced Abbasid scholarship, and ensured continuity of themes such as eloquence and ethics.

Value-added response: Learners may add that these methods also encouraged comparative and philosophical approaches, integrated foreign traditions, and continue to provide insights for modern scholarship in understanding both classical and contemporary Arabic literature.



Part 3.1 Analytical methods in early criticism

- Comparative analysis meant evaluating poets and prose writers side by side to highlight differences in style, imagery, and rhetorical strength.
- Common rhetorical devices included استعارة (*isti'āra*, metaphor), تشبيه (*tashbīh*, simile), موازنة (*muwāzana*, parallelism), and جناس (*jinās*, wordplay).
- بلاغة (*balāgha*, eloquence) was considered central because it reflected clarity, beauty, and persuasive power.
- Criteria used included clarity of meaning, originality of imagery, and adherence to cultural values.
- Clarity of meaning strongly influenced judgement, as unclear poetry was considered weak.

Part 3.2 Historical and cultural approaches

- Tribal and social values shaped evaluation by rewarding poetry that celebrated generosity, bravery, and loyalty.
- The Qur'ān was considered a benchmark for eloquence and rhetorical excellence.
- It introduced moral and spiritual dimensions, encouraging critics to judge works by ethical standards.
- Greek philosophy and Persian literature influenced Arabic criticism during the Abbasid era.
- Greek thought contributed logic and aesthetics, while Persian literature added narrative styles and cultural themes.

Part 3.3 Ethical and philosophical approaches

- Moral values emphasised included generosity, loyalty, and honour.
- Philosophical reflections shaped the study of meaning and beauty by asking deeper questions about truth and aesthetics.
- Greek philosophy enriched Arabic criticism by introducing concepts of logic and aesthetics.
- Balancing aesthetics with ethical responsibility was essential to ensure literature was both beautiful and socially beneficial.



- Critics ensured this balance by praising works that combined artistic excellence with moral values.

Part 3.4 Legacy and influence of early approaches

- Continuities carried into Abbasid scholarship included emphasis on eloquence, moral values, and cultural identity.
- Later critics shifted towards systematic and codified approaches, introducing structured rules and categories.
- Categorisation of poets was significant because it provided a clear hierarchy and comparative framework.
- The legacy of early criticism is relevant to modern scholarship because it provides foundational insights into literary evaluation.
- Contemporary researchers apply early methods such as comparative analysis, rhetorical study, and ethical evaluation to both classical and modern texts.

References and Attributions [Series 3]

Textual Sources

- Al-Jāhīz. (1980). *al-Bayān wa al-Tabyīn* (البيان والتبيين). Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya.
- Ibn Qutaybah. (1953). *al-Shi‘r wa al-Shu‘arā’* (الشعر والشعراء). Cairo: Dār al-Ma‘ārif.
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- Montgomery, J. (2010). *The Vagaries of the Qasida: Arabic Poetry and Its Critics*. Brill.
- Allen, R. (2000). *An Introduction to Arabic Literature*. Cambridge University Press.

Illustrations (Figures, Plates, Boxes)

- *Figure 3.1: Comparative analysis of poets and prose writers*
 - AI-generated using prompt: “Create a diagram showing two poets compared side by side, with differences in style and imagery highlighted.”
 - Suggested OER search string: “comparative analysis Arabic poets diagram OER.”



- *Box 3.1: Common rhetorical devices in early criticism*
 - AI-generated using prompt: “Generate a text box summarising common rhetorical devices in early Arabic criticism.”
 - Suggested OER search string: “Arabic rhetorical devices criticism OER summary.”
- *Plate 3.1: Criteria for distinguishing excellence and weakness*
 - AI-generated using prompt: “Create an illustration of a scholar evaluating a manuscript, highlighting strengths and weaknesses in poetry.”
 - Suggested OER search string: “Arabic literary criticism scholar evaluating manuscript OER image.”
- *Plate 3.2: Poetry contextualised within tribal and social values*
 - AI-generated using prompt: “Create an illustration of a poet reciting verses about bravery and generosity to a tribal audience.”
 - Suggested OER search string: “Arabic poetry tribal values OER image.”
- *Figure 3.2: Influence of the Qur’ān on Arabic criticism*
 - AI-generated using prompt: “Create a diagram showing the Qur’ān at the centre, influencing clarity, rhythm, and moral values in Arabic criticism.”
 - Suggested OER search string: “Qur’ān influence Arabic literary criticism diagram OER.”
- *Box 3.2: Foreign influences on Arabic criticism*
 - AI-generated using prompt: “Generate a text box summarising Greek and Persian influences on Arabic criticism.”
 - Suggested OER search string: “Greek Persian influence Arabic literary criticism OER summary.”
- *Plate 3.3: Moral dimensions in Arabic literary evaluation*
 - AI-generated using prompt: “Create an illustration of a poet reciting verses about generosity and loyalty to an audience.”
 - Suggested OER search string: “Arabic poetry moral values OER image.”
- *Figure 3.3: Philosophical reflections in Arabic criticism*
 - AI-generated using prompt: “Create a diagram showing meaning, beauty, and human experience as interconnected themes in philosophical criticism.”
 - Suggested OER search string: “Arabic criticism philosophical reflections diagram OER.”



- *Box 3.3: Balancing aesthetics and ethics in Arabic criticism*
 - AI-generated using prompt: “Generate a text box summarising the balance between aesthetics and ethics in Arabic criticism.”
 - Suggested OER search string: “Arabic literary criticism aesthetics ethics balance OER summary.”
- *Figure 3.4: Continuities in Arabic criticism*
 - AI-generated using prompt: “Create a diagram showing continuities such as eloquence, moral values, and cultural identity in Abbasid criticism.”
 - Suggested OER search string: “continuities Abbasid Arabic criticism diagram OER.”
- *Box 3.4: Shifts in Arabic criticism*
 - AI-generated using prompt: “Generate a text box summarising shifts in Arabic criticism towards systematic and codified approaches.”
 - Suggested OER search string: “systematic codified Arabic criticism OER summary.”
- *Plate 3.4: Enduring relevance of early methods in modern scholarship*
 - AI-generated using prompt: “Create an illustration of a modern scholar studying classical Arabic manuscripts alongside contemporary literary works.”
 - Suggested OER search string: “modern Arabic literary criticism scholar OER image.”



Series 4: Principles of Textual Criticism in Classical Arabic Tradition

Part 4.1 Foundations of textual criticism

- 4.1.1 Definition and scope of textual criticism
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- 4.1.3 Relationship with literary and linguistic studies

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Part 4.4 Legacy and influence of textual criticism

- 4.4.1 Contributions to classical Arabic scholarship
- 4.4.2 Impact on Qur'ānic studies and Hadith sciences
- 4.4.3 Relevance to modern textual and literary studies

Introduction

In the last Series, we explored the methods and approaches of early Arabic critics, focusing on how they analysed, contextualised, and evaluated literary works. Building on that foundation, this Series turns to the principles of textual criticism in the classical Arabic tradition. Textual criticism is vital because it



ensures the accuracy, reliability, and preservation of texts, allowing scholars to distinguish authentic versions from later alterations. By studying this tradition, you will see how Arabic scholars developed rigorous methods to safeguard the integrity of their literary and religious heritage.

The aim of this Series is to introduce you to the foundations, methods, and guiding principles of textual criticism in classical Arabic scholarship, and to equip you with the ability to evaluate its legacy and relevance to modern studies.

We shall commence this Series by examining the foundations of textual criticism, including its definition, scope, and historical emergence. Next, we will move on to the methods of textual criticism, such as manuscript comparison, identification of textual variants, and techniques for establishing authenticity. Following that, we will consider the principles guiding textual criticism, including criteria for reliability, the role of isnād, and ethical considerations in preserving texts. Finally, we will conclude by assessing the legacy and influence of textual criticism, noting its contributions to classical scholarship, its impact on Qur'ānic and Hadīth studies, and its continuing relevance in modern literary research.

Series Learning Outcomes

Upon completing this Series, you should be able to:

- **SLO 4.1** define the concept and scope of textual criticism in the classical Arabic tradition,
- **SLO 4.2** explain the historical emergence of textual criticism within Arabic scholarship,
- **SLO 4.3** describe the relationship between textual criticism and literary or linguistic studies,
- **SLO 4.4** demonstrate how to compare and collate manuscripts in order to identify differences,
- **SLO 4.5** identify textual variants and explain their significance in evaluating authenticity,
- **SLO 4.6** apply techniques used by classical scholars to establish the reliability of texts,
- **SLO 4.7** analyse the criteria employed to evaluate textual reliability,
- **SLO 4.8** explain the role of **isnād** (chain of transmission) in validating texts,
- **SLO 4.9** evaluate the ethical considerations involved in preserving and transmitting texts,
- **SLO 4.10** assess the contributions of textual criticism to classical Arabic scholarship,
- **SLO 4.11** examine the impact of textual criticism on Qur'ānic studies and Hadīth sciences, and
- **SLO 4.12** appraise the continuing relevance of classical textual criticism to modern literary and textual studies.



4.1 Foundations Of Textual Criticism

4.1.1 Definition and scope of textual criticism

Textual criticism, known in Arabic as **النقد النصي** (*al-naqd al-naṣī*), is the scholarly discipline concerned with examining texts to determine their most authentic form. It involves identifying errors, variations, and alterations that may have occurred during transmission. The **scope** of textual criticism includes poetry, prose, religious texts, and historical documents, making it a central tool for preserving the integrity of Arabic literary and cultural heritage.

Fill in the blank: Textual criticism in Arabic is referred to as _____ (*al-naqd al-naṣī*).



Figure 4.1: Scope of textual criticism in Arabic tradition



4.1.2 Historical emergence in Arabic scholarship

The historical roots of textual criticism in Arabic scholarship can be traced to the early centuries of Islam. Scholars recognised the need to preserve the accuracy of the Qur'ān and Hadith, which led to the development of rigorous methods for verifying texts. Later, these methods were extended to poetry and prose, ensuring that literary works were transmitted faithfully. The **emergence** of textual criticism was therefore both a religious and cultural necessity, reflecting the importance of safeguarding knowledge.

Fill in the blank: The preservation of the _____ and Hadith was a major reason for the emergence of textual criticism.



Plate 4.1: Historical emergence of textual criticism in Arabic scholarship

4.1.3 Relationship with literary and linguistic studies

Textual criticism is closely linked to **literary studies**, which focus on the analysis of meaning, style, and themes, and **linguistic studies**, which examine grammar, vocabulary, and phonetics. By correcting textual errors and establishing authentic versions, textual criticism provides a reliable foundation for both disciplines. For example, a poem cannot be properly analysed for its



imagery if its wording is uncertain, and a linguistic study cannot be accurate if based on corrupted text. Thus, textual criticism acts as the bridge between textual preservation and scholarly interpretation.

Fill in the blank: Textual criticism provides a reliable foundation for both _____ studies and linguistic studies.

Field	Focus	Relationship to Others	Example / Impact
Textual Criticism	<i>Examines authenticity, accuracy, and transmission of texts.</i>	<i>Provides the foundation for literary and linguistic analysis by ensuring reliable sources.</i>	<i>Verification of Qur'anic manuscripts and early poetry collections.</i>
Literary Studies	<i>Analyzes themes, style, imagery, and rhetorical devices in texts.</i>	<i>Builds on textual criticism for authentic material, and draws on linguistics for stylistic precision.</i>	<i>Study of qaṣīda structure and metaphor in classical poetry.</i>
Linguistic Studies	<i>Focuses on grammar, semantics, phonology, and lexicon.</i>	<i>Supplies tools for both textual and literary criticism, clarifying meaning and stylistic choices.</i>	<i>Sibawayh's grammatical analysis guiding interpretation of poetic diction.</i>
Interdependence	<i>Each field reinforces the others: textual accuracy → linguistic clarity → literary appreciation.</i>	<i>Creates a holistic framework for evaluating Arabic texts.</i>	<i>Abbasid-era scholars integrated all three in systematic criticism.</i>

Box 4.1: Relationship between textual criticism and other disciplines



Pilot questions 4.1

1. What is meant by textual criticism in the Arabic tradition?
2. Why was the preservation of the Qur'ān and Hadith central to the emergence of textual criticism?
3. How did textual criticism extend beyond religious texts to poetry and prose?
4. In what ways does textual criticism support literary studies?
5. Why is textual criticism considered a bridge between linguistic analysis and literary interpretation?

4.2 Methods Of Textual Criticism

4.2.1 Manuscript comparison and collation

One of the most important methods in textual criticism is **manuscript comparison**, which involves examining different copies of a text to identify similarities and differences. **Collation** refers to the systematic process of aligning these manuscripts side by side to detect variations in wording, spelling, or structure. This method helps scholars trace the transmission of texts and determine which version is closest to the original.

Fill in the blank: The systematic process of aligning manuscripts side by side to detect variations is called _____.



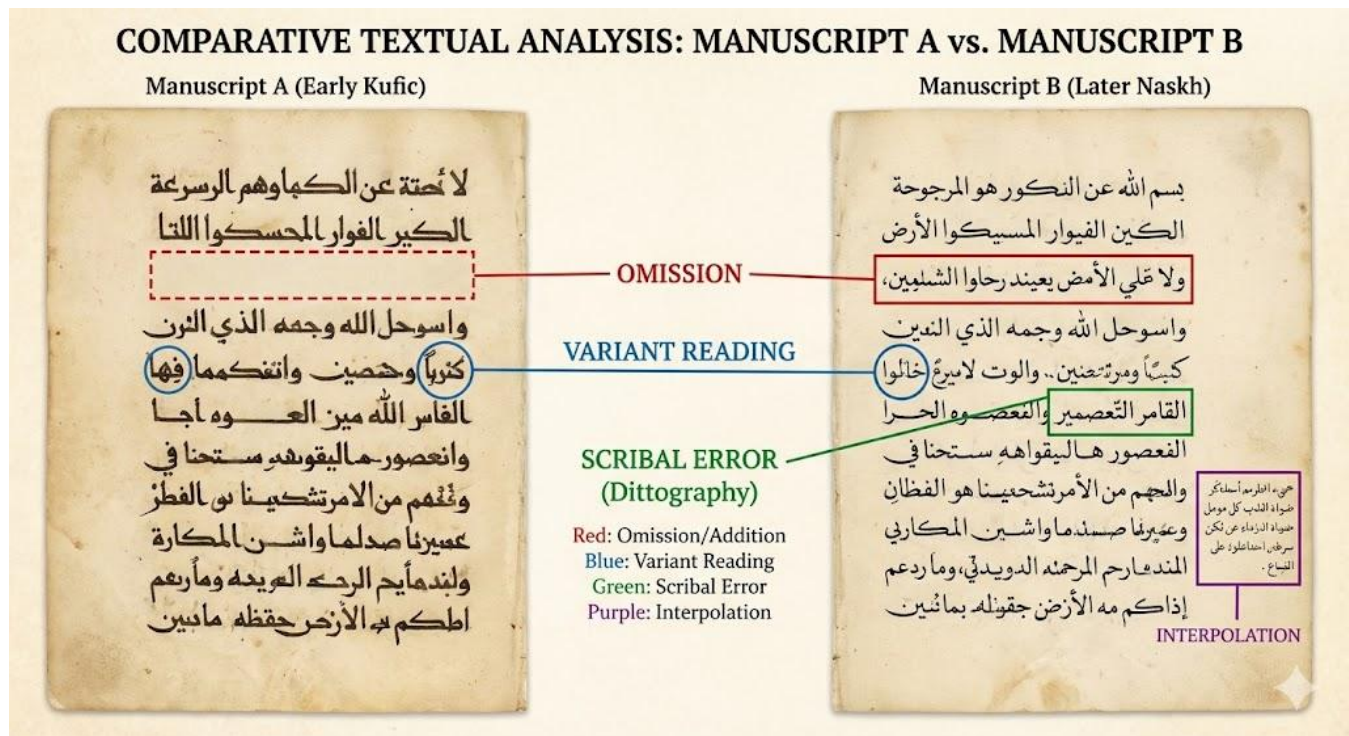


Figure 4.2: Manuscript comparison and collation

4.2.2 Identification of textual variants

A **textual variant** is a difference in wording, spelling, or phrasing found among manuscripts of the same work. Identifying these variants is crucial because they reveal how texts were copied, transmitted, and sometimes altered. Variants may arise from scribal errors, intentional changes, or regional differences in language. By cataloguing and analysing these variants, critics can reconstruct the most reliable version of a text.

Fill in the blank: A difference in wording or phrasing among manuscripts of the same work is called a textual _____.



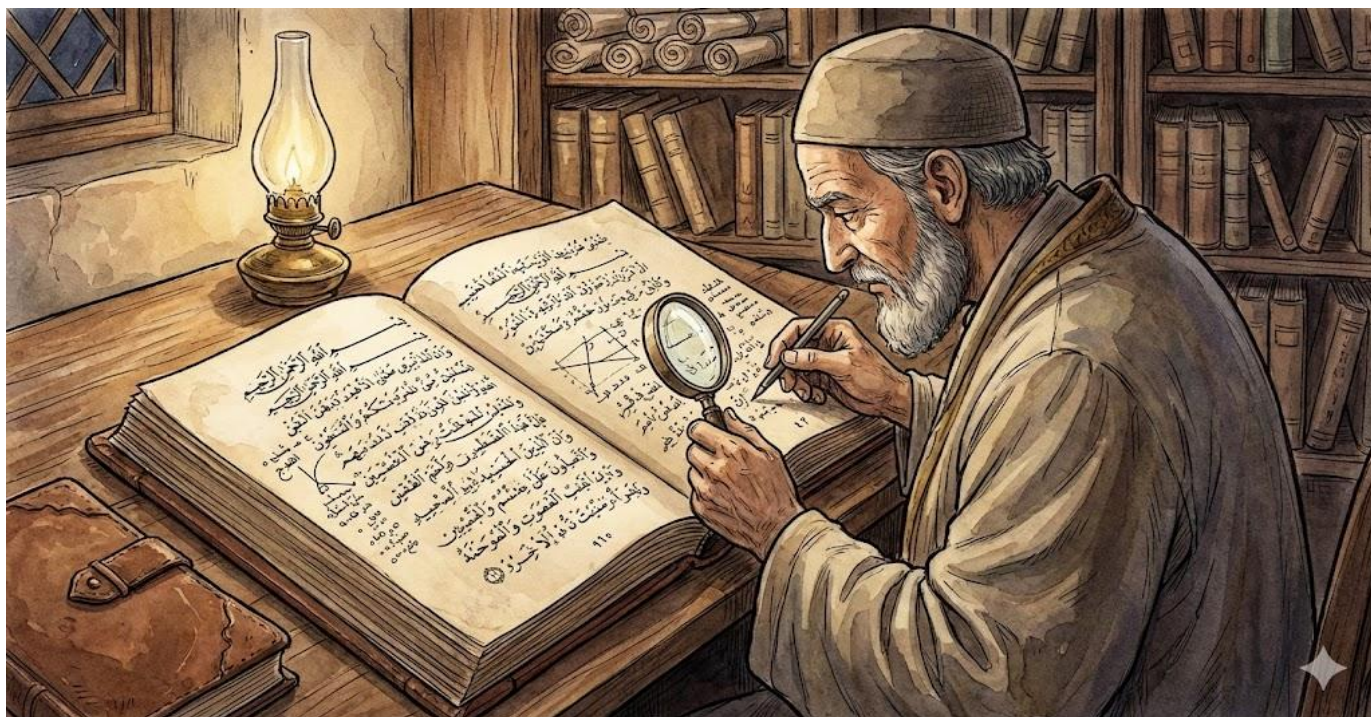


Plate 4.2: Identification of textual variants in manuscripts

4.2.3 Techniques for establishing authenticity

Establishing **authenticity** means determining whether a text is genuine and faithful to its original form. Scholars use several techniques, including examining the **isnād** (chain of transmission), evaluating the credibility of scribes, and cross-checking with other reliable sources. Authenticity is especially important in religious texts, but it also applies to poetry and prose, where critics sought to preserve the integrity of literary heritage.

Fill in the blank: The chain of transmission used to verify the authenticity of texts is known as _____.

Technique	Description	Example / Application
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<i>Examination of Isnād (Chain of Transmission)</i>	<i>Verifying the reliability of narrators and the continuity of transmission.</i>	<i>Assessing whether each transmitter in a hadith chain is credible and connected.</i>
<i>Evaluation of Scribal Credibility</i>	<i>Checking the trustworthiness and accuracy of scribes who preserved texts.</i>	<i>Comparing manuscripts to detect errors or biases introduced by copyists.</i>
<i>Cross-Checking with Reliable Sources</i>	<i>Comparing a text against other authoritative versions or parallel traditions.</i>	<i>Aligning poetic verses or hadith reports with established collections.</i>
<i>Comparison with Established Literary Standards</i>	<i>Judging authenticity by stylistic and rhetorical consistency with recognized norms.</i>	<i>Identifying interpolations by spotting deviations from classical qaṣīda style.</i>
<i>Philological Analysis</i>	<i>Using linguistic and grammatical scrutiny to confirm textual integrity.</i>	<i>Detecting anachronistic vocabulary that signals later additions.</i>
<i>Historical Contextualization</i>	<i>Placing texts within their cultural and historical setting to test plausibility.</i>	<i>Evaluating whether themes match the era of the supposed author.</i>

Box 4.2: Techniques for establishing authenticity

Pilot questions 4.2

1. What is meant by manuscript comparison and collation?
2. Why is identifying textual variants important in textual criticism?
3. What are some common causes of textual variants?
4. How do scholars establish the authenticity of a text?
5. Why is isnād considered a crucial tool in verifying textual reliability?



4.3 Principles Guiding Textual Criticism

4.3.1 Criteria for evaluating textual reliability

Textual critics relied on **criteria**, meaning standards or principles used to judge whether a text was reliable. These criteria included clarity of meaning, consistency across manuscripts, and alignment with established linguistic and literary norms. A text that showed frequent contradictions or unclear wording was considered unreliable, while one that demonstrated stability and coherence was valued.

Fill in the blank: A text that demonstrated _____ and coherence was considered reliable by classical critics.

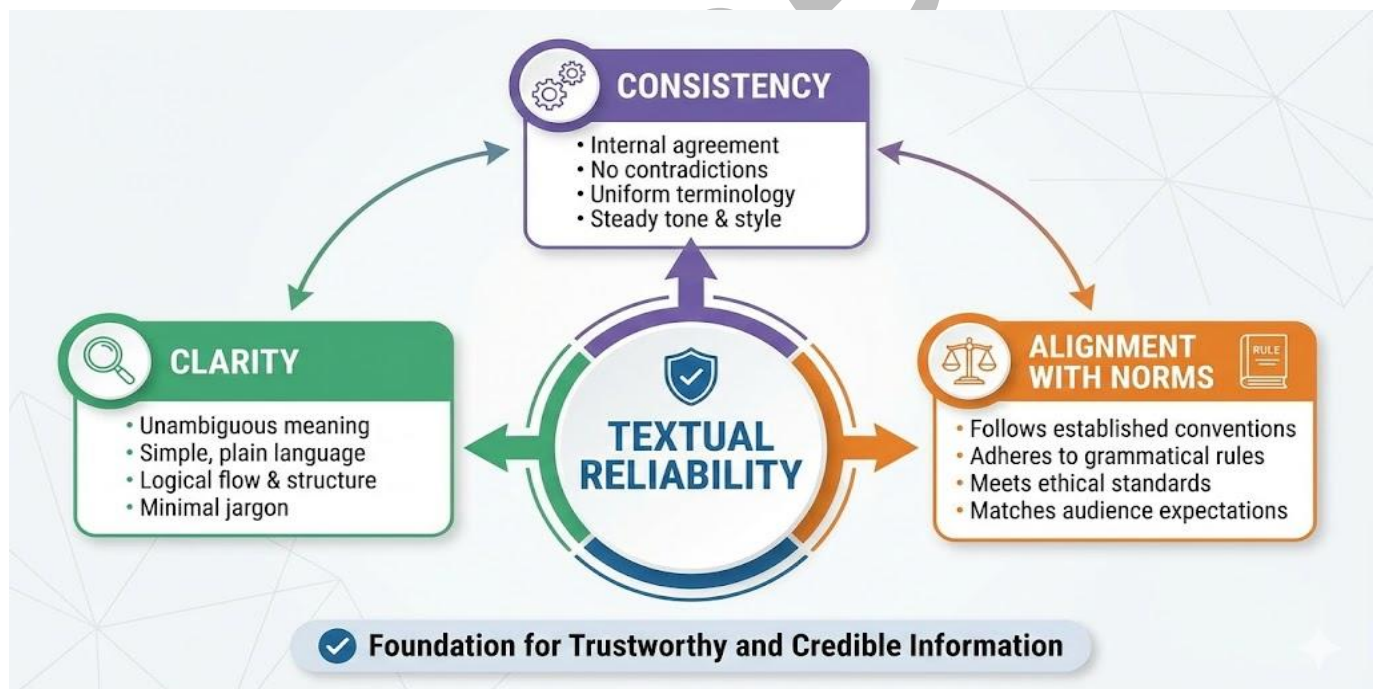


Figure 4.3: Criteria for evaluating textual reliability

4.3.2 Role of isnād (chain of transmission) in textual validation

The **isnād** (إسناد) refers to the chain of transmission used to trace a text back to its original source. In textual criticism, isnād was crucial for validating authenticity, especially in Hadith studies. A



strong isnād meant that each transmitter was trustworthy and the chain was unbroken, while a weak isnād indicated possible gaps or unreliable transmitters. This principle ensured that texts were not only linguistically sound but also historically credible.

Fill in the blank: A strong _____ meant that each transmitter was trustworthy and the chain was unbroken.

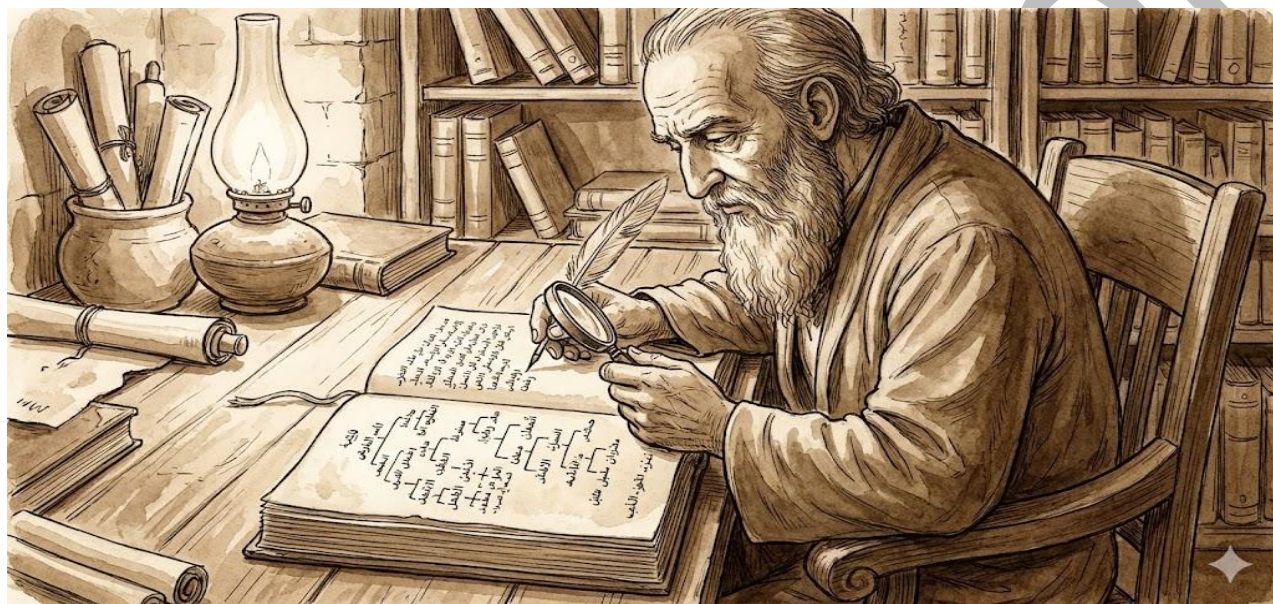


Plate 4.3: Role of isnād in textual validation

4.3.3 Ethical considerations in preserving texts

Textual criticism also involved **ethical considerations**, meaning the moral responsibilities of scholars in preserving and transmitting texts. Critics were expected to avoid deliberate alterations, respect the integrity of the original work, and acknowledge sources accurately.

Ethical responsibility ensured that texts were not only preserved faithfully but also transmitted with honesty and respect for intellectual heritage.

Fill in the blank: Ethical responsibility in textual criticism required scholars to avoid deliberate _____ of texts.



<i>Ethical Consideration</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>Example / Application</i>
<i>Integrity of Transmission</i>	<i>Ensuring texts are preserved without distortion or fabrication.</i>	<i>Avoiding insertion of verses or altering hadith wording.</i>
<i>Credibility of Sources</i>	<i>Respecting the reliability of narrators, scribes, and transmitters.</i>	<i>Rejecting reports from narrators known for dishonesty.</i>
<i>Respect for Authors</i>	<i>Preserving the original intent and style of the writer or poet.</i>	<i>Maintaining the poet's imagery without unnecessary modification.</i>
<i>Avoidance of Bias</i>	<i>Criticism should be fair, not influenced by tribal, political, or personal agendas.</i>	<i>Evaluating poetry based on eloquence rather than tribal affiliation.</i>
<i>Transparency in Method</i>	<i>Clearly stating the criteria and methods used in textual evaluation.</i>	<i>Ibn Qutaybah outlining his standards in Kitāb al-Shi'r wa al-Shu'arā'.</i>
<i>Cultural & Religious Sensitivity</i>	<i>Recognizing the sacred or cultural weight of certain texts.</i>	<i>Treating Qur'anic verses and hadith with reverence in textual analysis.</i>

Box 4.3: Ethical considerations in textual criticism

Pilot questions 4.3

1. What criteria did classical critics use to evaluate textual reliability?
2. Why was isnād considered essential in validating texts?
3. How did a strong isnād differ from a weak one?
4. What ethical responsibilities did scholars have in preserving texts?
5. Why was honesty in transmission considered vital to textual criticism?



4.4 Legacy And Influence Of Textual Criticism

4.4.1 Contributions to classical Arabic scholarship

Textual criticism made significant **contributions**, meaning lasting additions or improvements, to classical Arabic scholarship. By ensuring the accuracy of manuscripts, critics provided reliable foundations for literary, linguistic, and religious studies. Their work preserved the integrity of poetry, prose, and sacred texts, allowing later scholars to build upon authentic sources. This legacy highlights the importance of textual criticism as a cornerstone of intellectual development in the Arabic tradition.

Fill in the blank: Textual criticism preserved the integrity of poetry, prose, and _____ texts in classical scholarship.

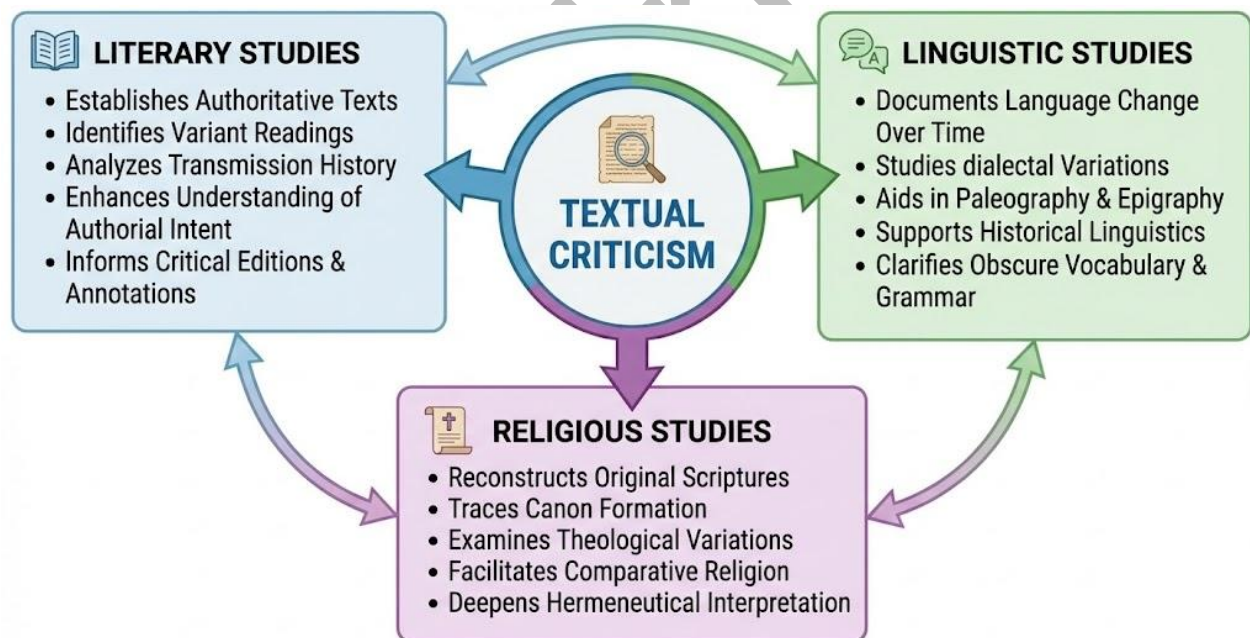


Diagram illustrating the multifaceted impact of textual criticism on scholarship.

Figure 4.4: Contributions of textual criticism to classical Arabic scholarship



4.4.2 Impact on Qur'ānic studies and Hadith sciences

The influence of textual criticism was especially strong in **Qur'ānic studies** and **Hadith sciences**. Scholars applied rigorous methods to verify the authenticity of verses and narrations, using isnād and manuscript comparison to ensure accuracy. This process safeguarded the transmission of religious knowledge and reinforced trust in the reliability of sacred texts. The impact of textual criticism in these fields demonstrates its role in protecting spiritual and intellectual heritage.

Fill in the blank: Textual criticism safeguarded the transmission of religious knowledge in Qur'ānic studies and _____ sciences.

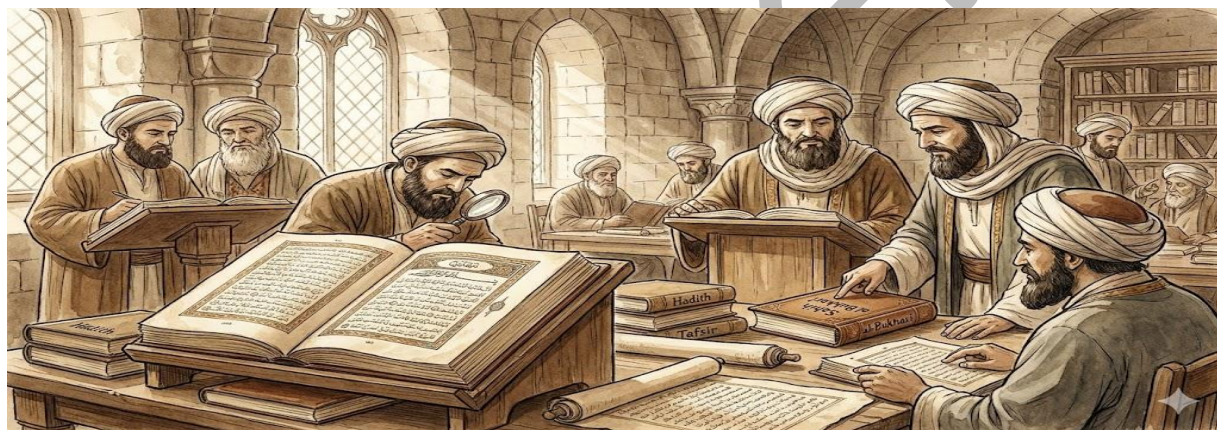


Plate 4.4: Impact of textual criticism on Qur'ānic and Hadith studies

4.4.3 Relevance to modern textual and literary studies

The **relevance** of textual criticism extends into modern scholarship, where researchers continue to apply its principles to both classical and contemporary texts. Modern textual studies benefit from the methods of manuscript collation, identification of variants, and authenticity checks developed by early critics. These approaches remain valuable for editing classical works, producing reliable translations, and studying the evolution of texts across time. Thus, textual criticism bridges the past and present, showing its enduring importance in literary and academic contexts.



Fill in the blank: Modern textual studies benefit from methods such as manuscript collation and identification of textual _____.

<i>Dimension</i>	<i>Modern Relevance</i>	<i>Example / Application</i>
<i>Preservation of Heritage</i>	<i>Ensures the authenticity of classical Arabic texts, safeguarding cultural and religious traditions.</i>	<i>Verification of Qur'anic manuscripts and pre-Islamic poetry collections.</i>
<i>Academic Rigor</i>	<i>Provides methodological tools for philology, linguistics, and literary studies worldwide.</i>	<i>Comparative analysis of Arabic manuscripts with Greek, Persian, and Latin sources.</i>
<i>Cross-Cultural Dialogue</i>	<i>Facilitates global scholarship by aligning Arabic textual traditions with international critical methods.</i>	<i>Integration of isnād analysis with Western textual criticism in manuscript studies.</i>
<i>Digital Humanities</i>	<i>Modern technology enhances textual criticism through digitization and computational analysis.</i>	<i>Online archives of Arabic manuscripts enabling global access and cross-checking.</i>
<i>Interdisciplinary Impact</i>	<i>Connects literary studies, linguistics, history, and religious scholarship.</i>	<i>Using textual criticism to study semantic shifts in Arabic across centuries.</i>
<i>Contemporary Relevance</i>	<i>Helps address issues of authenticity, interpretation, and translation in a globalized world.</i>	<i>Critical editions of Arabic classics used in modern education and comparative literature.</i>

Box 4.4: Modern relevance of textual criticism

Pilot questions 4.4

1. What contributions did textual criticism make to classical Arabic scholarship?
2. How did textual criticism influence Qur'anic studies and Hadith sciences?
3. Why was isnād important in safeguarding religious texts?



4. In what ways is textual criticism still relevant to modern scholarship?
5. How does textual criticism bridge the past and present in literary studies?

Series Summary

This Series has explored the principles of textual criticism in the classical Arabic tradition, emphasising its importance in safeguarding the authenticity and reliability of texts. Its purpose was to show how Arabic scholars developed systematic methods to preserve poetry, prose, and religious works, ensuring that future generations could rely on accurate sources for study and interpretation.

We began by examining the foundations of textual criticism, including its definition, scope, and historical emergence. Then we moved on to methods such as manuscript comparison, identification of textual variants, and techniques for establishing authenticity. Following that, we considered guiding principles, focusing on criteria for reliability, the role of isnād, and ethical responsibilities in preserving texts. Finally, we assessed the legacy and influence of textual criticism, noting its contributions to classical scholarship, its impact on Qur'ānic and Hadith studies, and its continuing relevance in modern research. In line with the Series Learning Outcomes, you should now be able to define and explain textual criticism, demonstrate its methods, analyse its guiding principles, and evaluate its enduring significance in both classical and contemporary contexts.

Glossary of Terms

Alteration – A deliberate change made to a text by a scribe or transmitter, often discouraged in textual criticism because it compromises authenticity.

Authenticity – The quality of a text being genuine and faithful to its original form, established through methods such as isnād and manuscript comparison.



Chain of transmission (Isnād, إسناد) – A sequence of transmitters linking a text back to its original source, used to verify reliability and credibility.

Collation – The systematic process of aligning manuscripts side by side to detect differences in wording, spelling, or structure.

Criteria – Standards or principles used to judge whether a text is reliable, such as clarity, consistency, and alignment with linguistic norms.

Ethical considerations – The moral responsibilities of scholars in preserving texts, including avoiding alterations, respecting integrity, and acknowledging sources.

Manuscript comparison – The method of examining different copies of a text to identify similarities and differences, forming the basis of textual criticism.

Reliability – The degree to which a text can be trusted as accurate and consistent across manuscripts.

Scope of textual criticism – The range of texts studied under textual criticism, including poetry, prose, religious works, and historical documents.

Textual criticism (النقد النصي, al-naqd al-naṣī) – The scholarly discipline concerned with examining texts to determine their most authentic form by identifying errors, variations, and alterations.

Textual variant – A difference in wording, spelling, or phrasing found among manuscripts of the same work, often caused by scribal errors or regional differences.

Transmission – The process by which texts are passed down through generations, either orally or in written form, forming the basis for textual preservation.

Concept Check Questions [Series 4]

Objective Questions



1. Define textual criticism in the classical Arabic tradition. (Linked to SLO 4.1)
2. Identify the Arabic term for textual criticism. (Linked to SLO 4.1)
3. State one major reason for the historical emergence of textual criticism. (Linked to SLO 4.2)
4. Name the process of aligning manuscripts side by side to detect variations. (Linked to SLO 4.4)
5. What is a textual variant? (Linked to SLO 4.5)

Short-Answer Questions

6. Explain how manuscript comparison supports textual criticism. (Linked to SLO 4.4)
7. Describe the role of isnād in validating texts. (Linked to SLO 4.8)
8. Analyse why ethical considerations are important in preserving texts. (Linked to SLO 4.9)
9. Distinguish between contributions of textual criticism to classical scholarship and its relevance to modern studies. (Linked to SLO 4.10, SLO 4.12)

Long-Answer Questions

10. Evaluate the criteria used by classical critics to judge textual reliability. (Linked to SLO 4.7)
11. Assess the impact of textual criticism on Qur'ānic studies and Hadith sciences. (Linked to SLO 4.11)
12. Appraise the continuing relevance of textual criticism in modern scholarship. (Linked to SLO 4.12)

Answers to Concept Check Questions [Series 4]

Objective Questions

1. Textual criticism is the scholarly discipline concerned with examining texts to determine their most authentic form.
2. The Arabic term is **النقد النصي** (*al-naqd al-naṣī*).
3. The preservation of the Qur'ān and Hadith.
4. Collation.
5. A textual variant is a difference in wording, spelling, or phrasing among manuscripts of the same work.



Short-Answer Questions

6. Manuscript comparison allows scholars to identify similarities and differences between copies, helping to reconstruct the most reliable version of a text.
7. Isnād provides a chain of transmission linking a text back to its source, ensuring credibility and authenticity.
8. Ethical considerations prevent deliberate alterations, promote respect for original works, and ensure honesty in transmission.
9. Classical contributions included preserving poetry, prose, and religious texts, while modern relevance lies in editing classical works, producing reliable translations, and studying textual evolution.

Long-Answer Questions

10. *Basic response:* Classical critics judged reliability based on clarity of meaning, consistency across manuscripts, and alignment with linguistic norms.

Value-added response: Outstanding learners may add that these criteria were influenced by broader intellectual traditions, including linguistic precision and cultural expectations, which shaped the standards of textual reliability.

11. *Basic response:* Textual criticism ensured the authenticity of Qur'ānic verses and Hadith narrations through isnād and manuscript comparison.

Value-added response: Learners may expand by noting that these methods reinforced trust in religious scholarship, safeguarded spiritual heritage, and influenced later developments in Islamic jurisprudence and theology.

12. *Basic response:* Textual criticism remains relevant today in editing classical works, producing translations, and studying textual evolution.

Value-added response: Learners may highlight that modern digital tools and interdisciplinary approaches build on classical methods, making textual criticism a bridge between traditional scholarship and contemporary research.



Part 4.1 Foundations of textual criticism

- Textual criticism in the Arabic tradition is called **النقد النصي** (*al-naqd al-naṣī*).
- The preservation of the Qur'ān and Hadith was a major reason for the emergence of textual criticism.
- Textual criticism extended beyond religious texts to poetry and prose to ensure faithful transmission of literary works.
- It supports literary studies by providing authentic texts for analysis of meaning, style, and themes.
- It is considered a bridge because it ensures textual accuracy for both linguistic analysis and literary interpretation.

Part 4.2 Methods of textual criticism

- Manuscript comparison and collation involve examining different copies of a text side by side to detect variations.
- Identifying textual variants is important because they reveal how texts were copied, transmitted, and sometimes altered.
- Common causes of textual variants include scribal errors, intentional changes, and regional language differences.
- Scholars establish authenticity by examining isnād, evaluating scribal credibility, and cross-checking with reliable sources.
- Isnād is crucial because it provides a trustworthy chain of transmission linking a text back to its source.

Part 4.3 Principles guiding textual criticism

- Classical critics used criteria such as clarity of meaning, consistency across manuscripts, and alignment with linguistic norms.
- Isnād was essential because it validated texts by tracing them back to reliable transmitters.
- A strong isnād differed from a weak one by being unbroken and composed of trustworthy transmitters.



- Scholars had ethical responsibilities such as avoiding deliberate alterations, respecting original works, and acknowledging sources.
- Honesty in transmission was vital to ensure texts were preserved faithfully and intellectual heritage was protected.

Part 4.4 Legacy and influence of textual criticism

- Textual criticism contributed to classical scholarship by preserving poetry, prose, and religious texts with accuracy.
- It influenced Qur'ānic studies and Hadith sciences by applying rigorous methods to verify authenticity.
- Isnād was important because it safeguarded religious texts through credible chains of transmission.
- Textual criticism remains relevant to modern scholarship by supporting editing, translation, and textual evolution studies.
- It bridges past and present by applying classical methods to contemporary literary and textual research.

References and Attributions [Series 4]

Textual Sources

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- Al-Jāhiz. (1980). *al-Bayān wa al-Tabyīn*. Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya.
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- Montgomery, J. (2010). *The Vagaries of the Qasida: Arabic Poetry and Its Critics*. Brill.
- Allen, R. (2000). *An Introduction to Arabic Literature*. Cambridge University Press.

Illustrations (Figures, Plates, Boxes)

- *Figure 4.1: Scope of textual criticism in Arabic tradition*
 - Al-generated using prompt: "Create a diagram showing the scope of textual criticism across poetry, prose, religious texts, and historical documents."



- Suggested OER search string: “scope of textual criticism Arabic tradition diagram OER.”
- *Plate 4.1: Historical emergence of textual criticism in Arabic scholarship*
 - AI-generated using prompt: “Create an illustration of early Arabic scholars examining manuscripts of the Qur’ān and Hadith.”
 - Suggested OER search string: “Arabic scholars textual criticism Qur’ān Hadith OER image.”
- *Box 4.1: Relationship between textual criticism and other disciplines*
 - AI-generated using prompt: “Generate a text box summarising the relationship between textual criticism, literary studies, and linguistic studies.”
 - Suggested OER search string: “textual criticism relationship literary linguistic studies OER summary.”
- *Figure 4.2: Manuscript comparison and collation*
 - AI-generated using prompt: “Create a diagram showing two Arabic manuscripts compared side by side with highlighted textual differences.”
 - Suggested OER search string: “Arabic manuscript comparison collation diagram OER.”
- *Plate 4.2: Identification of textual variants in manuscripts*
 - AI-generated using prompt: “Create an illustration of a scholar marking textual variants in an Arabic manuscript.”
 - Suggested OER search string: “Arabic manuscript textual variants scholar OER image.”
- *Box 4.2: Techniques for establishing authenticity*
 - AI-generated using prompt: “Generate a text box summarising techniques for establishing authenticity in Arabic textual criticism.”
 - Suggested OER search string: “Arabic textual criticism authenticity isnad OER summary.”
- *Figure 4.3: Criteria for evaluating textual reliability*
 - AI-generated using prompt: “Create a diagram showing criteria for textual reliability: clarity, consistency, and alignment with norms.”
 - Suggested OER search string: “criteria textual reliability Arabic criticism diagram OER.”



- *Plate 4.3: Role of isnād in textual validation*
 - AI-generated using prompt: “Create an illustration of a scholar examining a chain of transmission for a manuscript.”
 - Suggested OER search string: “isnad chain transmission Arabic textual criticism OER image.”
- *Box 4.3: Ethical considerations in textual criticism*
 - AI-generated using prompt: “Generate a text box summarising ethical considerations in Arabic textual criticism.”
 - Suggested OER search string: “ethical considerations Arabic textual criticism OER summary.”
- *Figure 4.4: Contributions of textual criticism to classical Arabic scholarship*
 - AI-generated using prompt: “Create a diagram showing contributions of textual criticism to literary, linguistic, and religious studies.”
 - Suggested OER search string: “contributions textual criticism Arabic scholarship diagram OER.”
- *Plate 4.4: Impact of textual criticism on Qur’ānic and Hadith studies*
 - AI-generated using prompt: “Create an illustration of scholars examining Qur’ānic manuscripts and Hadith collections.”
 - Suggested OER search string: “Qur’ān Hadith textual criticism Arabic scholars OER image.”
- *Box 4.4: Modern relevance of textual criticism*
 - AI-generated using prompt: “Generate a text box summarising the modern relevance of textual criticism in Arabic and global studies.”
 - Suggested OER search string: “modern relevance textual criticism Arabic literary studies OER summary.”



Series 5: Focus on Al-‘Āmidī’s *Muwāzanah*

Part 5.1 Background and context of *Muwāzanah*

- 5.1.1 Al-‘Āmidī’s life and intellectual background
- 5.1.2 Historical and literary context of *Muwāzanah*
- 5.1.3 Purpose and scope of the work

Part 5.2 Analytical framework in *Muwāzanah*

- 5.2.1 Comparative method of evaluating poets
- 5.2.2 Criteria for literary excellence and weakness
- 5.2.3 Use of rhetorical and stylistic analysis

Part 5.3 Critical principles and philosophical outlook

- 5.3.1 Balance between aesthetics and ethics
- 5.3.2 Influence of earlier critics and traditions
- 5.3.3 Al-‘Āmidī’s originality and contribution to criticism

Part 5.4 Legacy and influence of *Muwāzanah*

- 5.4.1 Reception among later critics and scholars
- 5.4.2 Impact on Arabic literary criticism as a discipline
- 5.4.3 Relevance to modern literary studies

Introduction

In the last Series, we examined the principles of textual criticism in the classical Arabic tradition, focusing on how scholars preserved and authenticated texts. Building on that foundation, this Series turns to one of the most influential works in Arabic literary criticism: Al-‘Āmidī’s *Muwāzanah*. This text is renowned for its comparative approach to evaluating poets and its systematic framework for distinguishing literary excellence from weakness. By studying *Muwāzanah*, you will gain insight into



how critical thought matured in the medieval period and how Al-‘Āmidī’s work shaped the discipline of Arabic literary criticism.

The aim of this Series is to introduce you to the background, analytical framework, and critical principles of Al-‘Āmidī’s *Muwāzanah*, and to equip you with the ability to evaluate its legacy and relevance to both classical and modern literary studies.

We shall commence this Series by exploring the background and context of *Muwāzanah*, including Al-‘Āmidī’s intellectual life and the historical setting of his work. Next, we will move on to the analytical framework, focusing on his comparative method, criteria for excellence, and use of rhetorical analysis. Following that, we will consider the critical principles and philosophical outlook that guided his evaluations, highlighting the balance between aesthetics and ethics as well as his originality. Finally, we will wrap up by assessing the legacy and influence of *Muwāzanah*, noting its reception among later critics, its impact on Arabic literary criticism, and its continuing relevance today.

Series Learning Outcomes

Upon completing this Series, you should be able to:

- SLO 5.1 describe Al-‘Āmidī’s life and intellectual background,
- SLO 5.2 explain the historical and literary context of *Muwāzanah*,
- SLO 5.3 define the purpose and scope of Al-‘Āmidī’s *Muwāzanah*,
- SLO 5.4 analyse the comparative method Al-‘Āmidī used to evaluate poets,
- SLO 5.5 identify the criteria he applied to distinguish literary excellence and weakness,
- SLO 5.6 demonstrate how rhetorical and stylistic analysis was employed in *Muwāzanah*,
- SLO 5.7 evaluate the balance Al-‘Āmidī maintained between aesthetics and ethics in literary criticism,
- SLO 5.8 explain the influence of earlier critics and traditions on Al-‘Āmidī’s work,
- SLO 5.9 assess Al-‘Āmidī’s originality and contribution to Arabic literary criticism,
- SLO 5.10 examine the reception of *Muwāzanah* among later critics and scholars,
- SLO 5.11 appraise its impact on the development of Arabic literary criticism as a discipline, and
- SLO 5.12 evaluate the continuing relevance of *Muwāzanah* to modern literary studies.



5.1 Background And Context Of Muwāzanah

5.1.1 Al-‘Āmīdī’s life and intellectual background

Al-‘Āmīdī was a distinguished scholar of Arabic literary criticism, best known for his comparative work *Muwāzanah*. His intellectual background was shaped by exposure to earlier critics and the rich scholarly environment of the Abbasid period. He combined rigorous analysis with a deep appreciation for poetry, aiming to establish fair and systematic standards for evaluating poets. The **intellectual background** refers to the cultural, educational, and scholarly influences that shaped his thought and writings.

Fill in the blank: Al-‘Āmīdī’s most renowned comparative work in Arabic literary criticism is called _____.



Plate 5.1: Al-‘Āmīdī’s intellectual background



5.1.2 Historical and literary context of Muwāzanah

The Abbasid era provided fertile ground for literary criticism, with scholars debating the merits of poets and prose writers. *Muwāzanah* emerged in this context as a systematic attempt to compare poets and highlight their strengths and weaknesses. The **historical context** refers to the political and cultural environment of the time, while the **literary context** involves the prevailing traditions of poetry and criticism. Together, these contexts explain why Al-‘Āmidī’s work was both necessary and influential.

Fill in the blank: The _____ era provided fertile ground for literary criticism and shaped the context of *Muwāzanah*.

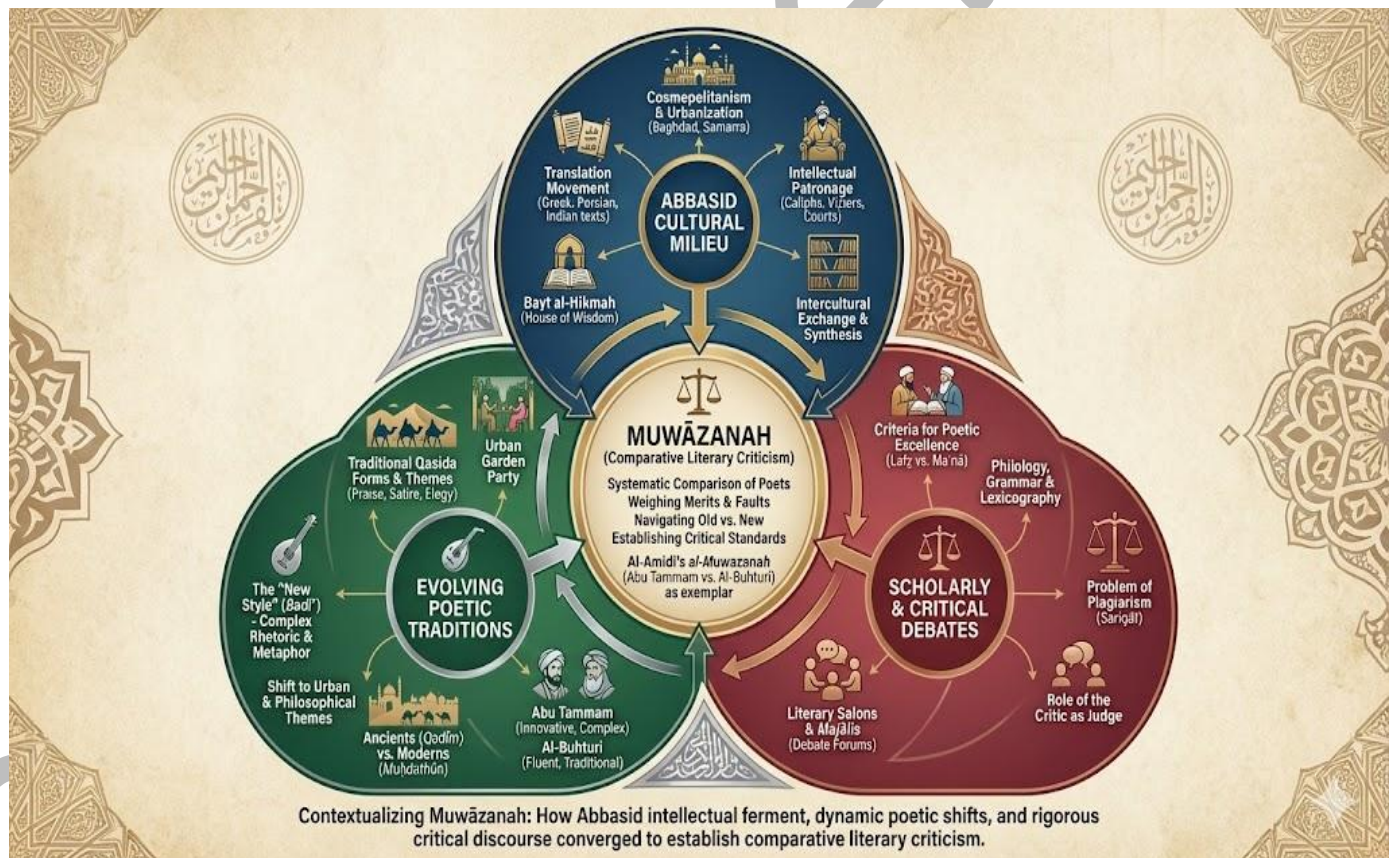


Figure 5.1: Historical and literary context of Muwāzanah



5.1.3 Purpose and scope of the work

The **purpose** of *Muwāzanah* was to provide a fair and balanced comparison of poets, offering criteria for distinguishing excellence from weakness. Its **scope** extended beyond individual poets to broader questions of style, rhetoric, and literary value. By setting clear standards, Al-‘Āmidī contributed to the professionalisation of Arabic literary criticism, ensuring that evaluations were not merely subjective but grounded in systematic analysis.

Fill in the blank: The purpose of *Muwāzanah* was to provide a fair and balanced _____ of poets.

<i>Aspect</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>Example / Impact</i>
Purpose	<i>To provide a systematic, comparative evaluation of two major poets of the Abbasid era: Abū Tammām and al-Buḥturī.</i>	<i>Highlighted their stylistic differences in imagery, diction, and rhetorical devices.</i>
Scope of Analysis	<i>Examined themes, eloquence, metaphor, simile, and poetic structure across their works.</i>	<i>Compared how each poet handled praise, satire, and descriptive passages.</i>
Methodological Innovation	<i>Introduced structured criteria for literary comparison, moving beyond subjective taste.</i>	<i>Balanced strengths and weaknesses of each poet with reasoned argumentation.</i>
Critical Objectivity	<i>Sought fairness by acknowledging merits and flaws in both poets.</i>	<i>Avoided tribal or personal bias, focusing on literary quality.</i>
Contribution to Arabic Criticism	<i>Established a model of codified, systematic criticism that influenced later scholars.</i>	<i>Inspired comparative approaches in works by Ibn Rashīq and others.</i>
Cultural Significance	<i>Reflected Abbasid intellectual trends of blending Arabic tradition with rational analysis.</i>	<i>Positioned poetry as both an artistic and scholarly pursuit.</i>

Box 5.1: Purpose and scope of *Muwāzanah*



Pilot questions 5.1

1. What was Al-‘Āmidī’s most renowned comparative work?
2. How did Al-‘Āmidī’s intellectual background shape his approach to literary criticism?
3. What historical and literary contexts influenced the writing of *Muwāzanah*?
4. What was the main purpose of *Muwāzanah*?
5. How did the scope of *Muwāzanah* contribute to systematic literary criticism?

5.2 Analytical Framework In Muwāzanah

5.2.1 Comparative method of evaluating poets

Al-‘Āmidī’s *Muwāzanah* is best known for its **comparative method**, which refers to the systematic practice of placing poets side by side to highlight their strengths and weaknesses. This approach allowed him to move beyond subjective preference and provide structured analysis. By comparing poets on aspects such as imagery, diction, and rhetorical devices, Al-‘Āmidī established a fairer and more balanced framework for literary criticism.

Fill in the blank: Al-‘Āmidī’s *Muwāzanah* is best known for its _____ method of evaluating poets.





Figure 5.2: Comparative method of evaluating poets in Muwāzanah

5.2.2 Criteria for literary excellence and weakness

Al-ʿĀmidī identified clear **criteria**, meaning standards or measures, for judging poetry. These included originality of imagery, clarity of meaning, elegance of style, and adherence to cultural values. Weakness was noted when poetry lacked coherence, relied on clichés, or failed to engage the audience. By setting these criteria, Al-ʿĀmidī provided a structured way to distinguish between strong and weak literary output.

Fill in the blank: Weakness in poetry was noted when it lacked coherence or relied on _____.



Criterion	Excellence	Weakness
Imagery & Metaphor	<i>Vivid, original, and meaningful imagery that enriches the text.</i>	<i>Overused, forced, or obscure metaphors that confuse rather than clarify.</i>
Eloquence (Balāgha)	<i>Clear, elegant, and persuasive language that flows naturally.</i>	<i>Awkward phrasing, lack of clarity, or excessive ornamentation.</i>
Emotional Impact	<i>Ability to move the audience with sincerity and intensity.</i>	<i>Cold or exaggerated expression that fails to resonate emotionally.</i>
Structure & Organization	<i>Balanced composition with coherent progression of ideas.</i>	<i>Disjointed verses or weak transitions that disrupt unity.</i>
Harmony of Sound	<i>Pleasant rhythm, rhyme, and phonetic balance enhancing recitation.</i>	<i>Harsh sounds, broken meter, or inconsistent rhyme schemes.</i>
Appropriateness of Themes	<i>Themes suited to context, audience, and purpose.</i>	<i>Inappropriate or trivial themes that diminish literary value.</i>
Comparative Strength	<i>Distinctive style that stands out when compared to rivals.</i>	<i>Inferior imitation or lack of originality in comparison with peers.</i>

Box 5.2: Criteria for literary excellence and weakness

5.2.3 Use of rhetorical and stylistic analysis

Al-‘Āmidī employed **rhetorical analysis**, which involves examining the use of devices such as metaphor, simile, and parallelism, and **stylistic analysis**, which focuses on diction, rhythm, and structure. These tools allowed him to highlight the artistry of poets and explain why certain verses were more effective than others. His emphasis on rhetoric and style demonstrated a deep appreciation for the technical aspects of poetry, making his criticism both precise and insightful.

Fill in the blank: Al-‘Āmidī’s rhetorical analysis often examined devices such as metaphor, simile, and _____.



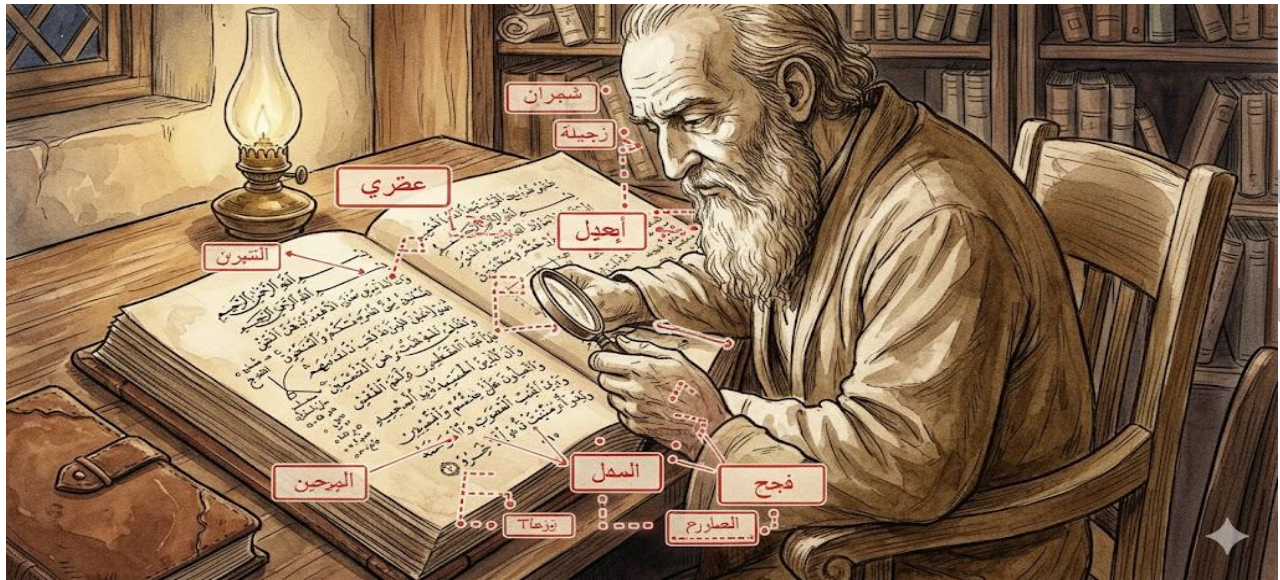


Plate 5.2: Rhetorical and stylistic analysis in *Muwāzanah*

Pilot questions 5.2

1. What method did Al-‘Āmidī use to evaluate poets in *Muwāzanah*?
2. What criteria did he set for literary excellence?
3. How did he identify weakness in poetry?
4. What rhetorical devices were commonly examined in his analysis?
5. Why was stylistic analysis important in Al-‘Āmidī’s framework?

5.3 Critical Principles And Philosophical Outlook

5.3.1 Balance between aesthetics and ethics

Al-‘Āmidī’s criticism in *Muwāzanah* demonstrates a careful balance between **aesthetics**, meaning the appreciation of beauty and artistic quality, and **ethics**, meaning moral responsibility in literary production. He argued that poetry should not only be artistically impressive but also



morally sound, reflecting values such as honesty, generosity, and respect. This dual emphasis ensured that literature was both pleasing to the senses and beneficial to society.

Fill in the blank: Al-‘Āmidī believed that poetry should be both artistically impressive and morally ____.

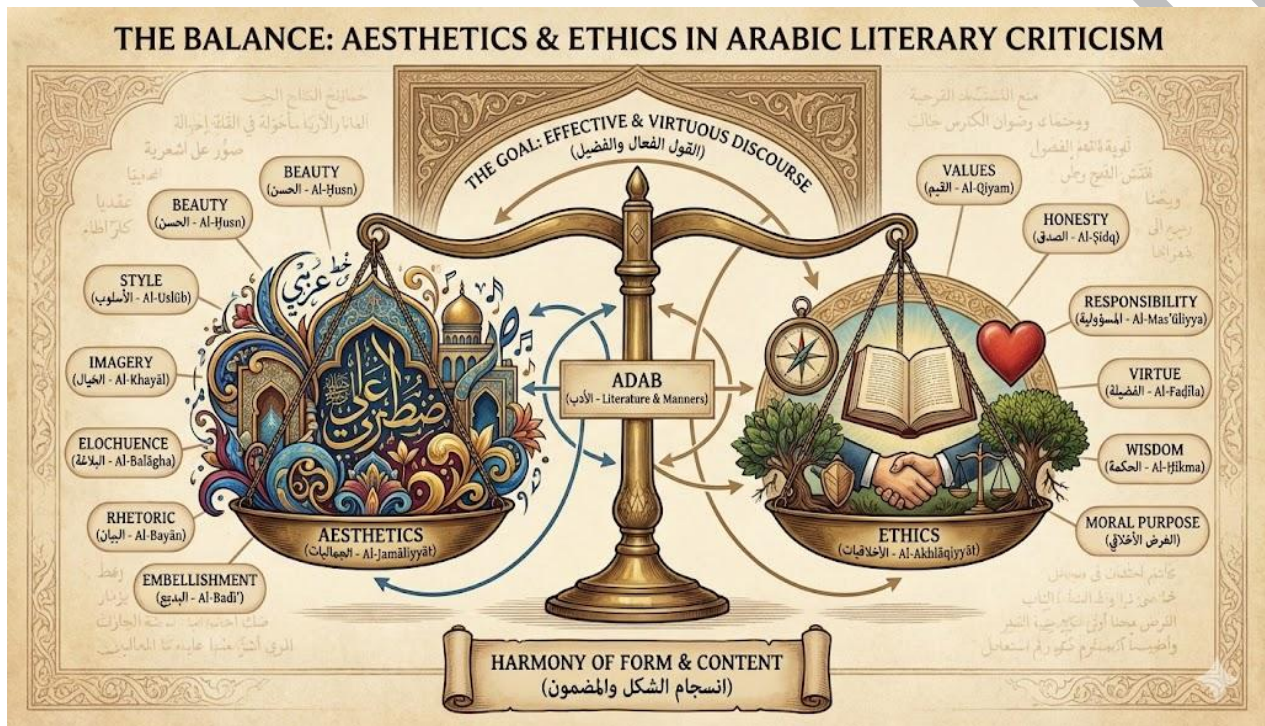


Figure 5.3: Balance between aesthetics and ethics in Muwāzanah

5.3.2 Influence of earlier critics and traditions

Al-‘Āmidī was influenced by earlier Arabic critics such as Ibn Qutaybah and Ibn Sallām, as well as by broader traditions of rhetoric and philosophy. The **influence** of earlier critics refers to the way their ideas shaped his comparative methods and criteria. He built upon their foundations but refined them into a more systematic framework. This continuity shows how Arabic literary criticism evolved through dialogue across generations.

Fill in the blank: Al-‘Āmidī refined the foundations of earlier critics into a more _____ framework.



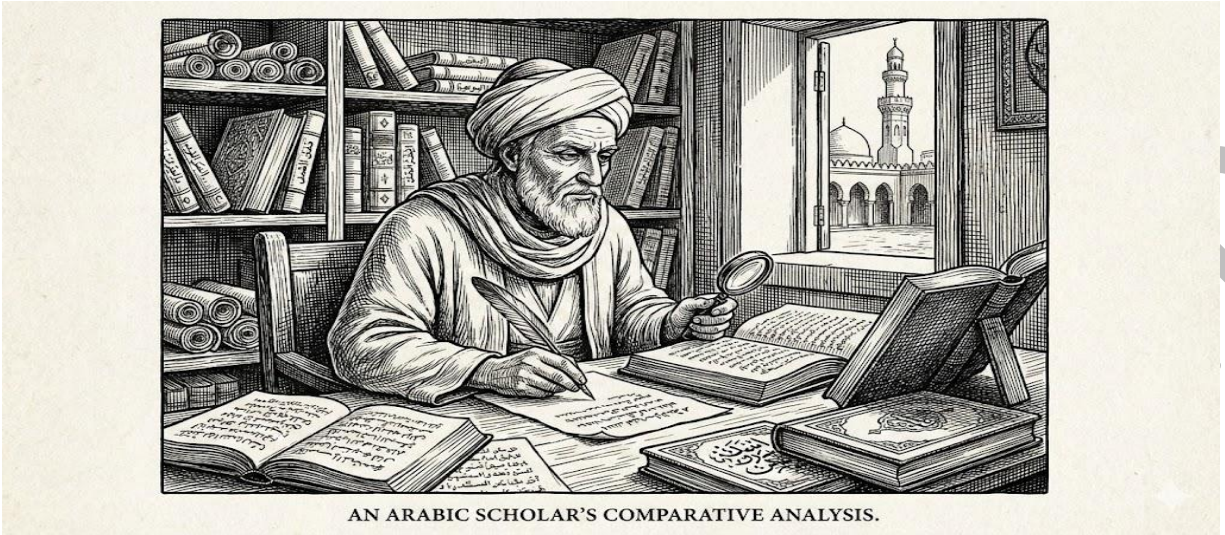


Plate 5.3: Influence of earlier critics on Al-ʿĀmidī

5.3.3 Al-ʿĀmidī's originality and contribution to criticism

Despite drawing on earlier traditions, Al-ʿĀmidī's work was marked by **originality**, meaning the introduction of new ideas or methods. His contribution lay in formalising comparative criticism and establishing clear criteria for evaluation. He moved beyond descriptive commentary to analytical judgement, making *Muwāzanah* a milestone in Arabic literary criticism. His originality ensured that his work was not merely a continuation of past thought but a significant advancement in the discipline.

Fill in the blank: Al-ʿĀmidī's originality lay in formalising _____ criticism and establishing clear criteria for evaluation.

<i>Aspect</i>	<i>Originality</i>	<i>Contribution</i>
Systematic Method	<i>Introduced structured, comparative analysis rather than relying on taste or intuition.</i>	<i>His al-Muwāzanah set a precedent for methodical literary evaluation.</i>
Comparative Criticism	<i>Pioneered side-by-side examination of poets, highlighting stylistic strengths and weaknesses.</i>	<i>Balanced study of Abū Tammām and al-Buḥturī became a model for later critics.</i>



Objectivity	<i>Emphasized fairness and rational judgment, avoiding tribal or personal bias.</i>	<i>Elevated criticism into a scholarly discipline with intellectual credibility.</i>
Integration of Rhetoric	<i>Applied principles of balāgha (eloquence) to literary analysis in a systematic way.</i>	<i>Helped codify rhetorical devices as criteria for excellence.</i>
Innovation within Tradition	<i>Preserved classical standards while introducing new analytical frameworks.</i>	<i>Bridged oral heritage with Abbasid-era scholarly methods.</i>
Influence on Successors	<i>Inspired later critics to adopt structured, comparative, and codified approaches.</i>	<i>Shaped the trajectory of Arabic literary theory in medieval scholarship.</i>

Box 5.3: Al-‘Āmidī’s originality and contribution

Pilot questions 5.3

1. How did Al-‘Āmidī balance aesthetics and ethics in his criticism?
2. Which earlier critics influenced Al-‘Āmidī’s work?
3. In what way did Al-‘Āmidī refine the foundations of earlier traditions?
4. What was Al-‘Āmidī’s originality in *Muwāzanah*?
5. Why is *Muwāzanah* considered a milestone in Arabic literary criticism?

5.4 Legacy And Influence Of Muwāzanah

5.4.1 Reception among later critics and scholars

The **reception** of *Muwāzanah* refers to how later critics and scholars responded to Al-‘Āmidī’s work. Many praised his systematic approach to comparing poets, noting that it brought clarity



and fairness to literary criticism. Others debated his judgements, which shows that his work stimulated ongoing discussion and reflection. This reception demonstrates that *Muwāzanah* was not only influential in its own time but continued to shape critical thought in subsequent generations.

Fill in the blank: The reception of *Muwāzanah* shows that Al-‘Āmidī’s work stimulated ongoing _____ and reflection.



Plate 5.4: Reception of *Muwāzanah* among later critics

5.4.2 Impact on Arabic literary criticism as a discipline

The **impact** of *Muwāzanah* was profound, as it helped establish Arabic literary criticism as a discipline with clear methods and standards. By formalising comparative analysis and criteria for excellence, Al-‘Āmidī influenced how later critics approached poetry and prose. His work contributed to the professionalisation of criticism, moving it from subjective opinion to structured evaluation.

Fill in the blank: *Muwāzanah* helped establish Arabic literary criticism as a discipline with clear _____ and standards.



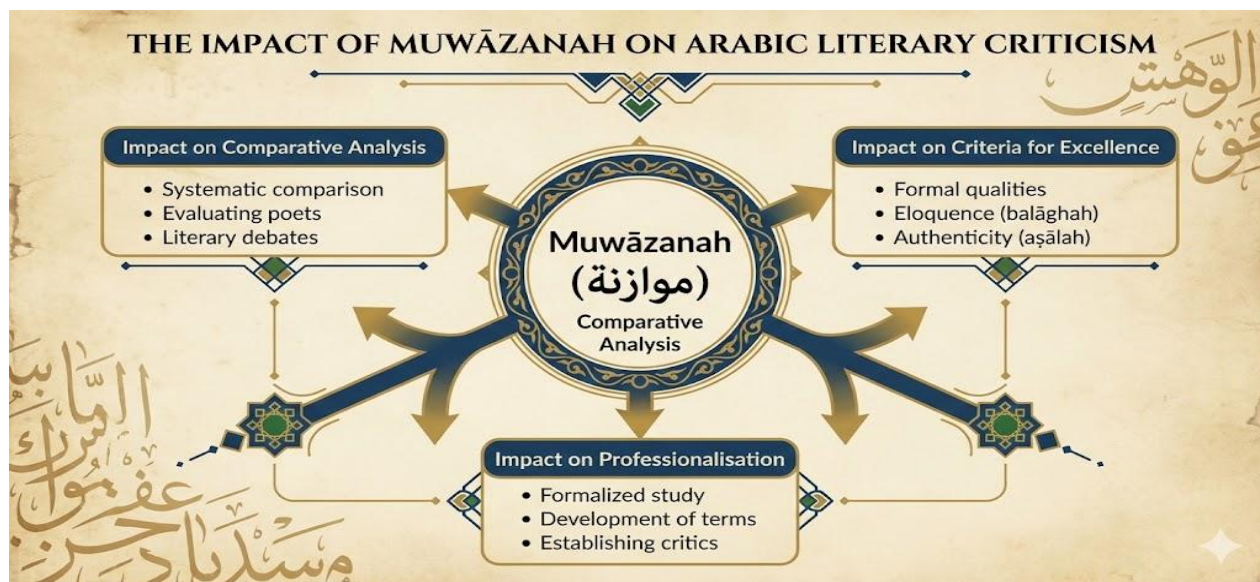


Figure 5.4: Impact of Muwāzanah on Arabic literary criticism

5.4.3 Relevance to modern literary studies

The **relevance** of *Muwāzanah* continues today, as modern scholars apply its principles to both classical and contemporary texts. Its emphasis on fairness, systematic comparison, and clear criteria remains valuable for editing, translation, and literary analysis. By bridging past and present, *Muwāzanah* demonstrates how classical criticism can inform modern approaches to literature.

Fill in the blank: The relevance of *Muwāzanah* today lies in its emphasis on fairness, systematic comparison, and clear _____.

<i>Dimension</i>	<i>Modern Relevance</i>	<i>Example / Application</i>
<i>Comparative Criticism</i>	<i>Provides a model for side-by-side evaluation of authors, still used in comparative literature today.</i>	<i>Modern scholars compare stylistic features of poets, novelists, or dramatists across cultures.</i>



Systematic Methodology	<i>Demonstrates the value of structured, codified criteria in literary analysis.</i>	<i>Applied in contemporary literary theory courses to show early frameworks of criticism.</i>
Objectivity in Evaluation	<i>Highlights fairness and balance in assessing strengths and weaknesses of texts.</i>	<i>Inspires modern critics to avoid bias and adopt transparent standards.</i>
Integration of Rhetoric	<i>Shows how rhetorical devices can be central to literary excellence.</i>	<i>Used in modern stylistics and discourse analysis to study metaphor, imagery, and sound.</i>
Historical Continuity	<i>Connects classical Arabic criticism with global traditions of literary theory.</i>	<i>Comparative studies link al-‘Āmidī’s methods with Aristotelian poetics and modern narratology.</i>
Pedagogical Value	<i>Serves as a teaching tool for understanding the evolution of literary criticism.</i>	<i>Included in curricula on Arabic literature and comparative criticism worldwide.</i>

Box 5.4: Modern relevance of Muwāzanah

Pilot questions 5.4

1. How was *Muwāzanah* received by later critics and scholars?
2. In what ways did *Muwāzanah* impact Arabic literary criticism as a discipline?
3. What methods and standards did Al-‘Āmidī formalise in his work?
4. Why is *Muwāzanah* still relevant to modern literary studies?
5. How does *Muwāzanah* bridge classical and contemporary approaches to criticism?

Series Summary

This Series has focused on Al-‘Āmidī’s *Muwāzanah*, a landmark text in Arabic literary criticism that formalised comparative methods and set clear standards for evaluating poets. Its purpose was to help you appreciate the background of Al-‘Āmidī’s intellectual life, understand the



historical and literary context of his work, and recognise why *Muwāzanah* remains central to the study of Arabic criticism.

We began by exploring the background and context of *Muwāzanah*, then examined its analytical framework, including comparative methods, criteria for excellence, and rhetorical analysis. Following that, we considered Al-‘Āmidī’s critical principles and philosophical outlook, highlighting his balance between aesthetics and ethics, his influences, and his originality. Finally, we assessed the legacy and influence of *Muwāzanah*, noting its reception among later critics, its impact on the discipline, and its continuing relevance today. In line with the Series Learning Outcomes, you should now be able to describe Al-‘Āmidī’s background, explain the context and purpose of *Muwāzanah*, analyse his methods and principles, and evaluate its lasting contribution to both classical and modern literary studies.

Glossary of Terms

Aesthetics – The appreciation of beauty and artistic quality in literature, focusing on style, imagery, and artistic expression.

Comparative method – A systematic approach used by Al-‘Āmidī in *Muwāzanah* to evaluate poets side by side, highlighting their strengths and weaknesses.

Criteria – Standards or measures used to judge poetry, such as originality, clarity, elegance of style, and adherence to cultural values.

Ethics – Moral responsibility in literary production, ensuring that works reflect values such as honesty, generosity, and respect.

Historical context – The political and cultural environment in which *Muwāzanah* was written, particularly the Abbasid era.

Intellectual background – The cultural, educational, and scholarly influences that shaped Al-‘Āmidī’s thought and writings.



Literary context – The prevailing traditions of poetry and criticism that influenced the creation of *Muwāzanah*.

Muwāzanah – Al-‘Āmidī’s most renowned comparative work in Arabic literary criticism, aimed at providing fair and balanced evaluation of poets.

Originality – The introduction of new ideas or methods in criticism, marking Al-‘Āmidī’s unique contribution to the discipline.

Reception – The way later critics and scholars responded to *Muwāzanah*, including praise, debate, and continued discussion.

Relevance – The continuing importance of *Muwāzanah* in modern literary studies, particularly in editing, translation, and analysis.

Rhetorical analysis – The examination of devices such as metaphor, simile, and parallelism to highlight artistry in poetry.

Scope – The range of issues addressed in *Muwāzanah*, including comparative evaluation, criteria for excellence, and literary value.

Stylistic analysis – The study of diction, rhythm, and structure in poetry to assess its effectiveness and artistry.

Weakness – Features of poetry that reduce its quality, such as incoherence, reliance on clichés, or lack of audience engagement.

Concept Check Questions [Series 5]

Objective Questions

1. Identify Al-‘Āmidī’s most renowned comparative work in Arabic literary criticism. (Linked to SLO 5.3)
2. State the historical era that provided the context for *Muwāzanah*. (Linked to SLO 5.2)



3. Define the comparative method used in *Muwāzanah*. (Linked to SLO 5.4)
4. List one criterion Al-‘Āmidī used to judge literary excellence. (Linked to SLO 5.5)
5. Name one rhetorical device examined in Al-‘Āmidī’s analysis. (Linked to SLO 5.6)

Short-Answer Questions

6. Explain the purpose and scope of *Muwāzanah*. (Linked to SLO 5.3)
7. Describe how Al-‘Āmidī balanced aesthetics and ethics in his criticism. (Linked to SLO 5.7)
8. Analyse the influence of earlier critics on Al-‘Āmidī’s work. (Linked to SLO 5.8)
9. Distinguish between the reception of *Muwāzanah* in Al-‘Āmidī’s time and its relevance today. (Linked to SLO 5.10, SLO 5.12)

Long-Answer Questions

10. Evaluate Al-‘Āmidī’s originality and contribution to Arabic literary criticism. (Linked to SLO 5.9)
11. Assess the impact of *Muwāzanah* on the development of Arabic literary criticism as a discipline. (Linked to SLO 5.11)
12. Appraise the continuing relevance of *Muwāzanah* to modern literary studies. (Linked to SLO 5.12)

Answers to Concept Check Questions [Series 5]

Objective Questions

1. *Muwāzanah*.
2. The Abbasid era.
3. A systematic approach of comparing poets side by side to highlight strengths and weaknesses.
4. Originality of imagery.
5. Metaphor.

Short-Answer Questions

6. The purpose was to provide fair and balanced comparison of poets, while its scope extended to



style, rhetoric, and literary value.

7. He emphasised that poetry should be both artistically beautiful and morally responsible.

8. Earlier critics such as Ibn Qutaybah and Ibn Sallām influenced his comparative methods, which he refined into a systematic framework.

9. In his time, *Muwāzanah* was praised and debated by scholars, while today it remains relevant for editing, translation, and literary analysis.

Long-Answer Questions

10. *Basic response:* Al-‘Āmidī’s originality lay in formalising comparative criticism and establishing clear criteria for evaluation.

Value-added response: Outstanding learners may add that his originality also lay in advancing Arabic criticism beyond descriptive commentary, creating a milestone in systematic analysis that influenced later traditions.

11. *Basic response:* *Muwāzanah* helped establish Arabic literary criticism as a discipline with clear methods and standards.

Value-added response: Learners may expand by noting that it professionalised criticism, moving it from subjective opinion to structured evaluation, and shaped the intellectual culture of the Abbasid era.

12. *Basic response:* *Muwāzanah* remains relevant today for editing classical works, producing translations, and guiding literary analysis.

Value-added response: Learners may highlight that modern scholars use its principles to bridge classical and contemporary approaches, applying fairness and systematic comparison to diverse literary contexts.

Answers to Pilot Questions [Series 5]

Part 5.1 Background and context of Muwāzanah

- Al-‘Āmidī’s most renowned comparative work is *Muwāzanah*.



- His intellectual background, shaped by earlier critics and the scholarly environment of the Abbasid period, influenced his systematic approach to literary criticism.
- The Abbasid era provided the historical and literary context for *Muwāzanah*.
- The main purpose of *Muwāzanah* was to provide a fair and balanced comparison of poets.
- Its scope included style, rhetoric, and literary value, contributing to systematic literary criticism.

Part 5.2 Analytical framework in Muwāzanah

- Al-‘Āmidī used the comparative method to evaluate poets.
- His criteria for literary excellence included originality of imagery, clarity of meaning, elegance of style, and adherence to cultural values.
- Weakness in poetry was identified when it lacked coherence, relied on clichés, or failed to engage the audience.
- Rhetorical devices such as metaphor, simile, and parallelism were commonly examined.
- Stylistic analysis was important because it highlighted diction, rhythm, and structure, showing why certain verses were more effective.

Part 5.3 Critical principles and philosophical outlook

- Al-‘Āmidī balanced aesthetics and ethics by insisting that poetry should be both artistically beautiful and morally responsible.
- Earlier critics such as Ibn Qutaybah and Ibn Sallām influenced his work.
- He refined their foundations into a more systematic framework of comparative criticism.
- His originality lay in formalising comparative criticism and establishing clear criteria for evaluation.
- *Muwāzanah* is considered a milestone because it advanced Arabic literary criticism beyond descriptive commentary to analytical judgement.

Part 5.4 Legacy and influence of Muwāzanah

- *Muwāzanah* was received with both praise and debate, stimulating ongoing discussion among later critics and scholars.



- It impacted Arabic literary criticism by helping establish it as a discipline with clear methods and standards.
- Al-ʿĀmidī formalised comparative analysis and criteria for excellence in his work.
- *Muwāzanah* remains relevant today because of its emphasis on fairness, systematic comparison, and clear criteria.
- It bridges classical and contemporary approaches to criticism, showing how past methods can inform modern literary studies.

References and Attributions [Series 5]

Textual Sources

- Al-ʿĀmidī, al-Ḥasan ibn Bishr. (1981). *Al-Muwāzanah bayna Abī Tammām wa al-Buḥturī*. Cairo: Dār al-Maʿārif.
- Ibn Qutaybah. (1953). *Al-Shiʿr wa al-Shuʿarāʾ*. Cairo: Dār al-Maʿārif.
- Ibn Sallām al-Jumhī. (1967). *Ṭabaqāt Fuḥūl al-Shuʿarāʾ*. Cairo: Dār al-Maʿārif.
- Montgomery, J. (2010). *The Vagaries of the Qasida: Arabic Poetry and Its Critics*. Brill.
- Allen, R. (2000). *An Introduction to Arabic Literature*. Cambridge University Press.

Illustrations (Figures, Plates, Boxes)

- *Plate 5.1: Al-ʿĀmidī’s intellectual background*
 - AI-generated using prompt: “Create an illustration of a medieval Arabic scholar studying manuscripts in a scholarly setting.”
 - Suggested OER search string: “Al-ʿĀmidī Arabic literary critic scholar OER image.”
- *Figure 5.1: Historical and literary context of Muwāzanah*
 - AI-generated using prompt: “Create a diagram showing Abbasid culture, poetic traditions, and scholarly debates as the context for Muwāzanah.”
 - Suggested OER search string: “Abbasid era Arabic literary criticism context diagram OER.”
- *Box 5.1: Purpose and scope of Muwāzanah*
 - AI-generated using prompt: “Generate a text box summarising the purpose and scope of Al-ʿĀmidī’s Muwāzanah.”



- Suggested OER search string: “purpose scope Al-‘Āmidī Muwāzanah Arabic literary criticism OER summary.”
- *Figure 5.2: Comparative method of evaluating poets in Muwāzanah*
 - AI-generated using prompt: “Create a diagram showing two Arabic poets compared side by side with strengths and weaknesses highlighted.”
 - Suggested OER search string: “comparative method Al-‘Āmidī Muwāzanah Arabic poets diagram OER.”
- *Box 5.2: Criteria for literary excellence and weakness*
 - AI-generated using prompt: “Generate a text box summarising Al-‘Āmidī’s criteria for literary excellence and weakness in poetry.”
 - Suggested OER search string: “criteria literary excellence weakness Al-‘Āmidī Muwāzanah OER summary.”
- *Plate 5.2: Rhetorical and stylistic analysis in Muwāzanah*
 - AI-generated using prompt: “Create an illustration of a scholar analysing an Arabic manuscript, highlighting rhetorical devices and stylistic features.”
 - Suggested OER search string: “Arabic manuscript rhetorical stylistic analysis Al-‘Āmidī OER image.”
- *Figure 5.3: Balance between aesthetics and ethics in Muwāzanah*
 - AI-generated using prompt: “Create a diagram showing balance between aesthetics (beauty, style, imagery) and ethics (values, honesty, responsibility) in Arabic literary criticism.”
 - Suggested OER search string: “Al-‘Āmidī Muwāzanah aesthetics ethics balance diagram OER.”
- *Plate 5.3: Influence of earlier critics on Al-‘Āmidī*
 - AI-generated using prompt: “Create an illustration of an Arabic scholar studying earlier critical works while drafting his own comparative analysis.”
 - Suggested OER search string: “Arabic literary critics influence Al-‘Āmidī Muwāzanah OER image.”
- *Box 5.3: Al-‘Āmidī’s originality and contribution*
 - AI-generated using prompt: “Generate a text box summarising Al-‘Āmidī’s originality and contribution to Arabic literary criticism.”



- Suggested OER search string: “Al-‘Āmidī originality contribution Muwāzanah Arabic literary criticism OER summary.”
- *Plate 5.4: Reception of Muwāzanah among later critics*
 - AI-generated using prompt: “Create an illustration of Arabic scholars debating and discussing literary works in a study circle.”
 - Suggested OER search string: “Arabic scholars reception of Al-‘Āmidī Muwāzanah OER image.”
- *Figure 5.4: Impact of Muwāzanah on Arabic literary criticism*
 - AI-generated using prompt: “Create a diagram showing the impact of Muwāzanah on Arabic literary criticism: comparative analysis, criteria for excellence, professionalisation.”
 - Suggested OER search string: “impact Al-‘Āmidī Muwāzanah Arabic literary criticism diagram OER.”
- *Box 5.4: Modern relevance of Muwāzanah*
 - AI-generated using prompt: “Generate a text box summarising the modern relevance of Al-‘Āmidī’s Muwāzanah in literary studies.”
 - Suggested OER search string: “modern relevance Al-‘Āmidī Muwāzanah Arabic literary criticism OER summary.”

