

## Chapter 52: Arabic Literature: Theories of Literary Criticism

In this account of the Arab contribution to the theories of literary criticism, the term “Arab” is used in a wide sense to include all the Arabic-speaking peoples, and the writers who used Arabic as their cultural medium, regardless of their racial origins.

Literary criticism is also broadly used to cover the whole field of literary appreciation, analysis, judgment, and comparison on the practical as well as the theoretical side. In this broad sense, *Balaghah* – which concerns itself with the study of the figures of speech and the stylistic aspects of literature in general – may be included under literary criticism, at least of the golden era of the early centuries of Hijrah, although, generally speaking the relation between the two is a matter of controversy.

The period covered by our treatment is likewise a fairly long one. It extends from the first/seventh century to the present time, and it corresponds to the Islamic era in the history of Arabs. For, although the Arabs achieved a high measure of perfection in their poetry two centuries before Islam, they did not reach the mature stage of theorizing about literature and its excellence until their minds were stirred and stimulated by the call of the new religion that arose in their midst. The fact that the miraculous sign of the religion of Islam came in the form of a “Clear Arabic Book” was destined to play an important role in Arabic language and literature, and consequently in the enrichment of Arabic literary criticism.

From early times, the Arabs were noted for their literary excellence. Poetry and oratory were the chosen forms of their artistic expression. As early as the second half of the sixth century A.D. when Arabic poetry was in its flowering period, some rudimentary forms of practical criticism could be observed. These were preserved by narrators, and later recorded by the early authors of the general studies of the Arabic language and literature. Some time before Islam there grew a number of marketplaces in the Hijaz where people of different tribes used to assemble for trade as well as for literary contests.

Names of recognized arbiters in those contests, such as that of al-Nabighah al-Thubyani, and their judgments and criticisms were handed down to posterity by the *rawis* (transmitters). Naturally, very little

explanation or justification was offered for such judgments, and very often one verse or one poem would be given as a ground for a high praise of a poet or for a comparison between two contestants in the marketplace. Some of the Prophet's Companions were known for their appreciation and sound judgment of pre-Islamic poetry. The Second Caliph 'Umar, for instance, was reported to hold that al-Nabighah was the greatest of the *Jahiliyyah* poets, and when he was asked the reason for this pronouncement, he answered, "Al-Nabighah never used redundant words, always avoided the uncouth in poetry, and never praised a person except for true merit.

By the end of the first/seventh century Arabic culture had spread outside Arabia in various directions with the spread of Islam. The mind of the new Muslim community was getting ready for a general intellectual awakening. The first to reap the benefit of those efforts were the religious fields on one side and the linguistic and literary on the other. Some scholars busied themselves with the explanation of the Qur'an and the understanding of its challenge of miraculous literary excellence. Others concentrated on tracing pure linguistic usages of the Arabic language and standardizing its grammar and syntax. Some directed their efforts to collecting pre-Islamic poetry and preserving it against loss.

The stage was now set for the beginning of a golden era in authorship which lasted several centuries. The critical problems raised by the Arab authors during this period can be summed up under the following main headings:

1. Literary aspect of the Qur'anic *i'jaz* (eloquence of discourse), and the extent to which literary could aid in discovering the secrets of that *i'jaz*.
2. Unique and sometimes obscure usages of the Qur'anic style.
3. Authenticity of literary texts transmitted by the *rawas* from pre-Islamic and early Islamic times.
4. Classification of the Arab poets, both Islamic and pre-Islamic.
5. Merits and demerits of the ancients and moderns in Arabic literature, and controversies between traditionalists and innovators.
6. Claims of meaning and expression to literary excellence.
7. Originality and imitation, and the phenomenon of plagiarism.
8. Nature of speech and articulation.
9. Meaning and essence of literary excellence, in structure, signification, effectiveness, and formal beauty.
10. Definition of the figures of speech.
11. Standards for the comparison between rival poets.

12. Norms of excellence in the chief poetical arts, such as panegyric, satire, and elegy.

13. Linguistic aspects of literary art.

These various problems of literary criticism were treated sometimes separately in a specialized fashion, and sometimes together in manuals or textbooks. The stylistic aspects in particular received a large share of the Arab authors' attention, and the researches around them grew until they formed a separate critical branch under the name of *Balaghah*. This was mainly the outcome of the Muslims pre-occupation with problems of the Qur'anic exegesis and *i'jaz*. Greek writings on rhetorics which were translated into Arabic as early as the third/ninth century also contributed to the growth of the science of *Balaghah*. In fact, that science dominated the Arabic critical field all through the later centuries of Islam from the seventh/13th to the 12th/18th.

The above enumeration of the different aspects of Arabic literary criticism will indicate the immensity of its wealth, and the difficulty of separating the Arab contribution in this field from their contribution to the development of Arabic language and literature in general. Many a general book on literature, such as the *Kitab al-Aghani* (Book of Songs) by Abu al-Faraj, would also claim a place among the books of literary criticism. The same can be said by the unique excellence of the Qur'an.

But the following survey of the main features of Arabic literary criticism we shall limit ourselves to singling out some of its outstanding landmarks and making a brief halt at each of them.

1. On the early grammarians, philologists, and literary critics of the first stage in Arabic authorship was ibn Sallam (d. 231/845). His book *Tabaqat al-Shu'ara'* is representative of the critical attainments of his period. Criticism, he maintains, needs long training and experience, and a critic must be an expert on his subject and well versed in the practice of his art. In other words, taste alone does not meet the requirements of criticism, and must be supplemented by experience and long study. He also adds that poetry, like the sciences and other arts, needs its own special technique and culture. He was aware of the established truth that abundance of practical study is worth more than all academic knowledge.

The second point stressed by ibn Sallam in his book is the importance of verifying the poetical texts and of ascertaining their origin. This is the first step in textual criticism and must be taken as its foundation. He directed a violent attack on the manner in which some Arab chroniclers accepted and narrated ancient poetry, and, therefore, questioned the authenticity of many of their texts.

The other important point in ibn Sallam's book is the division of poets into classes. With regard to time, poets were either Islamic or pre-Islamic. He tried to classify the poets of either era according to the abundance and excellence of their poetry. In his classification he also took into consideration the place of origin.

Although ibn Sallam failed to support judgments he passed on poets and poetry by analyzing the texts or describing the qualities of each particular poet, yet it must be admitted that Arabic criticism was taken by

him a step further, especially as regards questions of verification and classification of poets. What we miss in his book, however, is criticism in the sense of a discerning study and a methodical approach. The first attempts at methods are not to be found earlier than the fourth/tenth century.

Al-Jahiz (d. 255/869), who was one of the leading Mu'tazilites and writers of the third/ninth century, tried in his book *al-Bayan w-al-Tabyin* to give a picture of criticism in pre-Islamic times and the first/seventh century. The criticism of that period, he maintained, was elementary, but, to a marked degree, sound and convincing, as it emanated from genuine practical literary taste. The critics of that period, according to him, managed to discover a number of defects in poetical craftsmanship and to give valuable practical advice to orators and poets.

Al-Jahiz's book was an echo of the intellectual life of the Arabs of the third/ninth century. At that time the mosques of Kufah and Basrah were not only places for worship and administration of justice, but also schools for the teaching of language, grammar, Hadith, and jurisprudence, as well as platforms for narrators to relate to the assembled audiences the story of the Prophet's life and conquests. Leaders of theological schools and religious divisions used to go there for dialectical discussions, and a large number of people attended them in quest of knowledge.

Anyone who spoke in the mosque had to possess the ability to express himself clearly, to attract and persuade the audience. Thus, a new kind of study came into being to show the qualities an orator needed, and to point out the defects of different speeches. Observations on effective and defective public speaking contained in al-Jahiz's book can be grouped under the following headings:

- (1) Correctness of pronunciation and defects caused by deformities of the vocal organs.
- (2) Proper and improper employment of language and harmonious and disharmonious use of words.
- (3) Syntax and the relations between words and their meanings, clarity, conciseness, suitability of expression to different occasions and audiences, and of speech to its intended objective.
- (4) The appearance of the orators and the agreeableness of their gestures and mannerisms.

Another third/ninth century literary celebrity was the writer ibn Qutaibah (d. 276/889), and the author of many books on literature and Qur'anic usages. In one of his books, *al-Shi'r w-al-Shu'ara'*, he urged people to form independent judgments and use their own power of appreciation. He attacked the philosophers' approach to criticism and their use of logical method in the appreciation and analysis of literary texts. One of the critical problems he raised was that of the division of poets into those who deliberate upon, revise, and perfect their poetical works, and those who depend on the spontaneity and easy flow of their poetic inspiration.

He also opposed the tendency always to give preference to the ancients just because they were ancients. Literary talent, he argued, was not confined to any particular period. A modern poet might

easily surpass an ancient in literary creativeness and workmanship.

The contribution of the poet Prince 'Abd Allah ibn al-Mu'tazz (d. 296/908) to the development of Arabic criticism and his influence on it were of a different character. He made a study of *badi'* which was considered in his days an innovation in the poetical art, and set out to prove that it was not a new creation at all. His book *al-Badi'* was the first attempt at a systematic treatment of the figures of speech, which he divided into three main categories: (1) the metaphor which is the pillar-stone of poetry, (2) artifices connected with the form only and not with the essence of poetry, such as assonance (*tajnis*) and anti-thesis (*mutabaqah*), and (3) the dialectical style which takes the form of a logical argument (*al-mabath al-kalami*).

By quoting copious examples from the Qur'an, the Hadith, the speeches of the Prophet's Companions, and the language of the Bedouins, ibn al-Mu'tazz tried to show that the use of the figures of speech was inherent in the nature of poetry, and that the Arabs practised the art long before the time of Bashshar, Muslim ibn al-Walid, and Abu Nuwas. These modern poets of the 'Abbasid period did not invent the art but simply extended its use until it was thought a new creation. It is an open question whether ibn al-Mu'tazz was influenced, in his *Badi'*, by Aristotle's writing, especially the *Rhetorics* translated into Arabic during the third/ninth centuries.

But the treatment of ibn al-Mu'tazz has the unmistakable stamp of originality, and the subject seems to have begun to interest Arab critics in the second/eighth century as an Arabic literary phenomenon. The influence, if any, might be sought in the prominence given to metaphor and in the attempt at definition and division of literary artifices.

But the real disciple of the philosophical sciences and the author who manifested Aristotle's influence very clearly was Qudamah ibn Ja'far (d. 337/948). His book *Naqd al-Shi'r* is perhaps the first Arabic book to carry in its title the word *naqd* which is the Arabic equivalent of criticism. It is conceived and planned in the Aristotelian fashion of logical divisions and definitions. The author begins by defining poetry as regular speech with metres, rhymes, and meanings, proceeds to explain and justify this definition on logical grounds, and then adds words as the fourth element constituting poetry.

Out of the relations between these four simple elements he creates four complex ones, which evolve out of the harmony between them. He points out those earlier Arab authors have neglected the critical side of the studies of the poetical art, and directed their energies to the less important aspects, namely, prosody and linguistic considerations. His, then, was an attempt to create a real science of criticism and set the norms of excellence for the principal categories of Arabic poetry.

2. Arab contribution to literary criticism assumes clearer and mature forms in the fourth/tenth century. On the specialized side we meet with al-Baqillani (d. 403/1012), who gives a scholarly account of the Qur'anic *i'jaz*, al-Amidi (d. 371/981), who leaves us the best classical Arabic comparison between two great poets, representatives of two schools of poetical art, and al-Qadi al-Jurjani (d. 366/976) the writer

of the earliest critical treatise on a great Arabic figure in the literary history of the Arabs. On the general side, at least two contributions must be mentioned here. The first is that of Abu al-Faraj al-Isfahani (d. 356/956), the writer of *Kitab al-Aghani* (The Book of Songs), and a unique book of its kind in the literatures of the world. And the second is that of Abu Hilal al-'Askari (d. 365/1004), who attempted to give a complete systematic manual of Arabic rhetorical and critical principles as they were known at the time.

Now, to take the general contributions first. The "Book of Songs is a literary encyclopedia, in 20 volumes, dealing essentially with lyrical poetry which was set to music and singing by the musicians and singers of the early centuries of Islam. But around this theme the author collected a large amount of critical and biographical information of a great number of Arab poets. The critical aspect of *al-Aghani* has received the attention of modern academic research. The wealth of narratives and biographical data contained in the book has been a boon to modern Arabic play and story writers.

Al-'Askari made the two arts of poetry and prose the subject-matter of his treatment and tried to systemize and enlarge upon the earlier general attempts of al-Jahiz, ibn Mu'tazz, and Qudamah. The two Arabic rhetorical conceptions of *fasahah* and *balaghah* received at his hands satisfactory definitions, the first being connected with elegance and purity of style, and the second with communicating and conveying the desired meaning in a convincing and effective manner. Long chapters on distinguishing the good from the bad in speech, on the nature of literary art, and on the technique of composition and good description, with copious examples of excellent poetry and prose, occupy about half the book. The rest is an enumeration and elucidation of literary artifices, the number of which al-'Askari raised to 35, which is more than double the number given earlier by ibn al-Mu'tazz.

Al-Jurjani's treatise on *i'jaz* takes its place among Arabic critical books on account of its attempt at applying the critical conceptions to reveal some of the secrets of the Qur'anic literary excellence. In doing this the author subjected some of the highly esteemed Arabic poems to severe test of criticism to show the fallibility of human products. The Qur'anic *i'jaz*, he maintained, was something more than and above that which critical standards could explain, something that could be felt more than known by the expert and cultured reader or listener. This theory of *i'jaz*, peculiar to Muslim culture, we meet again in a different setting when we come to 'Abd al-Qahir al-Jurjani.

The two treatises which exemplify Arabic criticism proper in its methodical form are those of al-Amidi and al-Qadi, Al-Jurhani referred to earlier. Al-Amidi's *Muwazana* (Comparison) between Abu Tammam and his disciple and kinsman al-Buhturi is the first systematic treatment of its kind in Arabic criticism. The author collects the common meanings between the two poets and, on the basis of a rigid comparison between each pair of words of similar meanings, decides which is more poetical in that particular context. He takes account of the supporters of each poet, reproduces the reasons given by them for their stand, and brings into relief the faults and plagiarisms of each of the two great poets.

Although the subject of al-Amidi's study is a particular case of comparison, and the features it

concentrates on are the artistic and poetic ones only, it claims a high value because of its success in going beyond the particular comparison to a more general comparative study. It adopts the method of adducing comparable examples from the poetry of the forerunners of the two poets, thus enlarging its scope and claiming for it a larger share of critical accuracy. It exhibits the traditional literary models and reveals its author's wide knowledge of Arabic poetry and his cultivated analytical literary taste. It also gives one of the best practical accounts of the phenomenon of plagiarism, which greatly occupies the attention of Arabic critics, permeates a good deal of their comparative studies, and to some extent, colours their judgments of literary values.

Another valuable contribution in the fourth/tenth century to methodical criticism is the "Arbitration" (*Wasatah*) of al-Adi al-Jurjani between al-Mutanabbi, the famous Arab poet of the eastern Arab world of Islam, and his antagonists. Al-Mutanabbi, by his arrogant personality, wide ambition, and forceful poetry, created adversaries as well as staunch supporters wherever he went. Many grammarians, linguists, critics, and rival poets, shared in finding faults with his poetry and revealing plagiarisms, which, they claimed, he committed against previous masters of Arabic poetry, while others hailed him as the greatest Arab poet that ever lived.

Many treatises were written about him. The situation called for a sympathetic arbiter, and al-Jurjani tried to play the role. His introduction to *Wasatah* contains a good deal of theorizing about literature. An example of this is his interesting, and almost modern, analysis of poetical ability into four component factors: Natural aptitude, intelligence, acquaintance with and memorization of past models, and practical training. These, he maintained, were factors of a general nature, applicable to all humanity, and not confined to a certain age or generation. Another example is the discussion of the influence of environment on poetry, with illustrative examples from the poetry of Bedouins and city dwellers.

All the different aspects of al-Mutanabbi's poetry, viz, his philosophizing tendency to complication, occasional leaning on previous poets, the system of building up his poem and the use of *badi'*, all received a masterly analysis at the hands of al-Jurjani. The book succeeds in giving a general picture of literary criticism in that period. It abounds in opinions of critical scholars and recalls many famous comparisons held between poets, both post and contemporary. In short, the *Wasatah* of al-Jurjani along with the *Muwazanah* of al-Amidi represents the peak of practical Arabic criticism and illustrates the Arabs' mature efforts in that field of literary study.

3. The claims of the Arab contribution of the theories of literary criticism is still to be reached in the fifth/11th century at the hands of 'Abd al-Qahir al-Jurjani (d. 471/1078), the author of the two well-known critical books: *Dala'il al-I'jaz* and *Asrar al-Balaghah*. The first book, although primarily concerned with explaining the secrets and signs of the Qur'anic *i'jaz*, faces the wider issue of literary excellence in general and reaches a fundamental theory of structure, while the second searches deep into literary images and discovers, in the form of a psycho-literary theory, what the author takes to be the real secret of eloquence.

Each of the two volumes advances a thesis, explains it, discusses its applications indifferent rhetorical species, and answers any adverse criticism which it might arouse. They survey the field of Arabic literary criticism in the author's time, point out the lack of true scientific thinking, and the pre-occupation of authors with the non-essentials in literary art, and try to lay the foundations for a new science which would satisfy both the objective and the subjective aspects of literary appreciation. A modern reader of the two books feels inclined to presume that 'Abd al-Qahir thought of literary composition in terms of its two-fold division of structure and beauty.

But it is also possible that when the author wrote his first book he was mainly occupied with and guided by the thesis that eloquence is a product of correct structure and signification. At a later stage, and perhaps owing to other cultural influences and maturation of thought, he found that an important aspect of literary art, namely, its impact on the reader or the listener, still called for a separate and fuller treatment. The starting point in his line of thinking in *al-Dala'il* was the consideration of the place of words and meanings in the art of expression. Some of the ancients, e.g. al-Jahiz, had considered eloquence to be mainly dependent on the quality of the verbal elements, that is, the words.

But, argued 'Abd al-Qahir, words in themselves do not make language. They do so only when organized in a system of construction according to the requirements of the meaning. The important element in literary composition, then, is structure, and the essence of structure of meaning. Once meanings are defined in the intellect in their proper order, their verbal expressions follow faithfully in a determined fashion. A literary composition achieves its end if it is properly suitably constructed. It becomes vague, obscure, complicated, and generally defective when the verbal element does not harmonize with the meanings, or when the meanings themselves are not clear and coherent in the mind of the speaker or the writer.

Hence, it follows that our main concern in rhetoric should be with techniques of structure, such as junction and disjunction, mention and omission, definitiveness and in-definitiveness, etc. Our chief occupation here should be the study of the characteristics of meanings in construction, which is a combination of language and grammar. This new technique was ably and effectively applied by 'Abd al-Qahir to the study of the Qur'anic composition, and consequently to the analysis and appreciation of specimens of the highest literary models, and it yielded a complete system which later authors turned into a definite rhetorical branch, namely, the science of meanings (*ma'ani*).

In this analysis of the *Dala'il*, 'Abd al-Qahir found himself repeatedly resorting to the process of introspection, and suggesting that the best way to discover the secret of literary excellence is to look inwardly into oneself and find out what impressions, satisfactions, emotions, and excitements the whole composition leaves on one's soul. It appears as if this aspect of literary art directed 'Abd al-Qahir, in his second book *Asrar al-Balaghah*, to go deeper into the aesthetic side of literature and find out the secrets behind the felling of enjoyment produced by beautiful literary works. Thus, the field of research was transferred to the laws of human thought.

What goes on in our minds and souls when we hear a beautiful literary passage? Why do such artifices as alliteration and assonance please us? And, why do such phenomena as superfluity and obscurity of expression displease us? What is the secret behind the aesthetic effect of a good metaphor or a cleverly conceived compound simile? Which is more appealing to our taste – the spontaneous and easy flowing poetry of al-Buhturi or the deep and meditative poetry of Abu Tammam? And why? If we can refer such questions to some inherent characteristics in our perceptions and conceptions, in our cognition and imagination, we can be assured of a solid foundation for a study of literary appreciation.

In this part of his inquiry ‘Abd al-Qahir shifted the emphasis from constructing the meaning to communicating it in an effective and pleasing manner. The new domain of his study becomes the variety of ways and means for expressing the meaning in an artistic fashion. In this he showed himself to be clearly aware of the fact that literature is part of a wider field, namely, art. Occasionally, in his analysis and argumentation he would appeal to other fine arts such as painting and sculpture. His approach in this second inquiry gave later authors the basis for creating the two separate rhetorical sciences, the science of exposition (*bayan*) and that of embellishment (*badi’*).

Put together, the results of his two inquiries could be summarized as follows:

- (a) Excellence in literature should be judged from the quality of the structure of the meaning expressed and its pleasing effect on the mind and soul of the reader (or listener) rather than from its verbal aspects.
- (b) The beauty of metaphors lies in the fact that they give to style novelty, vigour, and movement, and that they bring out the hidden shades into a perceptual relief.
- (c) Composite comparisons by similitude please the human understanding for a variety of reasons: all abstract to the concrete, and from what is known by reflection to what is known intuitively or through sense-perception; man naturally enjoys seeing different things unified by links of similarities and the enjoyment is enhanced when the discovery is reached after a reasonable amount of intellectual activity – if the intellectual activity involved is too little or too exacting, the enjoyment is diminished or marred.

The functions of the intellect are thinking, reflection, analogy, and inference, and all these are exercised and perceiving relations between different things; the rhetorical figures are the embodiments of all these considerations.

In assessing the value and place of ‘Abd al-Qahir’s contribution to the theories of Arabic criticism, we must bear in mind two considerations: the first is that certain Arab scholars of the flourishing period of the third/ninth and fourth/tenth centuries did anticipate ‘Abd al-Qahir in some aspects of his theory. Al-Jahiz, for example, discussed at length the art of oratory from the point of view of its relation to the audience and expressed, though briefly, the idea that good speech affects the heart in a variety of ways. Al-Qadi, al-Jurjani also showed his interest in the psychology of literature and, as mentioned earlier, analysed in a psychological fashion the poetical ability into natural and acquired elements.

The second consideration which has been explored by modern research is that 'Abd al-Qahir must have been acquainted with the Arabic versions of Aristotle's *Poetica* and *Rhetoric* where the First Master probes the affective side of literature both in his treatment of tragedy and in his exposition of the art of metaphor. These various probable anticipations, however, did not diminish the claim of our later Arab author to originality. It is to his lasting credit that in the sphere of a literary study he tried to harmonize the rigour of scientific thinking with the spontaneity of literary taste, and succeeded in this to a remarkable degree.

4. We do not come across another great figure in the study of rhetoric during the fifth, sixth, and seventh centuries A.H., like 'Abd al-Qahir, nor even a vigorous follower of the founder of the science to develop further his ideas and widen the scope of their application, yet during this period much was added to the wealth of Arab contribution to literary criticism, mostly in general comprehensive surveys. One of the great minds of that period is Ibn Rashiq al-Qairawani (d. 436/1044), the author of a standard book on the art of poetry entitled *al-Umdah fi Mahasin al-Shi'r wa Adabih*. It is one of the fullest treatments of the technicalities of Arabic poetry and its principal kinds.

Another fifth/11th century critic is Ibn Sinan al-Khafaji al-Halabi (d. 466/1073), the author of *Sirr al-Fasahah*. Ibn Sinan's chief contribution is in the domain of linguistic criticism where he deals with the sounds of the Arabic language, their classifications, and their characteristics. Al-Zamakhshari of Khwarizm (d. 538/1144), the Qur'anic commentator, deserves a special mention here because of his consistent application of the rhetorical approach to the explanation and interpretation of the Qur'an. His book *al-Kashshaf* claims a high place among the Qur'anic commentaries.

He is also the compiler of *Asas al-Balaghah*, an Arabic dictionary, which is unique in its attention to original and metaphorical usages of the Arabic language. A later author and critic, Dia' al-Din Ibn al-Ayhit (d. 637/1239), left us a most valuable and interesting book on the two arts, of the writer and of the poet, entitled *al-Mathal al-Sa'ir*. He dealt with the literary art in two sections: one on verbal expression and the other on meaning, and managed to include under these two headings all the artifices and figures of speech which previous authors since the beginning of the third/ninth century had been exploring, defining and illustrating.

He also restated the problems of word and meaning, plagiarism, and norms of comparison in a masterly manner, exhibiting searching, analytical power and independence of thought. Moreover, he invented a practical method for the training of the undeveloped literary talent, which relied on the two factors: the natural aptitude and the nourishing of the ability on classical models. The method is explained in detail, and illustrated from the history of literature as well as from the personal experience and literary works of the author. Ibn al-Athir was so convinced of the originality and applicability of his method that he claimed for himself the title of *mujtahid* or Imam in the same way as the founders of Muslim schools of jurisprudence, Malik and al-Shafi'i, for example, were regarded by posterity.

We may end this series of the great minds with Yahya Ibn Hamzah al-'Alawi (d. 729/1328), one of the

Imams of Yemen and the author of *al-Tiraz al-Mutadammin li Asrar al-Balaghah wa 'Ulum Haqa'iq al-I'jaz*. The author criticizes books on the subject of literary criticism for being too detailed and thus tedious, or else too brief and consequently insufficient. He acclaims 'Abd al-Qahir as the founder of the science but confesses that he knew of his two books only indirectly through references to them in the writings of other scholars. He mentions some of the authors with whose books he was acquainted, including ibn al-Athir.

The motive for writing his book, he indicates, was to help his students understand al-Zamakhshari's approach to the Qur'anic exegesis and *i'jaz*. According to al-'Alawi, the Arabic literary sciences are four: the science of language which deals with the significance of separate words, the science of grammar which deals with words in composition and predication, the science of syntax which deals with the morphology of single words and their conformity to regular patterns in the Arabic language, and lastly, the combination of the two branches of *Fasahah* and *Balaghah* which are called *ma'ani* and *bayan* respectively, and which are the highest of the literary sciences.

After a long introduction, the book proceeds to deal theoretically with the cardinal questions in the rhetorical sciences, such as truth and metaphor, kinds of truth, kinds of significance, divisions of metaphor, linguistic sounds, single words and compound words and their characteristics, and requirements and examples of excellence in the various literary artifices.

But here we seem to have reached a parting of the ways between rhetoric and criticism. The separation is supposed to have been started by Abu Ya'qub al-Sakkaki al-Khwarizmi (d. 626/1228), the author of *Miftah al-'Ulum*. He is credited with the delineation of the boundaries of literary sciences in the manner referred to above which al-'Alawi must have followed in *al-Tiraz*. In the third division of these sciences, al-Sakkaki puts *'ilm al-ma'ani* and *'ilm al-bayan* conjointly, the first dealing with the characteristics of speech composition by virtue of which they conform to the requirements of the occasion, and the second with the different ways of expressing the meaning to complete the desired conformity.

By this division al-Sakkaki seems to have carried a logical conclusion the distinction which 'Abd al-Qahir indicated between questions of speech structure and composition and those of signification and effectiveness. To this dual division, al-Sakkaki appended a small section on the special aids to speech beautification, which later became the domain of a third separate science, namely, *badi'*. This process of narrowing the critical field to *Balaghah* and of demarcating its sciences was completed and standardized a century later by al-Khatib al-Qazwini (d. 739/1338) who condensed al-Sakkaki's *Miftah* into a textbook called *Matn al-Talkhis*.

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