

THE ISLAMIC SENSE ON LITERARY CRITICISM: A BRIEF HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract

*New Historicism and cultural history have opened up the new approaches to writing histories. However, the last decade national and transnational literary histories have continued to take different approaches, by typical new national literary histories have distinguished the teleology of grand narratives by revised the linear ways into specific subjects and certain conception. In the following discussion, I shall describe how 'new' perspective of moral and ideological on history of literary criticism reacted to the crisis of history writing, by appearing the writing of the history of Islamic literary criticism—especially to perceiving the historical writing proposed by M.A.R. Habib, *A History of Literary Criticism* (2005).*

Keywords: *Literary Criticism, Islamic Sense, History, Theory and Ideology.*

A. Introduction

When scholars discuss about literary criticism and theory, however, they in general way refer to history of literary criticism that used Western perspective. Even in studies of other

time-honored literary traditions, discussions of fiction theory are always conducted in terms of Western concepts such as mimesis, realism, naturalism, postmodernism, and others. Non-Western literary theory takes no account of scholarship, in textbooks or discussion on literary criticism and cultural issues. How are they neglected? "To continue ignoring the theoretical traditions of India, China, Japan, and the Arab World—as well as other theoretical developments not covered in this collection—is not only narrow-minded but imprudent," Hogan suggested (Patrick Colm Hogan, 1996: 14).

The other problems were expressed (Terry Eagleton, 1991: xiii). He points out the classical concept of ideology discredited by postmodernist thought. He discusses the three doctrines that turn on the problems caused. As Kuhn's paradigm that the new vision was to change the old. Three doctrines of postmodernism turn on rejection of the classical idea: 1) the model of representation, 2) epistemological scepticism which would hold that the very act of identifying a form of consciousness as ideological entails some untenable notion of absolute truth, and 3) formulation of relations between rationality, interests and power which causes the concept of ideology to be untenable, exactly unfashionable. He named these views as such post-ideological or end of ideology.

He also notes, "If the 'end-of-ideology' theorists viewed all ideology as inherently closed, dogmatic and inflexible, postmodernist thought tends to see all ideology as ideologically totalitarian and meta-physically grounded. Grossly travestied in this way, the concept of ideology obediently writes itself off." However, he also asserts the paradox under consideration. He states that 'criticism' in its Enlightenment sense, consists in recounting to someone what is awry with their situation, from an external, perhaps 'transcendental' vantage-point.

Eagleton accounts that the last decade, in addition to listed, happened as a sign of the resurrection of ideological movements. He

mention that in the Middle East, Islamic fundamentalism has emerged as a potent political force—he called Third World—and in one region of the British Isles, remembered Falkland or Malvinas War, revolutionary nationalism continues against imperialist power. Henceforth, he referred to as “the most powerful capitalist nation in history has been swept from end to end by a peculiarly noxious brand of Christian Evangelicalism.” (Terry Eagleton, 1991: xi).

A key figure in the development of both the New Criticism and the interdisciplinary work, T. S. Eliot published an essay entitled ‘Religion and Literature’ in 1935. He suggested the relation terms and engagement “literary criticism should be completed by criticism from a definite ethical and theological standpoint.” It supports a relation which can only be determined the texts from the outside by value-system or moral orientation such as Anglo-Catholicism be Eliot intended. Therefore, he concluded in the same way as literature and theology as explicit movement “in the history of literary criticism, and the New Critical project. If the latter tended to isolate literary works from their authorial meanings, it remained within the book-based model of reading by virtue of an interpretative canon...” (T. S. Eliot: 1953: 31).

The religious influence about the Protestant reverence of Scripture as “a unitary, self-authenticating” and the background in which it written show the timeless truths for the less theologically minded by sublime language and imaginary. So, while the role of the author took second place to that of the competent New Critical reader, the work of literature remained a self-identical. Its means a complete or masterable presence—it work called by canon.

David Jasper have a notion to resist the exclusivity the older modes of explication for reading practice the canonicity and interpretive orthodoxy. He suggests that ‘a different kind of politics which is reactive to situations of power and establishment, truly concerned with issues of freedom, the liberation of values’ (David Jasper, 1995). Towards T. S. Eliot

expressly decreasing those who 'demand more or less drastic changes' in the social order, because they are concerned only 'with changes of a temporal, material, and external nature'. On Eliot's terms, then, the political aspect of religious reading insisted upon by Jasper would be a (deplorable) species of 'secularism'. In addition, Eliot also emphasized on Christian critical practice as moral discourse of the contemporary stressed on the body and political inclusivity and as godless literature in others hand.

Christianity was the most powerful force in the development of medieval civilization. Even before the fall of Rome, Christianity had been increasingly tolerated initiated by the emperor Constantine. The beginnings of Christian thought related to Greek philosophical concepts. Afterwards Christian writers in the second century concerned to prove their faith. The movement in literary criticism which might be called 'literature and theology or religion', developed in Western Christian cultures during the second half of the twentieth century. The theological discourses are historically and culturally interwoven with literary criticism in the Christian west, and that this combination has shaped a critical movement. The factors contributed to the making of the Middle Ages: the evolving traditions of Christianity, the heritage of the Roman Empire and its social and political system; the legacy of the classical world; and contact with Islamic civilization.

B. The Islamic Tradition on Literary History

Actually in 1946 Grenebaum published a collection of articles about Arabic literary history. Evidently he read widely of Medieval Islam literature, pre-Islamic Arabic and Persian literature. Grunebaum's writing is an important part of the Western Orientalist tradition.

"Muslim civilization's greatest contribution to man's spiritual life were [*sic*] offered on the verbal level. ...literature bespeaks

the concept Islamic civilization formed of man." Literature provides the historian with historical documents for the mind-set of the time of its production so that the human essence of a civilization can be detected in its literature and described in articles like "The spirit of Islam as shown in its literature" or "Literature in the context of Islamic civilization." (Guscave E. von Grunebaum, 1946: 258).

In his statement above he uses the anthropological interpretation to analyse the more or less traumatic turning points in Muslim history, for instance contemporary Muslim societies faced with Western modernity represented as colonialism and democracy. "...each civilization would occupy a certain space within the boundaries of the one map called world history so that each civilization must occupy a different space according to its different intellectual development: Different civilizations can be similar, but they will never be equal." (See Dagmar Anne Riedel).

The model of world history determined by intellectual progress that characterizes discourse and its textual remnants. Grunebaum defines "classicism" as "the acceptance of a moral obligation to reproduce a model of past perfection" (Grunebaum, Gustave E. von, 1967: 10). so that in this way he can compare the different manner of "classical" tradition such as the Greek, the Arab, the Muslim, or the Germani. On the one hand, this produces absolutely ahistorical relationships, as for instance, between "classical" Arabic poetry and "classical" Islam. The synchronization of Arabic and European medieval texts is no base-reason for a comparison.

The Christian Middle Ages, he suggests, are just a transition from antiquity to Humanism, while late antiquity and the Christian Middle Ages are only Dark Ages in comparison with the classical antiquity. Therefore, Grunebaum cannot compare medieval "classical" Arabic literature with European medieval "non-classical" literature. The argument for a comparison is "classicality" which produces the similarity of different

“classical” mind-sets. Grunebaum can apply Goethe’s “classical” definition of poems as texts “expressing and recapturing personal, private sentiment” to “classical” Arabic poems, even if as a result he must complain that “Human conflict is strangely absent from Muslim and especially Arab-Muslim literature.” (Grunebaum, Gustave E. von, 1967: 11).

How about the Non-Western theoretical traditions? They have had a profound impact on Western theoretical reflection. The Arabic Aristotelians (especially Ibn Rushd) were greatly influential in the West, from the Middle Ages on, and have played an important role in determining the ethical orientation of much Western literary theory-though the Arab’s own treatment of ethics and literature was, again, far more theoretically sophisticated than most later European works. M.A.R. Habib states that Islamic thought and tradition has large influence in western tradition of criticism (See M.A.R. Habib). Literary criticism proposed with Islamic concepts by analysis of Aristotle’s Poetics written by al-Farabi (870-950), Ibn Sina (980-1037), Ibn Rushd (1126-1198), and other Islamic writers references to the order of poets found in the Qu’ran.

Modern criticism emphasized the “imaginative creation” as the defining the literature and look on that imaginative creation as serving, as we might say, to term sensibility, to develop moral perspective, and sophisticated orientations, and also feelings such as mercy, justice, and other didactic lessons. As in the European conception, literature leads us to act morally by leading us to expect judgement for bad deeds and reward for good deeds; it leads us to choose the path of wisdom, of spiritual things. But this view becomes particularly clear when contrasts it with the didactic moralism of European criticism. In the European vision, literature disseminates morality not by training sensibility, not by cultivating moral feeling, but by appealing to self-interest.

In this opportunity, M.A.R. Habib said that the critics need “to know why a text was written, for whom it was written,

what religious or moral or political purposes motivated it, as well as its historical and cultural circumstances." Indeed then the critics can move on to the issues of its style, language, structure, and deployment of rhetorical or literary techniques. He suggest that the modern criticism show us,

"that practice is not something natural but is a specific historical construct. Hence, to look over the history of literary criticism, a journey we are about to undertake in this book, is not only to revisit some of the profoundest sources of our identity but also to renew our connections with some of the deepest resources of our present and future sustenance." (See M.A.R. Habib).

C. From Textual Interpretation to Literary Criticism: Literature and Theology

Kevin Mills states that the relationship between the study of literature and the Christian theology in the West is refers to the context of the as the theological age of the linguistic sign. In Christian tradition, language has been thought to encode the divine sanction implied in the creation of the world by the Word or logos: 'God said "Let there be..." and "there was..." This specialised mode of textual interpretation influences the study of language, and literary criticism towards theology (Kevin Mills, 2008:389).

In 1990 was published *The Book and the Text*, a series of analyses of biblical texts by a some scholars that practising some mode of textual interpretation. The Bible is here brought into dialogue with various currents in contemporary theory such as structuralism, deconstruction, semiotics, hermeneutics, feminism, psychoanalytic interpretation and political thought. The book's title already tells the story of that dialogue, by juxtaposing two overdetermined literary terms.

In western Christian cultures, the Bible has never been just a book; it has always been the book: the definitive, self-contained expression of its author's being. Furthermore, the

word “God with/in us” produced a belief that the recoverability of the author’s presence in the process of reading was a religious truth. This tells us something important about the relationship between the book and the text in Christian cultures. The book as “a self-enclosed”, unitary entity was constituted by considerations which are not internal to it. The text, however, is incomplete, open to scrutiny, to question and to challenge. To characterise a book as a text, therefore, is to draw attention to the fact that interpretative contexts are external to, and discontinuous with, the documents interpreted. This described and related to the “close reading” of New Criticism.

The struggle between these two versions of reading (book versus text) has been characteristic of literary criticism in the second half of the twentieth century, and especially so of the branch of literary study with which this article is concerned: the interdisciplinary approach to literature and theology. This is an approach to the question of Being, capable of divesting it of the metaphysical ornaments which it had acquired through the philosophical tradition coming down from Plato and Aristotle.

The book as a closed unit, sealed in the name of an author (God as Author of the world and of the Word is the ultimate role model) who remains the possessor of its true meaning, is the product of theological interpretative discourses. This is differed from recent literary criticism, in which rejected the authority in interpretation of text that celebrating the autonomy of the text and the role of the reader in the grasp of meaning.

In *Early Christian Rhetoric: The Language of the Gospel*, Amos Wilder appreciates the distinct field of literature and theology. He was influenced by the critical modes of their day, the New Criticism in literary studies. Wilder especially appealed to New Critical canons of poetry in dealing with the biblical text (Amos N. Wilder, 1964: 134). But in attributing to the interrelation between literature, criticism, theory and religion, we need the interdisciplinary study of literature and theology to touch the cultural context of (English) literature.

In *Paradise Lost* Milton, such as, was renegotiated the biblical themes in the poetry of William Blake, and also the intellectual interests of nineteenth-century British thinkers such as Thomas Carlyle, George Eliot and Matthew Arnold, and the American transcendentalists, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Nathaniel Hawthorne and David Henry Thoreau. A theological and biblical notion has resonated in both literature and criticism, and still continues even today. It should also be remembered that certain critics have pursued interests in the Bible as literature, and in the influence of the Bible upon English literature. The others example, on C.S. Lewis's essays on the literary impact of the authorised version of the Bible, or on John Bunyan's allegorical vision, as well as the influence of literary study on his apologetical works (C. S. Lewis, 1939: 191).

Foucault argues that the history of cultural formations and the epistemological significance of a Nietzschean genealogy of concepts make unstable the foundations of belief upon an earlier generation of literature and theology scholars; and so do Lyotard whose critique of metanarratives (the grand systems) such as political ideologies, philosophical and religious doctrines. He questioned the legitimation of knowledge—also the legitimacy of interpretations based upon the undifferentiation of beliefs, dogmas and world-views; Baudrillard's idea of postmodern 'hyperreality' which the 'real' world is simulacra or replaced by a multi-layered of epistemologically unstable that disturbed religious belief in the 'world' as the object or totalisable field of God's love and of Christ's redemptive work. They were interrelated with Eagleton's premise above, especially about the single truth and legitimated aim either on ideology, knowledge or belief.

D. Tracing toward the Legacy of Islamic Thinker: Ibn Rushd's Literary Criticism

In this twelfth-century the renaissance thought was the growth spread in universities. The universities were in England,

France, and Italy such as Bologna (1158), Oxford (1200), Paris (1208–1209), and Naples (1224) had been largely devoted to the teaching of grammar and rhetoric. These universities spread abroad the philosophy of the “new” Aristotle (on natural history, metaphysics, ethics, and politics) to the West through translations and commentaries from Arabic and Greek. The famous of the Aristotelian thinkers was Ibn Rushd (Averroes). But his thoughts were opposite with Church doctrine.

In 1215 the study of the Aristotle was forbidden by the pope. But Dominican scholars attempted to reconcile the Christian faith with Greek philosophy (Curtius Ernst Robert, 1979: 55). Thus came into being the great impetus of scholasticism, reaching its height in Albertus Magnus and later his student Thomas Aquinas. By the efforts of the Dominicans at the University of Paris, “the dangerous Aristotle was purified, rehabilitated, and authorized. Even more: his teaching was incorporated into Christian philosophy and theology, and in this form has remained authoritative.” (Curtius Ernst Rober, 1979: 56). The major of humanism deriving from the classical grammatical tradition, the heritage of Neo-Platonism and allegorical criticism, and the movement known as scholasticism, which was largely based on a revived Aristotelianism mediated through Islamic thinkers.

The Islamic scholars had translated into Arabic nearly the entire corpus of Aristotle and texts of Galen, Hippocrates, Euclid, and Porphyry. The Aristotelian corpus, transmitted largely by the Islamic philosophers Ibn Rushd and Ibn Sina (Avicenna), was translated into Latin from the mid-twelfth century. Before that the Aristotle’s logical texts had been translated into Arabic in the eighth and ninth centuries, after which Arab thinkers produced commentaries and encyclopedias systematizing and analyzing the Aristotelian corpus—*Catalogue of the Sciences*(translated into Latin by Gerard of Cremona), *Rhetoric* and *Poetics* by al-Farabi. But the important of the transmission of Aristotle’s *Poetics* was Ibn Rushd’s *Commentary on the Poetics of Aristotle*

(translated into Latin in 1256 by Hermannus Alemannus). Ibn Rushd's commentary, in its Latin contribution, was influence in the Middle Ages than Aristotle's *Poetics* itself. It was the most important theoretical literary-critical statement of the scholastic period (Hardison, 1974, : 15).

Afterwards, Aristotle was taken as the fundamental philosophical foundation of the scholastics, and he replaced Plato as the primary philosophical basis of Christian theology. It is clear that scholasticism was generated and sustained fundamentally by an emphasis on logic or dialectic. As a part of logic Literature which is for the manipulation of language. Literature was seen as a form rather than as containing any specific value. This conception was intense influenced by Islamic philosophers such as Ibn Rushd. As mention Ibn Rushd contribution above, the most important scholastic account, Ibn Rushd's *Commentary on Aristotle's Poetics*—as did Aquinas in the context of his vastly influential world view or Dante's *Epistle to Can Grande della Scala*, which is one of the famous practical applications of scholastic criticism. The Aristotelian interpretation was focus more on the human qualities of authors to opposed the agency of God (as in scripture) or impersonalized sources of authority to be imitated in authorial roles and literary forms. On that account, the liberal critics was supported of using the term of author, material, style, structure, and effect (M.A.R. Habib).

In his interpretations of Aristotle, he gets to remove the elements of Neo-Platonism that had until now distorted earlier Arabic readings of the Greek philosopher. Habib suggested the three Ibn Rushd's theses:

- (1) poetry is defined broadly as the art of praise or blame, based on re-presentations of moral choice;
- (2) the purpose of poetry is to produce a salutary effect upon its audience, through both excellence of imitative technique and performative elements such as melody, gesture, and intonation;
- and (3) poetry is viewed as a branch of logic, or

logical discourse, which is compared and contrasted with rhetorical discourse (M.A.R. Habib).

Habib cited Ibn Rushd argue that the subjects of poetry are “*deal with matters of choice, both good and bad.*” The Ibn Rushd’s central thesis as “*Every poem and all poetry are either blame or praise*” was referred to Aristotle’s *Poetics* especially in chapter IV. A poem of praise should represent “a virtuous act of choice which has universal application to virtuous activities and not a particular application to an individual instance of virtue.” Ibn Rushd give an example of an epic of homer as according to Aristotle. The subjects are related with the aim of poetic is motivated people to virtue and vice.

What is meant by “universal application”? Habib suggests that a “representation can arouse the passions of pity or fear in the soul, through stimulating the imagination”. But it should represent their “character” which “includes actions and moral attitudes”. Ibn Rushd’s claim is that a virtuous act should be based on moral choice, not mere habit; as he says later, the actions portrayed by the poet should be “based on free choice and knowledge”.

Regarding poetic imitation, Ibn Rushd places great emphasis on realism. Whereas Aristotle talks of the poet representing what is probable, Ibn Rushd insists that the poet only engage in true representations, speaking “only of things that exist or may exist”. The poet in fact “only gives names to things that exist,” and his representations are based on things that are in nature, not things that are “made up or imaginary.” Like Aristotle, he suggests that the poet is close to the philosopher inasmuch as he speaks “in universal terms”. But Ibn Rushd insists that, just as “the skilled artist depicts an object as it is in reality... the poet should depict and form the object as it is in itself... so that he imitates and expresses the character and habits of the soul” (M.A.R. Habib).

...he goes so far as to say that poetry is most truthful when

it is based on direct experience: like everyone else, the poet “does best in reporting those things that he has understood for himself and almost seen first-hand with all their accidents and circumstances”.

In other words, unlike Aristotle, Ibn Rushd sees as realism or naturalism as directly increasing the affective and imaginative energy, and therefore the moral impact of poetry. Like Aristotle, Ibn Rushd related the pleasure of reception from poetry to the fact that representation is natural to human beings, and that we derive pleasure from images of things; he appends that we also derive it from meter and melody. He also cites that “the six basic errors” that the poet should avoid: 1) representing the impossible, 2) distorted representation, 3) representing rational beings by irrational ones, 4) comparing a thing to its contrary, 5) using words with ambiguous meanings, and 6) resorting to rhetorical persuasion rather than poetic representation. (M.A.R. Habib).

Aristotle had differ between elements intrinsic to poetry, such as mode of representation, plot, and character, and elements extrinsic to the performance of the play or poem. Ibn Rushd examines Aristotle’s distinction between “intrinsic” and “extrinsic” elements of poetry, using these two factors – imitation or representation and melody – as the basis of the distinction. In general, he acknowledges that the poet’s skill in both of these domains will affect an audience. The various features of performance “make the language more representational”. Having said this, he tends to agree with Aristotle that the skilled poet does not base on “extrinsic” performative aids. However, poetic speeches that express truth vividly do not need external sense. Ibn Rushd also recognize an internal connection between poetic representation and human emotion, based implicitly on a interrelation between the “external” world of objects and the “internal” world of human sense.

Ibn Rushd at least settle for poetry an important moral

function, but also agree with an epistemological function. For Ibn Rushd there are the two functions which are integrally related. He cited the moral function and the truth value. He stressed on the unity of poetic, and also need for poetry to produce a powerful effect on its audience.

E. Conclusion

In the end the text of Ibn Rushd's *Commentary on the Poetics of Aristotle* was transmitted to Europe in which influenced the history of literary criticism. Ibn Rushd is known primarily the Islamic philosopher and jurist. He had a profound impact on the medieval West, where he achieved wide influence among both Christian and Jewish scholars. However, ironically, as W. Montgomery Watt said, "for the subsequent history of Islamic thought, Ibn Rushd's influence in the Islamic world was far smaller than his impact on Christian Europe." Watt argues that Ibn Rushd failed to convince Islamic scholars and theologians of the propriety of philosophy within their religious visions. For this reason, M.A.R. Habib realized a history of literary criticism as well as in Islamic sense. He was interleaving Ibn Rushd's criticism that put in mildly for Arabic reader.

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