From the death of the author to the birth of the reader: situating reception theory in western literary criticism

Dr. Mansour Al-Harthy
Saudi Arabia

1.1 Introduction

In Western tradition, literary text has typically been interpreted using any one of a number of approaches drawn from such disciplines as linguistics, psychology, sociology, and history, all of which relate to the author as an individual. Each one of these approaches claims to reveal a specific aspect of the human experience and conceives of the author as being the creator of a text which reflects his/her own unique experience. In these approaches, the author is considered to be more important than the text, and even less attention is paid to the concept of the reader.

In his now famous essay, which announced "The Death of the Author", French literary critic and theorist Roland Barthes noted the extent to which the author has tended to be viewed as being of key importance in literary studies, dominating even the literary text itself:

The author still reigns in histories of literature, biographies of writers, interviews, magazines, as in the very consciousness of men of letters anxiousto unite their person and their work through diaries and memoirs. (1977:143)

Originally published in the late 1960s, Barthes' essay reflects the shift in critical approaches to literary texts which had taken place over the course of the twentieth century including the emergence of so-called New Criticism in the West. This new critical understanding redefined the concepts of author and reader, and even of text itself. The author's claims to influence and ultimate authority over the text as its solecreator were challenged. As the reign of the author

came to an end, the text was liberated and granted autonomous status. Freeing the text in this way also opened it up to various methods of interpretation and shifted emphasis to the role of the readeras receiver of the text.

This paper will focus on those disciplines, movements, schools and theories that made a major contribution to producing this revolution in critical thinking about literary texts which was to have a significant impact on the establishment of Reception Theory, the approach which is of central importance in this study.

1.1 Towards Reception Theory

1.1.1 Ferdinand de Saussure

An approach which focused primarily on the language of texts, placing this at the primary level of critical understanding, was particularly influential in the establishment of movements and philosophies such as the Russian Formalists (in particular, the Prague Linguistic School), Structuralism, and Marxist theories. These developments are usually most closely associated with the work of Ferdinand de Saussure whose importance is highlighted by Harris:

No one writing about Saussure today needs to take on the task of establishingthe historical importance of Saussurean ideas; for that has already been established beyond question and many times over. Saussure's influence,direct and indirect, dominates the twentieth-century development of those academic disciplines devoted to the study of language, languages and analysis of text. (2001: 01)

Saussure's impact was also felt in philosophy and in the sciences (Holdcroft, 1991: 04) but his influence is most strongly linked to linguistics and literary criticism,more specifically critical theories, such as Structuralism and Semiotics. Both of these can be traced to ideas originally put forward by Saussure in his lectures published as *Cours de linguistique générale* [Course in General Linguistics] (1916).

One of the best-known passages in Saussure's work is the analogy which he draws between

language and the game of chess, considering them both to be systems:

As the game of chess is entirely in the combination of the different chess pieces, language is characterized as a system based entirely on the oppositionof its concrete units. We can neither dispense with becoming acquainted withthem nor take a single step without coming back to them; and still, delimitingthem in such a delicate problem that we may wonder at first whether they really exist. (1983: 107)

David Holdcroft explores Saussure's use of the chess game analogy to illustrate the importance of language as a system:

[Saussure] does not expand on this claim, but presumably what he has in mind is the fact that to learn how to play chess someone has to learn what thepoint of the game is, what the relative weights of the pieces are, and what their legitimate moves are. Moreover, none of these things would seem to be determined by external exigencies or designed to achieve an ulterior purpose;they are internal to the game in the sense that they depend on the nature of the game itself and nothing else. (1991: 78)

Just like the pieces in a game of chess, each unit of language has a specific location with its own individual role. Any change in the place of a unit also leads to a significant change in its function. Thus, the value of each linguistic unit depends on its position within the text, and every word in the text is important, subject to its position in the context. Saussure's idea of studying language as an independent system is a development which later influenced the ideas of Structuralism, particularly when viewing language as a number of units which form the overall vision of the text.

This idea led Saussure to consider the units of language which made up the text, andto conclude that:

The statement that everything in language is negative is true only if the signified and the signifier are considered separately, when we consider the sign in its totality, we have something that is positive in its own class. A linguistic system is a series of differences of sound combined with a series ofdifferences of ideas; but the pairing of a certain number of

acoustical signs with as many cuts made from the mass of thought engenders a system of values; and this system serves as the effective link between the phonic and psychological elements within each sign. (1983: 120)

Saussure talks of the need for a comprehensive integrated study of both parts of the language system, which he refers to as the signified and the signifier. Furthermore, he recognises that the relationship between these two elements is significant. This idea created a new critical approach which views the text as a linguistic document composed of various elements, each having its own value. As Jonathan Cullerexplains, this approach to reading the text entailed trying to focus on the text's meaning based on its language as the link that connects all of these elements,maintaining it in isolation from its historical and social context, or as he puts it: "Thelink between language and mind had to be broken for a time – and language had to be studied as an object itself. It had to be treated, temporarily, as a system of forms with no special relation to mind" (1976: 59).

Here Culler encourages readers to focus solely on discovering the language itself, not as a system which builds and gathers the text units but as the purpose of reading the text. This approach is beneficial in the fields of pure linguistic studies. However, critical studies have been influenced by this linguistic knowledge which contributed to the development of the methods of literary criticism.

In his work, Saussure discusses a broad range of issues including linguistic value,the mechanism of language, the distinction between the linguistics of language(*langue*) and of speech (*parole*), and language as a system of signs. It can therefore be said that many of the principles and concepts originally outlined by Saussure at

the start of the twentieth century, such as diachronicity and synchronicity, entity, unit, sign (the basis of semiotics) and phoneme had a major influence not only on Western linguistics

but also on literary criticism.

1.1.1 The Russian Formalists: Viktor Shklovsky and RomanJakobson

Saussure's idea of viewing literary text as a piece of language that could be analysedusing appropriate tools was taken up by the Russian formalists who advocated the transformation of literary theory in 1917 when Viktor Shklovsky published his essay*Art as Device*. Along with Shklovsky, the most prominent thinkers of RussianFormalism are considered to be Boris Eichenbaum, Boris Tomashkevsky, YuriTynyanov and Roman Jakobson who later became a member of the Prague School. [4]Formalists' principles and their method of interpreting literary text were crystallised in Shklovsky's *Art as Device*, which explains how to use language in a literary way by creating "defamiliarization". [5] Shklovsky states that the purpose of literary language "is not to make us perceive meaning, but to create a special perception of the object - it creates a vision of the object instead of serving as a means for knowing it" (Lemon and Reis, 1965: 18). According to Shklovsky, making objects unfamiliar enables readers to see them in a new and unexpected way. Therefore defamiliarization makes the literary text attractive to readers as it creates an element of surprise and encourages them to search for the causes of this in the text. The reader is then in a position to engage with text.

For Formalists, artistic technique is not intended to deliver meaning as much as it is to make readers look at the familiar in a new light. Shklovsky discussed how Leo Tolstoy employed "defamiliarization" as an artistic technique in his writing.

After we see an object several times, we begin to recognize it. The object isin front of us and we know it, but we do not see it, hence we cannot say anything significant about it. Art removes objects from the automatism of perception in several ways […] Tolstoy makes the familiar seem strange by not naming the familiar objects. He describes an object as if he were seeing itfor the first time, an event as if it were happening for the first time. In describing

something, he avoids the accepted names of its part and instead names corresponding parts of other objects. (ibid: 13)

Shklovsky's essay played a crucial role in the transformation of criticism. The relationship between the language of the text and its process of interpretation has without a doubt been changed by defamiliarization. Defamiliarization opens the text up to the reader rather than the author.

Russian Formalists examined the language of the literary text in isolation from its thematic content in order to find out how the author had constructed the text; they became fixated on examining the arrangement of the words in the literary text. In short, their interests lay in analysing **how** poets and novelists wrote, not **what** they wrote about. As Peretc[6] has observed: "One must always bear in mind that in literaryhistory the object of investigation is not what the authors are saying but how theyare saying it" (Erlich, 1965: 56). Indeed it could be argued that the Formalists' method reflects the inherent relationship between theory and practice since theformation of theories is based on collecting the phenomena of a practice and analysing them.

More specifically, this method of reading literature opened up two new perspectives on the text: the first highlighted the analysis of the author's creativity in terms of his/her use of literary language, the second placed emphasis on the reader and his/her ability to perceive the aesthetics of the text.

With the passage of time, the idea of looking at the impact of craftsmanship on the literary text evolved among the Russian Formalists until they began to classify language as literary or practical, the purpose of the latter being to enable effective communication among members of a community which is generally understood to be the core function of language. However, there are no words that are used exclusively in literature, words themselves being the same in

both practical and literary types of language. They argued that the differences between literary and practical language are implicit in the types, combinations, and arrangement of wordsin the text:

One might apply this fairly easily to a writer such as Gerard Manley Hopkins, whose language is difficult in a way which draws attention to itself as literary, but it is also easy to show that there is no intrinsically literary language. Opening Hardy's *Under the Greenwood Tree* at random, we read the exchange"How long will you be?"' "Not long. Do wait and talk to me." There is absolutely no linguistic reason to regard the words as "literary". We read them as literary rather than as an act of communication only because we read themin what we take to be a literary work. (Selden, 1997: 32)

Thus, critical schools have tended to analyse what makes literary language literary, which features distinguish it from other types of expression, leading some critics to focus on the form and others on meaning. Formalist theory adopts the formerposition, namely that literary language can be distinguished from non-literary language in terms of the quality of its construction. In this respect, Formalists considered poetry to be: "the quintessentially literary use of language: it is speech organized in its entire phonic texture. Its most important constructive factor isrhythm" (ibid: 32).

At this stage, literary criticism focused on the text as language and meaning, andwas already treating the text as having a form of independence from the author. Increasingly, critical and linguistic studies began to concentrate on the language of the text and language functions. Together with fellow countryman, Petr Bogatyrev, Roman Jakobson, one of the key Russian Formalists, helped to found what later became known as the Prague School of linguistic theory in 1926. At this stage, Jakobson began to concentrate on the functions of language through his analysis of communication as a language system and he identified six different communication functions that are connected to both the sender and the recipient: referential, emotive, conative, phatic, metalingual and poetic. According to Jakobson, these

functions vary in importance, the poetic one being of key importance:

The poetic function is not the sole function of verbal art but only its dominant, determining function, whereas in all other verbal activities it acts as a subsidiary, accessory constituent. This function, by promoting the palpability of signs, deepens the fundamental dichotomy of signs and objects. Hence, when dealing with the poetic function, linguistics cannotlimit itself to the field of poetry. (cited in Sebeok, 1960: 356)

Jakobson's identification of the poetic function of language in communication between sender and receiver also proved to be another essential step in the processof shifting the focus from the author to the reader.

Jakobson also studies the six factors he says determine the functions of language:the addresser, message, addressee, context, code, and contact:

The **addresser** sends a **message** to the **addressee**. To be operative themessage requires a **context** referred to ('referent' in another, somewhatambiguous, nomenclature), graspable by the addressee, and either verbal or capable of being verbalized; a **code** fully, or at least partially, common to theaddresser and addressee (or in other words, to the encoder and decoder of themessage); and, finally, a **contact,** a physical channel and psychological connection between the addresser and the addressee, enabling both of themto enter into and stay in communication. (ibid: 353)

Here, Jakobson develops the idea of the speaking-circuit which was proposed by Saussure (1983: 11-13). According to this notion, the message starts from the sender's brain and goes into the receiver's ear through physiological transmission. Basing his ideas on Saussure's speaking-circuit, Jakobson demonstrates how the message forms inside the sender's mind, and how it then reaches the receiver. It can therefore be said that, this school of thought raised awareness about authors' ability to give meaning to a text. Using elements of linguistic communication theory, it waspossible to consider how meaning was conveyed from the author's mind to that of the reader. Applying this model to understanding literary communication prompted critics to view these factors separately, in the process creating the

three major types of emphasis which were to persist in literary criticism for several decades. One grouping of critics focused on the role of the author, analysing the individual writer's style. A second set of critics were more interested in exploring the role of the text and examining its linguistic aspects. This group contributed to the development of structuralism and post-structuralism. It was not until sometime later that a new critical school would emerge which finally focused on the role of the reader, namely, Reception Theory.

1.1.1 Barthes, Eco and the Role of the Reader

Structuralism is one of the most influential critical theories in the history of Western literary criticism. Like Russian Formalism, it was influenced by the development of Saussure's and Jakobson's ideas, and its main interest lies in the form of the text rather than the content. As Rice and Waugh note: "Structuralism is not particularly interested in meaning *per se,* but rather in attempting to describe and understand the conventions and modes of signification which make it possible to mean; that is, it seeks to discover the conditions of meaning" (1996: 22-23).

Structuralist studies contributed greatly to reducing the author's authority over the text, as they viewed interpretation in terms of reading literary text as an open document. In this way, the reader is able to engage with the text through its language. As previously noted, one of the most prominent thinkers of structuralismis Roland Barthes whose essay, entitled "The Death of the Author" (1968), provedto be immensely influential in the development of reader-centred thinking.

Barthes notes that he is not the first to have written about the "death of the author", and cites the French poet Stéphane Mallarmé as being one of the first advocates for liberating text from its author, on the grounds that the text expresses itself throughits language, poetics and aesthetics. In his essay, Barthes argues:

It is language which speaks, not the author: to write is to reach, through a pre-existing impersonality – never to be confused with the castrating objectivity of the realistic novelist – that point where language alone acts, "performs," and not "oneself": Mallarmé's entire poetics consists of suppressing the author for the sake of the writing.(1977: 143)

Here Barthes revives Mallarmé's concept and refines it, applying Saussure's idea; according to which the recipient must treat the text as a language system.

Barthes' essay have been interpreted in at least three ways. Some critics haveequated the death of the author with the revival of the text; others have argued that the death of the author signifies the birth of the reader; whilst a third group maintain that Barthes' declaration was premature and that the author is still alive and well.The debate among Western critics regarding the relative importance of reader and author-centred approaches has lingered on, despite the influence of the ideas of structuralist theorists such as Barthes and Umberto Eco. Gough has also ironically suggested that the critic deserves greater attention: "If there are given rules, wemight decide that the critic is given a higher importance than the author, since the former is more industrious in exposing the structuralist truth in texts or narratives" (1997: 230).

Barthes' proclamation of the Death of the Author finds its parallels in the work of German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche who had declared "the Death of God", in the nineteenth century. Nietzsche was reacting against the despotism of the Church, which obliged people to follow rules which it had ordained, in this sense meaningthe Church suppressed the role of the receiver. Therefore, in order to give people, theright to question the authority of the Church, there was need for a revolution in thinking. By comparing these two concepts, the idea of the death of the author can be redefined as the revolution against the authority of the author and the freeing upof the text to multiple interpretations discovered in its own contents and poetics. Barthes elaborated on this point:

Literature[7] (it would be better from now on to say writing), by refusing to assign a secret, an ultimate meaning, to the text (and to the world as text), liberates an activity that may be called an anti-theological activity, that is truly revolutionary since to refuse to fix meaning is, in the end to refuse God and his hypostases - reason, science, the law. (Barthes, 1977: 147)

This revolution gives the reader the freedom to enter into dialogue with the literary text.

Barthes' comments on the importance which has typically been placed on the role ofthe author in various artistic fields:

The image of literature to be found in contemporary culture is tyrannically centred on the author, his person, his history, his tastes, his passions; criticism still consists, most of the time, in saying that Baudelaire's work is the failure of the man Baudelaire, Van Gogh's work his madness, Tchaikovsky's his vice: the explanation of the work is always sought in the man who has produced it, as if, through the more or less transparent allegory of fiction, it was always finally the voice of one and the same person, the author, which delivered his confidence. (ibid: 143)

For Barthes, the authority of the author does not exceed that of the text and the author cannot defend his/her views or purposes because he/she has become less important than the text from the point of view of the reader. Barthes attempts to exclude the effect of both the author and of literary history when dealing with text, aiming to detect patterns in acoustic, morphological and stylistic structures, regardless of what was written by the author. Instead, his focus lay in answering the question of how it was said.

A text is made of multiple writings, drawing from many cultures and entering into mutual relations of dialogue, parody, contestation; but there is one place where this multiplicity is focused, and that place is the reader, not, as was hitherto said the author. The reader is the space on which all the citations that make up writing are inscribed, without any of them being lost;a text's unity lies not in its origin but in its destination. Yet, this destination cannot any

longer be personal: the reader is without history, biography, psychology; he is simply that someone who holds together in a single field all the traces of which the written text is constituted. (ibid: 148) Barthes viewed the reader as an empty vessel into which all the information and experiences provided by the text are poured. Here Barthes stresses the important role of the reader in interpreting the text as he/she wishes. Building on the work of Saussure and Jakobson, Barthes emphasised the primacy of the text and the need for this to be interpreted independently by the reader, freed from the constraints that culture's insistence on the prime importance of the author-text relationship had traditionally imposed. Gough summarises the implications of the death of the author for literary critics in the following terms:

The text is the bearer of its meaning. It is an object in its own right, an entity persisting over time separately from any person and it is open to viewing and interpretation by the eyes of all and sundry, open to the author no more than anyone else, the same object to anyone who understands the language in which it is written. (Gough, 1997: 230)

These ideas also influenced the work of Italian semiotician, literary critic and writer, Umberto Eco, who created the concept of *opera aperta* or open text, in which he envisages the reader having direct access to interpreting the text without needing to have regard for the authority of the writer. His critical approach is based on semiotics and he emphasises the reader's response to the text. Eco's essay "The Role of The Reader" (1979) is one of his most influential pieces of writing, and it is here that he coins the term "model reader". Eco claims that:

To make his text communicative, the author has to assume that the ensemble of codes he relies upon is the same as that shared by his possible reader. The author has thus to foresee a model of the possible reader (hereafter Model Reader) supposedly able to deal interpretively with the expressions in the same way as the author deals generatively with them. (Eco, 1979: 07)

Eco thus views the text as a collaboration between the author and the reader, with each having their own function. The role of the author is to generate meaning and that of the reader is to

interpret this code, but he/she is free to read or respond to the text as he/she wishes, without viewing the author as its sole owner. As the nextsection of this paper will show the founders of Reception Theory in German studies were greatly influenced by Eco's views.

1.2 Reception Theory (*Rezeptionsasthetik*)

1.2.1 Hans Robert Jauss and the Horizon of Expectation

The late 1960s and early 1970s marked the beginning of *Rezeptionsasthetik* (literally, reception aesthetics), normally known as Reception Theory. This was a product of the University of Konstanz, and the two German academics, Hans Robert Jauss and Wolfgang Iser, are two of the most important founding members of this theoretical school. In 1967, Jauss delivered his inaugural lecture entitled "What is, and to what end does one study literary history?" deliberately echoing the title of Friedrich Schiller's own inaugural lecture delivered May 26 1789 "What is, and to what end does one study universal history?" In it Jauss described the impact of history on our understanding of the present and called for a new approach to literary studies.

There had been other attempts at discussing this topic, most notably an article by Harald Weinrich, entitled *'für eine literaturgeschichte des lesers'* (For a Literary History of the Reader) and Iser's lecture, "Indeterminacy and the Reader's Responsein Prose Fiction"'. In his lecture Jauss compared Marxist and Formalist viewpoints on the interpretation of literary texts, arguing that the former are interested inlooking into the text's meaning, whereas the latter consider form and poetics. Jauss, however, proposed a new method of understanding a literary text, *Rezeptionsasthetik,* which focuses on the text's impact on its recipient (Selden, 1995: 319-320).

Every theory has its roots and its precursors and, in the case of Reception Theory, Holub notes that these include Russian formalism, Prague school structuralism, the phenomenology of

Roman Ingarden, Hans-Georg Gadamer's hermeneutics, as well as approaches from the sociology of literature (1984: 14). Holub also highlights much older connections, drawing links between Reception Theory and ideas expressed by Aristotle concerning audience response:

Aristotle's *Poetics*, by its inclusion of catharsis as a central category of aesthetic experience, may be considered the earliest illustration of a theory inwhich audience response plays a major role. In fact, the entire tradition of rhetoric and its relationship to poetic theory can likewise be viewed as a precursor by virtue of its focus on the impact of oral and written communication on the listener or reader. (ibid: 12) [8]

Given that Arab thought in the Abbasid era was greatly influenced by the ideas of Aristotle, this may be one of the reasons for the emergence of the interest inaudience reception in Arabic rhetoric. This idea is explored in greater depth in Paper Three.

Jauss created the concept of the "horizon of expectation" as the basis of Reception Theory, and he also draws on Gadamer's hermeneutic concept with its focus on the three acts of the hermeneutic process: understanding, interpretation and application (1982: 139). Moreover, the importance of applying historical knowledge to our understanding of the present also forms one of the most important and influential factors in Jauss' ideology.

Jauss links the idea of the horizon of expectation with the process of text interpretation. He does this by relying on the reader's literary knowledge and linguistic background. This relationship adds clarity to the theory as they provide readers with specific principles that aid them in their interpretation of the text.

Moreover, Jauss emphasised the importance of the reader acquiring prior knowledgeregarding the literary genre being read. Selden explains Jauss' method thus:

Jauss suggests three ways to objectify the horizon of works that are historically less sharply delineated. First, one could employ normative standards associated with the genre. Second,

one could examine the work against other familiar works in its literary heritage or in historical surroundings. Finally, one can establish a horizon by distinguishing between fiction and reality, between the poetic and practical function of language, a distinction that is available to the reader at any historical moment. (1995: 323)

Jauss reiterates the importance of establishing the horizon of expectation and then assessing the aesthetic distance between the individual work and this horizon, as this is the process which allows critical readers to make their assessment of the quality of the text (ibid: 323). This concept of "aesthetic distance" helps to differentiate between three reader reactions. In the first instance, the reader finds the piece of writing is composed according to known aesthetic standards and conforms to his/her expectations. In this case, inherited aesthetic norms are invoked and replicated to constitute a sort of artistic tradition, and preserve its aesthetic heritage based on the historical value of literature. In this case the literary reception is coupled with satisfaction and even a sense of euphoria caused by the aesthetic pleasure which is characteristic of texts with inherited aesthetic traditions. The result is what Barthes (1976) refers to as the Pleasure of the Text.

In the second case, there is a conflict between a new work of literature and the familiar and customary horizon of expectations. This is the reason why some new works are initially found to be unacceptable for a while. They lack a receptive community due to their new style and/or themes, their altered function, or their innovation in terms of genre. For these reasons, they seem so odd when they first appear that the audience is disappointed and gets a feeling of dissatisfaction and dysphoria; unlike when the work lies within the recipient's horizon of expectations. In the third case, the new aesthetic standards of the work manage to establish a new horizon of expectations that acquires its own artistic credit which is dialectically related to contemporary questions and concerns. This can happen when there is a group of readers with sufficient open-mindedness and intellect to accept this new horizon and

appreciate it. Thus, their horizon of expectations as well as their literaryrepertoire is gradually expanded (Ḥamīd, 2005).

In addition, Jauss' theory opens up the study of specific literary readings and of reading strategies and also introduces the concept of different types of readers, including the super-reader who "is not only equipped with the sum total of literary historical knowledge available today, but is also capable of consciously registering every aesthetic impression and referring it back to the text's structure of effect" (1982: 144).

1.2.2 Wolfgang Iser and the Role of the Reader

Iser is perhaps most associated with the concept of the implied reader and although he does not focus on this idea in *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response* (1980), this term has gained the attention of many critics and scholars. ForIser, the purpose of the implied reader is to bridge the gap between the text and the reader in new ways through the interactive model of reading (Selden, 1995: 330). According to his original definition, in his book *the implied reader: patterns of communication in prose fiction from Bunyan to Beckett,* this concept incorporates "both the pre-structuring of the potential meaning by the text, and the reader's actualization of this potential through the reading process" (Iser, 1974: xii). Jauss and Iser are representatives of the two branches of the Konstanz School, the main difference between their works being that Jauss was greatly influenced by hermeneutics, whereas Iser was more interested in the work of Polish theorist Roman Ingarden on the role of the reader in the production of the text's meaning.

In his work, Ingarden distinguishes four strata or layers of meaning within a literary work:

The phonetic stratum (2) the semantic stratum (3) the stratum of objectivitiesrepresented by purely intentional states of things defined by the meanings of sentences, and (4) the stratum of schematized aspects by means of which represented objectivities of the work become

manifest. (1973: 12)

The literary work is thus framed by these strata and Ingarden views the completionof these and hence the production of meaning as being the reader's responsibility (Selden, 1995: 298).

According to Zhonggang:

The stratum which functions as the transition to the meaning intention is of great importance for the aesthetic value of the work. The stratum of meanings makes it possible for the author/poet to infuse a literary work with his intentions and for readers to infer the meanings of the work. In addition, understanding a sentence means actualizing the meaning intentions in that sentence. (2006: 48)

For Iser, Ingarden's "interactive model" of reading, in which "the convergence of text and reader brings the literary work into existence" served as the basis ofReception Theory. Iser further notes that this text-reader convergence "can never be precisely pinpointed, but must always remain virtual, as it is not to be identified either with reality of the text or with individual disposition of the reader" (1974: 274).

The According to Iser, the reader is able to create the meaning of the literary text by interacting with it without any external influences, and through a process of filling in the gaps (*Leerstelle*)[9] which can take several forms. At its most basic level, this process involves merely connecting various segments in a text. Thus, a plot will break off at one point in a novel and resume at a later time, at which point the readeris called upon to fill in the gap by supplying missing information about whatoccurred interim (Selden, 1995: 333). Here, in Iser's adoption of Ingarden's notion of gap filling, it can be seen that each reader applies what he/she knows when supplying the missing information, and in this sense, participates with the author in the creation of meaning.

This process of gap-filling may lead to the single meaning originally owned by the author being transformed into multiple meanings from various sources. Ingarden observes that

literary works of art contain a great deal of indeterminacy, and argues that this lack of determinacy is not accidental as it is necessary for the literary text (1973: 51). Iser also highlights the need for the author to avoid filling in all the gaps in the text:

The author of the text may, of course, exert plenty of influences on the reader's imagination – he has the whole panoply of narrative techniques at his disposal – but no author worth his salt will ever attempt to set the whole picture before his reader's eyes. If he does, he will quickly lose his reader,for it is only by activating the reader's imagination that the author can hope to involve him and realize the intentions of his text. (1974: 282)

According to Iser's idea of "realization", the interpretation of literary text is more the reader's responsibility than the author's, and this understanding opens up the literary text to multiple readings and interpretations. Iser made use of an anology to illustrate the multiplicity of readings offered by texts which contain indeterminacy:

Two people gazing at the night sky may both be looking at the same collection of stars, but one will see the image of a plough, and the other will make out a dipper. The "stars" in a literary text are fixed; the lines that join them are variable. (1974: 282)

The role of the horizon of expectations is to help limit the indeterminacy of meaningand to create a balance between the multiplicity of interpretations. In other words,the horizon of expectations can be said to help prevent the chaos of interpretation that can occur as a result of multiple interpretations of the text.

1.1 The Centrality of the Literary Recipient in Classical ArabicRhetoric

1.1.1 The Emergence of the Recipient

Since Classical Arabic rhetoricians were particularly interested in literary reception, the role played by the recipient in the process of literary creation was of major importance to them. Given that it can be argued that one of the main aims of rhetoricis to ensure discourse is

compatible with context, then rhetoric is concerned with how meaning is communicated to listeners or readers, and the extent to which this should be pitched at their level of understanding, taking into account both their psychological and ideological state. The importance of the recipient is not arbitrary, and there are logical reasons for the emergence of this concept.

Firstly, when Arabic literature was being established in the period from the pre- Islamic era until the early second Hijrah century, there was no codification of most Arabic knowledge. Literary works, whether poetry or prose, took the form of oral text communicated by the composer to the listener, who received it, memorised it, and then spread it. Thus, the role of recipients during that early period did not consist solely in appreciating the text; for in addition, they were assigned the role of memorising and disseminating the text. This made their role invaluable as they were the sole medium by which the text could be kept alive and disseminated to a broaderaudience.

A second factor which helps to explain the importance of the recipient in the literary process is that consumers of Classical Arabic literature possessed a highly developed level of linguistic competence and a remarkable socio-historicalawareness which qualified them to understand the poet (*al-shāʿir*) and to passjudgements on literary compositions. In the past, Arab poets travelled to the *Quraysh* (the people of Makkah) to introduce their poems to them. They were heldto be the arbiters of poetic quality and their approval or rejection of a poet's work guaranteed its popular success or failure (Al-Aṣfahānī, 1823: 112/21). For instance, al-Aṣfahānī cites the anecdote of al-Nābighah al-Dhubyānī who was one of the most famous poets in Makkah reproducing his critical rhetorical comments on some of Ḥassān bin Thābit's poetry:

For [al-Dhubyānī], it was rhetorically more effective to describe swords with the expression بيرقن بالدجى (they sparkle in darkness) and not by يلمعن نحي اضحى (they twinkle in the midday), because guests come more often at night-time than during the day. Similarly, the expression يقطرن دما (dripping with blood) is less effective than يجرين دما (flowing with blood), because the former denotes "a limited number of people killed by the fighter's sword", while the latter signifies "the pouring down of blood from the large number of people killed by the fighter's sword". (cited in Ḥusayn, 2006: 32)

Most of al-Nābighah's comments reproduced here focus on the relationship between the signifier and signified, and examine the social meaning of the signification. This example shows how the method of rhetorical critique during the pre-Islamic era and up to the early second Hijrah century depended on recipient response which was based on their own cultural, linguistic and critical background. A further piece of evidence which suggests the extent to which the people of Makkah were noted for their linguistic abilities as recipients of Classical Arabic compositions is that in the Qurʾān they are challenged by Allah to produce some verses imitating Qurʾānic style.[16]

At the beginning of the Islamic era, there was a growing interest in the role played by recipients, as Classical Arabic literature itself came under new influences. Some of these were external, such as Greek philosophical thought,[17] but new Islamic principles also transformed literary criticism. Poets were expected to be mindful of the moral and religious impact that their poems might exert on the minds of recipients/hearers and as a result, were expected to include some Islamic teachings in their work which would influence recipients to become virtuous:

There was a clear Islamic influence on the themes conveyed by various poetic genres such as romance, eulogy and satire. However, this influence was most marked in the appearance of ascetic and mystical subject matter. This was a logical response to the virtues and noble principles being spread by Islam. Muslims dealt with each other in an Islamic context with

the Prophet Muḥammad as their role model.[18] (Al- Samarrāʾī, 1977: 213)

Indeed, these new developments created closer links than had previously existed between the poet and the audience in the literary communication process, whichnow followed Islamic principles. The main aim of Arabic poetry during the early Islamic period was considered to be to guide recipients towards virtue and to extol moral values. Poets became very careful about the subjects that they referred to, howthey composed their works and the possible meanings which might be inferred from these, in order to avoid the threat of eternal damnation. This is clearly shown in the following quotation since according to the prophet Muḥammad:

"Shall I tell you of the root of the matter and of its contours and of its top?" I said: "Certainly, Messenger of Allah." He said: "The root of the matter is Islam, its contours are Prayers and its top is working in the cause of Allah (Jihad)." Then he asked: "Shall I tell you of that with which you can control ofall this?" I said: "Certainly, O Messenger of Allah." Then he took hold of his tongue and said: "Keep this in control." I said: "Shall we be called to account in respect of that which we say?" He answered: "May your mother lose you, will people not be thrown face down into Hell only on account of the harvest of their tongue". (cited in Al-Muntherī, 2000: 21/4)

This inevitably led to the emergence of new forms of Arabic literature. This new literary strategy was reflected in Arabic rhetoric, prompting growing interest in the role of the recipient.

1.1.2 Rhetoric and its Recipients

This interest in the importance of the role played by the recipient of literary texts surfaces in several places in Classical Arabic rhetoric studies and, interestingly, it makes an appearance as attempts were being made to define aspects of Arabic rhetoric itself. For example, al-Jāḥiẓ defines rhetoric as:

A concise appellation of all things, revealing and unveiling their meaning as well as reaping their harvest, by using whatever means, since the target and goal sought by the addresser and

the listener are understanding and explanation. Therefore, it [rhetoric] is how you elucidate meaning. (1960: 76/1)

Al-Jāḥiẓ here specifically mentions "understanding" and "explanation" in association with the concept of rhetoric, with the former being the goal of the addressee, while the former is the responsibility of the addresser. However, both are in favour of the recipient:

The addresser has to establish the nature of meaning and balance it betweenthe receivers' status and the nature of the circumstances by which each rank and each context has its own form of speech, in order to match what is said to what is meant, and to match what is meant to the status of the audience, as stated by Bishr bin al-Muʿtamir. (cited in Al-Jāḥiẓ, 1960: 139/1)

It is clear that Bishr envisages a significant role for the addresser in matching thetext to the recipient. Bishr bin al-Muʿtamir, who was the author of the earliest surviving document relating to Arabic rhetoric, said that the addresser must be aware of the circumstances of the recipients, and then use this knowledge in the literary text to attract them. Therefore, rhetoricians have decided that "the best words are the ones with a meaning that touches the heart faster than the sounds hit the ear" (Al-Jurjānī, 1991: 140).

According to al-Tawḥīdī "rhetoric lies in what is understood by the populace but accepted by the elite" (1988: 241/3) and he adds elsewhere that rhetoric should focus on the audience in two ways. Firstly, he emphasises the importance of the meaning of the text reaching recipients using sophisticated stylistic devices. Secondly, in order to achieve compatibility of discourse with context, rhetoricians must think about different types of recipients, such as the "populace" and the "elite",

taking into account their individual circumstances.

In Classical Arabic criticism there is evidence of great interest in the role of the recipient. Al-Jurjānī emphasises the need to engage recipients emotionally:

It is accepted that the point is to provoke a sense of wonder in the listener at something he has never seen. This amazement is not complete unless the speaker is daring, like someone who

does not care about being rejected but forces others willingly or unwillingly, to picture another sun rising from wherethe sun sets and their meeting together; the place where the first sun set becomes the place from whence the second rises. This kind of analogy usually seeks to amaze. It requires both art and craft in order to produce this unique appeal. Do you not see that the metaphor in his saying "*a sun to shade me from the glare of the sun*" is rather different from the metaphor in "*they never witness two suns*" despite the fact that both poets are declaring something that is uncommon and unconventional. (Al-Jurjānī, 1991: 92)

Al-Jurjānī focuses on provoking the amazement of the recipient as one of the most important aims of Arabic rhetoric. There are two techniques involved in creating thissense of wonder. Firstly, making things strange: this sense of strangeness is important in order to attract an addressee to a literary composition. Thus, the literarytext relies on defamiliarisation in its structure, which makes it attractive to the recipient.[19] This notion does not mean that literary meanings should be ambiguous and difficult for the recipient to understand, as its significance should be clear. This clarity of meaning is required for the text to be understood in the recipient's mind,so that it becomes as appealing as possible. Secondly, this inovolves using anelevated form of language to appeal to the listener, and presenting a carefully craftedidea. al-Jurjānī claims that if the nature of things is not clearly described andrevealed, but referred to obliquely by the addresser, this more subtle approach produces a greater emphasis (1992: 306).

Al-ʿAskarī also focuses on the importance of using a particular type of language when addressing recipients. He argues that words which are easy to pronounce and crystal-clear in meaning are ordinary and doomed to be rejected. The beauty of art isbelieved to lie in the illusion that stimulates the mind and enriches the emotions withtimeless experiences, as well as always being perceived as a coherent whole (1952: 79). This means that language has an important role to play in the poetics of literary text and, to a certain extent, in the creation of

meaning. This issue of *al-Lafẓ wa al- Maʿnā* (word versus meaning) became a key debate in Classical Arabic criticism.

However, choosing attractive meanings also has an important role in the production of a literary sentence, so the poet should employ words accurately. ʿAṣfūr (1991) asserts that a poem is a metaphorical composition which produces poetic effects. When denotation is detected by recipients, they are forced to contemplate this and beaffected by its connotations, carrying sensory streams referring to denotations and implicit signs, incorporating multiple meanings.

There is also evidence of interest in the role of the recipient when Classical critics discuss how the author maintains the attention of the recipient. Thus, ibn Ṭabāṭabā observes: "The bard diligently develops the exordium, heuristics, and then the conclusion, for they function as poetic means by which pathos and attentiveness are evoked" (2010: 25).

Finally, Classical Arabic critics paid great attention to the ability of recipients to interpret literary text. Sophisticated literary language is:

Like pearls in shells; you must open the shells. Those shells, like every very precious item, must be gently opened. Not every intellect is granted the opportunity to reveal the content, nor is access granted to every thought. Not everyone succeeds in opening the shell; those who do succeed are possessorsof knowledge. (Al-Jurjānī, 1991: 128)

A skilled recipient considers the contextual expressions, analyses the text and pays close attention to its stylistics in order to comprehend them. The careful recipient, therefore, has to grasp the value and aesthetics of a text, which requires a very knowledgeable recipient with refined tastes and a natural talent. Ibn Ṭabāṭabā determines a criterion for poetry which is based on the judgment of the knowledgeable recipients, who have the capability to judge the poem by their critical skills:

The proof of a poem's quality is determined by the expert recipient. If it is approved and accepted then it is well-crafted. If it is not approved andrejected, then it is not. This proof is based on the recipient's ability todistinguish between acceptable and unacceptable poetry, to approve or reject it on this basis. (2010: 20)

This judgment of the quality of Classical Arabic poetry was based on the criteria set by the concept of *ʿamūd al-shiʿr*.[20] Al-Jurjānī expresses this idea in the following terms: "each word approved and term sought should result in a logical rationale and an accepted cause. In addition, an approach to the sentence and authentic evidence for our thoughts should be provided." (1992: 41) Thus, Classical Arabic rhetoric restricted the freedom of poetic discourse by applying certain standards and criteria which became an important element of the expert recipient's expectations.

1.2 Conceptualising Literary Reception in Classical Arabic Rhetoric: From Pre-Islamic to Abbasid Literature

Strategies for reading Classical Arabic literature changed many times in line with the political, religious and social changes occurring in Arab society. This section traces the development of literary reception in Arabic rhetoric by exploring how recipients responded to Classical Arabic literary texts and the reading strategies theyemployed. It is important to note that just two literary genres were recognised at thattime: poetry and oration (*khaṭābah*). Since mapping the concept of literary reception in Classical Arabic rhetoric is a vast subject, four key issues have been chosen for in-depth examination.

The first of these relates to how recipients responded to literary text before the appearance of critical methods. The second examines the method of literary text reception using the work of Classical Arabic linguists. The third considers the work of al-Jāḥiẓ, the founder of literary

reception and Arabic rhetoric (*al-Bayān al-'Arabī*)*,* and the impact of his method on Arab critics, studying his rhetorical methodand focusing on how he interpreted the literary text in terms of its poetic function. The fourth focuses on the rhetorical ideas of one of the most important literary scholars of the period, ʿAbdulqāhir al-Jurjānī. Building on the work of al-Jāḥiẓ, he established the foundations of Arabic rhetoric, influencing subsequent schools of thought concerning literary reception. It is thus possible to determine three stages inthe evolution of the concept of literary reception in Classical Arab culture, namely, non-theoretical literary reception, linguistic reception, and rhetorical reception.

In the pre-Islamic era and early Islamic era, prior to the appearance of critical methods, there was no theory of literary reception, meaning that recipients judged work on the basis of their own criteria, without following any specific approach. Although there was no critical method in the pre-Islamic period, this was one of the most important periods of Arabic literature. This was mainly due to the people's reverence for poetry, and to the fact that poetry recounted Arab history and served asa repository of their knowledge and aphorisms (Khaldūn, 1377: 651). Ibn Sallām states that "poetry in the pre-Islamic era was the register of the people's learning andthe final word of their wisdom (*muntahā ḥukmihim*) which they adopted and followed" (cited in Beeston, 1983: 27). Moreover, ʿUmar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb stated: "There is no Arab knowledge except for poetry" and in a missive to Abū Mūsā al- Ashʿarī, he advises him to "ask people around about you to learn poetry because, it guides them to high morals, wisdom and knowledge of Arab heritage" (cited in Al- Qayrawānī, 1972: 10/1).

1.2.1 Pre-Islamic era

Arabs in the pre-Islamic era were more interested in poetry than any other literary form and poets were greatly honoured. According to al-Qayrawānī:

When there appeared a poet in a family of the Arabs, the other tribes roundabout would gather together to that family and wish them joy of their good luck. Feasts would be got ready, the women of the tribe would join together in bands, playing upon lutes, as they were wont to do at bridals, and the men and boys would congratulate one another; for a poet was a defence to the honour of them all, a weapon to ward off insult from their good name, and a means of perpetuating their glorious deeds and of establishing their fame forever. (cited in Lyall, 1930: 17)

In this passage, al-Qayrawānī shows the great stature that was accorded to poets during that historical period. A poet was able to raise the status of his tribe by praising it whilst at the same time denigrating another tribe by satirising it. In addition, poetry played a significant role in warfare amongst Arab tribes since poets spurred on combatants to defend their tribe and satirised their enemies.

The general consensus amongst critics is that that there was no critical doctrine during this historical period. Ḍayf claims that Classical Arabic criticism did not begin to develop until the end of the Umayyad period and that the criticism became more sophisticated in the Abbasid period, particularly when Arabic linguists started to study literary texts. In addition, Ḍayf confirms that Classical Arabic criticism in general was interested only in the individual issues in the pre-Islamic poetry. Moreover, Arab recipients did not study the poem (*qaṣīdah*) as a whole unit but studied each verse (*bayt*) individually (1962: 30-31).

However, some modern day critics deny the existence of any critical comments at that time. For instance, ʿAllām claims that since recipients in the pre-Islamic era were illiterate and simply listened to poetry being performed, they were not able to distinguish between *al-lafẓ wa al-maʿnā* (word and meaning).[21] ʿAllām notes that"if we had asked a poet in the pre-Islamic era of what was the most attractive featureof a poem, the words or its meaning, he would not have been able to understand you;for one simple reason; he did not distinguish

between them" (1979: 32). According to ʿAllām, neither poets nor those who listened to their poetry in the pre-Islamic period had the ability to make critical judgments which casts doubt on the validity ofthese claims concerning critical awareness.

Al-Qaṣṣāb notes that by the end of the pre-Islamic era, composing poetry was acraft, and poets were expected to study and work hard at becoming bards (2011: 14).Given that poetry in the pre-Islamic period was of an exceptionally high quality, it seems unlikely that it could have been produced by poets who lacked any sense of

the literary. Ḍayf argues that "the poets in the pre-Islamic period were interested in choosing the best words, meanings and imagery. And they were making critical judgments which are undoubtedly the basis of Arabic rhetoric" (1965: 13). This suggests that a pre-Islamic literary reception movement evolved in parallel with the development of poetry, and that the high quality of poetry was produced by interaction between poets and their recipients.

However, modern Arabic criticism has paid scant attention to this critical heritage ofthe pre-Islamic period for two main reasons. Firstly, since discourse relating literary reception at that time was unwritten, none of this has survived, unlike poetic texts which were more easily memorised, disseminated and eventually recorded in writtenform. The long gap between the pre-Islamic period and the period of codification ofArabic in the second century AH caused the loss of so much of the heritage of Classical Arabic criticism. Secondly, in the Islamic era, "the great majority ofMuslims had no sympathy whatever with the ancient poetry, which represented in their eyes the unregenerate spirit of heathendom. They wanted nothing beyond the Koran and the Ḥadīth." (Nicholson, 1914: 132)

However, traces of literary reception in the pre-Islamic era do still remain and canbe found in three key forms, namely *riwāyah*, poetry fairs and the development of the poetic genre known as *qaṣīdah*.

1.3.1.1 *Riwāyah* (Transmitting)

The first form of these can be found in the interaction between the poet and the *rāwī* (transmitter):

The Arab poet was not a narrator. He was a master of brevity, a magician of rhythm and words. His transmitter or *rāwī* would act as a commentator to supply detail and the necessary background. Having already reached the heartsof his listeners through the effect of his verses, he left the elucidation of their meaning to be dealt with by his transmitter. Hence, from ancient time, Arabic poetry needed its commentators-cum-transmitters. (Beeston, 1983: 29)

The *rāwī* thus played an essential role in ensuring that the poem was interpreted by all the recipients, and he was the link between poet and audience. The transmitter was the most important resource for Arabic poetry in that he memorised the poems then disseminated them among people. Thus, the transmitter had to have the appropriate linguistic and cultural background; he also must be an expert in *ayyām al-ʿArab*,[22] in order to be able to understand the references in poems and then convey them correctly. The most famous transmitters in Classical Arabic criticism were al-Aṣmaʿī, Abi ʿAmr bin al-ʿAlāʾ and al-Mufaḍḍal al-Ḍabbī (Al-Jumaḥī, 1974: 46/1). Al-Qayrawānī relates that when Ruʾbah bin al-ʿAjjāj was asked: "Who is the *faḥl* [23] of the poets?' He replied: The transmitter" (1988: 114). It is clear that *riwāyah* (the act of transmitting poetry) was the first step in honing their poetic skillsfor novice poets, since by memorising poems they learnt large quantities of vocabulary and how to employ a range of figures of speech, being exposed to themin the structure of the literary discourse:

They attached themselves to the poet as admirers and diffusers of his verses, learning them by heart and declaiming them after his manner or in accordance with his directions. Often a transmitter would himself be a poet and, in turn, would also have someone to transmit his own verses. Zuhayr stood in relation to his maternal uncle, Bashāmah b. al-Ghadīr, and to the poet Aws b. Ḥajar, and, in turn; he had Ḥuṭayʾah himself, to become a poet of renown, as his transmitter. (Beeston, 1983: 29)

Thus, before poetry could be recorded in written form, pre-Islamic poets were wholly dependent on *riwāyah* as a means of disseminating their work to recipients.

The central importance of the role of the *rāwī* is reflected in the fact that much of the work of that period has been lost because "numbers of *rāwīs* perished in the wars, or passed away in the course of nature, without leaving any one to continue their tradition" (Nicholson, 1914: 132).

1.3.1.2 *Al-aswāq al-shiʿriyyah* (Poetry fairs)

The popularity of *al-aswāq al-shiʿriyyah* (Poetry fairs) is another example of the existence of a tradition of literary reception in the pre-Islamic era. Poetry fairs, such as those held at Dhu al-Majāz, Mijannah and most famous of all, ʿUkāẓ, were the places where poets performed for audiences during the pilgrimage season:

Plenty of excitement was provided by poetical and oratorical displays, not by athletic sports, as in ancient Greece and modern England. Here rival poets declaimed their verses and submitted them to the judgment of acknowledged masters. Nowhere else had rising talents such an opportunity to gain wide reputation: what ʿUkāẓ said today all Arabia would repeat tomorrow. (ibid: 135)

These fairs functioned as a major means of disseminating poetry at that time. During these events, there were several types of recipients. Firstly, the average recipient was interested in listening to his preferred poets and relied purely on his personal likes or dislikes in relation to poetic texts. Secondly, there were also *rāwī* who were experts in the language and metre of the Arabs, and in the style and ideas of their poets. Thirdly, poets were in attendance, not only to recite their poems, but also to learn from the works of other poets. Finally, a judge, a master-poet, would be chosen from among the poets and a leather tent was pitched for him alone. The judge was one of the most important recipients due to the impact of his judgments on the audience, as his opinion alone determined the success or failure of the poet's work

The *qurayshi* admired this poem just as much and said: "These are the timeless jewels (*ṣimṭā al-dahar*)" (Al-Aṣfahānī, 1823: 112/21). However, no critical reasoning can be discerned in this brief comment and the criteria being used to judgethe poem are unclear. This method of criticism emerged in the oral culture of the pre-Islamic Arabs because such short critical comments would be easily remembered and disseminated.

1.3.1.3 The development of the *qaṣīdah*

The appearance of a canonical form of poetry in the shape of the *qaṣīdah* (ode) is strong evidence of agreement amongst critics and poets about an ideal form and structure for poetic text. In this sense, the development of the *qaṣīdah* is one of the most important manifestations of Classical Arabic literary reception. According to Nicholson, the *qaṣīdah* followed a set structure:

The verses (*abyāt*; singular *bayt*) of which it is built vary in number, but are seldom less than twenty-five, or more than a hundred; and the arrangement of the rhymes is such that, while the two halves of the first verse rhyme together, the same rhyme is repeated once in the second, third, and every followingverse to the end of poem. (1914: 77)

In addition, pre-Islamic poets used a standard three-section pattern:
The amatory prelude (*nasīb*), "disengagement" cast in the form of a camel journey (known as *takhalluṣ*), and the final section, the body of the poem, dealing with the motive (*qaraḍ*). (Beeston, 1983: 43)

This form did not develop arbitrarily or spontaneously, but was the result of consensus among poets and critics and all poetry was structured in the same fashion.As a result of the existence of this consensus both poets and recipients were able to reach agreement concerning the standard of excellence to which literary worksneeded to aspire. Consequently, a set of *qaṣīdah*, commonly referred to as *al-Muʿallaqāt*[24] (suspended poems) became established as the gold standard among allpoets and critics. The same poems are still revered among Arab critics today. The preference for these odes by the pre-Islamic recipients indicates a high level of

literary discussions and critical awareness.

Overall, these manifestations previously mentioned are clear evidence that a significant critical movement already existed in pre-Islamic culture despite claims tothe contrary.

1.2.2 The impact of Islamic thought

With the appearance of the Prophet Muḥammad, and the revelation of the Qurʾān,the form of literary reception changed as other aspects of the text became more important. As previously noted, in the pre-Islamic era, poetry was an important source of knowledge, but in the new Islamic culture the main source of knowledge became the Qurʾān and ḥadīth, because for Islamic recipients poetic texts were valued for highlighting the inimitability (ʾiʿjāz) of the Qurʾān.[25] According to ibn ʿAbbās: "if you do not understand something in the Qurʾān, go back to poetry to findthe meaning; poetry is the repository of Arab knowledge (dīwān al-ʿArab)"(cited in Al-Qayrawānī, 1972: 10/1).

There was considerable controversy among Classical Arabic critics concerning earlyIslamic attitudes towards poetry. It has been argued that Islam was opposed to poetry, and encouraged Muslims to focus on the Qurʾān.[26] In contrast, it has also been claimed that the Prophet Muḥammad was aware of the impact of poetry on Arab recipients and thus used this medium to spread his teachings amongst Arabs, and to defend Islam by satirising its enemies.[27] Moreover, he acknowledged the importance of poetry in forming the mind-set of Muslims and therefore was in favour of poetry which served to direct readers towards good morals, and divert them from evil-doing (Al-Ḥārthī, 1989: 53). Thus, there was a shift in the strategy employed for reading literary texts and poetic text became a linguistic document used by recipients to understand the meaning of the Qurʾān.

This new focus on the linguistic aspect of Classical Arabic literature meant that recipients

needed to pay close attention to the language used in the text in order to judge its worth by Qurʾānic standards. This involved recipients in examining words and their meanings, as well as everything related to the literary text including its prosody, rhyme and parsing. This approach was based on error analysis of the poet'sgrammar, words, meanings, rhyme and prosody (Al-Marzubānī, 1995: 34-35).[28]

Linguistic reception did not stop at this point, but proceeded to attempt to extract linguistic principles from the literary text, analysing the text's compatibility with therules of syntax.

However, many Classical Arabic scholars criticised the linguistic method; for instance, al-Jāḥiẓ claimed that the linguists focused on obscure poetry to find grammatical errors, or unusual vocabulary without considering the essence of the literary text (1960: 349/3). Indeed, it is clear that al-Jāḥiẓ saw linguists as exploiting poetry for their own ends; but this is not reason enough to claim that they were uninterested in the meaning of the poetry. In fact, al-Jāḥiẓ himself also employs poetry in his works as a source of information, using it, for example, to provide factual knowledge about animals for his text *Al-Ḥayawān*.

Classical Arabic linguists divided the history of Arabic poetry into two stages: Classical and modern. By their reckoning, the Classical period covered the pre- Islamic era (some one hundred and fifty years before Islam) until the middle of the second century AH, while the modern period started at the beginning of the Abbasid era (Al-Qaṣṣāb, 1980: 25). The main reason for this division was based on the linguists' rejection of the techniques and language employed by the new poets, who were named *al-Muwalladūn*. This group of poets came after Bashshār ibn Burd and included Muslim ibn al-Walīd, Abū al-ʿAtāhyah, Abū Tammām and al-Buḥturī.They renewed the style of poetry by introducing new words and literary forms. Thus, the linguists' approach to reading was not a neutral method, as they openly voiced their preference for Classical poetry not necessarily for its superior literary qualities, but because
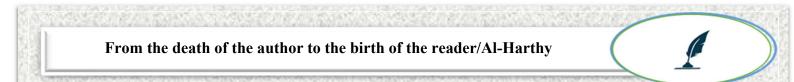
they thought this would maintain the purity of ClassicalArabic.[29]

1.3 Conclusion

In conclusion, Classical Arabic rhetoric paid great attention to the recipient, who is referred to by several terms in rhetorical studies: *al-mutalaqqī, al-qāriʾ, al-sāmiʿ* and *al-mukāḥṭab.* However, the term *al-sāmiʿ* is more commonly used in the rhetoric, owing to the fact that Arab culture was an oral culture at that time. This discussion also highlighted the importance of recipients in Classical Arabic literature according to their multiple functions and levels of language. Moreover, the argument concerning the impact of foreign cultures, particularly Greek culture, on Arabic recipients emphasises that the interest in recipients in both Arabic and Western criticism comes from Aristotelian thought. Analysis of Classical Arabic rhetorical studies, such as those of al-Jāḥiẓ, ibn Qutaybah, Abū Ḥayyān al-Tawḥīdī, ʿAbdulqāhir al-Jurjānī and ibn Ṭabāṭabā, showed evidence of the existence of differing concepts of the recipient. Three distinct stages of literary reception in Classical Arabic rhetoric were identified; the impressionistic stage, the linguistic stage and the rhetorical stage. Each of these had its own characteristic principles, suited to the period in which it emerged. The rhetorical reading strategy, for instance, mentioned by al-Jāḥiẓ and ʿAbdulqāhir al-Jurjānī, focused on the reader whilst the rhetorical method encouraged recipients to focus on how the author used his imagination to link reality and its literary representation.

Bibliography

1. Abbās, I. 1993. *Tārīkh al-naqd al-adabī ʿind al-ʿarab : naqd al-shiʿr min al-qarnal-thānī ḥattá al-qarn al-thāmin al-hijrī.* Amman: Dār al-Shurūq.

2. Abdullah, I.a.-M. 1967. *Kitāb al-Badīʿ.* Baghdad Maktabat al-Muthanná.

3. Abdullah, M.Ḥ. 1975. *Muqaddimah fī al-naqd al-adabī.* Kuwait: Dār Al-Buḥūth al-ʿIlmiyyah.

4. Adunīs. 2011. *Al-Thābit wa al-mutaḥawwil: baḥth fī al-ibdāʿ wa al-ʾittibāʿ ʿind al-ʿarab.* Beirut: Dār al-Sāqī.

5. Ajami, M.J. 1981. *ʿAmūd al-shiʿr*: legitimization of tradition. *Journal of ArabicLiterature.* **12**, pp.30-48.

6. Al-ʿAllāq, A. 2002. *Al-Shiʿr wa al-talaqqī, dirāsah naqdiyyah.* Amman: Dār AL-Shurūq.

7. Al-Āmedī, A.-Ḥ.b.B. 1961. *Al-Muwāzanah bayna shiʿr Abī Tammām wa-al-Buḥturī.* Cairo: Dār al-Maʿārif.

8. Al-Aṣfahānī, A.a.-F. 1823. *Al-Aghānī.* Cairo: Dār al-Kutub.

9. Al-Askandarī, A. 1919. *Al-Wasīṭ fī al-adab al-ʿarabī wa tārīkhuh* Cairo: Al-MaʿārifAl-ʿAskarī, A.H.a.-Ḥ.i.A. 1952. *Kitāb al-ṣināʿatayn: al-kitābah wa-al-shiʿr.* al-Ṭabʿah 1. ed. Damascus: Dār 'Iḥyā' al-Kutub al-ʿArabiyyah.

10. Al-ʾAthīr, Ḍ.A.-D.I. 1962. *Al-Mathal al-sāʾir fī adab al-kātib.* Cairo: Nahḍat Maṣr. Al-Bāzʿī, S. 2004. *Istiqbāl al-ākhar al-gharbī fī al-naqd al-ʿarabī al-ḥadīth* Beirut: Arab Cultural Center.

11. Al-Brikī, F. 2006. *Qaḍiyyat al-talaqqī fī al-naqd al-qadīm.* Amman: Dār al-shurūk.

12. Al-Futūḥ, H. 2012. *Qaḍiyyat al-lafẓ wa al-maʿnā min khilāl al-muwāzanah baynashiʿr Abī Tammām wa al-Buḥturī*. [Online]. [Accessed 12/11/2015].

13. Al-Ghadhāmī, A. 1994. *Al-Mushākalah wa al-ʾikhtilāf : qirāʾah fī al-naẓariyyah al- naqdiyyah al-ʿarabiyyah.* Beirut: Al-Markaz al-Thaqāfī al-

ʿArabī.

14. Al-Ghadhāmī, A. 2006. Al-Khaṭiʾah wa al-takfīr min al-bunyawiyyah ʾilā al-tashriḥiyyah naẓariyyah wa taṭbīq. Beirut: Al-Markaz al-Thaqāfī al-ʿArabī.

15. Al-Ḥallāq, M.R. 1999. Al-Naṣṣ wa al-mumānaʿah- muqārabāt naqdiyyah fī al-ʾadab wa al-ʾibdāʿ. Damascus: The Arabic Writers United.

16. Al-Ḥārthī, M.M. 1989. Al-Ittijāh al-ʾakhlāqī fi al-naqd al-ʿarabī. Makkah: Nādī Makkah al-ʾAdabī.

17. Al-Ḥārthī, M.M. 1996. ʿAmūd al-shiʿr al-ʿarabī al-nashʾah wa al-mafhūm.

18. Makkah: Nādī Makkah al-Thaqāfī.

19. Al-Ḥārthī, M.M. 2004. Al-Mutalaqqī ʿind Ḍiyāʾ al-Dīn ibn al-ʾAthīr. Unpublished Masters dissertation thesis, Umm Al-Qura University.

20. Al-Jāḥiẓ, A.ʿ.ʿ.i.B. 1938. *Al-Ḥayawān.* Cairo: Muṣṭafá al-Ḥalabī.

21. Al-Jāḥiẓ, A.ʿ.ʿ.i.B. 1960. Al-Bayān wa al-tabyīn. Cairo: Muṣṭafá al-Ḥalabī.

22. Al-Jumaḥī, M.i.S. 1974. Ṭabaqāt fuḥūl al-shuʿarāʾ. Cairo: Maṭbaʿat al-Madanī. Al-Jurjānī, ʿ. 1991. ʾAsrār al-balāghah. Cairo: Al-Madanī.

23. Al-Jurjānī, ʿ. 1992. Dalāʾil al-ʾiʿjāz. Cairo: Dār Al-Madanī.

24. Al-Jurjānī, A.-Q. 1966. Al-Wasāṭah bayna al-Mutanabbī wa khṣūmuh Cairo Alhalaby press.

25. Al-Khafājī, I.S. 1982. Sirru al-faṣāḥah. Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyyah.

26. Al-Maqdisī, A. 1977. Umarāʾ al-shiʿr al-ʿarabī fī al-ʿaṣr al-ʿAbbāsī Beirut: Dār al- ʿIlm Li al-Malāyīn.

27. Al-Marzubānī, M.i.ʿ. 1995. Al-Muwashshaḥ fī maʾākhidh al-ʿulamāʾ ʿalā al- shuʿarāʾ. al-Ṭabʿah 1. ed. Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmīyyah.

28. Al-Muntherī, Z.A.-D. 2000. Al-Targhīb wa al-tarhīb. Cairo: Dār Al-fajr.

29. Al-Murtaḍā, A.-S. 1954. Al-ʾAmālī. Damascus: Dār ʾIḥyāʾ al-Kutub al-ʿArabiyyah. Al-Nadīm, M.b.I.I. 1997. Al-Fihrist. Beirut: Dār Al-Maʾrifah.

30. Al-Qaṣṣāb, W. 1980. Qaḍiyyat ʿamūd al-shiʿr fī al-naqd al-ʿarabī al-qadīm: ḍuhūrhā wa taṭawwurha. Al-Riyadh: Dār Al-ʿUlūm.