

An Ornamentalist View of Metaphor in Arabic Literary Theory

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Abstract

The aim of the present paper is to examine the kind of thinking and the chain of assumptions that lie behind the reduction of metaphor to a mere ornament in Arabic literary theory. For this purpose, Arabic ornamentalist thinking is traced from the third century A.H. (the ninth century A.D.) to the seventh century A.H. (the thirteenth century A.D.). This is not to say, however, that the seventh century marks the end of such thinking in Arabic literary theory, but that at that time the Arabic literary theory, and the theory of metaphor, was developed into fixtures with an increasing emphasis given to form over content and the art of verbal expression in general. Inordinate attention was given to ornate style, and rhetoric became an arena for displaying verbal acrobatics. The axioms, "closeness of resemblance" and "congruity of metaphorical elements," represent metaphor's highest degree of formalization and stereotyping. That is why some of the images in classical theory are mainly based on complete parallelism between the objects compared, particularly with regard to form, size and color. From that time onwards, the fixtures of the classical theory have been kept intact. Metaphor, and rhetoric in general, is nowadays reduced to textbooks to be studied in abstract and rigid terms developed by the classical theory. Arabic rhetoric is a dead discipline: it is merely an ornamental repertoire of figures that could only be used as a sweet adorer for the language.

Keywords: Metaphor, Arabic Rhetoric, Arabic Literary Theory, Literary Criticism

1. Introduction

In the West, the theory of metaphor has undergone a drastic development starting from the classical view which confines metaphor to the general role of adornment, elucidation and agreeable mystification, to the modernist view—initiated by the romantics and reached its maturity in the twentieth century—which has reinstated the epistemic power of metaphor. Challenging the assumptions on which the ornamentalist view hinges, the western modernist view holds that metaphor is a mode of assimilating reality to language, a structural organizing principle that does not merely re-describe an already existing meaning but creates a new meaning with a cognitive content that is unparaphrasable¹. In the Arab world, however, the Arabic classical ornamentalist view is still dominating Arabic literary theory and, hence, has continued to exercise a fatal attraction up to the present day. The aim of the present paper is to examine the kind of thinking and the chain of assumptions that lie behind the reduction of metaphor to a mere ornament in Arabic literary theory. For this purpose, Arabic ornamentalist thinking is traced from the third century A.H. (the ninth century A.D.) to the seventh century A.H. (the thirteenth century A.D.). This is not to say, however, that the seventh century marks the end of such thinking in Arabic literary theory, but that at that time Arabic theory of metaphor was developed into fixtures that have been carried over to the present day. I will first discuss the definition of metaphor and the related tropes in Arabic rhetoric in order to outline the broader sense in which this

paper uses the term "metaphor" and which would be of relevance to the ensuing discussion. Then I will trace the historical evolution of metaphor to examine the chain of assumptions underlying the ornamentalist thinking.

2. Metaphor and Related Tropes in Arabic Rhetoric

Metaphor is the fundamental figure of speech in Arabic rhetoric: the other traditional figures, "تشبيهه" (simile) and "مجاز" (free trope) tend to be prototypes of metaphor. The term "استعارة" (metaphor) is derived from the root "أعـر- يعير" meaning "to borrow." It refers to a set of linguistic processes whereby attributes belonging to one thing are "borrowed" or transferred to another. (Matlub, 1983-1987, Vol. I, pp. 136) Hence, like its western counterpart, the Arabic metaphor is also seen as a trope of transference that manifests the basic patterns of figurative language. The word "مجاز" is used in Arabic rhetoric to refer to figurative language. The word originally refers to the place where a movement of some sort is displayed; and in rhetoric it indicates the movement or transference of words from one realm of thought to another (Matlub, 1983-1987, Vol. III, pp. 196). In this sense, "مجاز" (figurative language) is language which uses words deviating from their original meanings and uses. Its opposite is (literal language) "حقيقة", wherein words are used in their original sense. (Reinert, 1978, pp. 1025-1026)

In Arabic, as in western rhetoric, the distinction between metaphor and simile is based on syntactic considerations: metaphor is considered a shortened simile. However, while in western rhetoric the distinction is based on the absence or presence of the connective, in Arabic rhetoric it is based on the suppression of one of the terms of comparison. That is to say, in Arabic rhetoric structures of the form A is B, and A is like B are similes, whereas in a proper metaphor the borrowed term (B) completely replaces the proper term (A). This notion made dominant by such prominent rhetoricians as al-Qadi al-Jurjani (2006, pp. 324-325) and 'Abd al-Qahir al-Jurjani (1954, pp. 302-303), seems to pivot on the idea that the identification effected in a proper metaphor can only be expressed mentally, not linguistically. For instance, in the proper metaphor "رأيت أسداً" (I saw a lion) [i.e. Zayd], the speaker hides the name "Zayd" pretending that it is not the original name and gives the name "lion" instead. The identification in this case is embedded in the speaker's mind, and the linguistic utterance shows only the name "lion," which is pretended to be the only name set in the vocabulary of the language for Zayd. However, in the statements "زيدٌ أسدٌ" (Zayd is a lion) and "زيدٌ كالأسد" (Zayd is like a lion), where a simile is expressed, it is unlikely that the hearer would take Zayd and lion as identical, for one cannot be designated as a man and a lion at the same time.

Such a notion, however, seems to be mistaken. Needless to say, no mental operation can take place outside the domain of language. The mental intention of one who says (I saw a lion), meaning Zayd, cannot be expressed except by a linguistic utterance, be it audible or not. In other words, the statement, "I saw a lion" is, in fact, based on a basic statement of identity of the form A is B (Zayd is a lion). That is, there is no essential difference between metaphor and simile; the same phenomenon is referred to by two grammatical forms.

Closely connected with metaphor and simile in Arabic rhetoric is the figure "مجاز مرسل" (free trope). The term literally means a trope or a figure which is free of the relation of resemblance expressed by metaphor and simile. (Reinert, p. 1027) The relations expressed by free trope include those of metonymy and synecdoche in western rhetoric: the cause for the effect (السببية), or the effect for the cause (المُسببية); the whole for the part (الكُلِّيَّة); the part for the whole (الجزئية); the condition for the place where it manifests itself (الحالية) or the contrary (المحلِّيَّة). (Matlub, Vol. III, pp. 307-309) Instances are: "بث الحاكم" (The governor spread his eyes in the city), where "eyes" (the part) is a substitute for "men" (the whole); "رعينا" (we tended the rain), where "rain" (the cause) is a substitute for "plants" (the effect); "أمطرت السماء نباتاً" (the sky rained vegetation), where "vegetation" (the effect) replaces "rain" (the effect). Free trope might be designated as a figure of contiguity, a movement within a single world of discourse. However, we also find the basic statement of identity; A is B, lying at the center of it: A is identified with B which is contiguous to it. In "We tended the rain," "rain" is identified with "plants," while each retains its own identity.

In this paper, I use the term "metaphor" to include what is traditionally designated as metaphor, simile and free trope since the basic statement of hypothetical identity expressed by metaphor lies at the center of all related figures. This definition of metaphor springs from the nature of figurative language of which metaphor is considered a basic manifestation. The process of figurative language is one of synthesis, as opposed to discursive language which is analytical; it is the unification of heterogeneous elements into some kind of unity in which heterogeneity is paradoxically preserved. By the same token, metaphor is a vital synthesis: the metaphorical elements A and B are identified with each other so that we can see two ideas in one.

3. The Evolution of Metaphor in Arabic Literary Theory

3.1. The Tenth Century

A more systematic Arabic literary theory (and theory of metaphor) began to be established around the third century A.H. (the tenth century A.D.). The formation of the theory was influenced by the translations of Greek works, especially those of Aristotle and Plato, and by the Arab theologians' involvement in exegesis of the Quran. (Abbas, 2006, pp. 51-65; Maroth, 2002, pp. 241-243; Simawe, 2001, pp. 275-276) Around this time, the first step towards the formation of a theory of metaphor was taken by al-Jahiz, Ibn al-Mu'tazz and Qudama bin Ja'far. Like western classical theorists, Arab theorists

formulated the theory of metaphor in connection with the issue of form and content, or language and thought, an issue which preoccupied Arab thinkers for centuries to come. In Arabic literary theory, this issue took the form of the dichotomy of words (الألفاظ) and ideas (المعاني). Words are seen as the dress of ideas, and metaphor is one of the verbal graces (المحسنات البديعية) used by poets to embellish words. Hence, Arab theorists leveled harsh criticism against the far-fetched and abstruse metaphors and insisted upon the harmony and congruity of metaphorical elements.

Al-Jahiz (d. 255/862) was the first Arab critic to deal with the question of form and content. In his *al-Hayawan*, he announces his well-known theory that ideas are available to everyone, and that what counts is the verbal qualities that give them expression. (pp. 131-132) The significant feature of most of his discussion is the insistence on form rather than content as the decisive criterion of quality. The declared assumption is that little, if anything new, can be originated in poetry, and that the only difference between one poet and another lies in his manner of expression. Al-Jahiz's doctrine of form was later abused by such critics as Ibn al-Mu'tazz and Abu Hilal al-'Askari, who drew heavily on formal analysis.

In his treatise *Kitab al-Badi'*, Ibn al-Mu'tazz (d. 296/903) conducted a systematic study of poetical figures. The fundamental thesis of the book is that *badi'* (or the New Style) is in no way invented by the new poets. Good examples of *badi'* could be found in the Qur'an, the Tradition, and the pre-Islamic poetry. The sole difference, however, is that while the ancients used those poetical figures sparingly, the moderns—like Bashshar Ibn Burd, Muslim Ibn al-Walid, Abu Nuwwas and Abu Tammam—used them with extravagance. (p. 1) Ibn al-Mu'tazz goes on to enumerate five figures of *badi'*, of which metaphor is one, in addition to twelve beauties (محاسن), with prescription of the manner in which each figure should be used. Instances of the infelicitous use of figures are drawn particularly from the modern poets (المحدثون الشعراء), amongst whom Abu Tammam appears with special frequency, as an example of the extravagance that poets should avoid.² For instance, Abu Tammam's metaphor, فضرِبْتُ الشتاءَ في أخدعيه (And I struck winter on the neck) is an example of the corrupt metaphor (الاستعارة المعيبة) that should be avoided, for winter does not have a neck. (pp.23-24)

This tendency to formalize and stereotype metaphor was further reinforced in Ibn Tabataba's *'Iyar al-Shi'r*. Ibn Tabataba (d. 322/929) was a critic with Mutazilite learning. The Mu'tazilite thinking, which held sway over literary criticism in the third and fourth centuries A.H. (the ninth and tenth centuries A.D.), insisted on a degree of clarity and exactitude in the ideas expressed by the poet, and gave logical and hard argument precedence over the poetical figures. (Abbas, 2006, p. 65) Hence Ibn Tabataba's insistence on the clarity of metaphorical elements. According to him, the poem is the product of conscious process; it is nothing but "a labor of thought" (p.10) "جيشانُ فكر":

فإذا أراد الشاعر بناء قصيدة مخض المعنى الذي يريد بناء الشعر عليه في فكره نثرًا، وأعد له ما يلبسه إياه من الألفاظ التي تطابقه، والقوافي التي توافقه والوزن الذي يسلس له القول عليه. فإذا اتفق له بيت يشاكل المعنى الذي يرومه أثبته وأعمل فكره في شغل القوافي بما تقتضيه من المعاني على غير تنسيق للشعر وترتيب لفنون القول فيه ...

When a poet composes a poem, he thinks of the ideas in prose, and chooses from words the best garments that suit them and from rhymes and meters those that are fitting. And when he comes upon a line that goes with the meaning he has in mind, he writes it down, and then he cudgels his brain in search of the rhymes that fit the ideas without previous arrangement of lines ... (p.5)

Consequently, Ibn Tabataba obliterates the distinction between prose and poetry. (p.6) "Poetry," he says, "is well-knit letters, and letters are unraveled poetry" (p. 78). This requirement for hard and logical thought in poetry leads Ibn Tabataba to emphasize the truth of imagination, or what he calls "the truth of resemblances" (صدق التشبيه):

فأحسن التشبيهات ما إذا عكس لم ينتقض بل يكون في كل شبه بصاحبه مثل صاحبه ويكون صاحبه مشتبهاً به صورةً ومعنى.

(The best resemblances are those which, if reversed, will not be distorted. Rather, the objects involved should be similar to each other in image and meaning.) (p.11)

Accordingly, the "abstruse and far-fetched metaphors" (الاستعارات البعيدة الغلقة) are deplored, as when al-Muthaqqab al-'Abdi personifies his camel:

تقول إذا درأت لها وضيئي أهذا دينه أبدأ وديني
أكل الدهر حل وارتحال أما يبقي علي ويبقيني

(It [the camel] says as I fasten the girth on it: is this always the way with me and him?
Is all life settlement and departure? Would he not preserve and keep me?) (pp. 119-120)

Good poetry, Ibn Tabataba concludes, "should be truthful with no lies, and plain with no figures" (p. 128). Similarly, al-Amidi (d. 370/967) stresses the truth of resemblance. In his *al-Muwazana*, he makes it clear that al-Buhturi is a better poet than Abu Tammam because he strictly adheres to the "essentials of poetry" (عمود الشعر) as represented by the pre-Islamic poets who use metaphor with decorum, whereas Abu Tammam transgresses all limits and uses resemblances which have not been used by Arab poets before. For instances, Abu Tammam's depictions of Time (الدهر) with a neck or a hand, or as a man who thinks and smiles are ugly and far-fetched metaphors because Arabs are not accustomed to such resemblances (pp. 245-250).³

Like his predecessors, Qudama Bin Ja'far (d. 320/929) considers metaphor to be one of the ornaments that should be used with propriety. While Ibn Tabataba and al-Amidi advocate the truth of poetry, Qudama claims in his *Naqd al-Shi'r* that "the best poetry is that which feigns most". (p. 26). (أحسن الشعر أكنبه), and that poetry is characterized by hyperbole (الغلو) and extravagance (الإفراط), not by the image of reality (p.31). As 'Abbas has demonstrated, Qudama was indirectly influenced by Greek philosophy, particularly by Aristotle's *Rhetoric* and the *Poetics*. Hence, his doctrine of the feigning of poetry. (Abbas, 2006, pp. 192-195) However, the hyperbole and extravagance Qudama insists upon are not related to the poet's images, but his ideas and meanings. He demands a degree of clarity in the conveyance of ideas, without relying on difficult images which might obscure them. (p. 132) As such, he is of the opinion that the power of resemblance should be curbed:

وأحسن التشبيه هو ما وقع بين الشئين اشتراكهما في الصفات أكثر من انفرادهما فيها حتى يدنى بهما إلى حال الاتحاد
(The best resemblance is that in which the common characteristics shared by the objects are more than the differences, so that they may become almost one.) (pp. 55)

A metaphor cannot be accepted unless it is intended as a simile because it is closer to reality. (p. 104) As such, poets should avoid the use of "the far-fetched metaphor" (فاحش الاستعارة), viz., the metaphor which is "alien to convention and to what people commonly use" (منافراً للعادة بعيداً عما يستعمل الناس مثله) (p. 105). Moreover, the duality of words and ideas persists throughout Qudama's critical account. According to him, poetry consists of four elements: words, ideas, meter and rhyme (p.2). Good poetry depends on the correct way of using these elements and on the choice of stylistic figures to embellish the ideas. (p.9)

In *al-Risalah al-Mudiha*, al-Hatimi levels harsh criticism at al-Mutanabbi because of his improper use of figurative language. In reply to al-Mutanabbi's claim that his metaphors adhere to the Arab norm, al-Hatimi says that they are rather "strange" (مُسْتَهْجَنَة) and that:

والاستعارة إذا لم يكن موقعها في البيان فوق موقع الحقيقة، لم تكن استعارة لطيفة.
(a metaphor becomes elegant only if it is meant to illustrate the plain meaning.) (p. 69)

According to such a criterion, al-Mutanabbi's metaphor, as below, is an "ugly metaphor" (استعارة قبيحة), for how could thoughts limp? (69):

أليس عجباً أن وصفك معجز وأن ظنوني في معاليك تظلع
Is it not a wonder that describing you is impossible and that my thoughts about your Excellency limp?

Al-Hatimi also criticizes al-Mutanabbi's metaphors on the grounds that they remove things from the image of reality (pp. 92; 95) Al-Qadi al-Jurjani (d. 392/999), whose fundamental treatise in *al-Wasata* is to mediate between al-Mutanabbi and those who speak slightly of him, concedes that a major defect of al-Mutanabbi's poetry is the extravagant and licentious use of metaphor. While pre-Islamic poets use metaphor with moderation, modern poets, like Abu Tammam and al-Mutanabbi, transgress all limits and use metaphors that are far-fetched and artificial. (p.38)

3.2. The Eleventh Century

By the fifth century A.H. (the eleventh century A.D.), we find al-Marzuqi (d. 421/1038) in his *Sharh al-Hamasa* giving a complete formulation of "the essentials of poetry" by way of summarizing the critical views of the third and fourth centuries. These views came mainly as a reaction to the use of the badi' figures. Al-Marzuqi enumerates seven essentials, two of which are "the closeness of resemblance" (المقاربة في التشبيه) and "the congruity of metaphorical elements" (مناسبة المستعار منه المستعار له). (Vol. I, p. 9) The criterion of these two essentials is the establishment of resemblance between two things which are almost alike, so that the point of similarity is revealed without ambiguity. (pp. 10-11) As such, within the theory of "the essentials of poetry," which was the culmination of the prescriptive tendency in Arabic criticism, metaphor is formalized and stereotyped; poets were required to use pre-packaged, pre-digested and finished metaphors. The role of rhetoric as a sweet adorer was dominant.

With 'Abd al-Qahir al-Jurjani (d. 471/1078), metaphor starts to enjoy a more important status. As Gibb (1963) rightly points out, the balance between form and content was to some extent redressed by 'Abd al-Qahir al-Jurjani who "supplemented the excessively formal analysis of his predecessors by a system of logical and psychological analysis which demanded at least equal consideration for the ideas expressed" (p. 88) Still, al-Jurjani's arguments in his celebrated *Dala'il al-'Ijaz* and *'Asrar al-Balagha* makes it clear that metaphor, and figurative discourse in general, is deviant from and decorative to literal discourse. Al-Jurjani's theory of figures emerges from his doctrine of the inimitability of the Qur'an. In opposition to his predecessors, he (1962) argues that the sublimity of the Qur'an does not lie in the use of words, for individual words existed long before the revelation of the Qur'an. (pp. 295-296) Nor does it lie in the ideas alone if they are understood as the raw materials which are available to everyone. (198-199). Rather, it lies in those logical ideas which emerge from the arrangement of words in a particular way congruent with the syntactic rules of the language. Hence his doctrine of composition. (نظرية النظم والتأليف) (pp. 3-4) However, although al-Jurjani calls for reconciliation between words and ideas, he seems also to suggest that this reconciliation can only be effected by the mediation of the element of "dress":

ولن تجد أيمن طائراً ... من أن ترسل المعاني على سجيبتها وتدعها تطلب لأنفسها الألفاظ فإنها إذا ثركت وما تريد لم تكتس إلا ما يليق بها، ولم تلبس من المعاني إلا ما يزينها.

(The best thing ... is to leave ideas to their own devices and let them choose their own words. They will select the garments that suit and embellish them best.) (*Asrar*, p. 10)

At this juncture, al-Jurjani distinguishes two levels of meaning: "the meaning and the meaning of meaning" المعنى والمعنى المعنى (*Dala'il*, p. 203) Metaphor, simile and the other figures belong to the "meaning of meaning." Thus in the utterance "رأيت أسداً" (I saw a lion) [i.e., a brave man], one moves from the level of plain meaning or the denotation of the word, which is not intended here, to the figurative level. (*Dala'il*, p. 201)

In '*Asrar*, al-Jurjani explores at length the nature and scope of the figurative level. Figurative language, he explains, is deviant from the ordinary language:

وأما المجاز فكلمة أريد بها غير ما وقعت له في وضع واضعها

(Figurative meaning consists in the use of a word which deviates from the ordinary meaning and use.) (*Asrar*, p. 325)

By the same token, metaphor is a deviant word: it is a word transferred from one entity to another where it appears as a "borrowed word":

واعلم أن الاستعارة في الجملة أن يكون للفظ أصل في الوضع اللغوي تدل عليه الشواهد على أنه اختص به حين وضع، ثم يستعمله الشاعر أو غير الشاعر في غير ذلك، وينقله إليه نقلاً غير لازم فيكون هناك كالعارية.

(Know then that metaphor is, generally speaking, a word that has a basic meaning in language, which all the evidence bears out. Then, the poet or the layman uses and temporarily transfers it to another sense; so that it appears there as a borrowed word.) (*Asrar*, p. 29)

The virtue of metaphor is that it illustrates and decorates the plain meaning. (*Asrar*, p. 41) However, contrary to his predecessors al-Jurjani considers the far-fetchedness and abstruseness of the resemblances a mark of genius in the artistic work. For him the most refined image is that in which heterogeneous ideas are yoked together:

وإنها لصنعة تستدعي جودة القريحة والحنق ... في أن يجمع بين أعناق المتنافرات والمتباينات في ربةً ويعقد بين الأجنيبات معاهد نسب وشبكة.

(It is a craft which needs talent and skill ... in which heterogeneous and dissimilar ideas are brought together, and foreign objects become next of kin.) (*Asrar*, p. 136)

Thus, an image becomes trite when resemblances are pictorial and literal, for no cudgeling of the brain is involved to respond to resemblances that appeal to the sense of sight. However, far-fetched and strange images are of the best quality because the point of similarity requires intellectual effort (تأول) to perceive it. (*Asrar*, p. 151)

According to this criterion al-Jurjani classifies metaphor. There is on the one end of the scale the metaphor in which the point of similarity is conspicuous that the reader does not exert much intellectual effort to perceive it. An instance is the comparison of a rose with a cheek where the common characteristic (redness) is so obvious (*Asrar*, pp. 80-81). On the other end, there is the finest type of metaphor (الصميم الخالص), one in which the discovery of the point of similarity requires further interpretation and reflection on the reader's part. An instance is the comparison of a convincing argument with the sun. As the point of similarity (clarity) does not consist in a physical property, the reader cannot grasp it at first sight and needs to reflect upon both objects in order to come up with the dominant trait. (*Asrar*, pp. 83-84)

'Abd al-Qahir al-Jurjani is perhaps the only classical Arab theorist who gives the synthetic power of imagination a relative importance. However, his contribution was not built on by later critics and was eclipsed by critical accounts that were more or less a dismal continuation of the stylistic theory of ornamentation. For instance, in his *al-'Umda*, al-Qayrawani (d. 456/1064), al-Jurjani's contemporary, announces that metaphor is one of the "beauties of words" (محاسن الكلام), and that the elements of metaphor should not be discordant (Vol. I. 270-71) He defines the "refined metaphor" (الاستعارة الحسنة) as:

إذا استعير للشيء ما يقرب منه ويليق به كان أولى مما ليس منه في شيء.

(When the object borrowed to a thing is, rather than alien, congruent and harmonious with it.) (p. 269)

Accordingly, Abu Nuwwas's metaphor, as below, is far-fetched and ugly, for money does not have voice to shout and complain (p. 270). The sole function of metaphor and simile, al-Qayrawani affirms, is that they illustrate the plain meaning and that the best resemblances are those which appeal to the senses (p. 287):

منك يشكو ويصيح

بُح صوتُ المالِ مما

(The voice of money has become coarse, complaining and shouting at you.)

Similarly, al-Khafaji (d. 466/1073), in his *Sirr al-Fasaha*, affirms that the use of metaphor should adhere to the Arab norm (p. 21), and that it should be based on convention (p. 136). He defines metaphor as a word transferred from its basic meaning for the sake of illustration. Therefore, it should be clearer than the plain meaning; otherwise, the plain meaning is preferable because it is the primary meaning and metaphor is secondary to it (p. 118). Al-Khafaji goes on to classify the far-fetched metaphor into two types: "استعارة مبنية على استعارة" (... either because the metaphorical elements are discordant, or because the metaphor is built on another.) (p. 120). Obviously, the second type al-Khafaji condemns is the "mixed metaphor," which he further dwells on:

إن الاستعارة إذا بنيت على غيرها قبحت وبغدت والواجب أن تكون لها حقيقة ترجع إليها بلا واسطة.
(When a metaphor is built on another, it becomes ugly and far-fetched, for it should have a literal meaning to refer to without mediation.) (p. 133)

He cites as "mixed metaphor Imri'u al-Qays's famous image of the night:

فقلت له لما تمطى بصلبه وأردف أعجازاً وناء بكلكل
(And I said to it [the night] when it stretched out its back and followed up with [its] hindquarters and struggled to get up with [its] breast ...) (Rendered by Heinrichs, pp. 3-4)

Al-Khafaji explains that while the word hindquarters (أعجاز) is borrowed to refer to the middle of the night, the words back (صُلْب) and breast (كُلْكُل) do not have any literal reference, but are built on the metaphor of hindquarters. (pp. 122-123)

3.3. The Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries

The sixth and seventh centuries A.H. (the twelfth and thirteenth centuries A.D.) witnessed an insufferable split between rhetoric and poetics. Arabic poetry became highly formalized, and an increasing emphasis was placed on form rather than content (Abbas, 2006, p. 496). As a result, there emerged among Arab poets a strong tendency to pursue *badi'* figures which were self-consciously artificial, pre-digested and designed to please on grounds of formal excellence. As Shawqi Dayf (1965) remarks, the degraded condition of metaphor and related figures could be clearly seen in the emergence at the time of a poetic genre called *al-badi'yat*—poems apparently written in panegyric of the Prophet, but were in reality a means of teaching the various types of *badi'* figures (pp. 273-274).

In the field of literary criticism, critics were at pains to classify and enumerate rhetorical figures. The five main elements of *badi'* classified by Ibn al-Mu'tazz were multiplied several times in al-Sakaki's *Miftah al-'Ulum*, the work which was destined to become the most popular manual of rhetoric. By the ninth century A.H. we find Jalal al-Din al-Suyuti stating that there are more than two hundred figures of speech (Badawi, 1978, p. 44).

Al-Sakaki (d. 629/1228), in subjecting rhetorical figures to abstract and rigid rules, represents the culmination of the ornamentalist view of metaphor and related figures. In *Miftah al-'Ulum*, the stereotyping and prescriptive tendency is conspicuous in his definition of metaphor:

الاستعارة هي أن تذكر أحد طرفي التشبيه وتريد به الطرف الآخر، مدعياً دخول المشبه في جنس المشبه به، دالاً على ذلك باثباتك للمشبه ما يخص المشبه به
(Metaphor is to mention one of the two terms of comparison and to mean the other, by way of claiming that the literal object becomes a member in the class of the borrowed object. This is achieved by attributing some of the characteristics of the borrowed object to the literal object.) (p. 369)

Accordingly he enumerates several types of metaphor under two headings: the explicit metaphor (الاستعارة التصريحية), in which the borrowed term is mentioned, and the implicit metaphor (استعارة مكنية), in which the borrowed term is suppressed. (p. 373)

The explicit-implicit formula is still the approach in Arabic theory of Rhetoric nowadays. As 'Isma'il al-Sayfi (1983) rightly says, the naivety of the approach can be clearly seen in the predetermined path assigned to the poet in the creation of metaphor: he first thinks of the two objects to be compared and then he suppresses one of the terms of comparison (p. 57). The reader's role in this mechanical and rigid process is also predetermined: he first identifies the suppressed term in order to determine the type of metaphor he is dealing with, and then he might think of the resemblances, mostly pictorial and literal, established between the two terms.

4. The Chain of Assumptions Underlying the Ornamentalist Thinking

As we have seen, the Arabic ornamentalist view of metaphor is based on a chain of assumptions with regard to metaphor and its relation to reality and language. Behind this view, there resides a fundamental split between language and thought, word and idea, form and content. Language is viewed as a mere mode of expression, a dress by means of which ideas are clothed. Reality is a "fixed" entity totally separate from language which can describe but cannot change it. Therefore, the term "dress" is frequently used among Arab theorist to define the relationship between both entities. According to this view, there is also the assumption that language itself displays a further split between the literal or plain discourse (الحقيقة) and the figurative discourse (المجاز). The "proper" or "ordinary" way of expressing ideas is assigned to the literal discourse, while the

"deviant" way is assigned to the figurative discourse. This cleavage can largely be seen as that between the language of prose and the language of poetry, analytic language and synthetic language.

By the same token, metaphor, being assigned to the figurative mode of expression, is viewed as something extraneous to language, to the plain way of "dressing" thought. Hence, the view that metaphor is a transposed or borrowed word. Now, since language is separate from reality and metaphor is separate from language, then metaphor is thrice removed from reality. It has no power over thoughts but is merely a means of decorating and illustrating the plain meaning. In this sense, we speak of metaphor as a stylistic device which can be assigned to the manner of expression but has no bearings on the creation of meaning.

If metaphor is external to the real meaning of an expression, why should it appear in the expression at all? Generally, most Arab classical critics agree that metaphor has two functions: decoration and illustration. The implied assumption is that metaphor enhances the plain meaning with charm, vivacity and clarity. However, it is frowned upon whenever it transgresses these confines. As such, Arab theorists tend to set rules of decorum peculiar to Arabic culture, according to which the proper or improper use of metaphor is measured. For them, metaphors are generally accepted when they are immediately apparent to the reader and are based on "easy" or "obvious" resemblances. In short, the tendency is to banish metaphors which, instead of decorating and clarifying the real meaning, obscure it—a prescriptive tendency which aims at curbing the "licentious" and "extravagant" use of metaphor.

Lastly, given such a subsidiary function, metaphor, according to the Arabic classical view, does not contribute to the cognitive content of the real meaning, but is something added to it. It can be dispensed with and the plain meaning can be retrieved by the reader. For instance, the Arabic common metaphor *زيدٌ أسدٌ* (Zayd is a lion) can be translated into its real meaning *زيدٌ شجاعٌ* (Zayd is brave). This means that in principle the metaphorical expression is exhaustively paraphrasable.

5. Conclusion

In the sixth and seventh centuries A.H., the Arabic literary theory, and the theory of metaphor, was developed into fixtures with an increasing emphasis given to form over content and the art of verbal expression in general. Inordinate attention was given to ornate style, and rhetoric became an arena for displaying verbal acrobatics. The axioms, "closeness of resemblance" and "congruity of metaphorical elements," represent metaphor's highest degree of formalization and stereotyping. That is why some of the images in classical theory are mainly based on complete parallelism between the objects compared, particularly with regard to form, size and color (Moreh, 1976, p. 245). From that time onwards, the fixtures of the classical theory have been kept intact. Metaphor and rhetoric in general, is nowadays reduced to textbooks to be studied in abstract and rigid terms developed by the classical theory. Arabic rhetoric is a dead discipline: it is merely an ornamental repertoire of figures that could be used as a sweet adorer for the language.

A distinction, however, should be made here between metaphor in literary practice and in literary theory. No doubt, the modern Arab poetic trend in the twentieth and twenty first centuries has initiated a revolution in the use of metaphor and successfully exploited it to express new realms of experience. The liberation of poetic experience has opened the way to all kinds of experiments with metaphor. Nevertheless, the classical concept of metaphor remains completely inadequate in expressing "the transforming power of metaphor in Arabic modernism" (Simawe, 2001, p. 284). As Salma al-Juyyusi (1981) rightly maintains, if we assess the use and importance of metaphor in modern Arabic poetry, we will understand the kinds of liberation the modernist poet has undergone. Modern poetry has become "inclusive poetry"; it offers an experience in its entirety, which is "complex and full of contradictions." This gives the poet the chance to exploit the metaphorical power latent in all objects. Being open to all life, metaphors spring from the new freedom of the poetic creativity to co-ordinate all life's objects and experiences (Vol. II, pp. 680-681). However, such a development in the use metaphor has not been accompanied by a similar development in critical theory. The classical concept is still dominant in literary criticism, leading to the inevitable result that the theory is lagging behind the practice.

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Endnote

¹ The Western modernist concept of metaphor is a vigorous one which has furnished a more profitable understanding of metaphorical language, and rhetoric in general. The origin of this concept can be traced back to the early 19th century with the emergence of the Romantics who conceived of metaphor as presiding at the very birth of speech, ideas, and human institutions. Shelley (1962), for instance, holds that in the infancy of the society "language itself is poetry," and poets speak a language which is "vitaly metaphorical" (p. 301). Coleridge's interest in the concept of metaphor lies at the center of his theory of imagination. According to him (1968), the ultimate realization of imagination takes a linguistic form manifested in the sort of association of ideas which generates metaphor (p. 202). One of the modernist critics who revolutionized the study of metaphor is I.A. Richards, whose *The Philosophy of Rhetoric* constitutes a formidable thesis on the concept of metaphor. Richards argues that metaphor is not "something special or exceptional in the use of language, a deviation from its normal mode of working," but it is "the omnipresent principle of all its free action" (pp. 89-90). It is the instance of the merging of two contexts or two realms of thought Richards calls "the tenor" (the underlying idea that the metaphor expresses) and "the vehicle" (the basic analogy which is used to carry the tenor) (p. 100). Building on Richards' views, Max Black (1962) holds that metaphor is essentially a structural organizing principle whereby a "system" of thoughts is perceived in terms of another. For him, metaphor is not just a matter of language, but also of human thought processes (pp. 40-41). Black's ideas are further emphasized by Lakoff and Johnson (1980) who hold that metaphors are not rhetorical embellishments but are a part of everyday speech that affect the way in which we perceive, think and act (pp. 22-23).

² The poets Abu Tammam, Bashshar Ibn Burd, Abu Nuwas and al-Mutanabbi became the subjects of literary debates among Medieval Arab critics on grounds of their "licentious" use of metaphor and figurative language in

their poetry. Chief among those poets is al-Mutanabbi whose poetry is often frowned upon by critics because it does not adhere to the figurative language of pre-Islamic poetry ('Abbas, 2006, pp. 135-37).

³ As 'Abbas points out, this tendency among Arab critics to refrain from personification in general, and personification of Time in particular, perhaps proceeds from a religious impulse, as the tradition declares that Time is Allah: "لا تسبوا الدهر، فإن الله هو الدهر" (Curse not Time, for Time is Allah) (p. 170). We might as well ascribe this tendency to the influences of the Mu'tazilite thinking. One of the Mu'tazilite fundamental doctrines is that it is a deadly sin (كبيرة) to compare God to his creatures (Zettersteen, 1978, p. 792). Thus, Arab classical critics rejected personifications, lest it should be connected with anthropomorphism.