

The Construction of the Poetic Experience and the Problematics of Poeticity: A Critical Approach

Dr. Oueissi Othman

PhD – Ibn Khaldoun University, Tiaret – Algeria

Specialization: Modern and Contemporary Literature

Email: aouissiot693@gmail.com

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Abstract:

This study examines the concept of the poetic experience and its relationship to the notion of poeticity, proceeding from a critical perspective that integrates the psychological, artistic, and linguistic dimensions. The research highlights that the poetic experience is not merely a linguistic skill or a formal craft; rather, it is a comprehensive psychological and cosmic image that takes shape in the poet's consciousness and sensibility before being realized in the text. It is grounded in artistic sincerity and emotional authenticity, and is intrinsically connected to psychological and existential truths as well as to social reality.

The study also addresses the concept of poeticity both linguistically and terminologically, tracing its lexical roots and critical implications in Arabic literary heritage and modern Western criticism. It sheds light on the problematics of the term, the multiplicity of its definitions, and the diversity of its fields of application. The research concludes that poeticity represents the essence of literariness that is, the internal laws that render a text literary, whether it be poetry, narrative, or any other form of artistic discourse.

Key words: Poetic Experience, Poeticity, Literariness, Artistic Sincerity, Existential Reality, Arabic Literary Heritage

Poeticity and the Poetic Experience:

1.The Poetic Experience:

The poetic experience is considered a complete psychological or cosmic image that the poet depicts when contemplating a given matter a contemplation that reflects the depth of his feeling and perception. In such an experience, the poet returns to an inner conviction and artistic sincerity rather than relying merely on technical skill in crafting expressions to distort truths or to conceal others' feelings in pursuit of their approval. Rather, the poet transcends this by enriching his poeticity with noble ideas and motives of altruism that emanate from elevated impulses and the foundations of noble chivalry, portraying and elucidating the beauty of nature and the human soul ¹We do not stray from the truth if we consider that the poet is the one who weaves and fashions his experience: he knows it, understands it, senses its depth, and grasps all its details through both thought and emotion. He arranges it internally before thinking of writing, immersing himself in fertilizing and nurturing it until he attains mastery over its most delicate elements and minutiae. Only then does he become capable of transmitting it to us, fully aware of the surrounding events and the world's unfolding currents, thereby infusing life and the impulses of inner conflict that beset both the psyche and the individual simultaneously. Indeed, the experience ²“pulsates with a life that opens our eyes to truths that the

facts of life or psychological states as they appear to most people may fail to reveal, and which the words of language and its dictionaries may fall short of uncovering; for the poetic image and its suggestive power are more forceful in expression and effect”³

The true poet establishes an intimate relationship with psychological and cosmic truths, which in turn form the axis of his poetic experience an experience that fundamentally unfolds along two interrelated trajectories: abstract ideas and reflections. Thus, the poetic experience becomes a revelation and disclosure of the depths of the self, conveying truth as it has matured in the poet’s thoughts and contemplations with sincerity and devotion⁴. “The poetic experience is a disclosure of the inner self, of truth as it exists in the poet’s reflections and thinking, with a sincerity akin to that of the mystic’s devotion to his creed. This requires the poet to concentrate his energies and devote his full awareness to his experiences”⁵

As for these two trajectories or dimensions, the first is manifest and disseminated in ideas, reflections, images, and emotions elements that are, in their nature, not inherently poetic. The second lies latent within the poetic process itself, which consists in shaping these contents into specific artistic molds that define the formal characteristics and external manifestations of the poetic genre, its language, and its poeticity, thereby distinguishing it from other literary genres⁶

Shawqi Daif defines it as follows: “The complete poetic experience is an ascent toward a distant summit an ascent that has a beginning from which it starts and an end at which it concludes. It is an ascent along an extended path, where each segment leads into another, and each segment requires a measure of stillness and rest so that the poet may complete his journey and take sufficient time to restore his vigor and strength for further ascent, from one segment to the next. It is as though he does not walk merely on his feet, but rather explores, contemplates, and observes all that surrounds him from every angle. When he reaches the distant peak, he senses that he has indeed undertaken an unprecedented journey a journey marked by all that distinguishes it, such that upon its completion he feels he has accomplished a new and complete work, unchallenged by other works, nor hindered by obstacles or impediments that might prevent its fulfillment”⁷

This definition encompasses numerous dimensions, primarily emphasizing that the poetic experience must be founded upon a specific, structurally complete subject endowed with cognitive content through which its essence, continuity, and vocabulary are embodied. It also necessitates clarity and distinction within the poet’s psyche, so as to instill in him the exhilaration of attaining a desired goal all within a unified organic context governed by an orderly structure. In such a structure, no part of a single poem should precede or follow another improperly; otherwise, the overall meaning is disrupted. This is what is referred to as “organic unity”.

Poetic experiences, despite their diversity and variation, derive their existence and authenticity from the poet’s self and emotional consciousness. They remain aspirational and deeply embedded within the folds of the psyche, drawing upon its latent energies diffused into infinity, while maintaining an unbroken bridge with reality in order to depict it and express, through it, the concerns, aspirations, hopes, and pains of society. All of this forms a fertile ground for both ideas and language alike. “When the poetic experience strikes its roots deep into the depths of the poetic self, relying on the immense energy stored within it and its extraordinary capacity for communication and interaction, it also remains closely connected to reality, with all its ambiguity and complexity, and all that it imprints upon the poet’s mind and embeds within his depths of visions”⁸

The poetic process, insofar as it is an act of confession, provocation, and disclosure of psychological states and the inner being comprising emotions, ideas, obsessions, experiences, and visions and their formulation into textual structures born of the poet's creativity, as a cohesive and harmonious textual fabric that leads to a mode of representation governed by an organic structure and regulated by both internal and external rhythm, constitutes the core of the poetic experience and its conceptual essence.

Behind every great poem lies a poetic language. Naïve, cold, inert, and rigid language does not create poetry; rather, it produces language itself. It is the dynamic language rich in turns, waves, and creative undulations, fluid and vibrant that generates poetry. One of the most prominent features distinguishing contemporary Arab modernist poets is their awareness of the value of language, its importance to the poem, its stature, and this interactive relationship between poetry and language⁹

Language, in all its levels for poets, is a world in itself, endowed with all the components of the tangible world, yet it does not fully manifest except to those endowed with revelation. Engaging with this world thus becomes a departure from the apparent, an interaction with living entities brimming with vitality and activity, concealing more than they reveal. This constitutes an additional veil over the ambiguity and obscurity that have long surrounded Sufi language, rendering the tracing of its trajectories a difficult task through its complex curves that submit only to the source of experience itself according to the poet's lived suffering of it, what is made available to him for its expression, and his understanding of that hidden world, as well as his manner of engaging with its components, in light of the privilege they hold for him and their rank among their kind. This is especially so when we recognize that "letters are a nation among nations; they are charged with duties and addressed, and among them are messengers of their own kind"¹⁰. This leads us to wager on the possibility of describing Sufi writing as poetic, given its distinctive features and singular characteristics, manifested in a unique language that suggests more than it declares. This language constitutes the focal point of our inquiry and the cornerstone of our thesis, the details of which unfold across the stages of this scholarly endeavor.

2.The Concept of Poeticity

Linguistically:

In *Lisān al-ʿArab* by Ibn Manẓūr, the root is defined as meaning to know or to perceive. The expression "would that I knew", and poetry refers to metrical speech, which gained prominence due to the nobility conferred upon it by meter and rhyme. Al-Azhari states that poetry is measured verse confined within specific markers that it does not exceed; its plural is poems, and its composer is called a poet, because he perceives what others do not perceive that is, he knows. He is called a poet due to his acumen and perceptiveness¹¹

Considering the meanings found across most Arabic lexicons, we may conclude that the linguistic root of poeticity points to two meanings: one material, which is not the concern of this study, and the other abstract and immaterial, which predominantly denotes knowledge, awareness, and perceptiveness. As for its implication of fixity, this stems from the fact mentioned by al-Azhari in *Lisān al-ʿArab* that poetry is bounded by markers it does not transcend. This corresponded to poetry in earlier periods, when poets adhered to specific rules and criteria they could not violate.

A close examination of the relationship between the modern critical concept of poetry and its linguistic root reveals a subtle connection between their meanings. This lies in the fact that poetry is governed by laws that regulate and discipline it, while poeticity as a whole represents the laws of

literary discourse, of which poetry is one type subject to defined constraints despite the relative and time-bound nature of such constraints, which are often subject to change.

After delving into the linguistic meanings of the term poeticity, we find that it carries several implications, including:

- The indication of knowledge, perceptiveness, and awareness.
- The notion that every form of poeticity rests upon specific markers and governing principles.
- The implication that poeticity entails a kind of provisional or relative fixity.

3. Poeticity as a Technical Term:

“Poeticity has become one of the most problematic terms; its concept has grown opaque and constricted, whereas it once constituted a broad field in which studies and research actively converged”¹². The problematic nature of the term appears particularly perplexing in Arab criticism. Western criticism, however, may be said at least to some extent to have transcended this difficulty since Aristotle, who entitled his work *Poetics* (poētikḗ), meaning *The Art of Poetry* or *On Poeticity*, as it is commonly referred to in modern Western criticism. In our own critical heritage, by contrast, we encounter various terms, including the term poeticity itself, yet its concept differs from what poeticity denotes in its general sense¹³

Reflecting upon the foregoing, it becomes evident that the term poeticity has assumed multiple significations among critics, owing to the diversity of formulations originally adopted for the term. The disagreement in this domain is too extensive to be exhaustively delineated; rather, our aim is to draw attention to the intense critical dispute surrounding poeticity. Thus, “it seems that, on the one hand, we may be confronting a single concept expressed through different terms an aspect particularly evident in our Arab critical heritage and, on the other hand, different concepts expressed through a single term, a phenomenon that appears more clearly in Western critical tradition”¹⁴. Accordingly, it may be stated that “poeticity is neither the history of poetry nor the history of poets; nor is poeticity the art of poetry, for the art of poetry admits division into genres and purposes; poeticity is neither poetry itself nor a theory of poetry. Rather, poeticity is that which makes poetry poetry, that which confers upon the poetic field the attribute of poetry. It is, perhaps, its absolute essence”¹⁵

4. The Conceptual Dimensions of Poeticity:

Poeticity constitutes an attempt to formulate a general, abstract, and immanent theory of literature as a verbal art, one that derives the laws by which linguistic discourse assumes a literary orientation. It is thus an identification of the laws of literariness in any linguistic discourse, regardless of differences between languages¹⁶. The debate surrounding poeticity does not stop at this point but extends to its very subject matter. Some critics confine it exclusively to poetry, regarding it as a natural disposition for composing verse, connected to several factors, most notably an innate and overflowing temperament predisposed to poetic creativity, along with circumstances and environment such as being raised in poetic surroundings and training and practice¹⁷

This conception is particularly evident in classical Arab criticism, given that poetry was the dominant craft of those eras. It was the diwan of the Arabs and the preserver of their glories and genealogies, which led to a greater focus on poetry than on other forms of literary discourse apart from certain exceptions, such as al-Jurjani through his theory of *nazm*, and thinkers influenced by philosophy like Ḥāzīm al-Qarṭājannī. Other critics, however, have expanded the scope of poeticity to encompass all forms of literary discourse. Thus, poeticity concerns the study of the characteristics of literary works and is not restricted to poetry alone; it extends to other literary arts. Among the most

notable studies adopting this perspective is Bakhtin's analysis of the poeticity of Dostoevsky, which focused on the artistic function of Dostoevsky's ideas¹⁸

Accordingly, poeticity may be applied to all branches of art painting, music, and others since it concerns aesthetic elements. It may even be used to describe the beauty of a natural scene, prompting us to say: a poetic landscape.

The debate over the most appropriate Arabic term for poeticity continues among Arab critics. Some insist on replacing the term (poeticity) with (poeticness), as argued by Abdullah al-Ghadhami, who contends that using poeticity inevitably directs a mercurial movement toward poetry itself, a movement that is difficult to restrain within the pathways of thought. To avoid this ambiguity, he proposes adopting poeticness for both prose and poetry, encompassing the concepts of literariness and stylistics¹⁹. Accordingly, poeticity studies artistic and aesthetic forms and literary styles.

Poeticity is thus closely related to stylistics, narratology, and the rhetoric of figures. Consequently, poeticity is the study of literary art as verbal creativity, or the study of the internal structures of texts. It also concerns itself with describing literary texts, cataloguing their constant components and variable features, and examining the rules governing their generic classification. Hence, we may speak of the poeticity of poetry, the poeticity of narrative, the poeticity of cinema, the poeticity of visual art, the poeticity of theatre, and the poeticity of rhythm. Likewise, one may speak of rhythmic poeticity, phonetic poeticity, spatial poeticity, rhetorical poeticity, syntactic poeticity, discursive poeticity, stylistic poeticity, and the poeticity of genre, type, and mode as well as the poeticity of literature in general. Today, we may also speak of major poeticities, such as structuralist linguistic poeticity, generative poeticity, and cognitive poeticity²⁰

In sum, poeticity concerns the rules of literary, artistic, and aesthetic creativity; the investigation of its internal immanent components; the utilization of linguistic structuralism; a focus on internal interactive systems; the deconstruction and reconstruction of texts and discourses; and the study of phonetic, rhythmic, morphological, syntactic, semantic, and rhetorical levels. In addition, it addresses the classification of literary genres, types, and modes, and examines what distinguishes poetry, the novel, the short story, and drama from other literary and artistic genres.

After all these views and contradictions surrounding the term poeticity which have reached enormous proportions and have only served to further complicate the issue it becomes necessary to adopt the term poeticity itself rather than any alternative. The term *shi'riyya* constitutes the most appropriate equivalent of Poetics, without engaging in terminological disputes that merely increase complexity without yielding genuine cognitive value²¹

5.Results of the Study:

- The poetic experience is a complex emotional and cognitive act.

- Organic unity is a fundamental condition for the completeness of the poetic experience; the coherence of the poem and the interconnection of its parts ensure the integrity of the experience and prevent distortion of the overall meaning or fragmentation of the artistic structure.

- Poetic language is an essential element in the formation of poeticity; dynamic, suggestive language capable of transcending the direct and the familiar is what produces poeticity, as opposed to superficial and rigid language.

- Poeticity is a problematic critical concept with multiple significations; the term has witnessed considerable divergence among critics regarding its scope and meaning, between those who confine it to poetry and those who extend it to various genres and arts.

-Poeticity transcends poetry to encompass literary and artistic discourse in general; it may be applied to narrative, theatre, cinema, and the visual arts, insofar as it studies the internal aesthetic laws of texts.

-Adopting the term poeticity is a methodological necessity. The study ultimately favors the term poeticity as the most accurate equivalent of Poetics, while transcending terminological debates that only render the concept more obscure without adding substantive epistemological value.

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¹ Muḥammad Ghunaymī Hilāl: *Modern Literary Criticism*, Nahḍat Miṣr for Printing, Publishing and Distribution, Egypt, 1st ed., 1986, p. 363.

² Ibid., p. 363.

³ Ibid., p. 363.

⁴ Ibid., p. 364.

⁵ Ramaḍān al-Ṣabbāgh: *On the Criticism of Contemporary Arabic Poetry: An Aesthetic Study*, Dār al-Wafā’ for Printing and Publishing, Alexandria, Egypt, 1st ed., 2002, p. 108.

⁶ See: Aḥmad Ismā‘īl al-Nu‘aymī: *Articles on Poetry, Criticism, and Contemporary Studies*, Dajla Publishing House, Amman, Jordan, 1st ed., 2012, p. 37.

⁷ Shawqī Ḍayf: *In Literary Criticism*, Dār al-‘Ārif, Cairo, Egypt, 9th ed., 2004, p. 138.

⁸ Ramaḍān al-Ṣabbāgh: *On the Criticism of Contemporary Arabic Poetry*, previously cited, p. 108.

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