



The Centrality Of Interpretation In Poetic Discourse Analysis

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Abstract

In examining the question of poetry, it is not significant to seek limited answers that merely add another layer of stagnation to classical reading approaches, following unilateral perspectives that impose predetermined value judgments dominated by ideological constraints. Rather, it is the hermeneutics of poetry that grants readers the freedom to navigate between intended meanings and conceptual hypotheses—an approach that closely resembles the Sufi experience in its transcendental journey within the text to uncover the essence of meaning. This rich experience in our Arab heritage has expanded its horizons through modern studies that have crystallized interpretation into a methodological framework, through the principle of multiple readings that remain inherently relative and require subsequent deconstruction. The reader's task in this domain remains analyzing discourse from its surface level before penetrating its depths in a way that highlights its multiplicity of meanings.

Keywords: Poetry, Hermeneutics, Discourse, Interpretation, Reader.

Introduction

If the intentionality of a literary work aims to communicate its literary message, this must not come at the expense of the work's aesthetic symbolic value system. While the presence of 'literariness' remains fundamental to rhetorical and stylistic elements, ambiguity often leads the reader through dark tunnels, thereby narrowing the reader's horizon. This postpones the dream of contextual fusion between reader and text, or speaker and recipient, and impedes the hope for interactive emotional engagement.

Discourse in general—whether religious, literary, artistic, or legal—demands that the modern intellect pay increased attention to methodological necessities and epistemological approaches in establishing possible and ultimate frameworks for precise and astute reading. Perhaps this vast accumulation in methodological sciences has led philosophers and critics to forge numerous concepts and procedures to assist them in examining and excavating texts. Consequently, interpretative theory has passed through several significant historical turning points that have enriched its cognitive apparatus and established its major theoretical approaches.

Poetic discourse stands as one of the most prominent forms of discourse marked by ambiguity, owing to its governing nature, its linguistic material, and its psychological emotional underpinnings. From this context, we can pose the following problematic: What are the styles and methods employed in interpreting and reading poetic discourse?

This problematic branches into several questions, including:

- What is the relationship between poetic text and the dialectic of ambiguity and interpretation?
- What are the mechanisms for interpreting poetic discourse? And what are the manifestations of poetic discourse and its multiplicity of meanings?

To achieve these objectives, we have adopted a descriptive methodology that aligns with the nature of our study.

First: The Problematic of Terminology

Ambiguity and clarity are two sides of the same coin in literary discourse; the presence of one naturally evokes the other. Clarity provides the recipient with a code through which to enter the text's world, enabling greater interaction with its vast imaginative content and building a bridge for positive and constructive communication with the semantic components that abound in discursive production. This stems from the functional dimensions and noble message of literature, determined through the rhetorical capacity of the speaker to address both intellectual and emotional levels by producing meaning while acknowledging the other's presence during the act of writing or delivering discourse. The literary discourse fulfills its intended function when the recipient successfully decodes the discourse's productivity and achieves the elements of conscious cognitive productive reading.

Hermeneutics lacks a single agreed-upon definition, varying with different theories, schools, and perspectives. Classical Western hermeneutics was contested between two approaches: Aristotelian logic and religious text interpretation. Modern hermeneutics has divided into numerous methodologies, including literary, legal, sacred text, historical, and philosophical hermeneutics. These methodologies evoke names of contributors like Schleiermacher, Dilthey, Heidegger, Gadamer, Ricoeur, Jauss, Foucault, and others. Hermeneutics remains a vast field raising numerous questions and referring to diverse meanings.

Interpretation (ta'wil) is among the most debated terms in Arab culture. Linguistically, as stated in *Lisan al-Arab* under the root (أول): "to interpret speech is to contemplate and assess it. To interpret is to explain it, meaning to explain speech whose meanings differ and cannot be understood without explanation beyond its literal wording" (Ibn Manzur 2008, p. 383). This is precisely what poetic text requires: contemplation, reflection, assessment, and deep interpretation.

Interpretation also means "returning to the origin of something to explain its significance and meaning; from another perspective, it means explaining its meaning after stripping its surface; and from a third perspective, it means transferring the apparent meaning from its original position to one requiring evidence without which the apparent meaning would not be abandoned" (Hijazi 2008, p. 166).

It is known that reading poetic discourse compels us to transcend the text's surface and apparent meaning to reach its deep structure through decoding symbols that enable us to move from the text's apparent meaning to its profound meaning (Al-Qaud 2002, pp. 299-300).

There exists a different concept of interpretation that sees the word as meaning both "a return to origin and reaching a goal and purpose. While returning to origin is a reverse movement, reaching a goal is a progressive, developing movement" (Abu Zaid 1990, p. 259).

However, we see these two meanings as inseparable; for interpretation to reach its intended goal, it cannot eliminate the movement back to origin, which serves as a starting point

for establishing multiple aspects and significances, encompassing linguistic relationships without returning to an absolute origin.

This linguistic approach to the concept of interpretation allows us to access its functional, terminological meaning. Historically, it passed through symbolic or esoteric interpretation focused on sacred texts interpretation, being a mechanism for interpreting religious texts in connection with exegesis, distinguishing between "traditional interpretation" and "rational interpretation." The former collects linguistic and historical evidence to help understand the text objectively, while the latter interprets revelation based on the Quran carrying multiple meanings and purposes, acknowledging that certain texts (clear verses) cannot be interpreted while interpretation applies to ambiguous verses, as practiced by philosophers, Mu'tazilites, Sufis, and Shi'ites (Abu Zaid 1991, pp. 14-15). Though interpretation remains a possible reading of Quranic text, it serves as a safety valve against interpretative chaos, accepting multiple readings subject to reading standards and confirming the openness of Quranic text's significance as miraculous speech (Bara 2005, p. 340).

Therefore, we observe that the concept of interpretation was initially linked to reading and explaining religious texts, before taking another path in the modern era through its integration into literary interpretation and social sciences. Every literary text now has multiple interpretative dimensions that vary with its recipients, requiring critics to explain one of these dimensions while exploring its implications through the text's historical and linguistic givens, which are inseparable from the reader's ideology and procedural tools through which they can form a text that is fundamentally one of the esoteric interpretative dimensions in the literary text. This means it is one of the text's deep structures that no single reader can fully fathom; rather, they attempt to interpret a part and uncover its implications and meaning within their ideological framework, where accessing the internal is achieved through the external.

Consequently, the term interpretation in the modern era has transformed into what is called "interpretation theory" or Hermeneutics, evolving from serving sacred texts to investigating various forms of human discourse. The history of interpretation isn't merely a transition from sacred to human, but also a movement from narrowness to breadth - from the constraints of a single subject to multiple subjects, from limited focus on religious text interpretation to broader attention to different forms of discourse including poetry, fiction, philosophy, literary criticism, and semiotics (Tawfiq 1994, pp. 58-59).

Second: Interpretation within Historical Analysis Framework and the Hermeneutic Circle

The term hermeneutics, meaning the art of interpretation, has been a focal point of debate that began theologically with sacred text interpretation, continued epistemologically with multiple critical readings of creative phenomena, and philosophically due to its ontological connection to existential vision and cosmic interpretation from dialectical and demonstrative perspectives. Paul Ricoeur adopts "the following scientific definition of hermeneutics: it is a theory of understanding processes in their relationship to text interpretation. Thus, the fundamental idea in hermeneutics will be perceiving discourse as text.

This paves the way for attempting to resolve the central hermeneutic problem, which is the opposition that I see reaching catastrophic levels between explanation and understanding. Therefore, any integrated research between these two concepts, which Romantic hermeneutics tends to deconstruct, will epistemologically lead to redirecting hermeneutics as required by the concept of text itself" (Ricoeur 2005, p. 38). What interests us in Paul Ricoeur's definition is his reference to understanding processes and their independence, as they don't solely rely on the interpreter's will but fundamentally involve many factors, stimuli, and capabilities, especially since interpretation is no longer that naive concept related to literal and symbolic meaning.

The new concept of hermeneutics has swept away many established perceptions to establish different deductions resulting from critiquing previous standards. Schleiermacher was among the pioneers in expanding the hermeneutic circle: "Thus, Schleiermacher's hermeneutic program carried a dual mark: a romantic mark through his pursuit of sensory relationship with the creative process, and a critical mark through his desire to expand universally valid rules of understanding" (Ricoeur 2005, p. 45). This translates awareness of the shift from superficial and literal interpretation to comprehensive and uncertain interpretation, where explanation is a matter of certainty while interpretation is a matter of speculation. Accordingly, Schleiermacher distinguishes between two methodologies in interpretative practice:

1. Linguistic Rules Methodology: This approach treats the text or any expression based on its specific language [regional language, grammatical structure, literary form], determining word meanings through their constituent sentences and these sentences' meanings, in light of the work as a whole: linguistic interpretation thus finds the precise meaning of specific discourse through and with the aid of language.

2. Psychological Interpretation Methodology: This approach relies on the author's bibliography, intellectual and general life, and the motivations and incentives that drove them to express and write, positioning the work (text) within the context of the author's life and its historical context" (Muftah 1990, pp. 90-91).

Atef Jawda sees that: "the horizon of meaning is unlimited, and the openness of both text and interpreter establishes the structural element in the fusion of horizons. In this dialogic understanding, the concepts used by the other, whether a text or a present 'you,' are newly acquired, as concepts become embedded in the interpreter's perception in our understanding of the question posed by the text; we also question ourselves, thereby allowing meaning to unfold and reveal its possibilities" (Nasr 1996, p. 16).

It's worth noting here that the recipient is addressed because the text addresses them, but they are also a speaker because they dialogue with the text. Thus, the act of reception clearly appears as an uninterrupted dialogue and a growth in the degree of existence manifested in the cyclical exchange between the positions of address and speech.

Michel Foucault attempted to establish a general encyclopedia of various interpretative techniques known to Western thought from the Greeks to the modern era, based on two fundamental ideas. The first is: "the belief that language does not say exactly what it means, and the second is that it always transcends its pure verbal form, and that there are other things in the world that speak without being language."

❖ Aspects of Interpretation in the Modern Era

Foucault delineated the contours of interpretation in the modern era through the following points:

1. Interpretation is a surface movement that increases in elevation, allowing the depth beneath it to gradually unveil itself.
2. Excessive engagement in interpretation brings us dangerously close to a zone where interpretation not only regresses but also vanishes, leading to the disappearance of the interpreter themselves. Upon reaching this threshold, a separation occurs.
3. The inexhaustibility of interpretation implies that there is nothing to interpret; thus, there is no starting element for interpretation. All elements are, in essence, interpretations themselves. Every sign is an interpretation of other signs, and each interpretation appropriates a prior interpretation. This indicates that interpretation precedes the sign, which is a characteristic of

contemporary interpretation, what Foucault referred to as the ontological nature of language (Bghoura 2005, pp. 215-216).

Third: Poetic Discourse and the Multiplicity of Meaning in Interpretative Contexts

The central question in exploring poetry is not to seek limited, convincing answers that would merely add another layer of stillness to the static nature of classical reading, as suggested by a monolithic perspective that imposes evaluative judgments and ready-made answers steeped in ideological biases.

The inquiry into poetry remains a question of possibilities and interpretations that are distant from systems of evidence and argumentation—far from clarification and elucidation, and also removed from justification and explanation. It constitutes a hermeneutics of poetry, which grants the reader the freedom to navigate between intended meaning and the assumptions of perception that have been approached through mystical experience in its ascent within the text to unveil the essence of meaning or knowledge. This rich experience in our Arab heritage has expanded its horizons with modern studies that have solidified interpretation through methodological foundations. At the forefront of these movements is deconstruction, which has liberated the principle of multiple readings, remaining relative and requiring subsequent deconstruction. The reader's task in this domain is to "analyze the text starting from its surface and then penetrate its depths in a way that highlights the multiplicity of its meanings rather than confining it to a single meaning" (Abu Dib 1987, p. 143).

From this interpretive perspective, which engages in dialogue and debate with the question of poetry, reading emerges as a distinctive creative act. The reader transforms from a mere follower of the discourse's codes into a genuine producer of the discourse, confronting the semiotic and intertextual signs of poetry that organize themselves into the methodologies of poetic interpretation. This establishes a dynamic relationship with the reader, granting them the right to unravel the mysteries of the poetic question as a product of the text.

We arrive at a subsequent inquiry into poetry characterized by its Arabic essence. The question remains in search of the relationship between poetry as a vision in the Arabic language. We grasp meaningful answers only when we cascade questions upon questions: Is the issue of Arab critique ancient or modern, related to poetry as poetry or to poetry as Arabic, formed within an Arabic linguistic structure?

Thus, the poetic language in contemporary poetic texts is a language of signs with new significations. Consequently, the entire text becomes a sign among other significative signs. In terms of form, its new structure is intertwined with the inner experience related to human sentiment and reflective vision, accompanied by intellectual and philosophical influences. This renders contemporary poetic texts as generative, not beginning from a specific starting point nor concluding at a defined endpoint. They are texts that open up to the succession of absent texts and multiple readings, embodying interpretation.

Perhaps the most pressing question in modern critical consciousness is how it approaches and internalizes contemporary poetic texts, attempting to transcend their boundaries—not to seize a singular meaning but to achieve tests of spirit, intuition, and contemplation through engaging with the transparency of meaning, its aesthetics, and rhythm, and delving into its intricacies. The text itself is creative in the essence of being, and the reader is but another self seeking its reflection within the poetic text, thus opening broader avenues for a methodology rich in openness, crystallized through the question of anxiety and revelation—this is the question of hermeneutics: How do we understand poetic texts aesthetically?

Poetics emerged from the philosophical conception of beauty, which Plato defines as "that which makes beautiful things beautiful." Consequently, the concept of poetics became

associated with "what transforms a text into a poetic text" (Kohn 2000, p. 10). While the distinction between poetry and non-poetry (prose) was clear in classical eras, today it tends to fade and diminish (Kohn 2000, p. 11). Nevertheless, the primary characteristic uniting various poetics lies in the opposition of poetry to non-poetry.

❖ **Types of Poetics**

The juxtaposition of poetry and non-poetry (prose) has given rise to various forms of poetics, including:

1. **Content-Based Poetics:** This type focuses on theories that seek poetic qualities within the content. These theories generally do not perceive poetic meaning as a semantic property or a qualitatively distinct meaning; rather, they consider it merely an enhancement of meaning. Typically, these are semantic and stylistic poetics.

2. **Playful Language Poetics:** This approach views poetic texts as a form of wordplay, transforming them into aesthetically pleasing linguistic subjects. Such poetics include structural and formalist theories.

3. **Multiplicity of Meaning Poetics:** This contemporary theory does not recognize layers of meaning but upholds the idea of multiplicity. This type belongs to comparative poetics that rely on interpretation, the aesthetics of reception, deconstruction, and reading theory.

The role of poetic language is not merely to liberate the poetic sign; it also seeks to reclaim it in a dynamic movement away from the isolation of the signifier, granting freedom to the signified. Consequently, deviation appears as a "penetrating distance," serving as a form that suffices to model another form. Instead of adhering to established models, poetics focuses on breaking and refuting them, exploring what eludes conventional structures.

Poetics has attempted to trace the impact of such deviation by engaging in a reflective experience that regards poetic language as an expressive mode deviating from the norm. Its presence is determined by the degree of this deviation, necessitating a criterion to evaluate the levels and forms of such deviations against the backdrop of conventional language use. The effect on the reader's sensibility becomes a measure of this evaluation. However, this exploration has led to further ambiguities concerning the phenomenon of deviation, which has been destined for deferred closure. This is not due to a failure in vision, shortcomings in methodology, or deficiencies in reflection, but rather to the following reasons:

- The vastness of its subject matter, "literariness," which is part of a broader theory of language—namely communication—contrasting with the confinement of poetics within binary distinctions: poetry/prose, reality/metaphor, norm/deviation.
- Its focus on poetry as a linguistic function arising from uses that contrast with or oppose prose.
- The separation of language from its essence (poetry) and its treatment as merely a component, concentrating on the play of metaphors and understanding poetry as merely a deviation from the original language (Kheira 2000, p. 35).

Conclusion

In light of the above, hermeneutics centers on reading, understanding, and analyzing discourse in terms of its interpretation and meaning. Thus, the relationship between the interpreter (critic) and the discourse becomes one of comprehending and grasping meaning, with the aim of uncovering possible truths that may be concealed within it, as well as understanding the semantic, cognitive, and aesthetic values inherent in the text—essentially, grasping the text in all its connotations.

Poetics represents an inquiry into what makes literature "literary," focusing on the characteristics inherent in any distinctive and creative work. Deviation is the potential of language during the moment of poetic revelation, thus embodying multiple avenues for innovation and creativity.

The diversity of poetic orientations is central to enriching and enhancing critical experiences. It reveals the openness of aesthetic perception in the reader on one hand, and the evocative density, referential depth, and semantic richness of the texts on the other.

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