

**The Paradigm Shift in Arabic Literary Theory:
An Analytical Inquiry into Al-Ghathami's Cultural Criticism**

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Abstract

This study explores Abdullah Al-Ghadhami's project in cultural criticism through his reading of Arabic poetry and the debate it has raised between cultural and literary criticism. It examines his use of Western cultural theories and adapted critical concepts to reveal the underlying structures of Arabic poetry. It also addresses the following questions: How does Al-Ghadhami define cultural criticism? How does he apply it to classical Arabic texts? And how does he present it as an alternative to literary criticism.

Keywords: Cultural criticism, AlGhathami, critical framework, underlying structures, alternative literary methodology.

التحول النموذجي في النظرية الأدبية العربية: دراسة تحليلية في النقد الثقافي عند الغدّامي

ملخص

تستكشف هذه الدراسة مشروع عبد الله الغدّامي في النقد الثقافي، عبر فحص قراءته الثقافية للشعر العربي، وما أثارته من جدل بين النقد الثقافي والنقد الأدبي. سعى الغدّامي إلى توظيف النظريات الثقافية الغربية بأسلوب مميز، مع تكييف المصطلحات النقدية لتحليل البنى الكامنة التي تخفيها جماليات الشعر العربي. وتكشف قراءته الجريئة والعميقة عن الاختلالات النسقية الكامنة تحت السطح، واضعةً نقده الثقافي بوصفه منهجًا بديلًا للنقد الأدبي التقليدي. وتهدف هذه الدراسة إلى الإجابة عن الأسئلة الآتية: كيف يعرف الغدّامي النقد الثقافي؟ وكيف يطبق هذا المنهج على النصوص العربية الكلاسيكية؟ وكيف يقدم مشروعه بوصفه بديلًا للنقد الأدبي؟

الكلمات المفتاحية: نقد ثقافي، غدّامي، إطار نقدي، بنى كامنة، منهج أدبي بديل.

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Introduction:

The emergence of cultural criticism within Arab literary studies marked a decisive moment of intellectual rupture with long-established aesthetic and rhetorical approaches. This shift was driven by a growing dissatisfaction with criticism that confined itself to formal beauty, stylistic analysis, and textual autonomy, while neglecting the broader cultural, ideological, and social forces shaping literary production. Cultural criticism, thus; positioned itself as an intervention that seeks to interrogate what lies beneath the surface of discourse, exposing the concealed systems that operate through language, symbolism, and aesthetic pleasure.

Within this context, Abdullah Al-Ghathami stands out as one of the most influential and controversial figures in Arab cultural criticism. His project does not merely propose an expansion of critical tools, but advances a radical claim that traditional literary criticism has exhausted its epistemological potential and must give way to a culturally oriented mode of analysis. By applying concepts derived from Western critical theories—such as cultural materialism, post-structuralism, and discourse analysis—Al-Ghathami attempts to uncover the hidden cultural patterns embedded in Arabic poetic and literary texts, particularly those related to authority, patriarchy, and domination.

However, the boldness of Al-Ghathami's project raises fundamental theoretical and methodological questions: To what extent can cultural criticism legitimately replace literary criticism rather than coexist with it? Does the emphasis on uncovering hidden systems risk reducing literary texts to ideological documents stripped of their aesthetic specificity? And are the conceptual tools proposed by Al-Ghathami—such as the systemic function, the dual author, and the cultural pun—sufficiently rigorous to support the sweeping conclusions he draws about Arabic literary heritage?

This article approaches Al-Ghathami's cultural criticism not as a finished or unquestionable paradigm, but as a critical experiment that invites scrutiny and reassessment. It seeks to examine the conceptual foundations of his project, to analyze its methodological procedures, and to evaluate its practical applications to classical and modern Arabic poetry. By doing so, the study aims at highlighting both the intellectual contributions and the epistemological limitations of Al-Ghathami's approach, arguing that cultural criticism, while undoubtedly enriching critical practice, cannot justifiably annul the role of literary criticism or negate the centrality of aesthetic value in literary discourse.

I. Cultural Criticism and Reconfiguration of Critical Terminology through AlGhathami's Lens:

Cultural Criticism utilizes a systematic methodology predicated on specific mechanisms, terminologies, and procedural instruments, integrating influences from neo-Marxism, cultural materialism, new historicism, feminist criticism, postcolonialism, and technological narrative discourse. The preeminent Arab critic Abdullah AlGhathami has offered significant contributions to this discipline, notably in his publications *Cultural Criticism: A Reading in Arab Cultural Frameworks* and *Cultural Criticism or Literary Criticism?* (Al-Ghathami, 2005). Within these works, AlGhathami delineates his conceptualization of cultural criticism, elucidating its operative mechanisms and methodological framework. Although his approach remains aligned with universal principles, it introduces distinctive shifts in terminology and procedural application, which may be summarized as follows:

1- Systemic Meaning:

Roman Jakobson classified the communicative model into six primary functions, each oriented toward a specific constituent: the emotive (sender), conative (receiver), referential (context), metalingual (code), phatic (contact), and aesthetic (message). (Al-Ghathami & Asteef, 2004). AlGhathami, while acknowledging the influence of this model on contemporary critical thought, contends that an exclusive focus on the aesthetic function is inconsistent with the objectives of Cultural Criticism. Consequently, he proposes a seventh dimension the "systemic meaning" (Al-Ghathami, 2005: 64), designed to emphasize systemic



significance over purely literary aesthetics. (Al-Ghathami & Asteef, 2004: 23–24) This transition represents a shift in analytical focus from literal and implied meanings toward a framework of systemic interpretation. (Al-Ghathami, 2005: 64).

2- Systemic Meaning:

Al-Ghathami's cultural project identifies three distinct strata of meaning. The first is explicit, direct meaning, which is governed by grammatical structures and serves a primary communicative and informative purpose. The second is implicit, symbolic meaning, characterized by semantic duality; this level is inherent to the literary sentence and fulfills an aesthetic function, thereby establishing the fundamental conditions of "literariness." The third level which Al-Ghathami introduces to emancipate critical discourse from the traditional hegemony of aesthetics is cultural-systemic meaning. This dimension is intrinsically linked to the systemic element and the "cultural sentence," ultimately generating systemic cultural significance.

3- The Cultural Sentence:

Al-Ghathami posits a fundamental interdependence between cultural meaning and the cultural sentence, asserting that these sentences are profoundly calibrated to the complexities of cultural formation. This anthropological perspective transcends mere customs and norms, encompassing systemic mechanisms such as laws, regulations, and strategic frameworks that internalize values of centralization and subjugation. These mechanisms are perpetuated through repetition and the management of coercive containment across diverse cultural structures. Such systems are architected for dominance, engendering a subjective bias within cultural discourse that frequently projects the traits of the self onto "the Other," thereby transforming the Other into a mirror of the ego (Al-Ghathami, 2005: 71–72) a phenomenon frequently observed in ethnographic studies.

Furthermore, Al-Ghathami maintains that cultural criticism necessitates a distinction between the quantitative properties of the grammatical sentence and its qualitative cultural significance. He contends that a single cultural sentence can possess the semiotic weight of thousands of grammatical sentences due to its high density of meaning and expressive resonance. Consequently, the cultural sentence becomes the primary unit of analysis, as it encapsulates cultural discourse and elucidates contextual meanings embedded within broader cultural environments.

Finally, Al-Ghathami argues that the traditional application of literary or rhetorical metaphor typically confined to individual words or isolated sentences are insufficient for the analysis of cultural discourse. In the framework of cultural criticism, the objective is the disclosure of "cultural sentences" rather than those that are merely grammatical or literary. Thus, metaphor is reconceptualized to extend beyond linguistic fragments, encompassing entire discourses that simultaneously shape and are shaped by broader cultural responses.

4- The Dual Author:

Al-Ghathami extends his investigation into the systemic obscurity inherent in Arabic literature and criticism, which, he contends, obscures critical consciousness. He subsequently re-evaluates the concept of authorship, introducing a theoretical departure from traditional paradigms that attribute a text to a solitary creator. He posits that every creative endeavor involves a duality of authorship: the overt biographical author which was traditionally the focus of literary inquiry, and an implicit author which is culture itself. The latter is the "true" author synthesized by a specific cultural milieu, acting as its medium to unconsciously propagate entrenched systems. This cultural dimension possesses a structural potency that subsumes the individual writer within overarching conceptual frameworks, thereby aligning the discourse with specific ideological imperatives. Consequently, the author emerges as a bifurcated entity: one personal and one cultural, with the cultural component perpetually exerting a transformative influence over the individual. Ultimately, the divergence between latent cultural significance and manifest discourse serves as the catalyst for cultural criticism,



elucidating the dual author's role and affirming the primacy of cultural frameworks in the construction of discourse.

5- Synecdoche:

In classical linguistic theory, the trope is defined as a figure of speech wherein a term or phrase is deployed beyond its literal denotation. As established in rhetorical tradition, the use of metaphor and linguistic expansion involves utilizing a word not for its literal essence, but to convey a related or analogous meaning, thereby transcending the conventional boundaries of the phrase. Historically, tropes have occupied a central position in classical rhetoric, serving as the foundation of eloquence and aesthetic sophistication. Their utility lies in their capacity to endow literary texts with stylistic complexity and linguistic resonance.

However, Al-Ghathami provides a divergent interpretation of tropes, contesting their purely aesthetic function within the prevailing critical paradigm. He contends that tropes function as linguistic mechanisms employed to disseminate specific cultural ideologies, subtly influencing the recipient—a state he characterizes as "cultural blindness." Within this linguistic structure, a network of primary tropes, including synecdoche, is strategically organized according to a deliberate systemic design. The inherent risk of these figures resides in their capacity for the subtle manipulation of meaning. Consequently, the trope is elevated to a vital theoretical instrument in Al-Ghathami's methodology, serving as the most efficacious means of deconstructing the latent systems embedded within sophisticated linguistic structures. He asserts that without this analytical tool, cultural criticism cannot achieve the theoretical advancements that have remained inaccessible to traditional literary criticism and related disciplines (Al-Samhi et al., n.d.: 36). This requirement necessitates the formulation of innovative strategies to expose these underlying systems, given that conventional methodologies have proven inadequate for such a task.

6- Cultural Pun:

Etymologically, the term "pun" signifies concealment and obfuscation, suggesting the pursuit of a significance that deviates from a word's literal interpretation; essentially, it implies that a single term may harbor multiple meanings. This rhetorical device holds substantial weight within cultural criticism, as it enables readers to analyze characters and speakers pseudonymously rather than focusing on the authors, thereby fostering the perception of literary autonomy. Al-Ghathami contests the traditional Arabic rhetorical understanding of the pun as intentional ambiguity, asserting that this concept, much like the broader rhetorical framework, primarily addresses conscious expressive phenomena and their interpretation within discourse. This preoccupation with deliberate ambiguity has restricted the capacity of the pun to expose underlying cultural structures, relegating it to a form of sophisticated aesthetic artifice where both the creator and the audience remain aware of the intended significations. Consequently, literary criticism has frequently been limited to aesthetic decoding rather than the investigation of the pervasive and elusive cultural frameworks integrated within discourse.

From this standpoint, Al-Ghathami broadens the definition of the pun, proposing that it comprises two distinct layers: a primary, superficial meaning and a secondary, obscured meaning that remains subconscious and frequently unrecognized by both the author and the reader. He maintains that this latent depth constitutes the authentic foundation of discourse, wielding a significant influence that surpasses conscious emotional or social interactions. To describe this phenomenon, Al-Ghathami introduces the term "cultural pun," suggesting it necessitates a rigorous excavation to reveal the latent cultural connotations residing beneath textual surfaces.

7- Subtext:

The subtextual system, whether dominant or marginalized, serves as a fundamental component of cultural criticism. It operates on the premise that every culture is underpinned by latent systems; for example, the rhetorical and aesthetic frameworks of literature often



mask these underlying subtextual structures. This concept is defined as a collection of values embedded behind texts, discourses, and social practices. Al-Ghathami has established this notion as the centerpiece of his cultural criticism project, driven by the conviction that these cultural frameworks are historical, persistent, and ubiquitous, often characterized by a societal predisposition toward consuming cultural outputs that reinforce such systems. The rapid and widespread public endorsement of a specific text or cultural product indicates the active presence of a subtextual system that requires identification and analysis.

Therefore, the examination of discursive systems within their diverse contexts is essential. Every discourse contains non-aesthetic semantic components rooted in cultural realities—shaped by historical, political, and social conditions—which are utilized to subtly disseminate their systems while hiding behind aesthetic facades. Al-Ghathami contends that culture maintains dominant systems that rely on concealment through dense masks, the most critical and hazardous being the mask of aesthetics. The objective of cultural criticism is to identify, to comprehend, and to interpret these systems, removing the veil from their hidden dimensions and investigating the truths obscured by deceptive appearances to reveal their impact on history, customs, and culture.

Al-Ghathami repeatedly highlights this systemic positioning, noting that the system is inherently narrative and operates through a complex plot, allowing it to remain implicit and constantly concealed behind various masks—most notably linguistic aesthetics. Through the vehicle of rhetoric and aesthetics, these systems circulate securely under a broader protective canopy. Al-Ghathami establishes four essential criteria for a system: first, the simultaneous presence and interaction of two systems within a single text or entity; second, a central contradiction between an implicit system and an explicit one; third, the aesthetic nature of the textual sample; and fourth, the text's broad public readability and acceptance. The absence of these collective conditions renders a cultural study unfeasible.

II. AlGhathami's Methodological Framework to Cultural Frameworks:

AlGhathami identifies specific selections from both classical and contemporary Arabic poetry as the foundational material for his cultural methodology and as manifestations of his systemic principles. This selection is predicated on his recognition of poetry's foundational role within Arab culture, its central and pervasive influence on the collective consciousness, and its potent effect on a general audience oriented toward aesthetics. In his perspective, poetry functions as the dangerous repository of these systems, the germ disguised in aesthetics, which has continued to exert its influence and produce its models generation after generation, not only in poetic discourse but in all cultural manifestations, starting with prose, which one senses from an early stage, as well as intellectual, political, and creative discourse, including criticism.

The implementation of AlGhathami's approach commences with the deconstruction of this cultural architecture to reveal its latent systems. He posits novel and non-traditional cultural inquiries, substituting the analysis of discourse with the analysis of the system, and shifting focus from explicit content to the subtextual and the unstated. As he notes, the question of mass consumption rises to dominance, while the question of the creative elite recedes. Moreover, questions about the process of influencing the audience, caught between the center and the margin, multiply.

Evidently, these inquiries facilitate a rigorous, concentrated, and meticulous cultural examination of the systems inherent in Arab culture. This is achieved by analyzing the subtexts that destabilize the internal mechanisms of poetry and by investigating the techniques of aesthetic delivery and their instrumentalization for cultural objectives. This methodology constitutes the primary axis and essence of AlGhathami's cultural enterprise. He has examined these selected Arabic poems to investigate their underlying systems, the most significant of which include:



1- Patriarchal Discourse:

Al-Ghathami's analytical framework rigorously explores the patriarchal discourse profoundly integrated into Arab intellectual tradition and consciousness. This discourse, predicated on societal values considered sacrosanct within Arab culture, saturates public existence and functions as a linguistic manifestation of masculinity, virility, and reproductive capacity. Although it appears to focus on concepts of hegemony, preeminence, and the archetypal traits of the Arab male, Al-Ghathami provides an alternative interpretation by emphasizing the latent patriarchal structures that obscure these manifest meanings. This systemic framework, entrenched within the social, political, and epistemological architectures of the Arab world, instrumentalizes these structures for its own preservation. Consequently, Al-Ghathami aims to restructure this patriarchal discourse by contesting the perceptions, cognitive faculties, and behaviors it delineates, thereby reframing the authentic Arab reality. He contends that the patriarchal paradigm functions as a vital analytical lens for investigating the perilous ideological foundations that govern Arab thought and cultural programming.

Following this premise, Al-Ghathami scrutinizes the patriarchal cultural construct within Arab society, investigating its various strata and its concurrent cultural frameworks. He underscores how patriarchal discourse was institutionalized as a paramount value that remained beyond reproach, asserting that the dominance of male authority governed symbolic structures, notably language. From this viewpoint, language serves as the fundamental pillar sustaining and protecting this authority; thus, a scholar requires no specific text to substantiate the presence of this patriarchal ideology, exposes its constituents, or delineates its architecture.

In his investigation, Al-Ghathami curated a selection of classical and contemporary Arabic poetry significant to Arab literary history, including the oeuvres of Jarir, Al-Mutanabbi, Abu Tammam, Al-Nabigha al-Dhubyani, Nizar Qabbani, and Adonis. He initiated a critical inquiry by addressing fundamental questions, such as whether Al-Mutanabbi represents a distinguished creator, a significant mendicant, or a synthesis of both. His objective was to reveal the authentic function of panegyric poetry in classical Arabic, seeking to comprehend the underlying motivations that compelled Arab culture—as represented through verse—to advocate for a contradictory and fabricated discourse at odds with reality. This poetic artifice, emerging from the interaction between the poet, the benefactor, and the cultural environment, instituted and normalized a system of falsehoods through an aesthetically pleasing medium. Consequently, this became an established cultural and social convention that was both pursued and anticipated. This aesthetic maneuver proved highly influential during the zenith of Arabic poetry, embedding panegyric discourse within the collective psyche alongside its most hazardous values: the depiction of a culture characterized by sycophancy and hypocrisy, and the portrayal of the patron through synthesized, self-serving qualities that elevated the subject above the constraints of truth and material reality.

Al-Ghathami identifies a binary axiological framework that has historically characterized Arabic poetry. He contends that poetic production has been subject to two antithetical perceptions: a venerated image, which predominates within the Arab collective consciousness—largely because "the poetic cultural institution was the most potent and influential" (Al-Ghathami, 2005: 97)—and a marginalized, pejorative image associated with servility, mendicancy, and ethical degradation. This thesis draws upon foundational literary and historical compendiums, including Al-Asma'i's *Al-Bayan wa'l-Tabyin*, Ibn Rashīq's *Al-Umdah*, Al-Masudi's *Muruj al-Dhahab*, and Abu Hayyan al-Tawhidi's *Al-Imtā' wa-l-Mu'ānasah*.

Because the cultural establishment canonized poetry as the primary epistemological and existential record of the Arab people, any discourse critiquing or disparaging the medium was effectively neutralized. Consequently, Arab society was compelled to adopt poetry as its linguistic and moral standard, viewing poets as the ultimate exemplars of conduct and



rhetoric—the "princes of speech," as defined by Khalil ibn Ahmad al-Farahidi. This cultural centrality underwent a radical shift during the pre-Islamic era, moving from the poetic form itself to the persona of the poet, whose individual interests became paramount. The rise of commissioned panegyrics fostered a "cultural fusion of eloquence and sophisticated falsehood," (Al-Ghathami, 2005: 100) involving a tripartite relationship between the poet, the patron, and financial reward. This system institutionalized a poetic ethic that masked deception as truth and elevated the undeserving, all while being sanctioned by an institution that marketed poetry as a repository of virtue.

These systemic attributes permeated the collective psyche, influencing social behavior and framing the ruler through the lens of hyper-masculinity. Even as formal rhetoric evolved and the poet's role shifted away from tribal advocacy, traditional tribal values—such as ancestral pride, oppression, and arrogance—persisted. These values, rooted in a history of raiding and conflict, equated the tyrant with the sage. This is exemplified in the works of Amr ibn Kulthum and the verse by Zuhayr ibn Abi Salma: He who does not oppress others will be oppressed.

Ancient Arabic prose further consolidated this cultural paradigm. The focus shifted from collective tribal prowess to individualistic gain, repurposing survival-based tribal values for self-serving ends. These fabricated individualistic values, sustained through emotional manipulation, arguably detached the Arab identity from objective reality, fostering a reactive emotional state. The conceptualization of the "quintessential poet" as the national voice solidified this individualistic model. This was most evident in panegyric poetry, where linguistic excellence was leveraged for material gain, thereby embedding individualism into the national cultural identity.

The individual poetic voice became synonymous with notions of uniqueness and superiority. Critically, this voice attained cultural hegemony through the establishment of hierarchies that ranked poets based on individual skill. Critics categorized poets into four distinct tiers, placing the "most poetic" at the summit. Al-Ghathami argues that this structure positioned the "patriarchal" figure at the apex of the social hierarchy, reinforcing notions of class distinction. This patriarchal ego eventually monopolized self-expression; where earlier poets like Amr ibn Kulthum balanced the "I" with the "we," the subsequent trajectory favored the singular "Ego".

This patriarchal discourse, characterized by rigid stratification, extended its influence over linguistics, prioritizing form and medium over substantive meaning. This led to a hierarchical organization of language, where words and meanings were categorized into "noble" or "pure" strata, and even the narrators of these texts were subjected to a class-based ranking system.

AlGhathami subsequently undertakes a critical analysis of the hidden patriarchal structures within various Arabic poems. By investigating their symbolic content, he aims to uncover the underlying cultural assumptions. To illustrate his point, he references verses from Amr ibn Kulthum's ode (Al-Ghathami, 2005: 119–122):

We claim this world, its lands and skies our own,
When we strike, our strength is widely shown.
As tyrants, we ascend without a fall,
But first, we challenge those who stand tall.
The seas we've filled until their shores can't hold,
Their waves now tremble at our courage bold.
When babes outgrow the cradle's gentle sway,
Even giants bend beneath our sway.
We drink from streams where waters purest flow,
While others sip from depths murky and low.
Let none forget the might we've come to claim,
For we surpass the weak, outlast the lame.



These verses underscore the centralizing, arrogant, and exclusionary nature of tribal logic, rooted in the value of injustice—central to pre-Islamic values. This behavior is not merely situational but arises from a fundamental aspect of the pre-Islamic value system, as illustrated by the lines, (We were the oppressed, yet we've never wronged, but soon we'll turn the tables on our wrongers). In this context, the tribe serves as the ultimate reference point, regardless of individual status, asserting dominion through coercion and intimidation. As the poetic "Ego" shifted from representing the tribe to the individual, it inherited these systemic particularities and modes of expression, exemplified in the poetry of Jarir (Al-Ghathami, 2005: 127):

Time perishes, but death and time abide,
Bring me a thing eternal, side by side

Which is a cultural retort to Farazdaq's claim:

I am that Death who comes to quench your breath—
Rage as you will, you wrestle but with death.

The verses of Jarir and Farazdaq are rooted in the expression of an inflated, individualistic, and arrogant poetic ego. This ego is all-encompassing and unrivaled, and the cultural discourse it embodies is of the same essence. It positions the individual as both time and death, and this lineage of patriarchal is perpetuated through generations. Al-Ghathami cites Al-Mutanabbi as the greatest exemplar and the undisputed heir of this tradition, considering him 'the greatest translator of the tribal consciousness, making him our first poet (The patriarchal archetype)'. AlGhathami quotes several of Al-Mutanabbi's early poems (Al-Ghathami, 2005: 119–122), including...

To what great heights might I ascend, what depths descend?

I'll cast aside all creation, seen or penned.

My ambitions soar, boundless and untamed,

The world, like a single strand, I'll claim and command.

"And he will have many poems, countless in number, all of which will merely be variations upon this same pattern; such as (Al-Ghathami, 2005: 127)":

Time itself but echoes my verse's might,

My words ignite, and time takes flight.

Al-Mutanabbi (Al-Ghathami, 2005: 127), (Archetype poet), reaches the pinnacle of his hierarchical expression, he says:

My soul, so grand, disdains mortal frame,

A being divine, I claim my name.

Those to whom one aspires to belong are, in fact, the epitome of the patriarchal class that we have come to identify as the patriarchs (fuḥūl) AlGhathami progresses in his approach to these poetic examples, moving from understanding and explanation to cultural interpretation. He concludes that ancient Arabic poetry exalts the masculinity of the individual, who is unparalleled, and that this is a fertile ground for delving into its undisclosed cultural undercurrents. This patriarchal discourse has not weakened, despite the passage of time, and it manifests in modern poetry, where the poet begins by distinguishing himself from others in a manner imbued with superiority. Ahmed Shawqi (Al-Ghathami, 2005: 124), for example, speaks with the voice of the enduring old-new patriarchal discourse when he states in his famous verse:

The garment of defiance beckoned, proclaiming,

You poets are the true essence of humanity.

The process of social and discursive categorization continues to differentiate between poets and the "other," where the latter is effectively reduced to the status of "non-people." Al-Ghathami's inquiry concludes with an analysis steeped in cultural judgment, highlighting the perils of a poetic discourse that originated the concept of the "patriarch." While this discourse possesses undeniable aesthetic merit, it is characterized by profound flaws that have fundamentally influenced Arab identity and its historical development. Consequently, the



Arab ego has undergone a process of hyper-inflation, conditioned by the discursive structures of Arab cultural heritage, resulting in significant adverse effects. Al-Ghathami maintains that "Arabic poetry, for all its beauty, contains extremely dangerous discursive flaws" (Al-Ghathami, 2005: 93–94) which have fostered defects within the Arab personality. Characteristics associated with the beggar, the liar, the hypocrite, and the greedy coexist alongside with the figure of the solitary "patriarch"—a manifestation of an inflated ego that marginalizes the other; both elements are deeply rooted in poetic discourse and extend into broader discursive fields.

The preoccupation with poetic aesthetics has caused audiences to ignore critical discursive shortcomings, permitting the most hazardous components of cultural discourse to remain unexamined. As a result, we have not examined the primary components of our cultural and behavioral identity. Al-Ghathami, therefore, endeavors to reveal the grave repercussions of the *fahul* (masculine/virile) discourse within the hegemonic poetic narrative of Arab culture, alongside the social, psychological, and intellectual toxins it has infused into the Arab psyche. This discourse has structured the Arab worldview, becoming integrated into daily conduct beyond conscious recognition. It follows that these latent subconscious influences consolidate into a profound reality, becoming foundational to the development of personality and the rise of the "patriarch." Al-Ghathami contends that identifying and deconstructing the components of this discourse is vital for comprehending the hidden dimensions of specific unconscious activities and their structural formation within Arab culture.

2- Oppressive Discourse:

Al-Ghathami contends that the binary opposition resulting from the intersection of poetry and the "patriarch" has supplanted an alternative binary: that of poetry and the tyrant. This transition is grounded in a profound cultural metamorphosis occurring toward the conclusion of the pre-Islamic era, which shifted cultural discourse from a collective "we" to an individualistic "I," thereby replacing humanistic values with egoistic and utilitarian ones. As a result, cultural structures emerged that celebrate and sustain mendacity and hypocrisy, epitomized by the tradition of panegyric poetry ingrained within Arab society.

Nevertheless, the hazards associated with the latter system exceed those of the former. The tyrant does not merely invoke the "I," which persists by suppressing the voice of the other, restricting freedom, and necessitating compliance. Rather, the tyrant personifies diverse manifestations of authoritarian subjugation, retaining considerable vigor through deceptive strategies employed against adversaries and the persistent formulation of exploitative statutes that solidify control over the populace. Within this framework, he fabricates values and concepts that merge into a delusional, treacherous system, protecting his despotic domain and rationale.

Historically, the synthesis of the concepts of "patriarch" and fatherhood among Arabs is attributable to the infiltration of oppressive discourse into the Arab system during the late pre-Islamic period. This period witnessed the rise of kingdoms in northern Arabia—specifically the Ghassanids and the Lakhmids—which were influenced by the patriarchal imperial structures dominant among the Persians and Romans. This evolution gave rise to the figure of the absolute monarch, glorified in his characteristics and singular in his status. Consequently, Persian and Roman imperial traditions permeated Arab culture; the Lakhmids and Ghassanids consolidated their authority not through martial dominance, but through the medium of panegyric poetry, offered in exchange for substantial material compensation to poets.

The traditional tribal chief was, thus; transformed into a non-tribal sovereign who dictated laws, influenced by both poetry and the inherited hallmarks of sovereignty. To satisfy the ruler's ambition to bridge the awe of the sultanate with moral nobility, the poet—possessing "power at his disposal"—strove to fulfill the sovereign's aspirations. This resulted in a new cultural product that manifested the image of the absolute ruler, as we find it in the early



panegyric poetry and the resulting discursive attributes, thereby constructing the metaphorical emperor as an emotive rhetorical sculpture.

Al-Ghathami persists in his investigation of the patriarchal discourse that facilitated the rise of the tyrannical ego, exposing its fabricated heroics within Arab culture across ideological, political, and social strata, while simultaneously deconstructing its internal power dynamics. Every form of the sacred vigorously guards its territory to entrench itself, utilizing specific mechanisms for maneuvering, coercion, and domination. Among the most perilous of these methods is the representation of culture through mythical, generalized symbolism, in which the sovereign personifies idealized masculinity and serves as a model for emulation.

Core values within the tribal system frequently pivot to accommodate the ruler, including the virtues of generosity and courage—existential values fundamental to Bedouin endurance and originally independent of any desire for acclaim or exaltation. Generosity, particularly, is vital for preserving life; honoring a guest is not merely an act of kindness but a necessity for survival in the harsh desert. Failure to uphold hospitality risks death for both the host and the guest. Consequently, the commendation of a Bedouin for such a trait remains authentic and sincere, as it is fundamentally rooted in their cultural identity.

Nonetheless, a profound metamorphosis in the character of the panegyricized occurred with the emergence of the Ghassanid and Lakhmid monarchs. These rulers commanded a distinct prestige; yet, despite contemporary political shifts, the foundational tribal value system endured. Sovereigns solicited commendation for their valor and magnanimity to validate their authority, accentuate their idiosyncratic virtues, and affirm their exclusive prerogatives. They were prepared to acquire these attributes financially, a demand expertly satisfied by poets such as al-Nabigha and al-A'sha. Consequently, tradition was forfeited for pecuniary advantage and a "logic of opportunistic commercialism".

This juncture marked the commencement of a broad cultural transition. Poetry evolved into a functional instrument, and virtues such as liberality—formerly integral to tribal existence—became tethered to personal prestige and "individual renown." As al-Ghathami notes, "Here, the archetype of the patriarch, the manifestation of the tyrannical ego, was established. It is, unquestionably, a metaphorical construct; however, its figurative nature did not preclude it from evolving into a social, political, and cultural actuality. In other words, the aesthetic and metaphorical poetic representation transitioned into a cognitive paradigm, assimilated and fostered through poetic rhetoric, subsequently replicated socially and mentally to become a systematic cultural archetype." (Al-Ghathami & Asteef, 2004).

In his investigation of Arab reality, al-Ghathami highlights the omnipresence of this repressive discourse across all facets of this patriarchal civilization. It infuses every domain, destabilizing the rapport between the Arab subject and the state. This is evidenced by the stifling of individualism, the relegation of persons to the status of compliant and deferential subjects, and the marginalization of their intellectual and ontological awareness through the rhetorical advancement of an autocratic ideology proficient in duplicity, artifice, and obfuscation.

Al-Ghathami identifies Saddam Hussein, the late Iraqi president, as a quintessential embodiment of the despot in both its classical and contemporary manifestations. He characterizes Saddam as a human specimen representing "a cultural product of a discourse that generates its archetypes not merely within verse, but within social and political reality." (Al-Ghathami & Asteef, 2004: 193) In this perspective, Saddam corresponds precisely to the patriarchal attributes envisioned in classical poetry. An analysis of Saddam Hussein's terminology reveals a remarkable alignment with the model of poetic discourse. He does not belong to the world so much as the world belongs to him. He is not Iraqi so much as Iraq has been 'Saddamized.' The military is Saddam's military; the conflict with Iran is designated as 'Saddam's Qadisiyyah.' Likewise, he is not a Ba'athist so much as the party itself is Saddamized. These values, bolstered by a poetic rhetoric that favored the centrality of the



agent over the deed, are mirrored in the manner virtues are attributed to the lauded as a prerequisite for praise, just as the poet assumes traits of exceptionalism and uniqueness as a prerequisite for patriarchal status.

Al-Ghathami executes an exhaustive critique of Saddam's vocabulary and the alterations he enforced upon humanistic, insurgent, and nationalist principles. He distorted these principles into a fraudulent metaphorical structure that advanced his objectives, perpetually masking his despotic egocentrism and entrenching his autocratic rule. Consequently, his rhetoric, characteristic of any autocrat, recalibrated the cosmos to align with his conduct, centering himself within it. Values pertaining to action underwent substantial systemic modification; for example, the concept of revolution was diminished to a singular coup defined by brutality and the liquidation of adversaries, merely substituting one oppressor for another. Correspondingly, citizenship was reinterpreted as allegiance to the singular leader as a dictatorial figure, conflating the revolutionary patriarch with the state itself." (Al-Ghathami & Asteef, 2004: 197).

Furthermore, al-Ghathami consistently underscores the reciprocal interests between the sovereign and cultural apparatuses which, notwithstanding their assertions of generating impartial cultural values, have historically maintained a bias in his favor. This collusion between the two entities traces back to the inception of the pre-Islamic era. The cultural evolution undergone by Arab society, coupled with a transition in Arab cultural rhetoric, has culminated in a discourse proficient in mendacity, adulation, and aesthetic distortion. This has fundamentally destabilized the ethical hierarchy, alienating values from their humanitarian essence and submerging them in a utilitarian, materialistic framework. The autocrat has leveraged this modern cultural discourse, utilizing it as a potent mechanism for the subjugation of the populace.

III. Shifts in Cultural and Literary Criticism in Al-Ghathami's Thought:

Al-Ghathami categorizes cultural criticism as a primary byproduct of postmodern literary theory, identifying it as the most resilient methodology for analyzing diverse discourses. This approach examines systemic structures within their broader cultural environments, anchoring them to their specific social, historical, and institutional settings. It performs an analytical excavation of the profound cultural strata inherent in literary works, isolating the dominant underlying systems that exist beneath aesthetic exteriors. Cultural criticism prioritizes the disclosure of hidden mechanisms rather than the evaluation of beauty; as Al-Ghathami posits, it is concerned with revealing not the aesthetic, as is the case with literary criticism, but rather with uncovering what is hidden beneath the masks of the rhetorical/aesthetic. He further argues for the development of theories regarding the "grotesque"—not to find beauty within it, which would simply validate traditional rhetoric, but to expose the functionality of these systems and their counter-conscious and critical sensory activity.

Consequently, fundamental cultural frameworks do not experience genuine transformation; they instead produce a facade of superficial change by manipulating the discourse that envelops them to remain concealed. Because of this, cultural criticism utilizes a multidisciplinary methodology, with its parameters established through historical inductive reasoning. This views the text as an operational medium for deciphering veiled cultural substance within the linguistic and aesthetic unconscious. As Al-Ghathami asserts, this field functions as a critical discourse that honors difference and marginality while resisting homogenization and the "grotesque in discourse." He contends that traditional literary criticism has historically failed to challenge these destructive movements due to a "comprehensive cultural blindness" that numbed its analytical capabilities, leading to a passive surrender to aesthetic pleasure without critical deconstruction. Al-Ghathami concludes that literary criticism is transitioning toward obsolescence, to be superseded by cultural criticism. He attributes this decline to a preoccupation with elitism and aesthetic consumption, which has fostered defective cultural structures. This provocative stance



necessitates rigorous academic dialogue to accurately delineate the boundaries of both critical disciplines.

The initial phases of actualizing this rational methodology originate from the fundamental prerequisites of cultural criticism, a field encompassing an extensive array of cultural investigations. This relatively contemporary vantage point integrates diverse critical inquiries, including elite and mass culture, subcultures, ideologies, cinematic and literary production, social movements, mundane daily existence, media, and philosophical frameworks. It utilizes these elements as analytical instruments while preventing the hegemony of any singular perspective. In contrast to other discourses -such as philosophy, politics, or economics- which examine reality through specialized prisms, cultural criticism acknowledges that reality is fundamentally intertwined with meaning-generating practices, the majority of which are cultural media.

The hallmark of this critical approach is that it does not constitute a rigid school of thought; instead, it is adaptable to the critic's persona, intellectual background, and inclinations, as well as the specific essence, themes, and attributes of the text. It remains receptive to hermeneutics, semiotics, and discourse analysis, alongside various humanities disciplines associated with literature. Furthermore, it is connected to intellectual and transformative movements such as feminism, the Black Power movement, and the discourse on the clash of civilizations, among other phenomena categorized as the "implicit discourse within the text and the underlying system that propels it". This underscores its foundational reality: its epistemological composition precludes it from being a scientific specialty or an autonomous field of knowledge capable of establishing a fixed methodology. Rather, it functions as an activity focused on the material and intellectual discourses generated by culture. It appropriates theories, concepts, and epistemological systems to attain what traditional critical methodologies have failed to access or investigate. Since it is an activity rather than a branch of knowledge, it endeavors to reach alternative forms of knowledge through the expansive application of theories and concepts that facilitate proximity to the cultural act within societies. Al-Ghathami asserts that it is a branch of general textual criticism, and consequently, it resides within the linguistic sciences as a field of linguistics dedicated to the critique of implicit systems.

An analysis of Al-Ghathami's conceptual architecture and procedural selections reveals a cultural vision characterized by internal inconsistencies and substantial lacunae. This deficiency in rigorous epistemological examination—across theoretical, procedural, historical, sociological, psychological, aesthetic, and anthropological dimensions—challenges their scientific legitimacy. As a result, contradictions emerge that undermine the core tenets of his methodology, such as cultural discourse, the dual author, and the cultural pun. He maintains that the presence of two antithetical systems—the overt and the covert—is a prerequisite for literary discourse to be categorized under cultural criticism. His selected poetic models are presented as establishing these systemic constituents, whereas any phenomena external to this framework are marginalized. This position inadvertently concedes the existence of alternative discourses that do not conform to these binary systems and their reciprocal relationships.

Al-Ghathami's perspective on literary discourse challenges his own premise regarding the eternal and pervasive nature of cultural systems across all texts, irrespective of their creative, intellectual, or philosophical distinctions. Recognizing the existence of distinct structural formations within thought and creativity undermines any intellectual, methodological, or practical justification for declaring the "death of literary criticism" or dismissing its contemporary significance.

By employing conceptual terms such as the "dual author," "cultural discourse," and the "cultural pun," Al-Ghathami effectively absolves the actual author of responsibility for reinforcing cultural systems, thereby exonerating them from any perceived collusion with political or cultural institutions. He contends that the implicit and unconscious nature of



systemic meaning limits the author's agency; similarly, he denies the reader's active involvement, as both operate beyond the threshold of conscious awareness. In this framework, if an author's consciousness is engaged at all, it is restricted to the shaping of implicit meanings for aesthetic purposes, resulting in mere refinement and embellishment. However, this hypothesis lacks robust verification, as there is no compelling evidence to support the notion that cultural frameworks invariably infiltrate the author's consciousness without their knowledge.

Furthermore, no theoretical barrier prevents an author from intentionally and collusively producing flawed cultural frameworks. It is equally plausible for poetry to transcend such frameworks; there is no logical epistemological basis to deny the positive role of aesthetic value in literature or its capacity to reveal hidden, non-flawed systems. This necessitates a critical review of the exclusive focus of cultural criticism on highlighting the "grotesque" associated with underlying systems, often discarded in favor of aesthetic codes as if this were an unquestionable assumption. Mohammed Alimat's study seeks to liberate ancient Arabic poetry from the "complex of the grotesque" that Al-Ghathami attributed to it as its sole characteristic, burdening the medium with the historical tragedies and failures of the Arab world. Conversely, Alimat delved into the depths of this poetry to extract noble values, significant achievements, and linguistic formations characterized by active semantic interaction and profound creative suggestion. (Alimat, n.d.: 12). Thus, Alimat's reading integrates the search for positive cultural frameworks with the features of aesthetic formation in literary discourse.

Regarding Al-Ghathami's dismissal of literary criticism as a declining field nearing its end, it is essential to emphasize the existence of critical approaches currently in a state of continuous development and scientific production. These methodologies have achieved significant results in advancing the field, including:

- **Semiotic Theory:** Contributions to the semiotics of action, passions, and visual semiotics.
- **Deconstruction and Hermeneutics:** Deepening the philosophical engagement with texts.
- **Reader-Response Criticism:** Re-evaluating the agency of the audience.
- **Generative Poetics:** Analyzing the structural origins of literary form.
- **Interdisciplinary Approaches:** Bridging literature with diverse scientific paradigms.

Al-Ghathami's definitive judgment on the hierarchy of rhetoric and its scholarly decline, coupled with his proposal to modify its perspective on literary texts—termed “unbinding the critical faculty”—suggests that his cognitive lens remains fixed on traditional rhetorical views. While traditional rhetoric established close connections between rhetorical and literary aspects, a reconsideration of its historical shortcomings led to a revitalization of the field through the integration of linguistic sciences. This infusion provided rhetoric with renewed vitality.

From the late 1950s onward, rhetorical studies underwent a qualitative transformation, culminating in the emergence of the "New Rhetoric." This movement sought to formulate a universal science for the analysis of all discourse varieties. Notwithstanding these developments, the New Rhetoric manifested heterogeneous and fragmented inclinations, largely shaped by the linguistic paradigm that occupied the pinnacle of the contemporary epistemological hierarchy.

Subsequently, rhetoric underwent fundamental shifts in its foundational and conceptual frameworks, aimed at establishing a comprehensive theory for the analysis of literary discourse. This revival facilitated the maturation of rhetorical studies, which successfully provided a systematic account of textual persuasiveness by integrating insights from linguistics, pragmatics, and communication theories. Guided by these innovative methodologies, rhetorical research transcended the traditional boundaries of persuasion and stylistic analysis, adopting the characteristics of contemporary scientific inquiry and intersecting with diverse disciplines such as literary criticism, anthropology, semiotics,



linguistics, and psychoanalysis. (Badri, n.d.: p. 31). These advancements, further influenced by philosophical developments, led the researcher Jamil Hamadawi to argue that Al-Ghathami's conceptualization of rhetoric had become antiquated. (Hamadawi, 2022).

It is observed that Al-Ghathami's project establishes an excessive link between the cultural structures of classical Arabic poetry and various political theories and ideological doctrines, including materialism and neo-Marxism. This orientation has resulted in broad political generalizations. Indeed, this tendency toward generalization was not restricted to the political sphere; it led to the arbitrary and reductive imposition of literature into narrow political, social documentary, or monolithic cultural frameworks, thereby distorting its aesthetic essence.

In his attempt to emancipate literary discourse from the dominance of ideology and politicization, Al-Ghathami ironically becomes ensnared in extrinsic methodologies that excessively scrutinize and judge the creative text, compromising its singularity. Consequently, his methodology has faced criticism from numerous scholars. It has been noted that Al-Ghathami's position in advocating for cultural criticism is primarily undermined by his highly specific definition of literary criticism—a teleological view not shared by many contemporary Arab critics who maintain that literary criticism serves vital functions within modern Arab societies.

Al-Ghathami's application of cultural criticism invites scrutiny due to its perceived selective bias, contradictory stances, and expansive judgments that lack empirical substantiation. The assertion that the entirety of classical Arabic poetry merely mirrors defective cultural systems and degraded moral values—dictated by a rigid ideological reality—is considered untenable. Such an interpretation marginalizes the creative essence of poetry, transmuting criticism into an ideological lens reminiscent of historical materialism, Marxism, and psychoanalysis, while disregarding aesthetics and the intrinsic value of the arts. Furthermore, Al-Ghathami formulates sweeping moral and political verdicts on the whole of ancient Arabic poetry based on a restricted selection of examples, reaching conclusions without rigorous scientific validation. This approach often appears arbitrary, seemingly designed to support a preconceived notion of a flawed underlying system that mandates all discourse conform to its structural constraints.

This serves as a rationale for why various researchers view Abdullah Al-Ghathami's methodology as a reaction to a pre-existing hypothesis that encumbers poetry with the burdens of civilizational aesthetics, seeking to unveil and critique the discourse generated by hegemonic cultural institutions, while identifying the latent ideology within the aesthetic frameworks long monopolized by critical traditions. Accordingly, Al-Ghathami indicts the entirety of Arab modernist poetry as reactionary, asserting that its existence is derived from an archaic, regressive heritage. He contends that "the political sphere is not an independent construct but a manifestation of a systematic culture; similarly, the poet is not a self-made entity but a cultural product. Thus, the 'system' represents an underlying cultural determinant that necessitates exposure and semiotic investigation." (Al-Ghathami & Asteef, 2004: 46–47). Modernism is, therein, characterized as reactionary, with Arab modernism appearing as a casualty of a pervasive system that governs the subconscious mind, bypassing individual consciousness or any recognition of its foundational origins.

Al-Ghathami highlights the censured political themes and the dissident perspective, pinpointing the patriarchal apparatus—forged by political and social autocracy—as the core of classical Arabic poetry. He maintains that the poetic modes of panegyric (praise) and invective (satire) emerge from this despotic centrality, grounded in social resentment and political opportunism, which in turn fosters individual tyranny across social and political landscapes. Consequently, the patriarchal voice suppresses all alternative discourses, including romantic poetry, as such expressions conflict with Arab masculinity and undermine its hegemony.



Al-Ghathami directs his critique toward the whole of Arab modernist poetry, encompassing both foundational and contemporary icons such as Adonis and Nizar Qabbani. He argues that although Arab modernism originated with Nazik al-Malaika spearheading a movement to feminize Arabic poetry, and male poets like Badr Shakir al-Sayyab instituting a novel humanistic and anti-patriarchal discourse, the cultural establishment and its custodians intervened to re-masculinize the medium. They restored patriarchal ideals, a phenomenon exemplified by Adonis, who remains a fundamentally patriarchal poet despite his modernist and Enlightenment posturing. As a result, modernism transitioned from a transformative endeavor to a mere process of coordination that bolsters the status quo. This demonstrates the centralized operation of the system, which stifles any initiative aimed at transcendence.

Al-Ghathami offers a comprehensive critique of Arabic poetry, deconstructing its aesthetic foundations while marginalizing its inherent diversity and pluralistic expressions. He categorizes both experimental and folk poetry as manifestations of authoritarian discourse, asserting a necessity to reveal their underlying structural mechanisms. From his perspective, literature operates in subordination to political authority, functioning as a sequence of ideological representations that underscore hegemonic control. Such generalized evaluations tend to eclipse individualized interpretations, given that Al-Ghathami "makes no distinctions, excludes no one, and does not differentiate between discourses, schools, or poetic purposes." Consequently, he constrains autonomous scholarship regarding both classical and contemporary Arabic poetry by applying predetermined cultural-critical frameworks to the entirety of the poetic canon. (Hamdawi, 2022).

It is undeniable that literary criticism has been enriched by cultural criticism, which arises from an endeavor that engages with culture in its totality as a subject of research, thought, and expression of attitudes towards its developments and characteristics. The cultural methodological framework operates extensively, integrating insights from the social and human sciences while responding to the fluid paradigms of globalization and postmodernism. Accordingly, it is reasonable to assert that cultural criticism represents the latest phase in the pursuit of philosophy.

This progression has led to a significant localization of the cultural concept within methodological inquiry. This cognitive shift has culminated in the emergence of cultural criticism, which reorients literary analysis toward a profound investigation of the socio-cultural phenomena underpinning creative production. This methodology transcends elitist boundaries, prioritizing the study of popular and marginalized texts along with the social, intellectual, and aesthetic systems they represent, thereby offering a more sophisticated interpretation of these components.

Arab literary criticism is compelled to continuously refine its epistemological tools and methodologies to address deficiencies in the interpretation of modern subjects. As noted by scholars, while significant portions of Arab culture remain anchored in "inherited paradigms," there are intrinsic factors contributing to the obsolescence of certain intellectual modes and the subsequent search for innovative alternatives. The cultural-critical paradigm has reinvigorated literary studies by introducing previously neglected insights, expanding analytical horizons, and dissolving interdisciplinary boundaries. It integrates diverse human practices under the umbrella of culture while challenging established dichotomies between reality and ideology, as well as the material and the spiritual.

Furthermore, literary criticism has progressively assimilated subjects it formerly disregarded, recalibrating its analytical focus to investigate novel dimensions of human existence. Literature, serving as a reflection of life's expansive transformations, must integrate all societal systems and the models they project through its specific linguistic medium. This engagement with contemporary reality signifies an effort to achieve synthesis within lived experiences. Given that reality is mediated via language, literature reconfigures this reality, contesting its structures to rebuild it in original forms. This transformative process



renders language seemingly estranged from its primary context, while simultaneously adopting a secondary reality—the reality of multifaceted expression.

This intellectual and cultural convergence has bridged the divide between formalist and contextual methodologies, cultivating a critical lens that integrates social and aesthetic dimensions within literary analysis. These constituents are intrinsically linked in the act of literary creation, rendering it essential to analyze the text as a conceptualized socio-cultural event.

Conclusion:

Al-Ghathami's contribution to cultural criticism represents a significant and influential intervention within contemporary Arab critical thought. By developing a conceptual framework that foregrounds cultural systems, implicit structures, and modes of symbolic domination, his project has expanded the scope of critical inquiry beyond the confines of purely aesthetic evaluation. In this respect, cultural criticism offers valuable analytical tools for examining literary and cultural production within their broader social and historical contexts.

At the same time, the ambition to elevate cultural criticism to the status of an autonomous and exclusive methodology raises important epistemological considerations. Rather than functioning as a substitute for literary criticism, cultural criticism may be more productively understood as a complementary mode of analysis. Its strength lies in its capacity to illuminate dimensions of meaning that remain inaccessible to formalist or text-centered approaches, while literary criticism retains its central role in engaging with the aesthetic, linguistic, and symbolic specificities that define literary discourse.

A balanced critical practice, therefore, necessitates an integrative perspective that recognizes the interdependence of cultural and aesthetic analysis. Literary texts do not merely transmit cultural systems; they also generate meaning through the distinctive properties of language, form, and style. It is precisely through these aesthetic dimensions that literature articulates its cultural significance and asserts its epistemological value. To disregard this dimension risks reducing literary discourse to a mere reflection of external systems, thereby obscuring its creative and transformative potential.

In this light, Al-Ghathami's project should be approached not as a final or self-sufficient paradigm, but as a dynamic critical orientation that invites dialogue with existing methodologies. Its most enduring contribution lies in its ability to provoke critical reassessment of inherited assumptions and to encourage more inclusive analytical frameworks. When situated within a pluralistic critical landscape, cultural criticism can enrich literary studies without negating the foundational role of aesthetics, thus fostering a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of literary and cultural phenomena.

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