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CHARACTERISTICS OF CLASSICAL ARABIC LITERARY PROSE

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Abstract

One aspect of literature that is highly sought after by many people is imaginative or creative literature. Two major components of creative literature are poetry and prose, each possessing various characteristics that can captivate the attention of enthusiasts. The Arab country stands out as one of the nations with an exceptionally rich literary culture. The produced prose is highly diverse and carries extraordinary messages and embellishments, imbuing it with significant value. Therefore, this article will encompass the characteristics of classical Arabic literary prose. The method employed in this study is the library research method, which involves collecting data relevant to the topics discussed in this article and presenting it in a descriptive form. The findings reveal that the concept of prose in the Arab world exhibits unique traditions and characteristics that set it apart from other forms of prose. The characteristics of Arabic prose, which originated from the Jahiliyah period in the form of al-khitab, al-wasaya, and al-hikam, continue to evolve to this day. As for the general characteristics that can be found in classical Arab literary prose, among them are eloquence and rhetoric, rich vocabulary, imagery and descriptive language, poetic elements, complex sentence structure, themes of honor and morality, storytelling tradition, cultural and historical context, Islamic influence.

Keywords: *creative literature, Arabic prose, Ignorant period, al-Khitab, al-Wasaya, al-Hikam*

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INTRODUCTION

Literature constitutes an integral part of cultural entities, its manifestations reverberating through literary works. It is noteworthy that all cultures and civilizations across the globe undergo significant periods of transformation, and this phenomenon is equally applicable to the Arab nation's culture and civilization in its entirety. Arab writers have significantly enriched human civilization with their distinctive skills and prowess in the field of literature. Civilization, in this context, pertains to the collective term used to denote the state of a cultured society. Among the characteristics of a cultured society is the ability to create and materialize culture within high-quality cultural entities. The culture of the Arab nation, which holds significant value, resides prominently in the field of literature. Their language proficiency exemplifies their expertise and brilliance in producing exquisite literary works.

In the Arabic language, literature is referred to as "*adab*." The plural form is "*adâb*." Lexically, the term "*adab*" encompasses not only literature but also ethics (courtesy and manners), protocols, philology, humanity, culture, and the humanities (Kamil, 2009). In the context of literature, "*adab*" (literature) is divided into two major categories: "*al-adab al-wasfi*" (descriptive/non-imaginative/non-fiction literature), and "*al-adab insya'i*" (creative/fiction literature). "*Al-adab al-wasfi*," also commonly referred to as "*al-ulum al-adabiyah*," comprises three main components: literary history, literary theory, and literary criticism. As for "*al-adab insya'i*," it is divided into three major genres: poetry (*asy-syi'r*), prose (*al-naśr*), and drama (*al-masrahiyyah*) (Kamil, 2009).

In this article, the author will discuss Arabic literary works in the form of prose. Prose is a composition or literary work that is not bound by the rules of poetry (KBBI, t.th). Arabic literary prose has been present since the era of Jahiliyah with a form that was initially quite rudimentary. However, as time progressed, Arabic literary prose experienced rapid development, reaching its current modern era. Among the modern Arabic literary prose that has flourished in the Arab world are novels, short stories, novelettes, and drama scripts, which will be discussed in the following explanations. However, the focus of this article is limited to the examination of the characteristics of prose within each periodization.

METHODOLOGY

The method employed is a literature review method (research library), involving the collection of data related to the topic discussed in this article, which is then presented in a descriptive form.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

ARABIC PROSE

Linguistically, "*al-naśr*" means prose. In technical terms, "*al-naśr*" refers to a form of expression that is not fully bound by specific metrical *wazan* and *qafiyah* (Dhaif, 1960). During the Jahiliyah period, prose was divided into two forms: firstly, ordinary prose or what is often referred to as the language of communication, which lacks literary values but is commonly found in "*amśal*" (proverbs) and "*hikam*" (wisdom sayings). Secondly, there was prose that utilized the art and skill of language, along with rhetoric (*balaghah*), such as "*khitabah*" (oratory) and "*kitabah*" (composition) (Dhaif, 1960). "*Khitabah*" is a form of communication delivered with eloquent words, aiming to represent something good and significant before a general audience. On the other hand, "*kitabah*" refers to words marked with writing or inscription, with the intention of not being spoken aloud, preserving them for future generations, or due to specific issues between two speakers (Iskandari & ʻAnnani, 1925).

One example of the beauty of prose found in the oration (speech) of Qus bin Sa'idah, a Jahiliyah orator, is presented in the following ʻUkaẓ marketplace discourse (Iskandari & ʻAnnani, 1925).

" أيها الناس. اسمعوا وعوا، من عاش مات، ومن مات فات، وكل ما هو ات ات. ليلٌ داج.
ونهار ساج. وسماء ذات أبراج...."

Arab civilization and scholarship have experienced continuous development throughout each period, and the same applies to Arabic literature. Initially, Arabic prose was divided into two forms, which later expanded and diversified into several forms. Of course, the novel, which emerged during the Umayyad period, as well as the short story, novella, and drama that emerged in the modern era, are also described as part of Arabic literary prose (Kamil, 2009). In modern Arab literary criticism books, what draws the attention of critics is literary prose in the form of novels, short stories, and drama texts.

TYPES OF PROSE IN ARABIC LITERATURE

In general, *al-naśr al-adabi* can be divided into two main categories (Kamil, 2009): Non-imaginative literary prose and imaginative literary prose. Non-imaginative literary prose refers to prose that discusses literature. In the Arab literary tradition, this non-imaginative literary prose is referred to as "*al-adab al-wasfi*" (descriptive literature), or "*al-ʿulum al-adabiyah*" (literary studies). Al-Adab al-wasfi consists of three parts: literary history (*tarikh adab*), literary criticism (*naqd al-adab*), and literary theory (*nazariyyah al-adab*).

As the imaginative literary genre, it encompasses fiction or fictional stories, which rely more heavily on the power of imagination compared to narratives found in biographies, autobiographies, histories, or memoirs, which are based on facts or

reality. This type of fictional prose can be divided into three genres: novels or romances (*riwayah/hikayah/qissah*), short stories (*qissah qasirah*), novellas (*uqsusiyah*), and dramas (*masrahiyyah*). All three genres share similar elements of fiction, but the proportions of these elements differ, and their purposes of writing vary accordingly.

1) Novel

The novel (*riwayah*) is a prose narrative of extensive length, characterized by a complex plot and theme, numerous characters, and diverse atmospheres and settings. In Arabic literature, there are those who equate *riwayah with qissah*, such as Ismai'il Mustafa al-Saifi and 'Abd al-Aziz bin Muhammad al-Faisal. There are also those who differentiate them, with the *qissah* having a page thickness between the novel (*riwayah*) and the short story (*qissah qasirah*). According to Mahmud Zihni, riwayah is a lengthy narrative with a page thickness of approximately 250-400 pages or around 40,000-90,000 words. On the other hand, *qissah* is a shorter narrative or novel than *riwayah* but longer than a short story, with a page thickness of about 130-150 pages or 20,000-30,000 words (Kamil, 2009).

The novel (*riwayah*) can be divided into three categories: romance novels, adventure novels, and fantasy novels. Romance novels involve both female and male characters in a balanced manner, with women sometimes playing a more dominant role. In this type of novel, almost all themes are explored, making it the most common genre. Examples of this category include the novel "Laila Majnun," which originated during the Umayyad period but was written by Sheikh Nizami in 1188, as well as the modern novels "Majdulin al-Manfaluti" and "Zuqaq Midaq" by Najib Mahfuz (Kamil, 2009).

Adventure novels rarely incorporate the role of women. Adventure novels are considered "male-oriented" literature since their characters are predominantly male, dealing with issues that are primarily related to men and have little relevance to women. Although there might be occasional romantic elements in this type of adventure novel, they remain merely peripheral. In other words, novels are not solely focused on love affairs. The serial novel "Aulad Hartina" (The Children of Our Village) by Najib Mahfuz, which revolves around the main characters Adham, Jabal, Rifaah, and Qasim, can be classified within this category. The novel depicts male protagonists entangled in various male-related issues and occasional violence, especially concerning social influence and power struggles (Kamil, 2009).

Fantasy novels discuss unrealistic and implausible aspects that go beyond everyday experiences. This type of novel employs unrealistic characters, settings, and plots to convey the author's ideas. Fantasy novels prioritize the author's ideas, concepts, and literary notions, which can only be clearly expressed in a fantastical form, meaning they defy empirical laws and everyday experiences. An example of this genre is "at-Tawabi' wa az-Zawabi'" (The Female Jinns and Disasters) by Ibn Shahid, an Andalusian prose, that revolves around literary figures and critics from the jinn community and falls into the category of fantasy novels (Kamil, 2009).

In the modern period, Arabic fictional prose was marked by the influence of the Arab world coming into translated Western literary prose. One example of this is "Mawaqi' Aflaq fi Waqai' Tilmak," a free translation by at-Thantawi. In his translation, he maintained only the stylistic elements and was not bound by the language of the source text. Following this period of translation, new fictional prose emerged from innovative prose writers. Among them, Muhammad al-Muwallihi (d. 1930) stood out as the author of "Maqamat Hadis Isa bin Hisyam" in the year 1908 (Kamil, n.d.).

In addition to al-Muwallihi, another figure who made significant changes in Arab literature during the early modern period was al-Manfaluthi (1876-1924). He developed romantic-themed novels and short stories. In novel form, he played a role in adapting Western works into his language, using a classical writing style, particularly the "*bayan*" style, as seen in his adaptation of Bernardin de Saint Pierre's "Paul et Virginie" titled "al-Fadhilah" (The Virtue), (Kamil, n.d.).

However, the Arab novel most acknowledged by Western critics as the first modern Arab novel due to its realist tendency is "Zainab" by Husein Haikal (1888-1956), who was also renowned as a prominent journalist and thinker. This novel was published in the year 1913. Additionally, another influential novel is "Sarah", a semi-autobiographical novel by Abbas Mahmud al-'Aqqad (1889-1973), (Kamil, n.d.).

2) Short Story

The short story (*qissah qasirah*) is relatively brief prose narrative. The term "short" in this context does not have a precise measurement. Therefore, the length of this short boundary can be measured by the time it takes to read it. Edgar Allan Poe stated that reading a short story takes around half an hour to one or two hours with a deep reading approach (Ismail, 2013). Critics generally agree with Poe's statement, although there are some groups disagree. Some argue that reading a short story takes 3-4 hours. Herbert George Wells, an English novelist and historian, stated that reading a short story does not require more than one hour (Ismail, 2013). According to Henry Moseley, the length of a short story should range from 1,500 to 10,000 words (Ismail, 2013).

The short length of short stories is also because this genre only possesses a singular effect, limited and non-diverse characters, plot, and setting, and lacks complexity. Short stories can also be categorized into three groups: regular short stories, long short stories, and short stories (Kamil, 2006).

In the realm of modern Arabic literature, Najib Mahfouz is known as the pioneer of the novel, while Tawfiq al-Hakim is recognized as the pioneer of drama. Similarly, Mahmud Taymur can be regarded as the pioneer of the short story. He earned the title "Syaikh al-Qissah al-Qasirah," a well-deserved recognition for his role in initiating and accompanying the journey of modern Egyptian short stories. He was not the first person to introduce the short story in the world of modern Arabic literature, but his contributions to adding a modern touch and packaging it in a contemporary manner have inspired other writers to follow in his footsteps. He is not solely a short story writer, as he also expressed his works in other genres such as

drama and novels. However, his inclination towards the short story is far greater than that of novels and dramas (Tasnimah, 2008).

Under the guidance of Mahmud Taymur, Arabic literary prose advanced significantly. He produced more than a hundred short stories and novellas, compiled in 26 collections of stories, 7 thick novels, 18 dramas, and 16 books of travel accounts and essay collections, totaling 77 books. However, some of his works are yet to be traced or accounted for (Tasnimah, 2008). Among his short stories are "Maukib al-Hayah" (The Parade of Life), which contains 38 selected stories from world literature, published in 1924, "al-Syaikh Jum'ah wa Qishas Ukhra" (Sheikh Jum'ah and Other Stories), published in 1925, "Ma Tarah al-'Uyun" (What the Eyes Saw), published in 1927, and "al-Athlal" (The Rubble), published in 1934.

3) Novella

A novelette, or *uqsusiyah* in Arabic, is a prose narrative that falls in length between that of a novel and a short story. If the thickness of a novel is around 200 pages and a short story is 5-15 pages, a novelette typically ranges from 60 to 100 pages. Some experts refer to novelettes as long short stories (Kamil, 2009).

The stories in a novelette revolve around a single core journey, without encompassing the entire life of the characters involved, and only focusing on one specific event or emotional state. Unlike the structure of a novel, which requires a beginning and an end to reach the intended goal, a novelette does not necessitate such introductory and concluding parts. An event, in general, serves as the conclusion of the elements within the novelette and does not contain many life lessons (Quthub, 1980). The narrative and scenes in a novelette are presented at a moderate pace, gradually unfold and sometimes involving slight jumps. Some examples of novelettes include "Rajulun lil Bahri" by Harold Alfred Manhood, "As-Shumtu" by Leonid Andreyev, and "Al-Ahmar" by William Somerset Maugham (Quthub, 1980).

4) Drama

As for drama, it is a literary work that conveys its story through the dialogues of its characters. Three elements determine a literary work as drama: firstly, the presence of dialogues between characters; secondly, it is created not to be enjoyed through reading but through performance; and thirdly, while novels or short stories narrate events, drama presents events on stage or reconstructs an occurrence (Kamil, 2009).

Drama is one of the literary genres. It represents actions that occur in life and are depicted in a drama script and even performed on stage. Drama is also a manifestation of imagination brought to life through a work of performance, both in verbal and physical aspects. In drama, aspects of human life, the reality of nature, and social context serve as references to portray a performance. Drama involves dramatic actions, which depict life by including dialogue as its medium. Typically, it portrays the real-life experiences of people in their daily lives.

Over time, various types of drama have emerged, both in terms of staging techniques and the drama scripts themselves. The types of drama include tragedy, comedy, melodrama, and farce.

Tragedy is one of the drama genres based on the content of the story. Comedy drama presents a storyline that can make its audience laugh with happiness, joy, and delight. Melodrama offers stories filled with surprises and is presented engagingly. On the other hand, farce has the following characteristics: events and characters may occur and exist, creating humor in a disorderly and non-logical manner, being episodic in nature, requiring only temporary credibility or belief in its aspects, and everything that happens is based on the situation rather than the characters.

As for the writing style, drama can be divided into three types: drama in prose, drama in poetry, and mixed prose and poetry. Like most prose literary works, drama can also be written in the form of prose. Some dramas are in the form of poetry, also known as poetic drama. There are also dramas called mixed dramas, where the drama is written in prose form with some parts in poetry form.

In Arabic literature, Taufiq al-Hakim is the playwright who gave birth to drama scripts, including the play "Ahl al-Kahfi," while Mahmud Taymur wrote drama scripts like "Qanabil," "'Awali," and "al-Yaum Khamr."

THE INTRINSIC ELEMENTS OF ARABIC IMAGINATIVE PROSE

All imaginative literary prose, whether novels, short stories, or dramas, must consist of five essential elements: characters with their characteristics (*as-syakhsiyyat*), plot or storyline (*al-habakah*), setting/background (*al-bi'ah*), ideas or themes (*al-fikrah, at-tausiah, al-maudu'*), and writing style (*uslub*) (Kamil, 2009).

According to Nurgiantoro, the term "character" refers to the person who interacts with various traits, while traits, temperament, and character refer more to the qualities and attitudes of the characters as interpreted by the readers, and they point to the personal qualities of a character. In other words, character development is the clear portrayal of a person depicted in a story (Warsiman, 2013). According to Wellek and Warren, character development can be divided into two categories: static characterization and dynamic characterization. Dynamic characters can change, learn from experiences, and adapt to different situations. On the other hand, static characters can not change or learn from experiences. From the beginning to the end of the story, static characters do not undergo any changes in their traits at all (Warsiman, 2013).

Plot is the entire sequence of events found within a story; or the construction made by the reader regarding a series of logically and chronologically related events caused or experienced by the characters. According to Budi Darma, a good literary work is not just a story but a plot, where one event is connected to another through cause and effect. The key element of cause and effect is conflict, and the key aspect of conflict is the characters or character development (Warsiman, 2013). Based on the

chronological order of events, plots can be categorized into three types: first, linear or progressive plot, if the events narrated are in chronological order. Second, flashback plot, if the events narrated are not in chronological order. Third, mixed plot.

Setting encompasses all information about the time, space, and atmosphere in which the actions take place within a literary work. (Warsiman, 2013). Setting or background functions as the logic of the story, shaping the theme and plot.

Thought or theme is the idea, concept, or worldview conveyed through dialogues, constructed conflicts, and indirect comments, and it can be implied or expressed explicitly (Kamil, 2009).

Meanwhile, style of language refers to the author's behavior in using language as a medium for conveying imaginative literary prose. The selection of the style of language is influenced, among others, by the author's disposition, the intended goals, the presented topics, the type of prose, and the readers' conditions.

CHARACTERISTICS OF PROSE IN EACH PERIODIZATION

Prose in the pre-Islamic era consists of *al-khitab* (speech), *al-wasâyâ* (counsels), and *al-amsâl* (proverbs). *Al-khitabah* refers to an individual's expression through clear and direct wording, conveying a specific purpose. The language used typically employs figurative language, similar to the sermons of Hani' bin Mas'ud. As for the criteria of a speaker (*khatib*) during the pre-Islamic era, it includes having a loud voice, clear speech, and a strong personality, such as Qus bin Sa'adah and Hasyim bin 'Abdi Manaf (Bayumi, 1400).

Al-wasâyâ takes the form of advice that contains experiences and knowledge, typically originating from a father, mother, or group leader who exerts influence on the human soul. As for *al-amsal*, it can be derived from the oral traditions or the words of individuals, using beautiful expressions that often depict detailed aspects of their living environment (Bayumi, 1400).

The emergence of Islam had a significant influence on the development of Arabic prose. With the advent of Islam, prose during this period began to change and improve upon the previous prose. The purpose of prose during the arrival of Islam was more focused on improving life, inviting people to the path of Allah through wisdom, good advice, and constructive debates by the Quran and the teachings of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). As for the types of prose during this period, they include *khitabah* (sermons), correspondence (letters), and agreements (*al-mawatsiq*), which are written in clear and unambiguous *fushah* language, while avoiding the use of foreign languages (Bayumi, 1400).

The development of prose during the Umayyad dynasty took the form of *khitabah*, serving various purposes and objectives. The need to convey invitations and calls in Islam led to the widespread use of *khitabah*, especially in the realms of politics and society. Prose in the form of correspondence also saw significant growth and

expansion during this period, fulfilling the administrative and caliphal affairs of the state. Consequently, a dedicated institution for correspondence, known as Diwan al-Insya', was established to handle all government affairs (Faruq, 1968).

During the Abbasid era, the development of prose experienced rapid growth. Influences from the West started to enter and interact with Arabic literature. During this period, there were innovations in literary genres, particularly in prose. While in the previous era, prose genres mainly focused on *khitabah* and correspondence, poets in this era expanded their exploration of prose to depict social and societal life, as well as human psychological issues. The thoughts and ideas of this period were heavily influenced by the works of Greek and Persian authors that flourished at that time.

During the Abbasid period, there was also a genre called maqamat, which is a form of short story that narrates the experiences of a specific individual or group. These stories are presented by a narrator in a framed narrative format, employing a unique style of language characterized by concise expressions. Maqamat stories often contain a mix of advice or criticism interwoven with humorous elements.

From the description above, we can conclude several characteristics found in classical Arabic literary prose as follows:

1) Eloquence and Rhetoric. Classical Arabic prose is known for its eloquence and sophisticated use of rhetoric. Writers often employed intricate language and intricate structures to convey their ideas effectively.

2) Rich Vocabulary. The Arabic language, particularly in classical literature, is celebrated for its vast and rich vocabulary. Writers utilized a wide range of words an expression to enhance the beauty and depth of their prose.

3) Imagery and Descriptive Language. Classical Arabic literature is replete with vivid imagery and descriptive language. Writers often used detailed descriptions and vivid metaphors to evoke emotions and create a sensory experience for the reader.

4) Poetic Elements. Many classical Arabic prose works were influenced by poetry, and as a result, they incorporated poetic elements such as rhyme, rhythm, and meter. This infusion of poetic features added musicality to the prose.

5) Complex Sentence Structure. Classical Arabic prose tends to have complex sentence structures. Sentences are often long and intricately crafted, showcasing the writer's command over the language and their ability to weave together various elements seamlessly.

6) Themes of Honor and Morality. Classical Arabic literature frequently explores themes of honor, morality, and virtue. Writers often used their works to convey ethical principles and impart wisdom to the reader.

7) Storytelling Tradition. Many classical Arabic prose works are rooted in a strong storytelling tradition. Narratives often feature compelling plots, character development, and intricate story arcs.

8) Cultural and Historical Context. Classical Arabic literature reflects the cultural and historical context of the time. It often provides insights into the societal norms, values, and historical events of the Arab world.

9) Islamic Influence. Given the significant role of Islam in the Arab world, classical Arabic literature often incorporates Islamic teachings, values, and references to religious texts.

These characteristics collectively contribute to the unique and enduring appeal of classical Arabic literary prose.

CONCLUSION

The prose is a form of writing that is not bound by *wazan* (meter) and *qafiyah* (rhyme). In many Arabic literary works, speeches, proverbs, correspondence, and wisdom are also classified as Arabic prose. This is possible due to the unique Arab literary tradition, which differs greatly from the traditions of other nations. In Arabic literature, certain elements that were mentioned earlier can be considered as prose due to their high literary content, such as the orations of Qus bin Sa'adah, which resemble short rhymed poems.

The characteristics of the Arabic prose genre have undergone development in each period. It began during the pre-Islamic era (Jahiliyah) when genres such as *al-khitabah* (speeches), *al-wasâyâ* (wills), and *al-amṡal* (proverbs) were categorized as prose. With the advent of Islam, prose became more focused on *khitabah* (sermons) and correspondence. During the Umayyah period, prose in the form of *khitabah* and letters experienced rapid growth with various objectives. In the Abbasiyah era, there was an expansion of prose exploration into social and psychological issues, incorporating Western perspectives into their works.

As for the general characteristics that can be found in classical Arab literary prose, among them are eloquence and rhetoric, rich vocabulary, imagery and descriptive language, poetic elements, complex sentence structure, themes of honor and morality, storytelling tradition, cultural and historical context, Islamic influence.

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ETHICS STATEMENT: This research is based on textual analysis and did not involve human participants or animals. The study complied with institutional and international ethical guidelines; therefore, no formal ethical approval was required.

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