

Meaning Elicitation Tactics in Jacques Derrida and Abd al-Qahir al-Jurjani: A Comparative Critique

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Abstract

The current research paper centers basically around two prominent theorists in the critical arena, a modern Westerner and an ancient Easterner. These are the French, Algerian-born philosopher, Jacques Derrida (1930-2004), and the Medieval Muslim scholar of Persian origins and rhetorician, Abd al-Qahir al-Jurjani (1009-1078). The main effort here is particularly focused on the former's theory of *deconstruction* and the latter's concept of *nazm*. Two reference books are deliberately selected for the study: Derrida's *Of Grammatology* (2016) and al-Jurjani's *Dalail al-I'jaz* (2004 [*The Rationale behind the Inimitability of the Quran*]). In spite of the huge gaps of time, let alone the cultural differences that separate the two thinkers, a close reading of their texts, already mentioned, reveals that there are many similarities linking the two together. Derrida and al-Jurjani, alike, elaborate on skillful tactics for reading a literary piece in terms of its linguistic structure or context. Derrida's *deconstruction* represents a singular act of reading, that concentrates on studying the structure of 'reference' within a 'sign-system'. Al-Jurjani's *nazm* is a collective method of reading that tends to illuminate the 'semantic-syntactic' fabric of 'discourse'. In order to highlight the linguistic structure of a literary text, Derrida and Al-Jurjani suggest that the very function of literary criticism is to urge the readers to contemplate the causal relationship between a 'sign' and its 'signified' message. Regardless of their different critical methodology, both theorists have an identical aesthetic project, that enables critics to treat the literary text, as if it were a linguistic 'code' between the author (sender) and the reader (recipient).

Keywords: Jacques Derrida, Abd al-Qahir al-Jurjani, deconstruction, nazm, Of Grammatology, Proofs of Inimitability.

أساليب استنباط المعنى عند جاك دريدا و عبد القاهر الجرجاني: نقد مقارن
المستخلص:

تقدم الدراسة الحالية قراءة نقدية مقارنة لنظرية التفكيكية التي أسسها الفيلسوف والناقد الفرنسي جاك دريدا (1930-2004) ونظرية النظم التي أرساها العالم الفارسي البارع في علوم اللغة العربية ومؤسس علم البلاغة العربية عبد القاهر الجرجاني (1009-1078)، وتتبنى الدراسة المنهج التحليلي المقارن والذي يسعى الباحث من خلاله الي تتبّع الأسس والجذور الفلسفية لنظرية التفكيكية و النظم من خلال القراءة العميقة والمقارنة الدقيقة في علم الكتابة (2016) ل دريدا ودلائل الأعجاز (2004) ل الجرجاني ، وتحليل ومقارنة النصين يتوصل الدرس إلي أربع نتائج مهمة. أولاً، ان دريدا والجرجاني يمثلان كل علي حدة بؤر زمانية وفكرية ومذهبية مختلفة جذرياً، إلا أن نتاجهم النقدي يؤكد انهما سعي إلي تدشين اليات جمالية تهدف الي سبر أغوار النص الأدبي واستنباط أصل المعنى من خلال التركيز علي تحليل البناء اللغوي للنص؛ ثانياً، علي الرغم من هذا التشابه إلا أنه يمكن تعريف التفكيكية بأنها فعل قراءة فردي يسعى إلي دراسة علاقة التأثير والتأثر بين مرجعية المعنى وأنظمة العلامات النصية، وعلي النقيض من هذا، فأن النظم هو فعل قرائي شامل جامع يهدف إلي إلقاء الضوء علي النسيج الدلالي والنحوي للخطاب للوصول إلي صورة المعنى ؛ ثالثاً، إلقاء الضوء علي البنية اللغوية للنص الأدبي، يؤكد دريدا والجرجاني أن وظيفة الناقد الادبي تتمثل في تشجيع القارئ علي التفكير في العلاقة السببية بين العلامة اللغوية والادل والمدلول وذلك لأبراز معني المعنى؛ وأخيراً، علي الرغم من الاختلاف الإيديولوجي بين التفكيكية والنظم، فقد أظهرت الدراسة ان التوافق بينهما يبدو جلياً في محاولة تأسيس منهج نقدي يؤكد ان النص الادبي ما هو إلا شفرة لغوية بين المبدع والقارئ.

الكلمات الدالة: جاك دريدا، عبد القاهر الجرجاني، التفكيكية، النظم، في علم الكتابة، ودلائل الأعجاز.

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“Impressed immensely by the labyrinth of Western critical theory, we are used to placing the achievement of Arab rhetoric before a concave mirror. Not only does this mirror minimize the creative aspects of Arab mentality, but it also devalues the considerable influence of Arab legacy against Western literary theory.” (Hammouda 2001, 481 [trans.is mine])

Introduction

Bearing Abdul-Aziz Hammouda’s *Concave Mirrors* (2001) in mind, the current paper recasts a new light on the present —supposedly problematic—situation of the modern Arab literary theory. Within the framework of this theory, contemporary Arab practitioners have kept repeating, not to say citing, Western technical terminology, deliberately ignoring the major contributions of their forefathers, especially in the field of the rhetoric. This is primarily why there was a need to conduct a comparative and critical study between two prominent theorists in the contemporary critical scene, a modern Westerner and an ancient Easterner. These are the French, Algerian-born philosopher, Jacques Derrida (1930-2004), and the Medieval Muslim scholar of Persian origins and rhetorician, Abd al-Qahir al-Jurjani (1009-1078).

The main effort is to be particularly focused on the former’s theory of *deconstruction* and the latter’s concept of *nazm*. For this purpose, to be achieved, two reference books are carefully selected. These are Derrida’s *Of Grammatology* (2016) and al-Jurjani’s *Dalail al-I’jaz* (2004 [*The Rationale behind the Inimitability of the Quran*]) (sometimes: *Asrar al-Balaghah* (1991 [*Secrets of Eloquence*])). Regardless of the huge gaps of time, not to say the cultural differences that separate the two thinkers, a close reading of their exceptionally rhetorical texts reveals that there are many similarities linking the two together. Derrida and al-Jurjani, alike, elaborate on skillful tactics for reading a literary piece, in terms of its linguistic structure or context. Derrida’s *deconstruction* represents a singular act of reading that concentrates on studying the structure of ‘reference’ within a ‘sign-system’. Al-Jurjani’s *nazm* is a collective method of a type of reading that tends to illuminate the ‘semantic/syntactic’ fabric of ‘discourse’.

Still, Derrida and al-Jurjani seem to be identical in that both bring forward to the reader's attention the casual interaction between a 'sign' and its 'signified' message —within a certain text —which will ultimately point out, when coupled with each other, the very authentic interpretation stemming from literary critical discourse. Regardless thus of their different critical methodology, both theorists have an identical aesthetic project, that enables critics to treat the literary text, as if it were a linguistic 'code' between the author (sender) and the reader (recipient). To interpret such a code may seem complicated in Derrida as it based on his 'deconstructive' treatment of the matter. However, the same code is decoded by al-Jurjani through his approach, which is based on 'nazm'.

Coined by Derrida, 'deconstruction', as this paper argues, is "a method of reading" (Rekret 2019, p. 467) that seeks to provide a critique of Western metaphysics. It is an interpretative framework that resists any strict "protocols of method or language" (Norris 2002, p. 17). The term 'deconstruction' is a literal translation of the concept "*Destruction* or *Abbau*" (McQuillan 2000, p. 1), invented by the German philosopher Martin Heidegger (1889-1976). In French, this term raises two meanings: "mechanical" and "grammatical." While the first stands for any attempt to "disarrange" the structure of words in a sentence, the latter refers to the pursuit to dismantle "a machine and transport it elsewhere" (p. 1). Intertwined, both meanings may generate the verb 'to deconstruct' which is but "a reflexive verb" that means "to lose one's own construction" (p. 1). 'Deconstruction', within this etymological context is "an act of reading", via which literary critics can decode the hidden codes of any given text by paying a particular attention to the linguistic elements of discourse (p. 6). It becomes a singular strategy of interpretation, not a collective method of reading, that can be applied to any text for the sake of exploring its forgotten contents. Nonetheless, 'deconstruction' is not a concrete methodology; rather, it is "a situation or an event" (p. 6), that occurs simultaneously within the signification process, mainly because it is "an endless act of reading" that has a highly creative aesthetic agenda (p. 7).

Unlike Derrida's deconstruction that tends to criticize Western metaphysics, al-Jurjani's theory of *nazm* seeks to provide principal insights into the "conceptual connotations" and "linguistic significance" of the Quranic Text (Mari et al., 2020, p. 262). The word *nazm* has several forms of translation into English: "discourse arrangement," "construction" (Sweity 1992, p. 44), "composition" (Harb 2013, p. 10) and "poetic theory" (Atabik 2021, p. 57). However, a close reading of

Dalail al-I'jaz insinuates one to think of it as a theory of discourse in itself. This vision can be attributed to the conceptual meaning of *nazm*, which signifies the “art of arranging heterogeneous elements in a homogenous style, namely the art of treating words as if they were precious pearls that can be stringed together to compose. . . a form of aesthetic harmony” (Ibn Manzour 2021, p. 312 [trans. is mine]).

Such an aesthetic harmony is the eminent linguistic miracle that clearly distinguishes the Glorious Quran from other Arabic forms of discourse. It is certainly what had paved the way for al-Jurjani to introduce his concept of *nazm* with a view to yielding a critical scheme that highlights the “syntactic-semantic interrelationships” (Sweity 1992, p. 44) between a text and the production of meaning. Not only do these interrelations illustrate the rationale behind making the Quran an inimitable text, but they also put the theory of *nazm* into the practice of Derrida’s deconstructive project. Like deconstruction, *nazm* is a theory of discourse that generates a creative act of reading via which one can delve deeply into the layer of literary discourse, in order to draw a close analogy between the literal meaning of words and their linguistic structure.

Rationale and Scope of the Study

The topic of this research begins from where Hammouda’s investigating project regarding an Arab critical theory ended. In his ‘mirrors’, Hammouda states that the ulterior reason behind the modern Arab cultural setback consists in the insistence of the modern Arab critics on “putting the achievement of their rhetoric before a concave mirror that minimizes its significant achievement” (2001, p. 7 [trans. is mine]). Depending on this statement primarily, the present paper adopts a comparative analytic approach. Derrida’s ‘deconstruction’ and al-Jurjani’s *nazm* are deeply examined in the light of *Grammatology* and *Dalail al-I'jaz*, with a view to proving that both thinkers provide literary theory with innovative tactics for generating meaning from literary texts.

Unequivocally, the main task here is not to provide a blind, prejudiced attitude against Western critical thinking, in favor of the remarkable accomplishments of classical Arab rhetoricians. Rather, it is to propose an aesthetic judgment based on Derrida and al-Jurjani, in terms of an objective plane mirror. However, this should not completely eliminate or even disregard Hammouda’s concave or convex mirrors. The overall objective is still the same: to place the Arab-Eastern critical legacy, represented by al-Jurjani particularly, in its due position within the mainstream of postmodern Western criticism, represented by Derrida. Such is the major rationale and scope of the study.

It is worthy of note that Derrida's deconstruction and al-Jurjani's *nazm* flow essentially from two completely different intellectual trends and cultural milieus. But the task at hand aspires to make the reader realize how these two theories contribute significantly to the birth of the contemporary basic literary premises. Both Derrida and al-Jurjani seem to be very similar in yielding a critical strategy for reading a literary text in terms of its linguistic fabric. Both dedicate their philosophical project in the hope of explaining that literary criticism is but a creative act of reading, via which one can interpret a text in question by making a natural bond between the literal content of words and their linguistic structure. Within this theoretical framework, several research questions are raised: 1) What are the aesthetic features of Derrida's deconstruction? 2) What are the aesthetic features of al-Jurjani's *nazm*? 3) What are Derrida's tactics for generating meaning? 4) What are al-Jurjani's tactics for producing meaning? 5) What are the main aspects of similarity and dissimilarity between Derrida's deconstruction and al-Jurjani's *nazm*?

Deconstruction: Theory and Practice

Although deconstruction is best conceived as a theory of reading a given text, Derrida insists that it "is not a method of interpretation" that can be applied to any literary (or otherwise) discourse (1991, p. 273). Rather, it is an endless act of reading that has no "preconceived methodology" for examining the basic elements of discourse (McQuillan 2000, p. 5). This assessment stems mainly from the view that deconstruction is but a flexible, limitless strategy that aims to reconcile the constituents of the irreducible fabric of a text. Any given text should supply the critics with an exceptional creative practice through which they can unfold what it "imposes on the reader." In line with this, the text means what the critics, not its author, "want it to mean" (p. 5). By unleashing literary criticism from the firm grip of traditional theories of interpretation, deconstruction successfully wipes out the fake limits separating between literature and linguistics, simply because it ascertains that literary piece is "an event" that springs essentially from its linguistic structure (Derrida 1991, p. 274).

Depending on a text's linguistic structure, deconstruction seems to be neither "a general theory" nor an interpretative model that tends to draw an analogy between the inside material of the text and its outside context. Rather, it becomes an innovative framework that attempts to set up an "inside-outside" relationship between linguistic and nonlinguistic motifs that gives rise to the text in the first place (Lucy 2004, p. 12). Thus, deconstruction is a critique of the inside-outside linguistic traces via which Western metaphysics maintains a speech-writing binary

opposition. In order to refute this opposition, Derrida fosters a “standard hierarchy” which seeks to show that “writing comes before speech” (p. 13). By thus establishing the primacy of writing over speech, Derrida suggests that deconstruction is not just “a concept,” but “the very concept of a concept,” which relies greatly on the “idea of difference-as-presence” (p. 13). It can be a technique used for analyzing a literary discourse in terms of the structure of the opposition lurking within the linguistic and nonlinguistic elements responsible for the birth of the text.

Therefore, it follows that the ‘deconstructive’ critical technique defines the text, whatever it be, as a “system of marks, traces, referrals” (Royale 2017, p. 7). It is such primary critical zones that the critics should untangle with an eye to showing the non-existence of an essential difference “between language and the world” (Bennington 1989, p. 84). Accordingly, the implication of words runs in terms of a chain of meanings, where the meaning of one particular word refers to another, which, in turn, reflects the identity of “non-linguistic marks,” resulting from the analysis of linguistic traces (p. 84). These become something like an inevitable “given order of priorities,” which deconstruction attempts to dramatize in order to castigate “the conceptual opposition,” accountable for drawing false boundaries between the absence and presence of meaning. In this context, Derrida’s philosophy aims to defend the art of writing against Saussure’s ‘semiotics’ that overemphasizes the primacy of speech over all other forms of communication. But, he never tries to argue that writing is “more basic than speech” (Norris 2002, pp. 30, 31). In order to avoid being mere blind prejudice against Saussure’s linguistic output, deconstruction endeavours to investigate “the problematic statue of writing,” by deliberately reflecting upon the clash that often occurs between “gesture and statement” (Norris 2002, p. 31). Not only does this clash empower the position of the linguistic structures that control the contours of any discourse, but it also opens new windows onto Derrida’s ‘grammatology’. Viewed in this light, deconstruction becomes a critical practice that utilizes the linguistic fabric of an utterance to generate meaning from the heart of the very text it inspects. Mere focus on writing as a powerful tool for communication provides deconstruction with an ecstasy to liberate itself from the dead tablets of Western metaphysics. The end of metaphysics has always denoted that writing is not “a method or system of operative concepts.” Instead, it is a “structured economy of differential features” that should elucidate “the precondition of language” that causes the birth of any text (p. 31).

Nazm: Theory and Practice

Derrida's *deconstruction* represents a singular act of reading that concentrates on studying the structure of 'reference' within a 'sign-system', whereas Al-Jurjani's *nazm* is a collective method of a type of reading that tends to illuminate the 'semantic-syntactic' fabric of 'discourse'. Al-Jurjani's *nazm* is but a critical approach that investigates the mutual interaction between "words (*lafaz*) and meaning" (Atabik 2021, p. 64). In other words, it is a vivid 'objective correlative' that can produce meaning from the heart of the linguistic structure of a text. Combining both the linguistic and nonlinguistic factors, it reveals the 'referent power' intended by an author.

Derrida and al-Jurjani tend to manipulate literary text as if it were a sign-system that has no significance outside a knowable context. Derrida depends on a standard hierarchy to differentiate between gesture and statement, whereas al-Jurjani relies on an established set of "dialectic synthesis" that enables him to draw a firm demarcation line between "language and discourse" (Sweity 1992, p. 231). In it, language is conceived to be an inevitable outcome of constant "social conventions," that play a crucial role in determining the signified message of an utterance (p. 231). Unlike the restrictive atmosphere of language, discourse can endow the critic with a creative power to rework the linguistic codes to bring out signifying relationships that block the aesthetic value of a discourse. Similar to deconstruction, *nazm* represents a technique for reading religious or nonreligious texts, by finding a strong affinity between the inside and outside linguistic structures of a locution.

An analysis of the relationship between language and discourse proves that al-Jurjani, like Derrida, composes a critical theory proposing that any text is an essential precondition of language. Inspired by the power of language, al-Jurjani contends that language is but "a system of signs governed by linguistic relationships that can refer directly to the signified (content) of a locution" (Hammouda 2001, p. 217 [trans. is mine]). This springs essentially from a set sign and a knowable signifier whose interaction brings into prominence the subtext of a predetermined referent. It is best demonstrated by al-Jurjani who explicitly suggests that *nazm* is not only an attempt to explore a causative syntactic relationship between parts of speech, but also an effort to reveal the main reason for the birth of the text itself:

It is true that *nazm* is a symbiotic relationship between different parts of speech, an interrelationship that makes the interpretation of some words seem to be dependent on the

syntactic significance of others. Human speech is consisted of three main forms: nouns, verbs and particles. The interaction between them is a preordained act that runs as follows: while a noun refers to a noun and a verb signified an action; a particle is the decisive factor in illuminating the deeper meaning of discourse because it can be added to a noun or a verb to shift the mechanism of the sentence. (al-Jurjani 2004, p. 4 [trans. mine])

An explanation of the aesthetic bond among nouns, verbs and particles asserts that *nazm* can be perceived as an original Arabic critical theory. It is a theory that can call upon critics to focus on the study of the meanings of texts as reflected through their syntactic and semantic linking threads, not to say the dynamics of their sign-system or semiotic nature alone. Speech, in this sense, has no significance outside the limits of syntax that gives color to the words. Deconstruction insists on the text being a construction of marks, traces and referrals, whereas *nazm* maintains that the text is a linguistic system in which the grammatical and semantic dimensions of meaning are best crystalized.

Discussion

Derrida's Tactics for Generating Meaning

In order to procure several layers of meaning from the core of any text, Derrida elaborates on a skillful tactic of his own. But he, first and foremost, aims to liberate literary discourse from the firm grip of "phonocentric approach" (Norris 2002, p. 14), a concept developed by the Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure (1857-1913). To make his point, Derrida argues that the linguistic output of Saussure's approach completely ignores investigating the linguistic problems arising from the phonocentric method. This shortcoming can be ascribed to the fact that Saussure's concrete methodology, or rather semiotics does not deal with the writing/speech opposition as a unified "signifying system" that can certainly exceed the limits of "individual presence and speech" (p. 27). Due to his method's insistence on conceiving language as a system of phonic signs, Saussure's aesthetic efforts culminate in privileging speech terminologies over those of writing.

To maintain the power of speech, Saussure contends that human language is not only "the product" of speech, but is also an irreplaceable "instrument" (Norris 2002, p. 27) of writing. His argument brings forward the negative aspect of his linguistic assumptions, since it gives a distinct advantage to "individual speech" over "the system of meaning," that can

be best expressed through writing, not speaking. Such an approach is but a structuralist scheme that serves as a useful starting point for Derrida to launch a heavy criticism against Saussure's linguistic agenda, on the pretext that it springs from a "powerful structure of presuppositions" that place writing in "a secondary status." To rebut these presuppositions, Derrida's deconstructive agenda revolves around proving that Saussure's philosophy contains seeds of "visible contradictions" that falsely separates meaning from referentiality (pp. 27, 28).

Apparently, Derrida's critical agenda revolves around nullifying the phony opposition between speech and writing. This is the logical sequence of what he calls "logocentrism," a term he introduces to refer to "the metaphysics of phonetic writing" (2016, p. 3). It is but a philosophical term he borrows from a Greek word meaning "logos," which stands for the history "of the truth of truth" originally responsible for the birth of "universal language" The 'logos' is the universal "law" of communication since the dawn of history, simply because it provides the "voice" with an ecstasy to be closely connected with "the signified" outside discourse whether or not this 'signified' sign is perceived as a 'sense' or a 'thing' (2016, pp. 3, 11).

Of all signifiers, the written one is the most expressive among all others, because it skillfully combines the significance of the voice with that of the mind. It is a technical device that enables Derrida to abandon "logocentrism" which proceeds from "the metaphysics of phonetic writing." Besides spurring the critics to attack Western mentality, Derrida's abandonment of 'logocentrism' urges them to formulate their own theory of interpretation. Such a theory should largely depend on identifying the aesthetic interrelationships among "voice and being," "voice and the meaning of being" and "voice and the ideality of meaning." It is an active linguistic strategy via which the critics neither reduce the authority of phonocentrism, nor can they prove that the appreciation of the literary text stems mainly from the total interaction between 'signifier' and the 'signified' message (Derrida 2016, pp. 11,3,12).

In order to better explore the relationship between a text and its signified connotation, Derrida dissects each point of the argument of the 'logocentric tradition.' This technique can be justified by the very nature of a tradition that neither ignores the power of the linguistic structure of a discourse, nor does it entice Western thinkers to assert that writing is but a "parasitic and distorting form of speech" (Florentsen 1996, p. 70). In his endeavour to refute such an accusation, Derrida expounds his views on

the significant difference between the ‘signifier’ and what is ‘signified’ at great length. His view that writing and what is signified spring mainly from the same stream of “exteriority” gives rise to a belief that the interpretation of an utterance hinges greatly on the analysis of a “linguistic sign” (2016, p. 14). It also denotes that a sign is not only “the source of all cultural activity, but is also “the dangerous knowledge of its own constitution,” which ‘logocentrism’ attempts to repress (Norris 2002, p. 23).

That is why Western thinkers regard speech as the “originary form” of writing which is considered a “debilitating mode of expression.” In this regard, any written material is fated to be misunderstood by the logos that imprison the meaning within the cave of “secondariness.” To minimize the authority of ‘logos’ that somehow imposes a predetermined image of words, a critic should take into account something important: the significance of a locution, not to say a referent, should not be connected with “the logos of a Creator”, who is primarily responsible for creating the literal meaning of statements. That is why the keen critic should strongly believe that “the signified” meaning of a word finds an echo in the “immediate relationship” between the sign and its “signifier,” that has no signification outside the borders of the text. If there is no text, there will be no sign or signifier, and, consequently, no signified meaning:

Without that exteriority, the very idea of the sign falls into decay. . . . Reading and writing . . . are preceded by a truth, or a meaning already constituted by . . . the logos of a creator God where it began by being the spoken/thought sense, the signified has at any rate an immediate relationship with the logos in general (finite or infinite), and a mediated one with the signifier, that is to say with the exteriority of writing. (Derrida 2016, p. 14-15)

The sign-system of exteriority, accordingly, is the means through which the significance of an utterance is hammered home. It pops up as a result of a sophisticated chain of related critical processes. This is how Derrida describes the mechanics of such a chain of meaning: ‘a “sign signifies “a signifier” that reflects “an eternal verity”, a constant conception of the word that can be best perceived in terms of “a present logo” (Derrida 2016, p. 15). The discernable relationship between the ‘signifier’ and the ‘signified’ justifies Derrida’s assumption that the analysis of the linguistic structure of a discourse is the central keystone of the act of interpretation. It also supports his position, strengthens it, and gives him justification to criticize Saussure’s concept on that score.

Saussure has his own view as regards “the arbitrary nature of the sign,” which Derrida rejects, simply because it disturbs the logical dialectical harmony between “word and thing” (Norris 2002, pp. 4,5). In order thus to refute such an arbitrary aspect of signs, Derrida proposes point-blank: Linguistics seeks to be “the science of language” (2016, p. 29) whereas a literary text seems to be the science of linguistics. However, Saussure defines language as “a system of signs,” indicating that “graphism” puts an end to the existence of the science of interpretation, since the meaning of a locution is preconditioned by what is “drawn,” not “signified” (p. 32).

Saussure’s strong conviction in ‘the arbitrariness’ of the ‘linguistic sign’ is double-edged: Not only does it terminate the creative role of a literary critic, but it also reduces the value of analyzing an utterance. It makes it look like “an artificial exteriority,” that both obscures the ‘presence of language’ and misrepresents its semantic rhetorical aspect. In this context, the meaning of a given locution is the “outside” frame that flows essentially from “the inside” structure of the signified, not referent. It is a significant dialectal relationship which aims to strike an aesthetic balance between the linguistic structure of a sign and its literal meaning. From this angle, deconstruction aspires to set up a standard hierarchy between the “linguistic and graphic signs.” A close scrutiny of the arbitrary aspects of the sign is expected to reflect a twofold vision, namely that there are natural bonds between “sense” and “the senses” as well as between “sense” and “sound.” Mere tracing of these innovative bonds leads to an amazing realization. The art of interpretation should ignore the examination of “the phonic signifier,” in order to help the critics to break through the barriers between the text and its linguistic structure:

The meaning of the outside was always present within the inside, imprisoned outside the outside, and vice versa. . . . Therefore, there would be a natural order of relationships between linguistic and graphic signs, and it is the theoretician of the arbitrariness of the sign who reminds us of it. . . . This natural bond of the signified (concept or sense) to the phonic signifier would condition the natural relationship subordinating writing (visible image) to speech. (Derrida 2016, p. 35)

The close affinity between the ‘signifier’ and the ‘signified’ denotes that the authentic meaning of a text, regardless of its kind, results

mainly from its interior, i.e. its linguistic elements. This is probably what makes Derrida accept the idea that the interpretation of a discourse's exterior springs from the heart of "the inside", which is usually imprisoned "outside the outside" context and brought on by the 'logos' (2016, p. 35). The 'logos' becomes a dangerous force that destabilizes any attempt to decipher the linguist code of an utterance. That is to say, a proficient critic should put aside the influential power of the logos in order to unfold the hidden significance of the text in question. Once the meaning of a discourse is demonstrated in terms of the binary opposition between its outer and inner structures, language becomes an "obedient vehicle of thought" (Norris 2002, 30). The analysis of the language of the text thus appears, as if it were "the conceptual order, not to say the efficient powerful scheme," that not only "governs the relationship between the sign and its signified" message, but also "gives rise to the process of interpretation" in the first place (Derrida 2016, p. 43).

Inspired by the aesthetic value of the literary texts linguistic analysis, Derrida proposes four critical theses, by which the novice critic can be guided to know the ABC of discourse appreciation: 1) Since linguistics examines "determined linguistic models" that govern "its inside and outside" aspects, it cannot be a general science of interpreting discourse. Instead, the critics should originate an aesthetic *mélange* between the linguistic and literal fabric of discourse. 2) Interpretation is not an exterior act to "the system" of significations, mainly because an understanding of both the "exterior and interior" meaning of an utterance stems mainly from an aesthetic interaction between "the interior of the interior or the exterior of the exterior." An authentic interpretation is the outcome of some linguistic and nonlinguistic forces that mediate in the hot dispute between 'phoneme' and 'grapheme'. 3) The critic's comment on a given literary text may be an "image" or "figuration" of language, only when one considers the sublime functions of the "image within the system" of the language responsible for the birth of the text. 4) An interpretation is not "a sign of a sign," but a deep root sign "of all signs," which provides culture with fertile techniques for exploring the system of language (2016, p. 43):

First that a linguistics is not general as long as it defines its outside and inside in terms of determined linguistic models; as long as it does not rigorously distinguish essence from fact in their respective degrees of generality. The system of writing in general is not exterior to the system of language in general, unless it is granted that the division between exterior and interior passes through the interior of the interior or the

exterior of the exterior, to the point where the immanence of language is essentially exposed to the intervention of forces that are apparently alien to its system. (Derrida 2016, p. 43)

It is true that these critical theses can be considered as signs on the road that the novice critic can follow. But at the same time, they reveal certain convictions of Derrida, especially regarding his vision of arbitrariness. In addition to refuting Saussure's defense of phonic sign in the face of graphic one, they form a good starting point, via which Derrida can call upon critics to search within the text for the "instituted trace" (Attridge 2011, p. 64). It is the primary rationale behind the quest for and exploration of meaning elicitation tactics. Derrida argues that writing is neither "the image" nor is it the "symbol" of speech. Instead of being an exterior element of language, the 'instituted trace' is more "interior" to speech, mainly because it is produced within the limits of the linguistic structure that plays a crucial role in "all systems of signification" (Derrida 2016, p. 46). It is characterized with an arbitrary force, in terms of which the critics can incorporate the 'signified' into the signifier. The meaning of a discourse depends largely on investigating the consequences resulting from either the absence or the "presence of the trace", within the domain of "difference" that brings into prominence "a structure of reference". The absence of meaning, not to say the transcendental signified, is the very indication of its presence (pp. 47,46). The textual elucidation of the power of such a trace implies that the meaning of a locution presents itself, as if it were an "irreducible absence" that can be illustrated in the shade of the trace, the logic of the "non-present remainder" (Royle 2000, p. 7).

By thus demonstrating the aesthetic value of the 'trace' as a key criterion, via which the critics can touch upon the absence and presence of difference, Derrida launches a new strategy for generating meaning. His tactic is but a truthful illumination of how the structure of reference brings out "a differential network not to say a "fabric of traces," that directly refers one to a set of endless "differential traces" (Derrida 1995, p. 84). These traces are but an important element in unfolding the contention latent in the sign-system and exposed by the inner nature of a text. The process of meaning stems from a synthesis of the referent with the signified, or rather with a complex chain of semantic structure. In such a chain, the significance of a locution can be clarified in the light of "what is not" said, not in the shade of its resemblance with other locutions (2016, p. 47). It is the very concept of difference via which the relationship between words can be best articulated. That is why the

difference vis-à-vis the instituted trace illuminates the identity of an utterance. This implies that the accurate meaning of words is always buried beneath the deep linguistic structure of discourse, a critical trick maneuvered by the logocentric tradition, to prevent the critics from regarding the linguistic power of the trace as a fundamental, rise-giving force to meaning:

The instituted trace cannot be thought without thinking the retention of difference within a structure of reference where difference appears as such and thus permits a certain liberty of variations among the full terms. The absence of another here-and-now, of another transcendental present, of another origin of the world appearing as such, presenting itself as irreducible absence within the presence of the trace, is not a metaphysical formula substituted for a scientific concept of writing. (Derrida 2016, p. 46-47)

Having thus examined the interplay of the instituted trace, Derrida concludes that the text is “more exterior” as well as “more interior to” its linguistic fabric (Attridge 2011, p. 65). Motivated by this assessment, he sets out to develop Saussure’s statement that language contains “only differences without positive terms” (Saussure 2000, p. 57). This proposition enables him to enlarge upon the opposition that obsessed human knowledge, i.e. “symbol”/ “sign,” “nature”/ “convention,” and “presence”/ “absence” (Attridge 2011, p. 65). Since Derrida manipulates the concept of difference as a primary source for “linguistic value,” he defines this concept as an active component in all signifying practices. However, he explains that the difference does not offer a “sensible plenitude” of fixed meanings. Rather, it presents a plethora of significations that can have a clear implication outside the “phonic essence” of language system, and the independent nature of the “graphic signifier” (Derrida 2016, pp. 52, 53). Thus, the text is but a truthful expression of the internal system of language, via which the gap between “sound” and “meaning” can be bridged. Here, he criticizes Saussure’s concept of the ‘arbitrary nature’ of linguistic sign, simply because the latter excludes the power of discourse from any area of knowledge. In fact, the interpretation of the code and its signified are the outcome of difference, not phonic signs:

By definition, difference is never in itself a sensible plenitude. Therefore, its necessity contradicts the allegation of a naturally phonic essence of language. It contests by the same token the professed natural dependence of the graphic signifier. That is a consequence Saussure himself draws

against the premises defining the internal system of language. (Derrida 2016, p. 53)

Derrida openly discusses the connotations of ‘difference’, prior to employing it in booting his own meaning generating tactics. He insists that difference is neither “a word nor a concept;” it is even “a present thing.” Perhaps, it can be a system of signification via which the hidden relationships between “a set signifier and a knowable signified” may be revealed (McQuillan 2000, pp. 16, 21). It also can be described as “legible or readable” code that cannot be spoken. Since the dawn of history, the desire for speech, as an essential medium for communication, had reduced the presence of writing and difference. However, this repression maintains the concept of difference as the main reason behind the semantic output of the text. That is why it is difficult to fully grasp difference without unfolding the ecstasy of the “trace” (Derrida 2016, p. 57).

It is but ‘trace’ which explains how the arbitrariness of sign assassinates the field of literary criticism, since it negates the creative power of the critic, who has a license to dig deeply into the fabric of the text in question. Derrida supports this argument, stating that Western metaphysics contains two forms of difference: “formal” and “phonic difference” (p. 57). The former is the formal science of language that denies any connection between “sound and language,” whereas the latter confirms that the principal task of language is to form an aesthetic coordination between “sound” and “sense” (p. 57). The organic unity between these two items resolves the eternal dispute over the priority of form over content.

Hence, difference is an aesthetic relationship within words, whereby the “identity of each sign,” whether phonic or not, can be distinguished. This denotes that difference is but a “structure” whose interpretation bestows a sense of reality upon the text itself, as it produces a linguistic referent that “disappears and appears in its disappearance” (McQuillan 2000, pp. 16, 17). To solve this hermeneutic dilemma, one should adopt what Derrida christened an “originary synthesis” with a view to revealing “the originary trace,” not to say an “arche-trace.” Without this trace, there will be neither “difference” nor “meaning” nor even a text either. The study of trace depends on the “determination of the content,” a skillful critical practice that brings out “difference,” not to say “the (pure) trace” (2016, pp. 61, 62). Such a trace is not the outcome of “audible,” “visible,” “phonic” or “graphic” codes. Instead, it is the very “condition” responsible for the birth of the text itself in the first place.

It remains a textual feature that ‘trace’ and ‘difference’ are central to the process of signification, even though they have no clear presence within the deep structure of a discourse. The value of these two concepts is embedded in their being contributive to the existence of a sign-system, viz. “signified/signifier,” “sensible/the intelligible” and “content/expression” (Derrida 2016, p. 63). So, they are not “sensible” entities, but rather intelligible devices that supply signs/words with a linguistic power, to articulate themselves in terms of an “abstract order.” This leads to a process of critical negotiation with the inner structure of discourse, in the hope of resolving the metaphysical opposition between a sign/an utterance and the signified, or rather the eternal dilemma between meaning and referentiality. The very objective of reading a text should best explore the linguistic frame of the work in question, as well as the crucial part played by “the determined differences and the determined presences” in creating the text itself. It is then that ‘trace’ and ‘difference’ become “the being-imprinted of the imprint” material that forms the ethics of interpretation (p.63). Here language appears to be “a play of differences” that cannot occur outside the trace. The trace enables the critics to figure out that interpretation is a form of a “gram or difference” (Derrida 2004, p. 26).

Derrida proposes that it can be better for philosophers to search for a form of “syntheses” along with a set of “referrals,” that maintain the relationship between the production of meaning and the interpretation of sign-systems. The complete assimilation of a written or spoken locution requires the critic to seriously consider that no single fabric of a discourse can serve as an authentic sign for a particular *leitmotif* which is certainly absent from the structure of the text. This skillful maneuver denotes that the “phoneme or grapheme” constitutes not only the creative roots of the trace, but also the “chain” of connotative-denotative interrelationships. That chain brings into prominence the ethics of demonstrating a discourse, simply because it reflects, like a mirror, two different but related items. It firstly shows the critic as a textile designer and then secondly reflects the text itself as a factory that produces interrelated textile of meanings. With this in mind, one can safely infer that a discourse is but an aesthetic textile of signifiers that can be reached in the light of specific signified flowing from “another text.” The implication of an illocution relies deeply on examining “differences and traces of traces.” The grapheme is probably a truthful articulation of the power of the phoneme when the latter is articulated in a written form. Derrida successfully endows the critics with a creative critical strategy to set free the art of reading literary texts, away from the jails of Saussure’s

arbitrariness of sign. This is how he fosters the aesthetic agenda of his deconstructive project:

The play of differences supposes, in effect, syntheses and referrals which forbid at any moment, or in any sense, that a simple element be *present* in and of itself, referring only to itself. Whether in the order of spoken or written discourse, no element can function as a sign without referring to another element which itself is not simply present. This interweaving results in each "element"-phoneme or grapheme-being constituted on the basis of the trace within it of the other elements of the chain or system. (2004, p. 26)

In combining the linguistic power of the trace with that of the difference, Derrida's deconstruction holds that the meaning of any text is "always deferred." The interpretation of any text seems to be governed by the play of difference that can be ended when a critic adopts "an endless supplementarity" to bridge the gaps of meaning (Norris 2002, p. 31). This denotes that the supplement plays an intermediary part in associating the "total absence" of a linguistic code with its "total presence." It is a critical practice used to produce a "signifying structure" that can compensate for the lack of meaning. But it requires that the critic should lay special focus on the "intentional relationships" between the linguistic sign and its signified message. This brings into prominence a "doubling commentary" that flows mainly from the process of reading, and thus helps unravel the hidden themes that the phonic structure attempts to dress in conversational style. To evade the illusive gestures of the phoneme, the critics are to be merely contended with the idea of doubling discourse. There is no interpretation that can be located or applied outside a text that contains the ethics of meaning and referentiality: "there is nothing outside of the text" (Derrida 2016, pp. 157, 158).

This is where one can capture the essence of Derrida's tactics for generating meaning and can best appreciate the innovative metaphysics of interpretation offered by his deconstruction. The structure of the 'reference', the 'difference' and arch 'trace' helps the critics to easily exceed the borders of the text in quest for a "referent" or "transcendental signified" outside the text itself. In line with this critical maneuver, the very job of a critic is to look for "substitutive significations" that drive the readers directly to "a chain of differential references" (Derrida 2016, pp. 158, 159). These linguistic references proceed essentially from the inside of the text and hence should be laid heavy emphasis on, so as to explore the creative role played by the trace and supplement in clarifying the

meaning of a discourse. Derrida's theory of deconstruction shows that interpretation is but "the supplement par excellence." It is not a "sign of sign;" it is not "more a signifier than a signified, a representer than a presence" that results in producing a pure subtext of the text in question (pp. 281, 235). The art of interpretation is but a sign-system via which the "natural presence" of language is totally disappeared, not to say coded, and then decoded in order to reappear clearly through the linguistic analysis of words.

Al-Jurjani's Tactics for Generating Meaning

Derrida employs his 'deconstruction' to criticize Western metaphysics for privileging speech over writing, whereas al-Jurjani engineers his theory of *nazm* to examine the permanent power of the oral discourse over the written one. But al-Jurjani also aims to criticize the ideology of the *Mu'tazila*, a group of Islamic neutralists who refused to be indulged in the dispute between Ali ibn Abi Talib (c. 600-661) and his opponents over the legality of his caliphate. More important was their firm stand as regards the inimitability of the Quranic text on the grounds that it does not consist in its *nazm* [arrangement of sentences].

Since al-Jurjani was a staunch follower of *al-Ashari*, a Sunni school of Islamic theology, he develops the concept of *nazm* to prove that the miraculous aspect of the *Quran* stems from "its language structures," not from the literal meaning of its vocables (Atabik 2021, p. 189). Words here are but "the pots of meanings" that can be generated by discovering the relationship between the semantic implication of words and their syntactic functions (Ghneem 2022, p. 263). Al-Jurjani's *nazm* aims not only to highlight the reasons that had forbidden the early Arabs from composing a short verse of the Holy Quran for all their excessive fluency and eloquence, but also to rebut the *Mu'tazila* for suggesting that the miraculous aspect of the Quran is inherent in reading its vocables separately away from any other context. That is why al-Jurjani contends that the "meaning of words is the logical consequence of a signifying relationships between the semantic-syntactic threads responsible for the creation of the text itself" (Khalil 1983, p. 60 [trans. is mine]).

Al-Jurjani's *Dalail al-I'jaz* is a major monument of classical Arab critical thought, authored by an early theorist. In its entirety, it investigates the aesthetic factors that make one text seem to be "more or less eloquent than another" (Sweity 1992, P. 53). This is how al-Jurjani originates the theory of *nazm*: He contends that the duty of a critic is to examine carefully the syntax of a sentence in relation to its semantic features, so as to reveal the relationships between words and their

significance. In order that one may be able to put the theory of *nazm* into the practice of literary criticism, one should consider two crucial points.

First, the critic should lay great emphasis on analyzing “the syntactic fabric of an utterance” (al-Dayah 2018, p. 23 [trans. is mine]). This can represent a strategic force when interpreting a sentence by finding the grammatical interrelationships among its parts of speech. A critic is supposed to examine the deep structure of the text in order to be able to highlight the aesthetic interaction among a sentence’s subject, object, verb, adverb, and particles. Besides showing that words have no static meaning, the value of syntactic function points out the role of “morphology and lexicography” in illustrating a text (p. 23 [trans. is mine]). This practice entices the critics to ascertain that meaning is a flexible icon that may change when the context of an utterance is modified.

Second, the critic should realize that the words of a text have no fixed meaning, mainly because their indication normally proceeds from the conceptual interaction between the associative meaning and the syntactic position of a locution. In this regard, *nazm* is not just a haphazard combination of words arranged purposelessly. Rather, it is “a critical process in terms of which the parts of speech, composing the body of a text, ought to be thoroughly examined in relation to each other” (al-Jurjani 2004, p. 49 [trans. mine]). That is because this matter would reveal new relationships between words and their use within a particular text. This is what may not be revealed upon their first attempt to approach the text. Therefore, comes the role of the critic who removes the dust from these latent meanings.

Just as Derrida criticizes Western logocentrism for negating the relationship between words and their signified, al-Jurjani launches a heavy criticism against his predecessors of Arab thinkers for a rhetorical reason. His criticism is directed at their misunderstanding of the difference between “form (*lafz*) and content (*ma’na*)” (Harb 2015, p. 301). While *lafz* refers to a specific expression, or rather the words that compose a text, *ma’na* stands for the signification process by which one can bring into prominence the meaning of an utterance or a group of words. That is why al-Jurjani denounces Ibn al-Muqaffa, a Persian philosopher who first mentioned the term *nazm*, for insisting that the composer of *nazm* should only put “the words in their correct positions.” This composer is but a clever goldsmith whose very duty is to organize “precious stones [words] into bracelets [speech]” (Sweity 1992, p. 70). Al-Jurjani also strongly opposed the claim of al-Qadi Abd-al-Jabbar (935-

1025), a prominent hadith scholar, that “eloquence lies in utterances (*lafz*)”, not in their grammatical structures (Harb 2015, p. 303).

Al-Jurjani declares that the concept of *nazm* developed earlier by Islamic thinkers is incomplete as it focuses on the literal interpretation of words at the expense of their real significations. He argues that those who opt for the study of vocables in favor of the linguistic structure are but useless thinkers who not only segregate discourse from its essence, but also obscure its authentic significance. Their dreadful fault flows essentially from the notion that they deliberately ignore that the harmony between words and their linguistic fabric is the main rationale behind the birth of meaning. Al-Jurjani thus calls upon the critics to move right to the heart of the text, not around it, to generate the accurate interpretation of words, away from their literal entity, simply because all forms of speech have no value unless they are organized in terms of the ethics of semantics and syntax:

Indeed, homophones have no significance outside the borders of the signified of the vocables, simply because the meaning of a word does not proceed from its literal assonance. Rather, it is an aesthetic deduction that occurs when the critics realize that vocables are the obedient vehicles of meanings, not vice versa. Meaning has a boundless power that can impose itself on the composer and reader of a text. He/she whoever, alas, stands by the literal interpretation of words rather than their semantic meaning is but utterly ruthless spoilers of discourse, mainly because they do not only evacuate discourse from its essence, but also divert its aesthetic value into a meaningless phenomenon. Such infertile attempt brings on a labyrinth of fake rules and regulations responsible for the loss of meaning. (1991, p. 8 [trans. is mine])

Al-Jurjani’s statement that ‘vocables are the obedient vehicles of meanings’ is reminiscent of Derrida’s concept of the arbitrary nature of the linguistic sign. Al-Jurjani’s terms of *lafz* and *ma’na* find a suitable, sensible echo in Saussure’s semiology. Apparently, thus, Derrida debunks Saussure’s semiotics, whereas al-Jurjani seems to be in line with it, holding that there is a predetermined, natural bond between the sign and its signified message. It is Margret Larkin’s belief that while *lafz* is the “combination of sounds” (1995, p. 47), *ma’na* is the “lexical definition of the word” (p. 47). Not only does Larkin’s valuable note enable one to fully grasp al-Jurjani’s tactics for generating meaning, but it also helps one to conclude that *lafz* has a twofold function in al-Jurjani’s

aesthetics: it is the signifier as well as the sign. *Lafz* is the signifier produced by pronouncing a sign/word that essentially refers one to the signified/ *ma'na*. Derrida insists that the signified results from the exteriority of language, whereas al-Jurjani holds that “human language is but a set of vivid signifiers that have no signified outside the concept of things within human mind, that acts as the stream source of any referent” (2004, p. 50 [trans. is mine]).

Unlike Derrida’s tactics of producing meaning which proceed from the analysis of the structure of reference and differential traces, al-Jurjani’s tactics take a step further to include three forms of meaning: meaning of syntax, image of meaning and the meaning of meaning. Although these models of meaning have a completely different critical agenda, they seem to be identical in displaying the aesthetic value of semantic-syntactic analysis of words. Rather than asking the critics to focus on the analysis of sign-system of a word alone, al-Jurjani invites them to critically practice the meaning of syntax in order to make them focus on how the sentence is composed in the light of the grammatical relationships between its words. The concentration on these relationships requires the critics to consider that the significance of a word can be identified through the linguistic “appropriateness of its meaning in relation to its neighboring meanings” (Harb 2015, p. 305).

However, both Derrida and al-Jurjani tend to assert the inclusive power of the sign’s arbitrary nature. For this they provide critical assumptions which contend that the relationship between the signifier and signified is a preconditioned state made by an abstract order. In al-Jurjani’s instance, that order does not stem from the literal meaning of words but flows essentially from the basic rules of grammar, not to say from Derrida’s logos, which responsible for implanting a precise definition of each a sign. To enlarge upon the arbitrary nature of sign, al-Jurjani stresses that the professional critic should consciously differentiate between the combination of alphabetical letters and the composition of words.

Derrida refers to the attempt of making the sounds in a particular way, whereas al-Jurjani alludes to a creative practice that bestows meaning on such letters. If the author of a discourse says ريبض [ebat] instead of ضرب [beat], he/she does not only spoil the sign but also destroys the signifier. However, this misspelling has no considerable impact on the process of generating the meaning, simply because the signified is a preconditioned phenomenon within the structure of human mind that has a strict signified of each signifier. By composing words, the

writer aims to hint at the signified in a systematic way that can be reflected through the inside reality of the receiver of the codes. In short, *nazm* is an attempt to establish a semantic relationship between the literal meaning of words and their syntactic structure, that enables the addressee to deduce the intended implication of a signifier whether produced correctly or incorrectly:

One should carefully distinguish between the composition of alphabetical letters and that of words. The former refers to the way in which the letters are ordered to be pronounced without any reference to the process of signification, simply because the composer of letters strongly believes that the significance of letters does not spring from a natural-born relationship within the mind of the receiver. Take for example, when he/she says ربيض instead of ضرب, he/she succeeds only in corrupting the literal meaning, not to say the original sign. On the contrary, the composition of words hinges greatly on providing trace elements that drive the reader directly to the sublime significance of words as a combination of referents that flows from inside the inside of the addressee. That is, *nazm* is a comprehensive examination of the hidden linguistic schemes of a given discourse, not a singular scrutiny of each sign. (Al-Jurjani 2004, p. 49 [trans. is mine])

Al-Jurjani's insistence on showing that misspelling of the signifier does not distort the meaning of the signified is reminiscent of Derrida's notion that language is the being-imprinted of the imprint. While Derrida contends that phoneme or grapheme plays a mighty role in clarifying the utterance, al-Jurjani holds that the grapheme does not affect the process of meaning, simply because the signified meaning of a word results from the syntactic-semantic fabric that determines the process of signification, away from the method of composing phonemes or graphemes. Yet, both Derrida and al-Jurjani may be remarkably similar in holding that the literary text is but a textile factory and the critic is a textile designer, whose main duty is to produce interrelated textile of meanings. In this regard, *nazm* can be likened to the art of creative interweaving, via which the critics can inextricably twist different linguistic units to yield the significance of an utterance. Such is the critical framework via which one can unfold the rationale behind the importance of analyzing the syntactic fabric of words in relation to their semantic context.

At the time Derrida ascertains the exteriority of the signified, al-Jurjani confirms its interiority. Unlike Derrida's interpretative agenda

which indicates that a sign produces a signifier that leads to a signified message, al-Jurjani's *nazm* displays that *lafz/sign* constructs a binary structure that collects the signifier and the signified in one sublime icon. To explore this compound linguistic icon, the critics are required to identify the semantic-syntactic units that control the act of generating meaning from the well-balanced reciprocal interaction between the linguistic code and the signified. Thus, al-Jurjani argues that *nazm* does not mean the representation of the words' sound-image, but indicates the syntactic-semantic strategic coordination, resulting from the juxtaposition of words as used in a given utterance. Instead of laying heavy emphasis on looking closely into words away from their linguistic interrelationships, *nazm* suggests that it is better for the critics to uncover the impressive synergy between elements of discourse, with a view to proving that language has a preconditioned concept springing from the human mind, not logocentric tradition.

If the critics intend to ignore this critical maneuver, they will never be able to bring forth an appropriate appreciation of a given text, mainly because they will have no access to differentiate between linguistic and nonlinguistic forces responsible for the rise of the sign and its signified meaning. If *nazm* is applied falsely by some critics who concentrate on the analysis of sound-system as an independent phenomenon of its referent, it will be a fake monotonous artistry as it causes severe damage to the content of a discourse. To avoid this damage, the critics ought to deem the form via which the text is produced with the purpose of discovering whether or not the composer of the text represents his/her central thoughts through direct expressions or linguistic codes. The more the critics dig deep into the text in question, the more they will be able to clarify the semantic-syntactic ethics that governs the practice of interpretation. Otherwise, they should search for another profession:

It is illogical to perceive *nazm* as a method for examining the literal meaning of vocables and the mechanics of their pronunciation away from their psychological impact on the receiver of a locution. If so, there will be no two critics who can bring out a different account of a given text, simply because their critical scheme revolves around exploring the conceptual order of vocables in the process of pronunciation. . . . In order to avoid this artistry, the critics ought to explore the inner structure of all elements of discourse with the purpose of showing whether the composer of a text

represents his/her ideas in terms of denotative or connotative forms. (Al-Jurjani 2004, p. 51 [trans. is mine])

Since neither vocables nor their literal meanings can be conceived as a source of interpretation, al-Jurjani contends that it is necessary for critics to put “the meanings of syntax” at the top of their critical agenda (Ghneem 2022, p. 263). The syntactic analysis of an utterance requires the critic to deem that the arrangement of words ought to be in a total accord with their semantic functions. In order to put the theory of *nazm* into practice, he points out that *nazm* is a linguistic project via which the critics can look closely into literary texts by paying a particular attention to the ethics of grammar without sacrificing the essence of meaning. It is, thus, a sensible reproductive strategy that aims at examining the aesthetic natural bonds between the subject and a predicate of a sentence. To reflect upon the importance of syntax, he cites an extended example of the sentence *زيد مُنطلق* [Zayd is departing] by harping on the various morphological derivatives of the verb *ينطلق* [depart]. He seeks to show how a composer of a discourse can express the same sentence by using different predicative techniques, i.e. direct statement, if-clause and adverbs of circumstances: *إن خرج أخرج/ إن خرجت* [If you go out, I will go out] and *جاءني زيد مسرعا/ جاءني مسرع* [Zayd came to me rushing].

Al-Jurjani goes on stating that the identification of the word’s position in a locution and the role played by different particles act as a linguistic index. In it, the critics can decipher the hidden meaning of the text in question, as particles are but traceable guidelines that drives the reader to the significance of an utterance. That is, the full understanding of syntactic units endows the critics with innovative tactics via which they can reveal the semantic reference of each word. To fully analyze a text, a critic has to be equipped with applicable knowledge of syntax and semantics. Otherwise, he will get lost in the labyrinth of the text, mainly because the interpretation of an utterance is the result of the close analysis of its syntactic structures:

To fully grasp what a composer means by his/her composition, you ought to analyze the sentence construction by illustrating the similar and different linguistic units utilized by the author, e.g. the function of a predicate. . . , aspects of conditional sentence . . . , various particles . . . , place of conjunctions . . . and disjunctions. In so doing, you can easily reveal the syntactic harmony between parts of speech because the forceful accuracy of an utterance pertains to the ethics of grammar. To judge soundly the *nazm* of a

text, you should originate a critical tactic. That enhances you to prove that the main reasons behind the eligibility and excellency of discourse proceeds essentially from the author's dogged determination to employ correctly the judgements of syntax. (al-Jurjani 2004, pp. 81-83 [trans. is mine])

Al-Jurjani's words here highlight the first fundamental force of the theory of *nazm* inherent in "*manna al-Nahw* [meaning of grammar]" (2004, p. 83 [trans. is mine]). It is a critical tool by which one can figure out that syntax is the keystone of the process of generating meaning. Although the syntactic and semantic aspects of meaning share one common feature, they dramatize "differences in the shade of meaning" (Sweity 1992, p. 117). Like Derrida's concept of difference, al-Jurjani's shows that the critic should be armed with linguistic knowledge, in order to discover "the complex linguistic relationships that make each vocable necessarily refer to another in an endless signifying process" (Hamed 2018, p. 131 [trans. is mine]). In this regard, the text becomes a subtext that contains the seeds of grammatical relationships that bring out the authentic interpretation of a discourse. Both Derrida and al-Jurjani seem to be identical in asserting that difference is responsible not only for the semantic variation among words, but also for the causative bond between words and their signified meanings. To analyze this bond, al-Jurjani geared his aesthetic project to refute "the binary opposition *langue/parole* and *sound/sense*" (Hammouda 2001, p. 266 [trans. is mine]).

In order to rebut the binary opposition between sound and sense, al-Jurjani introduces the second remarkable core of the theory of *nazm* consisted in "*surat al-manna* [image of meaning]" (2004, p. 366 [trans. is mine]). It is but an innate analogy held spontaneously within human mind with a view to drawing a comparison between a certain object, or rather a signifier, perceived by our senses and its signified as reflected through mind. This comparison indicates that the interpretation of a locution is not determined by "its form nor by its content." Rather, it can be achieved by looking closely into "the final shape or image" via which a given idea is depicted (Harb 2015, p. 307).

Such is the image of meaning which the critics ought to harp on to reveal the hidden codes, not the direct significance. The articulation of the image of meaning denotes that interpretation is but a translation of the structure of an utterance into precise synonyms of the signified. The critic, then, becomes a proficient translator whose primary task is to render what is seen into abstract concepts arising from human mind. That

is why the differences that distinguish a realistic/linguistic phenomenon from another consist in the arbitrary relation between the sign and signified/the image of meaning. The diversity of realistic features of language requires the critics to search for meaning in terms of the absent image that has no existence outside the mechanism of mind. This particularity ascertains that there is no constant image of meaning, simply because the process of interpretation is a relative activity. While the same object has a specific image in a given context, it may have a different image of meaning in another one:

By the image of meaning, I mean the attempt to draw a comparison and concise analogy between the signified as perceived by our minds and the signifier as seen through our eyes. The significant differences between what we see and what we perceive is best consisted in the salient aspects of the image—so that the differentiation of one person from another, not to say one horse from another is the logical consequence of the particularity via which the image of one that is absent can be reflected through the image of the other. . . . It is because of this that a meaning/idea represents an image in this [statement/verse] that may be completely different from its image in another context. (2004, p. 508 [trans. is mine])

Like Derrida's difference, al-Jurjani's image of meaning is but a graphic signifier that enhances the critics to skillfully bridge the gap between sound and sense. By carefully comparing the concept of difference with that of the image of meaning, one can find out that while the former is a linguistic value that provides a plethora of significations, the latter does not aim to reveal a sensible plentitude of meanings. Rather, it seeks to unfold that each utterance has "a single unified meaning" that springs from the interaction between the words in a sentence and their mental referent (Harb 2015, p. 306). That particularity of meaning brings one closer to the final, basic aspect of the theory of *nazm*, consisted in "manna al-manna [meaning of meaning]" (2004, p. 263 [trans. is mine]). Indeed, the meaning of meaning is a linguistic concept invented by al-Jurjani to demonstrate that words are but potent signs produced by a composer of a text with a view to referring the reader to conclude figurative indication of words distant from their literal meanings.

Hence, the meaning of meaning is a hermeneutic concept which plays a decisive role in shaping the dynamics of the final image of meaning. This form of meaning stems essentially from four poetic devices: "*kinya* [allusion]," "*istarah* [metaphor]," "*tamthil* [analogy],"

and “*majaz* [synecdoche].” The allusion is an indirect expression produced by a speaker to bring into prominence the associative meaning of the sign, i.e. the sentence هو طويل النجاد [he is a man who has a sword’s long sheath] is an allusion to the tallness of that man. This denotes that figurative speech is but a linguistic innovative tactic composed by an author to make an intended deviation of an original utterance from its reality with the purpose of embellishing its literal meaning. This linguistic aspect is best reflected through metaphor and analogy. The former seeks to draw a comparison between two dissimilar entities to make them seem identical in a specific attribute, viz. the sentence رأيت أسداً [I saw a lion] and رأيت رجلاً كالأسد [I saw a man like a lion] implicate that the topic of discourse/the man is as brave as a lion. The deep examination of these two examples drives one to infer that although metaphor and analogy tend to make a form of coordination between the tenor/man and the vehicle/lion, they each adopt a significant linguistic tactic. While the former is a powerful metaphor that bestows an eternal quality on its tenor, the latter is an exaggerated simile that brings into prominence one single eternal attribute, between the subject for whom the figure of speech is made and the attributes intended to describe the tenor:

You ought to differentiate between the original meaning and the meaning of meaning. Whereas the former stands for what you capture from the literal signification of a locution directly without demonstrating any creative ecstasy, the latter requires you to ponder deeply over the utterance to arrive to an authentic meaning that drives you consequently to another hidden meaning. If a composer of a text makes the material of his/her sentence appear as if it were discourse ornaments, not to say he/she transforms meaning into a slave girl and the words into the market where that girl/meaning is put up for sale, you should discover that this composer seeks to make words the deep structure of meaning. You should also find out the very rationale behind the use of figurative language that forces you to search for the meaning of meaning in terms of the intended meaning. To direct your attention to the significance of the meaning of meaning, the author utilizes ingeniously the figurative devices of allusion, metaphor and analogy. (2004, p. 263 [trans. is mine])

Unlike Derrida’s deconstruction which asserts that there is nothing outside of the text, al-Jurjani’s *nazm* confirms that the transcendental signified of an utterance exists outside the text itself. This denotes that the

critics of *nazm* ought to scrutinize the meaning of syntax, the image of meaning and the meaning of meaning with a view to unfolding the substitutive significations that carry the reader to the intended meaning. The analysis of such forms of meaning enables the critics to yield a semantic-syntactic subtext of the text in question. However, both Derrida and al-Jurjani may have similar critical interests in proving that a text whether oral or written is but a linguistic code between the author and the reader. The more the former complicates this code, the more the latter is keen on deciphering it by adopting the tactic methodology of deconstruction or *nazm*, mainly because the literary text is no more a signifier than a signified.

Conclusion

Having thus examined Derrida's theory of deconstruction and al-Jurjani's concept of *nazm* in terms of an objective plane mirror, I would like to make four main points regarding their critical achievements. Firstly, although Derrida and al-Jurjani are the spokespersons for two completely different intellectual and cultural contexts, both, alike, develop aesthetic tactics for generating meaning from the heart of a literary text in the light of its linguistic fabric. While Derrida concentrates on the mechanism that gives rise to the signified, al-Jurjani focuses on demonstrating the linguistic value of the semantic-syntactic interaction between words. However, the critical maneuver provided by Derrida's deconstruction and al-Jurjani's *nazm* urges one to firmly believe that literary criticism is but a creative act of reading, via which one can interpret a text in question by making a natural bond between the literal content of words and their linguistic structure.

Secondly, in order to incorporate the art of interpretation into the field of linguistics, Derrida coins the concept of deconstruction and al-Jurjani opts for that of *nazm*. Deconstruction is an endless singular act of reading via which the critics can disarrange the deep layers of discourse with a view to revealing the hidden linguistic codes of a text. This indicates that the text becomes a battlefield of conflicting marks, traces, referrals. To reconcile these irreducible elements, deconstruction offers a flexible critical practice that enables one to highlight the inside-outside linguistic traces responsible for the birth of the meaning. In short, deconstruction is a singular act of reading that illuminates the linguistic and nonlinguistic factors via which western metaphysics deprivileges the power of grapheme in favor of phoneme.

Unlike deconstruction, *nazm* is a collective approach of reading that seeks to investigate the semantic-syntactic interrelationships that make the Quran an inimitable text. However, both theories seem to be

identical in engineering a critical approach that blends marvelously the linguistic and nonlinguistic forces responsible for the birth of the signified. This critical accomplishment denotes that while Derrida adopts standard hierarchy to distinguish gesture from statement in the shade of the mechanism of sign system, al-Jurjani engineers a dialectic synthesis to differentiate between the meaning of language and that of discourse in terms of the ethics of grammar and semantics. Despite adopting quite different critical methodologies, both Derrida and al-Jurjani share a common interest, in asserting that the very task of a critic is to dramatize the transcendental signified as reflected through the syntactic-semantic fabric of the text, or rather the dynamics of sign system.

Thirdly, inspired by a burning desire to instigate an innovative strategy for generating several layers meaning, Derrida criticizes Western logocentrism for denying the preconditioned relationship between words and their signified. Similarly, al-Jurjani blames the early Arab thinkers for not only considering the constant analogy between *lafz* and *ma'na*, but also for turning a blind eye to the sublime benefit of uncovering the linguistic fabric of an utterance. In order to highlight the signified, both Derrida and al-Jurjani hold that the process of interpreting a text should hinge greatly on a predetermined eternal literary canon that regulates the relationship between a sign and its signified. Unlike Derrida who asserts the signified is an internal-external phenomenon, al-Jurjani contends that the signified springs essentially from inside the inside internal system of language.

Fourthly, a close reading of *Of Grammatology* and *Dalail al-I'jaz* spurs one to infer that both Derrida and al-Jurjani adopt different tactics for generating the meaning. While the former lays heavy emphasis on the structure of linguistic differential traces, the latter provides a comprehensive strategy that combines the study of sign system vis-à-vis the semantic-syntactic structure of words. If Derrida maintains the arbitrary nature of linguistic sign, al-Jurjani emphasizes the arbitrary nature of syntactic-semantic units of an utterance as if they were preordained linguistic rules, not to say abstract orders that carry the reader directly to the significance of an utterance. In order to put the theory of deconstruction into practice, Derrida stresses that the proficient critic should skillfully analyze four basic critical premises: a- the arbitrary nature between sign and its signified, b- the instituted trace that gives rise to the text in question, c- the sublime role played by difference within the structure of reference, d- identification of the signified within discourse because there is nothing outside of the text.

On the other hand, *nazm* is a critical practice that seeks to set up a semantic relationship between the literal meaning of words and their syntactic structure. To accomplish this relationship, al-Jurjani contends that the critic should masterfully harp on three forms of meanings: 1) the meanings of syntax, 2) the image of meaning, and 3) the meaning of meaning which indicates that the authentic significance exists outside the text. By highlighting the critical methodology of their aesthetic tactics for producing the meaning, both Derrida and al-Jurjani deserve to be called the founders of the primary mainstreams of postmodern criticism, mainly because their critical efforts bring forth a paradigm shift in manipulating the literary text as a linguistic signified, not a representer of literal meaning. Such an achievement should encourage scholars of comparative literature to reconsider the remarkable contribution of early Arab rhetoric in embellishing the modern literary theory.

Endnote:

Translations from Arabic are all mine.

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