

Literary Critical Theory in al-Andalus between Innovation and Tradition: Ibn Hazm al-Andalusi as a Model

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Abstract

Throughout its long history, al-Andalus witnessed a rich literary, linguistic, and critical movement. At times, this movement reflected complete dependence on the literary and scholarly activity of the Mashriq, while at other times it represented an attempt to assert its own identity and a tendency toward establishing a distinct literary and intellectual achievement in the face of the increasingly dominant and expansive Mashriqi influence. This concern constituted a persistent dilemma for Andalusian writers and intellectuals, who frequently voiced their complaints about this Eastern cultural invasion and about the inclination toward submission and dependence among the general population of al-Andalus, including common people, writers, and thinkers.

Ibn Hazm al-Zahiri represents one of the prominent figures of Arab-Islamic thought, literature, and philosophy. He was a polymath scholar and the author of an extensive intellectual legacy in the fields of legal theory, jurisprudence, language, literature, history, and logic. In addition, he was a critic distinguished by exceptional originality, uniqueness, and controversy among Andalusian critics, despite not being widely recognized as a leading literary critic within Andalusian critical circles and despite not having devoted independent works specifically to his critical views and insights. His critical opinions constitute a significant exercise in critical reasoning, making it difficult for most scholars of literary criticism to overlook them or refrain from examining them and exploring their intellectual and philosophical foundations.

Keywords: Ethics – Rhetoric – Poetry – Imagination – Inimitability (I'jāz).

First: The Ethical Tendency in Ibn Hazm's Literary Criticism

The ethical tendency in literature in general, and in poetry in particular, is as old as these two arts themselves. This tendency has served as a republican or authoritarian instrument (the authority of the state and the authority of society) for establishing a social model founded upon moral principles, while employing religious texts to consolidate this model. Literature has often not been detached from the desired social and civilizational project.

From this perspective, the ethical critical trend in al-Andalus, led by Ibn Hazm, derives its legitimacy from the necessity of subordinating the aesthetic to the ethical and the creative artistic dimension to educational and moral values. The expressive artistic value of poetry, in his view, is the secret behind the audience's responsiveness to it and its influence upon them.

Hence arises the importance of mobilizing and dedicating this influence to serve social morality and the desired societal project.

Can Ibn Hazm's ethical view of poetry, its role in social reform, and his attack on traditional poetic genres such as panegyric and satire be regarded as stemming from a political stance toward the deteriorating conditions prevailing in al-Andalus during that period, when the Taifa kings dominated the cultural and intellectual scene and poets became divided between praising some rulers and satirizing their rivals? This situation may have prompted Ibn Hazm to call for the moralization of the cultural sphere and to distance poetry from clientelism, domestication, and co-optation.

Ibn Hazm holds poets responsible for perpetuating patronage and mercenary practices, reinforcing mediocrity, and prolonging the survival of corrupt kings and rulers who had usurped power. He therefore urges them to abandon deceptive discourses and to focus instead on the moral qualities and ethical values of society.

The Islamic civilizational project established a close relationship between literature and life, advocating a form of commitment in which the ethical principle and the aesthetic principle are harmoniously intertwined in both life and literature. The Holy Qur'an combines the beauty of meaning with the beauty of expression, as well as truthfulness with artistic beauty. Likewise, the Prophet Muhammad explicitly stated that eloquence possesses attraction and a kind of enchantment.

It is evident that the moral impulse was strongly present in the consciousness of the Andalusian writer and poet, and it was undoubtedly responsible for the relative scarcity of explicit literature in al-Andalus. From a critical perspective, it is also possible that the turn toward nature poetry was one of the consequences of this ethical orientation.

It is likely that "the flight to nature represented a psychological inclination away from the negative margins that the Andalusian environment had opened before the writer and the poet."¹ In contrast to Ibn Hazm, Qudāmah ibn Ja'far did not regard the obscenity of a meaning in itself as something that detracts from the quality of poetry. Likewise, al-Qāḍī al-Jurjānī insisted on the necessity of separating religion from art, considering artistic judgment independent of religious judgment. A similar position is expressed by al-Aṣma'ī in his book **Fuhūlat al-Shu'arā'** (**The Master Poets**), where he maintains that authentic poetry is that which follows the path of the great master poets such as Imru' al-Qays, Zuhayr, and al-Nābighah, encompassing descriptions of dwellings and journeys, satire, praise, amorous themes, depictions of wild asses and horses, wars, and boasts of valor. "But if you introduce it into the domain of virtue, it becomes weakened."²

For these critics, the criterion is artistic excellence, and all meanings are available to serve this excellence. No theme is forbidden to the poet, nor are red lines imposed upon him in the form of ethical objectives or a social project intended for implementation within society. In their

¹ Mahjoubi, Muhammad al-Tijani. "Issues of Literary Criticism within the Philosophical Milieu of al-Andalus," *Maqalid Journal*, University of Ouargla, No. 2, December 2011, p. 190.

² Al-Asma'ī. *Fuhulat al-Shu'ara' (The Master Poets)*, edited and annotated by Muhammad 'Abd al-Mun'im Khafaji and Taha Muhammad al-Mazini, 1st ed., Al-Maktabah al-Muniriyyah, 1953, p. 32.

view, poetic talent is not required to support, defend, or struggle for such objectives at the expense of other meanings, however obscene or morally destructive they may be.

Ibn Hazm is regarded as the pioneer of the ethical trend in literary criticism. This may be attributed either to his religious and juristic inclinations given that he was a distinguished jurist and theologian or to the conservative nature of Andalusian society, which was heavily, and perhaps excessively, influenced by religious authority.

Accordingly, Ibn Hazm delineated the literary path from which the poet should not deviate by defining the boundaries that ought to encompass poetic experience, so that poetry would consist only of “poems containing wisdom and goodness.”¹ His position is founded upon a critical principle centered on the moral effect of poetry upon its audience. For this reason, he condemned love poetry and delicate erotic verse because they arouse passion, invite temptation, encourage frivolity, incline the soul toward licentiousness and sensual pleasures, facilitate indulgence in libertinism and infatuation, and divert attention from religious and moral truths. He likewise opposed everything that ultimately leads to moral dissolution, the corruption of society, the neglect of religion, the squandering of wealth, the violation of honor, the abandonment of religious obligations, or the commission of prohibited acts in any form, especially poetry devoted to the description of wine, the glorification of male beauty, or licentiousness in all its manifestations.

As he states, “This type of poetry facilitates immorality, trivializes sins, and leads to complete ruin.”² Critical engagement with the genre of love poetry was not detached from religious and moral guidance. Ibn Hazm’s admiration for chastity and his condemnation of sin led him, in his treatment of the phenomenon of love, to draw upon poetic models that depict love as a pure and virtuous emotion, one that refuses to become entangled in moral transgressions. Conversely, he sought to expose the reprehensible nature of illicit romantic adventures and condemned violations of sanctity and honor through slander, false accusations, or defamation. Love discourses containing such elements, in his view, belong to the category of sins classified among the gravest destructive offenses, from which religion encourages believers to keep their distance and avoid approaching. If we gather together Ibn Hazm’s views on love poetry as dispersed throughout his epistles and “*Tawq al-Ḥamāmah*” (The Ring of the Dove) we can discern the critical framework and artistic motivations underlying his conception of the literature he recommended. These stem from his religious consciousness and his profound reformist vision, which aimed to shield society from negative influences that corrupt human nature, undermine public taste, and lead to states of licentiousness, frivolity, and debauchery, “ultimately resulting in destruction and corruption in religion.”³ Ghunaymī Hilāl maintains that

¹ Abd al-Rahim, Mustafa ‘Alyan. *Tayyarat al-Naqd al-Adabi fi al-Andalus fi al-Qarn al-Khamis al-Hijri* (Trends in Literary Criticism in al-Andalus in the Fifth Hijri Century), 1st ed., Mu’assasat al-Risalah, Beirut, 1984, p. 332.

² Ibn Hazm. *Rasa’il Ibn Hazm al-Andalusi* (Epistles of Ibn Hazm of al-Andalus), *Maratib al-‘Ulum* (The Ranks of the Sciences), Vol. 4, edited by Ihsan Abbas, 2nd ed., Arab Institution for Studies and Publishing, Beirut, 1987, Vol. 4, pp. 67–68.

³ Qarbou‘, Azzouz. “The Ethical Horizon in the Classical Arab Critical Heritage,” *Journal of Human Research and Studies*, University of 20 August 1955, Vol. 3, No. 6, p. 358.

Islam was “the strongest factor in the emergence of this type of love poetry,”¹ as it endowed emotion with a new dimension that involved a vigorous resistance to passion, fostered an ascetic attitude toward worldly life, emphasized the terrors of the Hereafter, and elevated the values of chastity, purity, and both emotional and physical integrity. Ibn Hazm also prohibited engagement with poetry dealing with brigandage and accounts of warfare, such as the poetry of ‘Antarah, ‘Urwah ibn al-Ward, Sa‘d ibn Nāshib, and others. In his view, such poetry excites the passions, inflames human nature, and encourages individuals to expose themselves to destruction without just cause. It may even lead a person to lose his life unjustifiably, forfeit salvation in the Hereafter, provoke social discord, trivialize crimes and reprehensible conduct, and foster a desire for injustice and bloodshed. He likewise discouraged poetry concerning estrangement and descriptions of deserts and wastelands because it encourages migration and wandering. He also condemned satire, which he regarded as the most corrupt form of poetry, since it habituates people to the conduct of the foolish, the ignoble, and the base; promotes the violation of honor, the exposure of private faults, and the infringement of the sanctity of fathers and mothers. As he states, “In this lies destruction in both this world and the Hereafter.”² Ibn Hazm then expresses his opinion regarding poetic genres that occupy an intermediate position between prohibition and permissibility, namely panegyric and elegy. In his view, the Sharī‘ah neither categorically prohibits nor actively encourages these genres; rather, they belong to the category of permissible yet disapproved practices. Their permissibility derives from the fact that they recount the virtues of the deceased and of the person being praised. Their disapproval, however, stems from the prevalence of falsehood in these two genres, and falsehood, in his view, contains no good. Furthermore, he argues that excessive engagement in the transmission and recitation of poetry constitutes an undesirable occupation, “because it belongs to the realm of falsehood and superfluity rather than to the realm of truth and virtue.”³ Ibn Hazm explicitly states that his adoption of this ethical criterion, together with his extensive classification, specification, and emphasis on the moral dimension of literature, does not stem from ignorance of libertine poetry, brigand poetry, or poetry of estrangement and travel. On the contrary, he had attained the highest degree of mastery and familiarity with the various forms, genres, and purposes of poetry and possessed a profound command of its craft. Rather, his position reflects a deliberate orientation and a doctrinal and intellectual commitment that he regarded as neither negotiable nor subject to compromise, for, as he states, “the truth is more deserving of being spoken.”⁴ Ibn Hazm further defines the proper domain of poetry as being confined to poems of wisdom and virtue, such as the poetry of Ḥassān ibn Thābit and his counterparts, including Ka‘b ibn Mālīk and ‘Abd Allāh ibn Rawāḥah, may God be pleased with them, as well as the poetry of Ṣāliḥ ibn ‘Abd al-Quddūs and similar poets, “for they are among the best means of awakening

¹Hilal, Muhammad Ghunaymi. *Modern Literary Criticism*, Dar al-Awdah, Beirut, 1987, p. 195.

² Ibn Hazm. *Rasa’ il Ibn Hazm al-Andalusi* (Epistles of Ibn Hazm of al-Andalus), Maratib al-‘Ulum (The Ranks of the Sciences), op. cit., Vol. 4, p. 68.

³ Ibn Hazm. *Rasa’ il Ibn Hazm al-Andalusi* (Epistles of Ibn Hazm of al-Andalus), Maratib al-‘Ulum (The Ranks of the Sciences), op. cit., Vol. 4, pp. 68–69.

⁴ Ibn Hazm. *Rasa’ il Ibn Hazm al-Andalusi* (Epistles of Ibn Hazm of al-Andalus), Maratib al-‘Ulum (The Ranks of the Sciences), op. cit., Vol. 4, p. 69.

the soul.”¹ Accordingly, the composition of poetry is, in Ibn Hazm’s view, a blameworthy activity, except when it concerns noble religious themes that serve the cause of faith, such as poems in praise of the Prophet ﷺ, expressions of wisdom, exhortations to virtuous conduct, noble meanings, the defense of religion, resistance to its enemies, and poetry devoted to goodness and moral admonition. In support of this position, he cites the Qur’anic verse: “And We did not teach him poetry, nor is it fitting for him”² (Qur’an 36:69).

Indeed, Ibn Hazm tends toward a scholastic orientation when he maintains that engagement with poetry is permissible only to the extent of necessity, such as citing it as evidence. As for one who composes poetry involving amorous references to Muslim women, he considers him sinful, citing the Qur’anic verse: “And the poets the erring follow them”³ (Qur’an 26:224). By contrast, one who composes poetry reproaching a friend, corresponding with him, lamenting the death of a brother, expressing meanings that are not false, or praising someone who truly deserves praise, “is neither sinful nor is such conduct reprehensible.”⁴ Here, Ibn Hazm the eminent critic who approves of poetry insofar as it promotes virtue and noble moral qualities, and rejects it insofar as it departs from ethical and religious principles—appears closer to a social reformer of a Platonic inclination. It is possible that he was influenced either by Miskawayh or directly by Plato, leading him to exclude most forms of poetry from his critical framework. In this respect, he follows the path of the serious Arab critical tradition. Al-Aṣma‘ī, for instance, when transmitting satirical poetry, neither recited nor explained verses containing satire, just as he neither recited nor interpreted poetry referring to astral phenomena, in accordance with the Prophet’s saying: “When the stars are mentioned, refrain.”⁵ Nor was Ibn Hazm exceptional among Andalusian critics who relied upon moral and religious criteria in accepting or rejecting poetry and in determining its literary value. A similar approach can be observed in Ibn al-Sīd al-Baṭalyawsī, who criticized a poem by Abū al-‘Alā’ al-Ma‘arrī for its excessive praise of a Shi‘ite figure, praise that, in his view, transgressed all limits. He also objected to the inclusion of what he regarded as Shi‘ite absurdities and beliefs, considering them matters that “should have been avoided altogether and with which his poetry should not have been defiled.”⁶ Ibn Hazm was keen to cultivate a generation firmly grounded in Islamic ethics and noble ideals. It may seem surprising that he excluded war poetry as a genre capable of contributing to the formation of such a generation through the reinforcement of concepts of heroism, courage, and their associated values, as exemplified in the poetry of ‘Antarah, ‘Urwah

¹ Ibn Hazm. *Rasa’il Ibn Hazm al-Andalusi* (Epistles of Ibn Hazm of al-Andalus), *Maratib al-‘Ulum* (The Ranks of the Sciences), op. cit., Vol. 4, p. 67.

² Qur’an, Surah Ya-Sin (36), verse 69.

³ Ibn Hazm. *Rasa’il Ibn Hazm al-Andalusi* (Epistles of Ibn Hazm of al-Andalus), *Al-Talkhis li Wujuh al-Takhliṣ*, op. cit., Vol. 3, p. 164; Qur’an, Surah al-Shu‘ara’ (26), verse 224.

⁴ Ibn Hazm. *Rasa’il Ibn Hazm al-Andalusi* (Epistles of Ibn Hazm of al-Andalus), *Al-Talkhis li Wujuh al-Takhliṣ*, op. cit., Vol. 3, p. 164.

⁵ Al-Mubarrad, Muhammad ibn Yazid. *Al-Kamil fi al-Lughah wa al-Adab* (The Complete Book of Language and Literature), Mu’assasat al-Risalah, Beirut, 1986, Vol. 3, p. 36.

⁶ Al-Baṭalyawsī, ‘Abd Allah ibn Muhammad. *Sharh Saqt al-Zand* (Commentary on Saqt al-Zand), edited by Mustafa al-Saqqā, ‘Abd al-Rahim Mahmud, ‘Abd al-Salam Harun, and Ibrahim al-Abyari, *Dar al-Kutub wa al-Watha’iq al-Qawmiyyah*, Vol. 1, p. 448.

ibn al-Ward, and Sa'd ibn Nāshib. However, Ibn Hazm's justification is consistent with his ethical criterion, which rejects any separation between poetry and religion. In his view, war poetry incites discord and trivializes crimes in the eyes of their perpetrators, in addition to stimulating tendencies toward injustice and bloodshed. In this respect, Ibn Hazm differs from Plato, who accepted poets that praised heroism after having "expelled them in the name of the general principles of metaphysical theory."¹ Even more striking is Ibn Hazm's rejection of poetry dealing with estrangement and descriptions of deserts and wastelands. The Arab poet traditionally remained highly sensitive to the voice of nature, with its circumstances, events, and suggestive power. Estrangement stirred his emotions and sentiments, stimulated his intellect and awareness, while the desert landscapes inspired the flow of meanings in his imagination, awakening nostalgia for home and inspiring love for land and homeland. Ibn Hazm, however, offered no more convincing justification than the assertion that such poems "facilitate migration and estrangement and entangle a person in situations from which it may be difficult to escape."² Ibn Hazm thus represents the model of the critic and writer committed to the concerns of his community, homeland, and identity. He sought to cultivate a generation whose sensibilities would be refined away from the influence of delicate and amorous poetry, particularly poetry describing male beauty, indulging in flirtation, celebrating licentiousness, or glorifying drinking gatherings and conviviality. Can it therefore be argued that this ethical conception of poetry originated in, and was influenced by, Platonic philosophy, especially given Ibn Hazm's extensive and critical acquaintance with Greek philosophy, as reflected in his definitions of love in *Ṭawq al-Ḥamāmah* (The Ring of the Dove)? It appears that such an explanation alone is insufficient to account for the view that Ibn Hazm, both poet and critic, defended with a passion and determination rarely matched among classical critics. Rather, this philosophical background was reinforced by another, more significant influence upon his critical orientation: his juristic and doctrinal background as a *Zāhirī* jurist. Ibn Hazm was the leading advocate of this legal school and confronted its opponents with an unparalleled mastery of dialectical and theological argumentation. If jurists generally viewed licentious literature or literature that neither adhered to Islamic principles nor encouraged virtue, chastity, and noble moral conduct with suspicion, disapproval, and disdain, this attitude would be even more pronounced in the case of a jurist deeply committed to a Salafi outlook and to *Zāhirī* thought, which rejects rational speculation and analogical reasoning. Ibn Hazm therefore adhered to the ethical criterion established by the unequivocal teachings of the Qur'an, according to which poetry is associated with error and misguidance. Consequently, he continually emphasized the sins associated with such poetry and the destruction it brings in this world, together with manifest loss in the Hereafter, throughout his persistent efforts to defend this position. It should be noted contrary to Ibn Hazm's explicit statements, which may at first mislead the reader that despite his condemnation of satire, excessive panegyric, poetry of estrangement, war poetry, and brigand poetry, he nevertheless continued to praise the poets of his homeland, such as Ibn

¹ Hilal, Ghunaymi. *Modern Literary Criticism*, Dar Nahdat Misr for Printing, Publishing and Distribution, Cairo, 1997, p. 34.

² Abd al-Rahim, Mustafa 'Alyan. *Trends in Literary Criticism in al-Andalus in the Fifth Hijri Century*, 1st ed., Mu'assasat al-Risalah, Beirut, 1984, p. 333.

Darrāj, Ibn Shuhayd, Jaʿūnah ibn al-Šimmah al-Kilābī, Jaʿfar ibn ʿUthmān al-Ḥājib, and other eminent Andalusian poets in his *Risālah fī Faḍl al-Andalus* (Epistle on the Excellence of al-Andalus). It is as though his criticism of poetry that conflicted with his religious and ethical outlook did not prevent him from recognizing its artistic qualities and acknowledging the poetic excellence of distinguished Andalusian poets. His ethical perspective, therefore, does not necessarily contradict a purely artistic critical perspective that evaluates poetry in terms of quality and weakness. This position closely resembles that of many Andalusian critics, such as Abū al-Ṭāhir al-Saraqustī, who remarked concerning al-Ḥuṭayʿah renowned for his exceptionally harsh and excessive satire = that: “In any case, his share of excellence is abundant, and the merit of one in his position cannot be overlooked.”¹ Perhaps, as Iḥsān ʿAbbās suggests, this attitude may also be explained by Ibn Hazm’s ambiguous conception of poetry and its purpose. For him, poetry appears to be a formal framework capable of serving any objective, including themes related to legal rulings and the doctrines of jurists, theologians, grammarians, linguists, and logicians. This ambiguity was compounded by “his failure in worldly experiences and his rejection of everything that did not bring one closer to God, despite the fact that poetry is among the phenomena most closely tied to worldly life; hence confusion arose in his literary criticism.”² In this regard, Ibn Hazm differs from most prominent Arab critics, such as Qudāmah ibn Jaʿfar as previously noted, and al-Qāḍī al-Jurjānī, who explicitly advocated a separation between religion and art. Al-Jurjānī argued that if religious deficiency were a blemish upon poetry and doctrinal error a reason for diminishing a poet’s status, then Abū Nuwās would have to be erased from the registers of poets. Indeed, those most deserving of such exclusion would be the great pre-Islamic poets, including the authors of the *Muʿallaqāt* and other poetic masters, despite the unanimous agreement of the Muslim community regarding their unbelief. Likewise, Kaʿb ibn Zuhayr, Ibn al-Zibʿarā, and others who attacked the Prophet ﷺ and criticized some of his

Companions would have had to be considered incapable and silenced. Yet, as al-Jurjānī concludes, “the two matters are distinct, and religion stands apart from poetry.”³ This commitment to an ethical criterion in criticism arises from a desire to Islamize Andalusian literature, a tendency championed by Ibn Hazm and a number of leading critics and men of letters. However, this tendency should not be understood solely within the framework of morality, values, and the patriotic sentiments of these critics. Ibn Hazm, who rejected love poetry on the grounds that it incites passion and leads to moral laxity and vice, nevertheless composed amorous poems of his own. While some of these poems share certain characteristics with the poetry of the ʿUdhri tradition, they are in fact closer to the type of love poetry prevalent among his contemporaries, particularly that of Ibn Zaydūn. He justified this by claiming that

¹ ʿAbd al-Rahim, Mustafā ʿAlyan. *Trends in Literary Criticism in al-Andalus in the Fifth Hijri Century*, op. cit., p. 335.

² Abbas, Ihsan. *History of Literary Criticism Among the Arabs (Poetry Criticism)*, 4th ed., Dar al-Thaqafah, Beirut, 1984, p. 484.

³ Al-Jurjani, ʿAli ibn ʿAbd al-ʿAziz. *Al-Wasatah bayna al-Mutanabbi wa Khusumihi* (Mediation Between al-Mutanabbi and His Critics), edited by Muhammad Abu al-Fadl and ʿAli al-Bijawi, 3rd ed., Dar Ihyaʾ al-Kutub al-ʿArabiyyah, p. 64.

“he was operating within their poetic field and could not depart from their conventions, since deviation from established poetic norms constitutes a fault.”¹ Despite this apparent contradiction, it does not significantly diminish the originality of Ibn Hazm’s critical method or his commitment to the ethical conception of literature and poetry in particular which is founded upon a close association between art and religion. This orientation led him, together with other ethical critics, to “criticize corrupt meanings without leniency, regardless of the status or poetic standing of their authors. In doing so, they differed from some Eastern critics who invoked the non-separation of poetry and religion only in defensive contexts concerning certain poets.”² Just as Ibn Hazm criticizes poets for meanings that contravene the principles of religion, its established rulings, the ethics of Islam, and its doctrines in general, he also exercises strict control over classical poetry at the structural level, employing what may be regarded as his decisive critical criterion: adherence to morality, virtue, and the unequivocal principles of religion in the form and structure of the poem itself. From this perspective, Ibn Hazm rejects the convention of opening poems with nostalgic ruin motifs (*ṭalaliyyah*) or wine preludes (*khamriyyah*). Commenting on a poem by Abū Nuwās, who says:

- Leave this behind, hasten to meet the age, and depart,
- Through the gardens of the hills on the mounts of wine.
- Drive them on with the exquisite melodies of the lute,
- As they are urged forward by the sound of the flute.

Ibn Hazm responds: “God forbid that forgetting what has vanished from our past should become our natural disposition, that disobedience to God through drinking wine should become our character, or that lack of aspiration should become one of our defining qualities...”³

Second: Imagination and the Criterion of Truth and Falsehood

In contrast to the classical critical tendency, which generally did not associate the quality of poetry with the issue of truth and falsehood as exemplified by Qudāmah ibn Ja‘far, who saw nothing objectionable in a poet’s falsehood or in his contradicting a previous statement with a new and opposing one, since praising something and later condemning it is not considered a defect and does not diminish poetic skill in any way Ibn Hazm adopts a different position. Qudāmah states: “Indeed, I consider this a proof of the poet’s strength in his craft and his mastery of it.”⁴ Within the framework of the ethical critical tendency in al-Andalus, critics approached certain poetic meanings in light of factual truth and moral truth. Ibn Hazm’s conception of factual truth, in particular, can be clearly discerned. Ibn Hazm employs “falsehood” as a criterion for evaluating imagination in the poetry of love poets, especially in their depiction of love. He objects to their excessive exaggeration in describing emaciation,

¹ Abd al-Rahim, Mustafa ‘Alyan. *Trends in Literary Criticism in al-Andalus in the Fifth Hijri Century*, op. cit., p. 358.

² Abd al-Rahim, Mustafa ‘Alyan. *Trends in Literary Criticism in al-Andalus in the Fifth Hijri Century*, op. cit., p. 358.

³ Ibn Hazm. *Tawq al-Hamamah fi al-Ulfah wa al-Ullaf* (The Ring of the Dove on Love and Lovers), edited by Hasan Kamil al-Sayrafi, Hijazi Press, Cairo, 1950, p. 114.

⁴ Qudamah ibn Ja‘far. *Naqd al-Shi‘r* (Criticism of Poetry), 1st ed., Matba‘at al-Jawa‘ib, Constantinople, 1302 AH, p. 4.

likening tears to torrential rain, claiming complete sleeplessness, total abstinence from nourishment, extreme physical wasting, and uninterrupted wakefulness among lovers. In his view, such descriptions constitute falsehood and are unacceptable under any circumstances, since, if true, they would inevitably lead to the destruction and death of the body. For this reason, Ibn Hazm adhered to truthfulness in his portrayal of love in *Ṭawq al-Ḥamāmah* (The Ring of the Dove). He ridiculed the abundant tears that poets claimed to shed over the dwellings or abandoned tents of their beloveds. He also maintained that much of what poets had written concerning the delights of union fails to correspond to reality, except in a limited number of cases. Unlike many other writers, Ibn Hazm did not indulge extensively in metaphor, simile, or other rhetorical devices, nor did he frequently resort to emotional exaggeration. His poetry is, for the most part, direct poetry that portrays the states of the soul as they truly are, without exaggeration, dramatization, or imaginative distortion. As he states: “I have confined my treatise to known realities, beyond which no other possibility can exist at all.”¹ With regard to the issue of “truth and falsehood in poetry,” Ibn Hazm initially adopts the artistic criterion, affirming that “the sweetest poetry is the most false,” and that poetry is therefore founded upon exaggeration. On this basis, he argues that poetry consists, for the most part, of exaggerations and falsehoods that have no foundation in reality. Yet Ibn Hazm does not appear to hold this position out of genuine conviction. Rather, he seems to be echoing the prevailing critical opinion that had long been accepted among critics, namely that “the sweetest poetry is the most false.” He does not appear fully persuaded by what these critics maintain; instead, he merely reports their view. However, with remarkable rigor, he soon overturns this opinion from a religious perspective, citing the fact that the Prophet ﷺ was prevented from composing or learning poetry and remained free from it, “precisely because it is falsehood.”² Consequently, Ibn Hazm excludes moral exhortations, maxims, and poems in praise of the Prophet from the category of poetry, since they are founded upon truthfulness, whereas poetry, in his view, is founded upon falsehood. Thus, if someone were to say:

- The night is night, and the day is day,
- And the mule is a mule, and the donkey a donkey.
- The rooster is a rooster, and the dove likewise,
- And both are birds that possess a beak.

such statements, despite being composed in verse, would not properly belong to poetry according to Ibn Hazm’s conception, because they are based on straightforward truth rather than imaginative falsehood or exaggeration. For Ibn Hazm, the author of such verses would be considered foolish and naïve, becoming an object of ridicule and mockery. By adhering too closely to literal truth, he ceases to fall within the domain of poetry. In this respect, Ibn Hazm aligns himself with those who maintain that “everything is enhanced by truthfulness except the

¹ Ibn Hazm. *Tawq al-Hamamah fi al-Ulfah wa al-Ullaf* (The Ring of the Dove on Love and Lovers), op. cit., p. 153.

² Ibn Hazm. *Rasa’il Ibn Hazm al-Andalusi* (Epistles of Ibn Hazm of al-Andalus), *Al-Taqrīb li Hadd al-Mantiq* (Approximation to the Definition of Logic), op. cit., Vol. 4, p. 354.

tale-bearer and the poet, for truthfulness detracts from both.”¹ Thus, Ibn Hazm does not accept poetry on the condition that it conform strictly to reality or adhere rigidly to factual accuracy. Rather, he associates the truthfulness of poetry and its avoidance of false meanings with artistic excellence. In this regard, he adopts a middle position between those who require poets to speak truthfully in accordance with the moral purpose of poetry and the “non-religious” critics who are unconcerned with whether the poet speaks truthfully or falsely, provided that artistic excellence is achieved, even if one verse contradicts another or the second hemistich contradicts the first. For Ibn Hazm, poetry acquires beauty only when it is adorned with exaggeration and ventures deeply into imagery and simile, as in the following verses:²

- Illness and lamentation became familiar with his body,
- And love wasted him away until he could scarcely be perceived.
- Conjectures perceive him only as conjecture itself,
- For he is more hidden than conjectures can perceive.
- We heard his groaning from nearby,
- So seek the person wherever that groaning may be.
- He did not survive because he was resilient; rather,
- He melted away from illness before death could find him.

This type of poetry, whose value Ibn Hazm places somewhere between elegance and absurdity, suggests that he was “inclined toward poetry that combines excellence of expression, moderation of imagination, and proximity to what is rational.”³ In other words, for Ibn Hazm, the sweetest poetry is not the most false, but rather the most balanced and measured. In this respect, he departs from the critical principle that regards the finest poetry as that which is most deeply immersed in imagination and most distant from what reason affirms or what sound judgment and balanced temperaments readily accept. This is evident in a wish he expresses when discussing the knowledge that ought to be acquired from the study of language as will be mentioned later in connection with the culture of the poet. He considers it desirable to expand one’s knowledge of linguistic expressions and the meanings they denote to such an extent that every meaning would possess its own precise term or distinctive designation. Although he acknowledges the impracticality of attaining such a goal, he nevertheless views it as an ideal because it would close the door to imaginative conjecture, speculation, and multiple interpretations, and would provide greater assistance in achieving clarity and precision of expression. This position is reinforced by his view that linguistic knowledge is no more than an instrument serving the other sciences. One should therefore not become preoccupied with it, but rather devote oneself to “what is more important and more essential among the other

¹ Ibn Hazm. *Rasa’il Ibn Hazm al-Andalusi* (Epistles of Ibn Hazm of al-Andalus), *Al-Taqrīb li Hadd al-Mantiq* (Approximation to the Definition of Logic), op. cit., Vol. 4, p. 354.

² Ibn Hazm. *Rasa’il Ibn Hazm al-Andalusi* (Epistles of Ibn Hazm of al-Andalus), *Al-Taqrīb li Hadd al-Mantiq* (Approximation to the Definition of Logic), op. cit., Vol. 4, pp. 354, 356.

³ ‘Abd al-Rahim, Mustafa ‘Alyan. *Trends in Literary Criticism in al-Andalus in the Fifth Hijri Century*, op. cit., p. 348.

sciences.”¹ Thus, Ibn Hazm places little value on imaginative language, on the movement from literal meaning to metaphor, or on the extensive use of figurative expression, metaphorical imagery, and indirect meanings. It is as though all such devices fall outside his conception of poetry and of the function of literature in general, which he sees primarily as educational, moral, and exhortatory. Artistic value and the degree of poeticity in literature do not occupy a central place within this conception.

Even in subjects where a poet would ordinarily exert the full force of his poetic imagination to express the deepest emotions of his heart and the intensity of his feelings, Ibn Hazm tends toward logical and restrained modes of expression grounded in explanation and deduction rather than in vivid imagery or rhythmic artistry. For example, he says:

- I wished that my heart were split with a blade,
- And that you were placed within it, then enclosed in my breast.
- Thus you would remain there and never depart from it
- Until the Day of Resurrection and Gathering.
- You would live within it as long as I live; and if I die,
- You would dwell in the innermost chambers of my heart in the darkness of the grave.

In addition to the conventional image of placing the beloved within the heart and enclosing her there, Ibn Hazm’s frequent use of particles of causation and sequence such as “fa” (“so,” “thus”) and “thumma” (“then”) together with his tendency to establish premises and arrange conclusions upon them, leaves us before verses that resemble “metrical composition (nazm)” more than fully realized poetry. Ibn Hazm therefore appears, in his attitude toward poetry and toward what ought to be learned, memorized, and recited, as someone who values poetry primarily when it encourages virtue and rejects it whenever it conflicts with the truths of religion, the concerns of religious preaching, and matters of faith and doctrine. In this respect, he stands closer to the tradition of “ethical philosophers influenced by Platonism”, such as Miskawayh, upon whom Ibn Hazm seems to have been profoundly influenced or perhaps he was influenced directly by Plato himself, who excluded most forms of poetry from his philosophical conception of art and literature. Whatever the case, the clarity of Ibn Hazm’s position and his frankness in formulating a distinct critical conception of poetry supported by explanation, argumentation, and evidence remain greatly to his credit. His effort contributes to making his views on poetry a source of both “admiration and astonishment”. Admiration arises from the coherence and explicitness of his theoretical position, while astonishment stems from the tension between his recognition of poetry’s dependence on imagination and exaggeration and his simultaneous insistence on subordinating poetry to moral, religious, and didactic purposes. This tension gives his literary criticism a distinctive character and makes it an important subject for reflection within the history of Arabic critical thought.

Third: Nationalist Tendencies in Ibn Hazm’s Literary Criticism

The rivalry between the people of the “Mashriq” (the eastern Islamic lands) and the “Maghrib” (the western Islamic lands, including al-Andalus) left a noticeable impact on literature and

¹ Ibn Hazm. *Rasa’il Ibn Hazm al-Andalusi* (Epistles of Ibn Hazm of al-Andalus), *Risalat al-‘Ulum* (Treatise on the Sciences), op. cit., Vol. 4, p. 67.

literary criticism, especially during the fourth and fifth centuries AH (tenth and eleventh centuries CE). During this period, a distinct “Andalusian critical identity” emerged, shaped by a group of writers and critics that included Ibn Hazm, Ibn Shuhayd, and Ibn Bassam al-Shantarini. One of the guiding principles of this movement was resistance to imported literary trends and the affirmation of the originality and authenticity of Andalusian literature and criticism. This concern manifested itself in four main areas: “literary biographies, poetic comparisons, literary imitations and rivalries, and literary genres.”

In his “Epistle on the Excellence of al-Andalus and the Merit of Its Scholars”, Ibn Hazm begins by reproaching the scholars of his homeland for neglecting to preserve and commemorate the achievements of their intellectuals, men of letters, and distinguished figures. Although they had reached the highest levels of accomplishment in the various sciences and arts and had mastered branches of knowledge and other disciplines, “their ambitions have fallen short of preserving the achievements of their homeland, the noble deeds of their kings, the virtues of their jurists, the merits of their judges, the glories of their secretaries, and the excellence of their scholars.”¹ Ibn Hazm composed his Epistle on the Excellence of the Scholars and Men of Letters of al-Andalus, in which he elevated Andalusian poets such as Abū al-Ajrab Ja‘ūnah ibn al-Ṣimmaḥ al-Kilābī to the rank of Jarir and Al-Farazdaq, maintaining that his poetry was worthy of being cited as linguistic evidence because it followed the manner of the early classical poets. Likewise, he compared Ibn Darraj al-Qastalli with such celebrated Eastern poets as Bashār ibn Burd, Abu Tammam, and Al-Mutanabbi. In addition, he praised a distinguished group of Andalusian poets, including Ja‘far ibn ‘Uthmān al-Muṣḥafī, Aghlab ibn Shu‘ayb, and his friend Ibn Shuhayd. Each of them, in his view, was “a master poet whose power inspires awe, and a noble steed marked by excellence.”² According to Ibn Hazm, the poet al-Ṭalīq among the Umayyads of al-Andalus occupied a position comparable to that of Ibn al-Mu‘tazz among the poets of the Abbasids. As for Ibn Shuhayd, Ibn Hazm proudly counted him among the foremost masters of eloquence, saying: “He possesses such command over the various modes and branches of eloquence that he speaks with a tongue compounded of the tongues of ‘Amr and Sahl.”³ At this point, however, it should be noted that the literary biographies presented by Ibn Hazm lack clear critical contours from a strictly evaluative perspective. His discussions are often dominated by praise and commendation. Thus, despite his attempts at objectivity, an impressionistic and emotionally influenced approach remains predominant in many of his judgments and opinions. As for the field of literary opposition and counterstatement, Ibn Hazm addressed many of the conventional themes of love poetry in his famous work *The Ring of the Dove*, often departing from accepted poetic conventions. For example, in his discussion of contentment in love, he criticizes poets for their pursuit of obscure meanings and far-fetched

¹ Ibn Hazm. *Rasa’ il Ibn Hazm al-Andalusi* (Epistles of Ibn Hazm of al-Andalus), *Risalah fi Fadl al-Andalus wa Dhikr Rijalihā* (Treatise on the Excellence of al-Andalus and the Mention of Its Men), op. cit., Vol. 2, p. 171.

² Ibn Hazm. *Rasa’ il Ibn Hazm al-Andalusi* (Epistles of Ibn Hazm of al-Andalus), *Risalah fi Fadl al-Andalus wa Dhikr Rijalihā* (Treatise on the Excellence of al-Andalus and the Mention of Its Men), op. cit., Vol. 2, pp. 187–188.

³ Ibn Hazm. *Rasa’ il Ibn Hazm al-Andalusi* (Epistles of Ibn Hazm of al-Andalus), *Risalah fi Fadl al-Andalus wa Dhikr Rijalihā* (Treatise on the Excellence of al-Andalus and the Mention of Its Men), op. cit., Vol. 2, p. 188.

conceits. Although each poet speaks according to the force of his natural disposition, Ibn Hazm argues that they frequently indulge in rhetorical excess, verbal ornamentation, and exaggerated eloquence without any real basis in truth. Some poets, he notes, imagine that the entire earth has become a mount for themselves and their beloveds, or that the whole universe concerns itself with no one but the two lovers. Ibn Hazm claims that he expressed this idea in a way that no critic could find either more precise or more profound, while at the same time explaining why a great physical distance may in reality be close:

- They said, “He is far away.” I replied: It is enough for me that he exists with me in a time from which there is no escape.
- The sun passes over me just as it passes over him,
- each day shining forth anew.
- Since nothing separates him from me in our journey
- except the passing of a single day,
- how can he truly be far away?

Explaining these verses, Ibn Hazm writes: “As you see, I have been content with being united with the one I love in the knowledge of God, from which neither the heavens, the celestial spheres, the worlds, nor any existing thing can be separated or detached. Then I restricted myself merely to the fact that we share the same span of time. This is more comprehensive than what others have said concerning the encompassing nature of night and day.”¹ This example, together with Ibn Hazm’s own explanation of it, is far removed from aesthetic literary opposition in the conventional sense. Rather than emphasizing beauty, imagery, or artistic rivalry, it moves toward philosophical interpretation and rational explanation grounded in religious and metaphysical ideas. It was perhaps the persistent disparagement of Andalusians by Eastern writers that drove many Andalusian intellectuals toward this defensive posture. In response, scholars and men of letters in al-Andalus sought to vindicate their culture and criticized their own compatriots for failing to preserve the achievements of their homeland, its sciences, and its literature. Although this defensive tendency made Andalusian criticism somewhat polemical and difficult in character, it nevertheless laid the foundations for the emergence of an independent Andalusian critical school. Its influence can be seen in both the critical theories and literary debates of the period and of subsequent centuries. It helped pave the way for the development of a distinctively Andalusian critical tradition, marked by originality, individuality, and intellectual independence. Indeed, Andalusian criticism ultimately arrived at “valuable judgments in both theory and practice,” making a significant contribution to the history of Arabic literary criticism.²

Fourth: The Poet’s Learning and the Language of Poetry

Ibn Hazm specifies the kinds of supporting knowledge that a naturally gifted poet must possess. He maintains that poetic talent alone is insufficient unless it is accompanied by a broad

¹ Ibn Hazm. *Tawq al-Hamamah fi al-Ullaf wa al-Ullaf* (The Ring of the Dove on Love and Lovers), op. cit., pp. 100–101.

² Mustafa Alyan Abd al-Rahim. *Tayarat al-Naqd al-Adabi fi al-Andalus fi al-Qarn al-Khamis al-Hijri* (Trends of Literary Criticism in al-Andalus in the Fifth Hijri Century), op. cit., p. 328.

education. The poet should be thoroughly grounded in the sciences, including knowledge of the Qur'an, Hadith, and historical works such as the writings of Al-Jahiz and others. At the same time, he must possess an innate poetic disposition, for: "He must be naturally gifted in it; otherwise, he will not be eloquent. Natural talent is of no benefit without broad learning."¹ In this respect, Ibn Hazm approaches the views of Al-Qadi al-Jurjani, who emphasized the importance of literary transmission and learning, regarding it as something that sharpens natural talent and refines literary taste.²

According to Ibn Hazm, poetry falls into two principal categories: natural and crafted.

The natural poem is one whose expression is effortless and whose effect cannot easily be reproduced in prose. It is free from affectation and artificiality, and "its wording does not outweigh its meaning."³ The crafted poem, by contrast, is marked by revision, polishing, and elaborate artistic techniques. It incorporates rhetorical devices such as metaphor, allusion, and figurative imagery in order to elevate and embellish meanings.

Although Ibn Hazm appears to prefer natural poetic talent and tends to favor naturally gifted poets such as Jarir, his conception of naturalness is not simplistic. Rather, he admires a profound and sophisticated natural talent capable of producing rare meanings, original images, and unexpected insights that transcend the reader's expectations, enrich artistic imagery, and deepen psychological expression. With regard to poetic language, Ibn Hazm rejects a rigid, scholastic, or formulaic style. He does not favor the highly conventional literary manner inherited from the classical rhetorical tradition. Instead, he inclines toward what might be called a literature for the people. The ideal style, in his view, is one that is commonly used in everyday speech and writing, what he calls "widely used and frequently employed language."⁴ He does not regard grandiloquent diction or adherence to scholastic linguistic models as the criterion of successful or exemplary style. Rather, he values expressions that have become accepted through common usage and that people naturally appreciate and understand. Eloquence, therefore, does not consist in obscurity or in the use of rare and unfamiliar words and constructions. Such features, he argues, have nothing to do with true eloquence; even if people occasionally employ them, they are neither considered genuinely eloquent nor widely admired.⁵

Ibn Hazm thus advocates a language that is clear, accessible, and current among ordinary people. The best literary language is one that can be understood by both the educated and the uneducated, by specialists and laypersons alike. In his view, the use of simple and straightforward vocabulary allows meaning to be grasped equally by "the common person and

¹ Ibn Hazm. *Rasa'il Ibn Hazm al-Andalusi* (Epistles of Ibn Hazm of al-Andalus), *Al-Taqrīb li-Hadd al-Mantiq* (Approximation to the Definition of Logic), op. cit., Vol. 4, pp. 352–353.

² Ali ibn Abd al-Aziz al-Jurjani. *Al-Wasata Bayna al-Mutanabbi wa Khusumihi* (The Mediation Between al-Mutanabbi and His Critics), op. cit., p. 25.

³ Ibn Hazm. *Rasa'il Ibn Hazm al-Andalusi* (Epistles of Ibn Hazm of al-Andalus), *Al-Taqrīb li-Hadd al-Mantiq* (Approximation to the Definition of Logic), op. cit., Vol. 4, p. 355.

⁴ Ibn Hazm. *Rasa'il Ibn Hazm al-Andalusi* (Epistles of Ibn Hazm of al-Andalus), *Maratib al-'Ulum* (The Ranks of the Sciences), op. cit., Vol. 4, p. 66.

⁵ Ibn Hazm. *Rasa'il Ibn Hazm al-Andalusi* (Epistles of Ibn Hazm of al-Andalus), *Al-Taqrīb li-Hadd al-Mantiq* (Approximation to the Definition of Logic), op. cit., Vol. 4, pp. 351–352.

the distinguished person, the learned and the ignorant, according to their respective capacities of understanding.”¹

Ibn Hazm criticizes the aristocratic tendency of early writers who deliberately adopted a difficult style in order to prevent the common people from attaining the level of their ideas and opinions. This led them to employ harsh and obscure vocabulary. He considers the truly fortunate among scholars and writers to be those who are able to simplify their knowledge, make it accessible to the general public, and ease its comprehension. Indeed, he believes that they should openly proclaim their knowledge in public places, invite people to it in the streets and public gatherings, and, more ideally, spend their own wealth on teaching it to students and supporting its dissemination. If one were to do so, “it would be a great fortune, a noble deed, and a praiseworthy endeavor.”²

This view reflects a degree of innovation on the part of Ibn Hazm. For him, eloquence is that which can be understood equally by both the educated and the uneducated, while employing words that do not pose difficulties for the general public. It follows the path of clarity, without exaggeration, addition beyond the intended meaning, or deficiency in conveying it. “The essence of this lies in brevity for those who understand and explanation for those who do not understand.”³ This contrasts with the position of many critics, such as Ibn Sharaf, who held that excessive simplicity “renders the poet’s language overly soft and distances it from eloquence.”⁴

Accordingly, the categories of style, according to Ibn Hazm, are limited to three:

A style that favors familiar, simple, and commonly used expressions known among the general public, such as the style of al-Jahiz. A style inclined toward linguistic aristocracy, exemplified by al-Hasan al-Basri and Sahl ibn Harun. And a mixed style combining expressions familiar to the public with less familiar ones, as found in the writings of Ibn al-Muqaffa’. It appears that Ibn Hazm does not prefer one method over another, nor does he privilege any one of them at the expense of the others, nor is he inclined to compare them. It also appears that he rejects any style that departs from these three categories. Speaking of later writers, he states that they are “far removed from eloquence and drawn closer to affectation and excess, with the exception of al-Hatimi and Badi’ al-Zaman, who incline toward the method of Sahl ibn Harun.”⁵ Likewise, he places his friend Ibn Darraj within one of these three stylistic categories in his sermons and epistles, “for his eloquence is composite.”⁶ In sum, Ibn Hazm assimilated al-Jahiz’s conception of the eloquent speaker’s ability to convey the meanings of the elite to the general public

¹ Ibn Hazm. *Rasa’il Ibn Hazm al-Andalusi* (Epistles of Ibn Hazm of al-Andalus), *Al-Taqrīb li-Hadd al-Mantiq* (Approximation to the Definition of Logic), op. cit., Vol. 4, p. 100.

² Ibn Hazm. *Rasa’il Ibn Hazm al-Andalusi* (Epistles of Ibn Hazm of al-Andalus), *Al-Taqrīb li-Hadd al-Mantiq* (Approximation to the Definition of Logic), op. cit., Vol. 4, p. 101.

³ Ibn Hazm. *Rasa’il Ibn Hazm al-Andalusi* (Epistles of Ibn Hazm of al-Andalus), *Al-Taqrīb li-Hadd al-Mantiq* (Approximation to the Definition of Logic), op. cit., Vol. 4, p. 352.

⁴ Mustafa Aylan Abd al-Rahim. *Tayarāt al-Naqd al-Adabi fī al-Andalus fī al-Qarn al-Khamis al-Hijri* (Trends of Literary Criticism in al-Andalus in the Fifth Hijri Century), op. cit., p. 156.

⁵ Ibn Hazm. *Rasa’il Ibn Hazm al-Andalusi* (Epistles of Ibn Hazm of al-Andalus), *Al-Taqrīb li-Hadd al-Mantiq* (Approximation to the Definition of Logic), op. cit., Vol. 4, p. 352.

⁶ See: Ibn Hazm. *Rasa’il Ibn Hazm al-Andalusi* (Epistles of Ibn Hazm of al-Andalus), *Al-Taqrīb li-Hadd al-Mantiq* (Approximation to the Definition of Logic), op. cit., Vol. 4, p. 352.

through the use of simple language, while taking into account the circumstances and context and favoring the use of common, straightforward expressions that are neither obscure nor harsh and cumbersome. For this reason, Ibn Hazm recommends specific books for learning the commonly used vocabulary and the meanings associated with it. These include *Al-Gharib al-Musannaf* by Abu 'Ubayd and *Mukhtasar al-'Ayn* by al-Zubaydi, so that one may "become acquainted with the vocabulary in actual use."¹ As for rare, obsolete, or infrequently used words unfamiliar to the general public, Ibn Hazm does not favor them and resorts to them only rarely, out of necessity or when required to understand "a difficult expression encountered in the reading of books."² Ibn Hazm distinguishes between his call for extensive knowledge of the Arabic language and his advocacy of limiting, as much as possible, the study of grammar, which he regards as an unnecessary pursuit with little practical benefit. He believes that language consists of established realities, conventions, and recognized expressions. He maintains that if every meaning had a distinct word exclusively assigned to it, this would be closer to eloquence and clarity. However, since such a condition is impossible, as it is not feasible for every word to denote only one specific meaning, one should confine oneself to the expressions and meanings commonly accepted and used by people, for "devoting oneself to what is more important and more essential among the sciences is preferable."³ For this reason, Ibn Hazm does not consider deep engagement with grammar to be part of the intellectual formation of the poet or man of letters. Rather, he regards it as a superfluous pursuit and a waste of effort and time. It is sufficient, in his view, to acquire the amount of grammatical knowledge necessary to ensure correct speech, prevent grammatical errors, and preserve proper syntactic structures. Examples of such works include *Al-Tawdih* by al-Zubaydi and *Al-Mujaz* by Ibn al-Sarraj. As for delving deeply into grammar until the poet attains the rank of specialized grammarians, Ibn Hazm considers this of no benefit, since it distracts the poet and the man of letters from what is more necessary and important. He states: "The purpose of this science is communication, and a person needs it only for reading books compiled in the various sciences."⁴ Accordingly, acquiring an excessive amount of grammatical knowledge constitutes engagement in what, according to Ibn Hazm, is not worth pursuing. In-depth study of grammar does not contribute to the development of the poet's linguistic, rhetorical, or intellectual abilities; rather, occupying oneself with other matters is more beneficial and preferable. He does not approve of spending one's life studying grammar and similar tools and auxiliary disciplines, considering such pursuits futile and a waste of time. In his view, this is merely the path of "the indolent, who use it to justify their neglect of knowledge or their incapacity."⁵ In this respect, Ibn Hazm follows

¹ Ibn Hazm. *Rasa'il Ibn Hazm al-Andalusi* (Epistles of Ibn Hazm of al-Andalus), *Maratib al-'Ulum* (The Ranks of the Sciences), op. cit., Vol. 4, p. 67.

² Ibn Hazm. *Rasa'il Ibn Hazm al-Andalusi* (Epistles of Ibn Hazm of al-Andalus), *Maratib al-'Ulum* (The Ranks of the Sciences), op. cit., Vol. 4, p. 67.

³ Ibn Hazm. *Rasa'il Ibn Hazm al-Andalusi* (Epistles of Ibn Hazm of al-Andalus), *Maratib al-'Ulum* (The Ranks of the Sciences), op. cit., Vol. 4, p. 67.

⁴ Ibn Hazm. *Rasa'il Ibn Hazm al-Andalusi* (Epistles of Ibn Hazm of al-Andalus), *Maratib al-'Ulum* (The Ranks of the Sciences), op. cit., Vol. 4, p. 67.

⁵ Sa'id al-Afghani. *Nazarat fi al-Lughah 'inda Ibn Hazm* (Studies on Language According to Ibn Hazm), 2nd ed., Dar al-Fikr, Beirut, 1969, p. 44.

the approach of al-Jahiz in maintaining that knowledge of grammar and rare, obscure poetic expressions, or familiarity with poems containing grammatical evidence, is not sufficient in itself. Rather, “most transmitters who possessed a broad and varied culture, as well as the most skilled poets, were those most knowledgeable about poetry and the most deserving of judging and evaluating it.”¹ Ibn Hazm therefore holds that grammatical competence is acquired through practice and familiarity with the linguistic styles and modes of expression of the Arabs, not through intensive study and excessive theoretical inquiry. Grammar, in itself, serves only as a means for understanding and grasping Arab linguistic usage, for “its underlying explanations are highly defective.”²

This implies that Ibn Hazm adopts an approach resembling the functional school of grammar, or what is referred to as text grammar, whereby the grammatical functions of words and sentences, their positions, and their usages are derived from their employment within the text itself rather than from the memorization and application of grammatical rules. If the acquisition of grammatical rules is necessary and it undoubtedly is it is sufficient to confine oneself to those books that help ensure correct linguistic usage, as mentioned above. Through this perspective, Ibn Hazm criticizes the men of letters of his age who eagerly frequented the circles of linguists, whom he regarded as one of the causes of the crisis of creativity in Andalusian literature in particular and Arabic literature in general. In doing so, they overlooked the fact that mastery of the minimum necessary grammatical rules “achieves the intended purpose and safeguards linguistic intuition.”³ Ibn Hazm also includes arithmetic among the essential elements of a poet’s education. This entails mastering multiplication and division, acquiring some knowledge of geometry, and reading portions of *Euclid’s Elements* in order to gain an understanding of the earth and its dimensions, as well as the celestial spheres, their positions, movements, and configurations. The purpose behind this, it appears, is religious and ethical in nature. Through the sciences whose study he recommends, the poet comes to realize the smallness of the universe and the greatness of the Creator, Glorified and Exalted be He, so that “nothing remains for him except contemplation of the Maker alone.”⁴ It thus appears that Ibn Hazm carries to its fullest extent his commitment to a method founded upon a religious and ethical criterion, namely, the employment of literature in the service of religion and the call to it. In this regard, it becomes difficult to distinguish between Ibn Hazm the sensitive poet, the poet of love and beauty in his book *The Ring of the Dove*, and Ibn Hazm the jurist, legal theorist, theologian, and scholar of speculative theology, the author of *Al-Ihkam*, *Al-Fisal*, and *Al-Muhalla bi al-Athar*.

¹ Abd al-Aziz Atiq. *Fi al-Naqd al-Adabi* (On Literary Criticism), Dar al-Nahdah al-‘Arabiyyah, Beirut, 1972, p. 270.

² Ibn Hazm. *Rasa’il Ibn Hazm al-Andalusi* (Epistles of Ibn Hazm of al-Andalus), *Al-Taqrib li-Hadd al-Mantiq* (Approximation to the Definition of Logic), op. cit., Vol. 4, p. 349.

³ Abd al-Rahman Uthman. *Fi al-Adab al-Mu‘asir* (On Contemporary Literature), Dar al-Nashr lil-Jami‘at al-Misriyyah, 1968, p. 30.

⁴ Ibn Hazm. *Rasa’il Ibn Hazm al-Andalusi* (Epistles of Ibn Hazm of al-Andalus), *Maratib al-‘Ulum* (The Ranks of the Sciences), op. cit., Vol. 4, p. 69.

Fifth: The Eloquence and Inimitability of the Qur'an According to Ibn Hazm

As for the question of the inimitability of the Qur'an, Ibn Hazm's position appears somewhat unusual and unconvincing, although it does not depart from the doctrine of *ṣarfah* advanced by the Mu'tazilites. After affirming the inimitability of the Qur'an on the basis of rational and transmitted proofs demonstrating the inability of all Arabs, as well as all humans and jinn, to reproduce its composition, he points to the Prophet's challenge to all of them to produce the like of the Qur'an, or even a small part of it, and to their subsequent inability to do so despite being confronted with this challenge in their assemblies and public gatherings. Ibn Hazm further maintains that the Qur'an's inimitability will remain until the Day of Resurrection and has neither ceased nor diminished, unlike the staff of Moses, which returned to its former state, or the hand of the son of Mary, which ceased to be radiant white once the miracle had ended. As evidence, he cites the Qur'anic expression "they will not produce it's like", which is formulated in the future tense, concluding that "it is thus established with certainty that this applies perpetually and forever in the future."¹

After presenting the disagreement among theologians concerning the aspect that constitutes the Qur'an's miraculous nature whether it lies in its composition, its foretelling of unseen matters, or both and expressing his support for the last opinion, Ibn Hazm raises the question of whether the Qur'an is miraculous because it represents the highest degree of eloquence or because God prevented creation from being capable of producing anything comparable to it. He responds to those who uphold the first view by arguing that if the Qur'an's miraculous nature consisted merely in its attainment of the highest level of eloquence, then it would provide no conclusive proof, since such excellence could be found in anything that reached the highest degree within its category. The verses of the Qur'an, however, are "outside the bounds of what is customary."² He further argues that, if their claim were correct, the Qur'an's inimitability would have to extend beyond Arabic and be equally demonstrable in all languages, whether Arabic or non-Arabic. This, he contends, is false, "for non-Arabs know the inimitability of the Qur'an only through the testimony of the Arabs."³ As for their reliance on verses such as: "And there is life for you in retribution"⁴ (Qur'an 2:179), Ibn Hazm questions why they single out such verses rather than others. If these verses alone are considered miraculous while others are not, then, he argues, the implication of their position amounts to explicit disbelief upon which there is unanimous agreement. But if all the verses of the Qur'an are equal in this regard, then "it should be said to them: why have you singled out these verses for mention rather than others?"⁵

From this perspective, Ibn Hazm maintains that the composition and eloquence of the Qur'an lie outside the three stylistic categories that he recognizes. The conclusion of this position is

¹ Ibn Hazm. *Al-Fasl fi al-Milal wa al-Ahwa' wa al-Nihal* (The Decisive Treatise on Religions, Heresies, and Sects), 1st ed., Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, Beirut, 1996, Vol. 2, p. 49.

² Ibn Hazm. *Al-Fasl fi al-Milal wa al-Ahwa' wa al-Nihal* (The Decisive Treatise on Religions, Heresies, and Sects), op. cit., Vol. 2, p. 50.

³ Ibn Hazm. *Al-Fasl fi al-Milal wa al-Ahwa' wa al-Nihal* (The Decisive Treatise on Religions, Heresies, and Sects), op. cit., Vol. 2, p. 50.

⁴ The Qur'an, Surat al-Baqarah, verse 179.

⁵ Ibn Hazm. *Al-Fasl fi al-Milal wa al-Ahwa' wa al-Nihal* (The Decisive Treatise on Religions, Heresies, and Sects), op. cit., Vol. 2, p. 50.

that the Qur'an is inimitable by virtue of *ṣarfah*, that is, because God, the Exalted, diverted people and prevented them from possessing the ability to produce anything like it or resembling it. Thus, the Qur'an does not belong to the same category of eloquence as that of human speakers. Alternatively, its composition constitutes a unique mode of discourse, an idea also advanced by the Mu'tazilites, among them Qadi Abd al-Jabbar al-Hamadhani, namely that "the Qur'an possesses a degree of eloquence that human beings can never attain."¹

Ibn Hazm argues that a verse such as: "Indeed, We have revealed to you as We revealed to Noah and the prophets after him; and We revealed to Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, the Tribes, Jesus, Job, Jonah, Aaron, and Solomon; and We gave David the Psalms"² (Qur'an 4:163) cannot be regarded as representing the highest degree of eloquence, since it consists essentially of a listing of names. If his opponents were to claim that this verse is not miraculous, they would, in his view, fall into unbelief by consensus. Yet if they admit that it is miraculous, then they have spoken the truth. "If it is then asked of them, 'Is it at the highest degree of eloquence?' and they answer yes, they are merely being obstinate and save us the trouble of refuting them, for it consists only of the names of men."³

Ibn Hazm further responds to his opponents among the theologians and rhetoricians by arguing that their position that the Qur'an is miraculous because it represents the highest degree of eloquence would imply that it belongs to the same category as the speech of Al-Hasan al-Basri and Sahl ibn Harun, or the poetry of Imru' al-Qays. This, he contends, is rationally impossible, because whenever someone attains the highest degree of eloquence, "there remains the possibility that an equal may necessarily produce something comparable."⁴ Ibn Hazm denies that the Qur'an can be said to occupy the highest degree of eloquence within the realm of created speech because it is not, in any respect or form, of the same kind as human speech. Consequently, any comparison between the speech of God and that of human beings is invalid. Rather, God has altogether prevented creation from producing anything like the Qur'an and has distinguished it from all human discourse. Ibn Hazm also adduces as evidence that the Qur'an does not belong to the category of human eloquence the fact that many of its surahs begin with isolated letters, the meanings of which are unknown. "This is not of the customary eloquence of human beings."⁵ By this he means that if a person were to insert isolated alphabetic letters into a letter, sermon, book, or exhortation, such usage would constitute a departure from the recognized forms of speech and stylistic conventions known among the Arabs. This demonstrates, in his view, that the Qur'an lies outside the genus of human eloquence, and that

¹Mustafa Alyan Abd al-Rahim. *Tayyarat al-Naqd al-Adabi fi al-Andalus fi al-Qarn al-Khamis al-Hijri* (Trends of Literary Criticism in al-Andalus in the Fifth Hijri Century), op. cit., p. 325.

² The Qur'an, Surat al-Nisa', verse 163.

³ Ibn Hazm. *Al-Fasl fi al-Milal wa al-Ahwa' wa al-Nihal* (The Decisive Treatise on Religions, Heresies, and Sects), op. cit., Vol. 2, p. 50.

⁴ Ibn Hazm. *Al-Fasl fi al-Milal wa al-Ahwa' wa al-Nihal* (The Decisive Treatise on Religions, Heresies, and Sects), op. cit., Vol. 2, p. 51.

⁵ Ibn Hazm. *Al-Fasl fi al-Ahwa' wa al-Milal wa al-Nihal* (The Decisive Treatise on Heresies, Religions, and Sects), op. cit., Vol. 1, p. 127.

God has prevented creation from producing anything comparable to it, removed from them the capacity to do so, “clothed it with inimitability, and distinguished it from all human speech.”¹ Thus, Ibn Hazm rejects the notion that the Qur’an and human speech share a single category, namely eloquence, such that both may be described as eloquent while the Qur’an is distinguished merely by occupying the highest rank within that category. He maintains that explaining the Qur’an’s inimitability on the basis that it represents the highest degree of eloquence, and thereby placing it on the same scale as human speech, diminishes rather than elevates its status. For the miracles of the prophets transcend all ranks, the nature of all things in the world, and the very structure of the universe itself. Such miracles do not operate according to any established law or recognizable pattern.

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¹Ibn Hazm. *Al-Fasl fi al-Milal wa al-Ahwa’ wa al-Nihal* (The Decisive Treatise on Religions, Heresies, and Sects), op. cit., Vol. 2, p. 51.

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