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# Al-fikr

## Journal of Arabic and Islamic Studies

• VOL. 21/22 • 2008/2009



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## “Al-Mutanabbī’s Satiric Poems on Kāfūr; A Content Analysis”

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### Introduction

Al-Mutanabbī was a renowned panegyrist who flourished during the Abbāsid period, especially the Golden era of Islam when poets were benevolently rewarded for their lines of poetry. The poet and his subject, Kāfūr, had been together positively for some times, but when failed to appreciate his art, the poet then turned his panegyric on him into a lampoon which eventually cost him his dear life. Since the focus of this paper is based on the study of satirical poetry of Al-Mutanabbī in Arabic literature during the Abbāsid period, an attempt will be made to consider the definition of satire (*Hijā*) from the perspective of the Arabs and western scholars.

Satire as a theme in Arabic poetry is known as *Hijā*’ which simply means ridiculing, lampoonery, scoffing, defamatory poem. It is the verbal noun of the root verb *Hajw* that is he satirized, lashed and lampooned. <sup>1</sup> Hanā al-Fakhūrī defines *Hijā*’ as follows:

"الهجاء أو الهجو فن من فنون الشعر الغنائى يعبر  
به الشاعر عن تجربة اشتهاه من الناس . ونقمة  
عليهم فيندد بمساوهم وتصور لهم قبائحهم."

*Hijā*’ “satire” is a theme among the themes of rhythymical poetry, which a poet renders to show the vices of men and their rancor over it, by exposing their faults and portray their ignominious act.<sup>2</sup>

It is also defined by Ahmad al-Iskandarī and Mustapha ‘Anānī as follows:

تعداد مثالب المرء وقبيلة ونفي المكارم والمحاسن عنه .

Meaning:

“It is an act of enumerating the negative attributes of a person, his tribe and stripping him of any virtues or merit”<sup>3</sup>

Going by the foregoing definitions, it could be understood that, satirical poems in Arabic literature are those poems composed to attack, ridicule, disgrace, or to belittle an opponent, king, politician, tribes, personalities or a community.

**Western scholars define *Hijā'* as**

Collins Thesaurus of the English Language defined satire as parody, mockery, caricature, send-up (*Brit. informal*), spoof (*informal*), travesty, takeoff (*informal*), lampoon, skit, burlesque.<sup>4</sup>

American Heritage Dictionary defined thus: Satire *n.* Irony, sarcasm, or caustic wit used to attack or expose folly, vice, or stupidity. A literary work in which human vice or folly is attacked through irony, derision, or wit.<sup>5</sup>

Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary defined Satire as;

Mockery, wit, irony, ridicule, sarcasm, raillery, pasquinade *it's an easy target for satire.* “a way of criticizing a person, an idea in a humorous way to show their faults or weakness”<sup>6</sup>

**The Encyclopedia Britannica's definition of satire is also apt:**

The expression in adequate terms of the sense of amusement of disgust existed by the ridiculous of unseemly, provided that humor is a distinctly recognizable element, and that the utterance is interested with literary form without humour, satire is invective without literary form it is mere clownish jeering.<sup>7</sup>

**Britannica Concise Encyclopedia:**

**Satire** ;Artistic form in which human or individual vices, folly, abuses, or shortcomings are held up to censure by means of ridicule, derision, burlesque, irony, or other methods, sometimes with an intent to bring



about improvement. Literature and drama are its chief vehicles, but it is also found in such mediums as film, the visual arts (e.g., caricatures), and political cartoons. Though present in Greek literature, notably in the works of Aristophanes, satire generally follows the example of either of two Romans, Horace or Juvenal. To Horace the satirist is an urbane man of the world who sees folly everywhere but is moved to gentle laughter rather than to rage. Juvenal's satirist is an upright man who is horrified and angered by corruption. Their different perspectives produced the subgenres of satire identified by John Dryden as comic satire and tragic satire.<sup>8</sup>

### Oxford Companion to Classical Literature defined:

Satire (Lat. *satura*, 'medley', 'farrago', from *satur*, 'full'). Quintilian claimed satire as 'entirely our own', i.e. a Roman creation: *satura quidem tota nostra est* (Institutio oratoria x. 1. 93). Although there were satirical elements to be found in Greek literature, notably in Attic Old Comedy (see COMEDY, GREEK 3) with Aristophanes' attacks on personalities of the day, e.g. Cleon, and in the Cynic-Stoic diatribes of Bion the Borysthenite and Menippus, it was the Roman achievement to develop satire as a separate literary genre characterized by variety of subject-matter and occasionally of form (dialogue, fable, anecdote, precept, verse of various metres, combination of verse and prose). Livy (7. 2) describes as *saturae* early dramatic performances (originally put on to placate the gods at a time of plague) combining song, music, and mimetic dancing. On the one hand these contributed to the evolution of Latin comedy, on the other there developed from them the semi-dramatic, mixed literary form of 'satire', a commentary from a personal viewpoint, good-humoured, biting, or moralizing, on current topics, social life, literature, and the faults of individuals. Roman sources say Ennius (239-169 BC) was the first to write satires in verse (among much else), but apparently without including invective or personalities. Lucilius (c.180-c.102 BC) was the first to confine himself entirely to this genre; and it was he who gave it its character as well as establishing the hexameter as the appropriate metre for it. All later Roman satirists regarded him as their founding father. He was followed by M. Terentius Varro (116-27 BC), who took as a model the satires of Menippus in which prose and verse in a variety of metres were rather oddly intermingled, but who wrote in a less bitter, mildly didactic vein.

The *Satires* of Horace, written in the 30s BC, show the strong influence of Lucilius but are more genial in tone, containing no dangerous



invective against powerful individuals or serious vices, and the personal slant is charmingly autobiographical. Persius (AD 34–62) also felt Lucilius' influence, but his satires, characterized by earnest Stoic moralizing, contain no direct attacks on individuals. His editor Cornutus toned down a line of verse which the emperor Nero might have resented. Roman satire reached its peak in the Satires of Juvenal (published in the first part of the second century AD), whose bitter denunciations of the vice and folly of his own times (safely attached to names of people of the previous generation) embrace most men and all women.

The genre took a different direction in two brilliant Menippean satires which appeared in the reign of the emperor Nero (AD 54–68), Seneca's *Apocolocyntosis*, a caricature of the deification of the late emperor Claudius, and the *Satyricon* of Petronius. In the fourth century AD the emperor Julian wrote (in Greek but in the Roman tradition) the *Caesars*. The form of Menippean satire, but not the tone or purpose, was followed by Martianus Capella in the *Marriage of Mercury and Philology* and by Boethius in the *Consolation of Philosophy*.<sup>9</sup>

A fourth century grammarian, Diomedes, defined satire thus:

A roman verse from that has seen in recent time and composed to censure the vices of men in the manner of old Greek comedy, as was written by Lucillius, Horace, and Persius, but formerly satire was the name given to a verse form made up of variety of smaller pieces of poetry such as the one written by Pacuvius and Ennius.<sup>10</sup>

By the definitions of western scholars, it could be understood that, satirical poems are those poems composed to attack or expose folly, vice, or stupidity. And shortcomings that are held up to censure by means of ridicule, derision, burlesque, irony, or other methods, sometimes with intent to bring about improvement.

### **Al-Mutanabbī: His Life and Parenthood**

His name is Abū Tayyib Ahmad bn Hussain bn Abdul-Samad al-Jinfat-Ay-Yamanī clan that lived at the village of Kindat in Kuffah. He was born in the year 303 A.H. /910 CE. His mother was of Arab descent from a place called Hamadān. Therefore, Abu Tayyib was an Arab origin both from his mother and father.<sup>11</sup> His father, Hussain bn Abdul-Samad, popularly known as *Heedan*, was a water-carrier of the Kind quarter of an impoverished descendant of Yamanī tribe – Bani Ju'fī.



This opinion is supported by the nickname *heedan siqā'*, which some scholars held a contrary view. They say his father was neither a water carrier nor his name was Heedan, due to the meaning of the two names given by Al-Fayrus Abbād in his lexicon "*al-Mulīṭ*" Where he defined "al-heedan" as a very long staff or very long rod, while *siqā'i* means (water skin)<sup>12</sup>. It was the tradition in the Arab desert to place a long stick by the roadside and hang a water skin on it, for the passersby as well as travellers in the deserts to quench their thirst with.

### His Education

Al-Mutanabbī grew up in Kūfa as a man with sharp and good retentive memory. He started his education by moving from one school center of learning to another in line with the standard during his period. This afforded him the opportunity to gain sound knowledge of Arabic literature, both prose and poetry. He later on mixed with Bedouin Arabs, with whom he spent many years moving from one village to another, an opportunity which enhanced the purity of his linguistic comprehension.

Al-Mutanabbī did not relent in his effort to seek for knowledge. Instead he visited educated elites in Kūfa, most especially the grammarians, such as Ibrahim al-Zujābī (d.311/923C.E.), Muhammad bn Sirāj (d. 317/929) among others. He also acquired knowledge on philosophy from Abu al-Fadīl al-Kūfī, which has great influence on his life.

Having become versed in many branches of the Arabic language, Al-Mutanabbī moved to the outskirts of Shām to display his talent of poetry in search of monetary gain. He soon became a genius who could distinguish himself among his contemporaries.

The following are some of the themes of his composition

- |                                |                              |                              |
|--------------------------------|------------------------------|------------------------------|
| (i) <i>Hijā'</i> (Satire)      | (ii) <i>Madḥ</i> (Panagetic) | (iii) <i>Ghazal</i> (Erotic) |
| (iv) <i>Wasf</i> (Descriptive) | (v) <i>Rithā'</i> (Elegy)    | (vi) <i>Fakhr</i> (Boasting) |

Al-Mutanabbī grew up as a gifted and self esteem poet in Kūfa having spent many years in the desert and later came back to the city during the Abbasid's regime, that is the golden age of Islamic era, that prized poetry greatly above all other arts, and in which the rewards for success were very great Naturally "his first aspiration before his ill-starred adventure into politics has been to achieve fame and comfortable livelihood as a poet, modeling his style and carrier on the greatest writers of the past, in particular Abu-Tammām (d.854) and al-Buhturī (d. 897).<sup>13</sup> He appeared



as if he greed not for only money but also for authority, political power and elevation.

His tender age for such a huge gift and uncommon talent among his contemporaries led to a great envy all combined to make him appear in the sight of the ruling class as a power usurper who was trickishly trying to assume for himself a position higher in rank than that of the ruling class. Hence, they took some verses of his poetry to mean the opposite of what he himself claimed. Consequent to this, he was jailed by Amir of Hamz. After his release, people began to call him Al-Mutanabbī, a nick name that later immortalized the poet to the extent that his real name is almost forgotten.

The poem follows:

غريب كصالح في ثمود      أنا في أمة تداركها الله  
كمقام المسيح بين اليهود      ما مقام بأرض نخلة

Meaning:

"I am a stranger among the people may Allah redeem them like Sālih was among the Thamūd. My status in the land of Nikhla is nothing short of the status of Jesus among the Jews".<sup>14</sup>

However, scholars were of different opinions on what led to that nickname, according to *Ibn Nashiq*, he stated that:

أن أبا طيب إنما سمي متنبأ لقظنته

"Abu Tayyib was nicknamed Al-Mutanabbī because of where he lived that is by revealing desert information".<sup>15</sup>

Al-Khātib al-Baghdādī (d.1571) maintained that Al-Mutanabbī rendered some prosaic words in one of the Kūfa deserts and claimed it to be some verses of the Qur`ān that revealed to him.

والنجم السيار، والفلك الدوران، إن  
الكافر في أخطار أمضي على سننك وأقف

أثر من قبلك من المرسلين فإن الله قامع بك  
زيغ من الحد في دينه وضل عن سبيله .

Meaning:

By the moving star and by the turning orbit.  
The unbeliever is in danger, for he had  
moved away from your path that succeed the  
path of those before you among the prophets,  
surely, Allah will save you from the  
derivations of those that turned away from his  
religion. And gone astray from His path.<sup>16</sup>

After his release from jail, he travelled far and wide in Abbasid's empire moving from one king to another praising them in order to secure political appointment from them. This made him to have many poems on *madh* (panegyric) than few occasions,<sup>17</sup> Askandari and Mustapha 'Anānī say:

وقد قال المتني الشعر في كل غرض من  
أغراض الشعر. وأجاد في وصف المعارك  
والعتاب المرائسى ..... وأما مدائحه  
فهي أكثر بضاعته.

Meaning:

Al-Mutanabbī had composed poems virtually on all the themes of Arabic poetry; he excelled in the description of the wars and in the reproaching people ... but his panegyric poems constituted much of his composition.<sup>18</sup>

Al-Mutanabbī moved to *Antakiyat* where he praised many dignitaries such as 'Ad -du-z-Zāhir al-Hamadhān; who later introduced him to the Hamādanid ruler of Aleppo -the heroic *Sayful-Dawlah*. He praised *Sayful-Dawlah* for almost nine years and the ruler eventually honoured him with a title of the chief panegyrist. It is worthy of note that throughout his stay with *Sayful-Dawlah* he did not praise him while standing as other poets, he praised him in the sitting position due to his arrogance. Al-Mutanabbī finally moved to Egypt at the palace of Abu al-Misk Kāfir Al-Ikshidīd [The Nubian slave who had risen to the



supreme power as the guardian of the young successor to Muhammad al-Ikhshidīd] with the intention of the poet to praising him so that he could attain political appointment. Even though, he praised Kāfūr, he was denied of his desire. Al-Mutanabbī was eventually so infuriated that he left Egypt with annoyance. He started raining insults on the ruler of Egypt for being a former black slave and mocks the people of Egypt for allowing him to rise to power and accepting him as their leader, and satirized Kāfūr with more than fifty lines of poetry. Al-Mutanabbī was waylaid and killed together with his son. It was reported that Fātiq (the king's army) said, in annoyance, after the killing:

قبحا لهذه اللحية يا قذاف المحصنات .

Meaning:

“Shame on this bearded, that defamed the chastes”<sup>19</sup>

### Selected satiric poems of Al-Mutanabbī on Kāfūr

#### His Satire on Kāfūr I

<p>أين المحاجم يا كافور والجلم          فعفر فوا بك أن الكلب فوقهم          تقوده أمة ليست لهم رحم          وسادة المسلمين الأعبد القزم          يا أمة ضحكت من جهلها الأمم          كيما تزول شكوك الناس والتهم          من دينه لدهر والتعطيل والقدم          ولا يصدق قوما في الذي زعموا</p>	<p>الطرق يأتي مثلك الكرم من أية          جاز الأولى ملكت كفاك قدرهم          لا شيء أقبح من فحل له ذكر          سادات كل أناس من نفوسهم          أغاية الدين أن تحفو شواربكم          ألا فتي يورد الهندي هامته          فإنه حجة يؤذي القلوب بها          ما أقدر الله أن يخزي خليقته</p>
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1. Through which way, does nobility approach you  
Where are the cupping-jars O! Kāfūr and the Clippers.
2. Those whom your hands controlled have exceeded themselves.  
So that through you they have been made aware that a dog is over them



3. Nothing is shameful than a stallion with a membrum.  
While being led along by a slave girl without a womb.
4. The nobles of every sort of men are their own selves.  
But the nobles of the Muslims are vile slaves.
5. Is it the goal of religion that you should pluck over your beards.  
O community whose ignorance is a laughing-stock to other nations.
6. Is there no prowess lad who could bring down the Indian sword on his skull.  
So that the doubts and suspicions of men may cease?
7. For he is a proof whereby the materialist torment the hearts.  
The agnostic and the atheist.
8. The powerful God destined not to put shame to his creatures.  
And not to prove true a people in what they have alleged.

#### His Satire on Kāfūr II

إني نزلت بكاذبين ضيفهم  
 جود الرجال من الأيدي وجودهم  
 ما يقبض الموت نفسا من نفوسهم  
 من رخو وكاء لبطن متفتق  
 أكلما اغتال عبد السوء سيده  
 صار الخصى إمام الآبين بها  
 نامت توطير مصر عن تغالبها  
 العبد ليس حراً صالح بأخ  
 لا تشتر العبد إلا والعصا معه  
 ما كنت أحسبني أحياء إلي زمن  
 ولا توهمت أن الناس قد فقدوا  
 وأن ذا الأسود المثقوف مشفره  
 جوعان يأكل من زادي ويمسكني  
 إن امرأ أمة حبلي تدبره  
 ويلهما خطة ويلم قابلها  
 وعندها لذ طعم الموت شاربه  
 عن القري وعن الترحال محدود  
 من اللسان فلا كانوا ولا الجود  
 إلا وفي يده من نتنها عنود  
 لا في الرجال ولا النسوان معدود  
 أو خانة فله في مصر تمهد  
 فالحر مستعبد والعبد معبود  
 فقد بشمن وما تغمي العناقيد  
 لو أنه في ثياب الحر مولود  
 إن العبيد لأنجاس مناكيد  
 سيء بي فيه كلب وهو محمود  
 وأن مثل أبي البيضاء موجود  
 تطيعه ذي العضاريط الرعايد  
 لكي يقال عظيم القدر مقصور  
 لمستضام سخين العين مفؤود  
 لمثلها خلق المهرية القود  
 إن المنية عند الذل قنديد



من علم الأسود المحصي مكرمة  
 أم أذنه في يد النحاس دامية  
 أقومه البيض أم آباؤه السيد  
 أم قدره وهو بالفلسين مردود  
 أولي اللئام كويفير بمعذرة  
 في كل لؤم وبعض العذر تفنيد  
 وذلك أن الفحول البيض عاجزة  
 عن الجميل فكيف الخصبية السود

1. Indeed I have alighted amongst liars  
 Whose guest is denied alike hospitality and departure.
2. Men's generosity is with their hands, their generosity  
 Is with their tongues would that neither they existed not their  
 generosity.
3. Death seizes not a soul of their souls  
 Without death has in his hand a stick because of its stench.
4. Everyone of them flaccid as to the leather strap of his belly  
 Swollen in the flanks, not to be counted amongst either men of  
 women.
5. It is whenever a wicked slave assassinates his master or betrays him  
 Therefore, must he get his training in Egypt?
6. There, the eunuch has become the chieftain of the runaway slaves  
 The free man is enslaved, and the slave is obeyed.
7. The gardeners of Egypt are asleep to the tricks of its foxes  
 Which have gotten indigestion, and yet the grape-clusters are not at an  
 end.
8. The slave not a befitting brother to the godly free man  
 Even though he is born in the clothes of the free person
9. Do not buy a slave without buying a stick along with him  
 For slaves are filthy and of scant good



10. I never thought I should live to see the day  
When a dog would do me evil and be praised into the bargain
11. Nor did I imagine that true men would have ceased to exist  
And that the like of the father of bounty still be here.
12. And that negro with his pierced camel's lip.  
Would be obeyed by those coward hirelings
13. A hungry man that eats of my provisions, and detains me.  
So he may be called "Mighty of worth, much sought after"
14. A man whose pregnancy was carried by slave-women,  
Controls the affairs; indeed oppressed, hot eyed, faint-hearted
15. What a predicament! Alas for one accepting it  
For the like of it were created the long-necked *mahri* camels
16. In such a situation, he who drinks of death enjoys its taste  
Doom is honey-sweet when one is humiliated
17. Who will ever teach the eunuch Negro Nobility?  
Is it the "white people, or his royal ancestors?"
18. Or his ear suffered bleeding in the hand of the slave-broker?  
Or his worth, seeing that for two farthings he would be rejected?
19. Wretched Kāfir is the most deserving of the base to the excused  
In regards to every baseness- and sometimes excusing is a reproach
20. And that is because white stallions are incapable of generality  
So, how much about a black Negro?

### His Satire on Kāfir III



لقد كنت أحسب قبل الخصي      أن الرؤوس مقر النهي  
 فلما نظرت إلي عقله      رأيت النهي كلّها في الخصي  
 ماذا بمصر من المضحكات      ولكنه ضحك كالبكاء  
 بما نبطيء من أهل السواد      يدرس أنساب أهل الفلا  
 وأسود مشفره نصفه      يقال له أنت بدر الدجى  
 وشعر مدحت به الكركدن      بين القريض وبين الرقي  
 فما كان ذلك مدحاله      ولكنه كان هجو الوري  
 وقد ضلّ قوم بأصنامهم      فأما بزق الرياح فلا  
 وتلك صموت وذا ناطق      إذا حركوه فسا أو هذا  
 ومن جهلت نفسه قدره      رأي غيره منه ما لا يري

1. Before I knew the eunuch, I thought that  
The head was the seat of reasons (Reasoning Faculty)
2. But when I looked at his intelligence  
I discovered that his reasoning was wholly in the testicles
3. What laughable things are there felt in Egypt!  
But this is a case of laughter being like weeping
4. There a Nabattaean of the people of the black soil,  
Teaches the genealogies of the desert
5. And a Negro who is one half lip  
And men say to him, "you are the full moon of the dark night"
6. Many poems I have composed in praise of that rhinoceros  
They are just half verse and half incantation,
7. And that was not a panegyric to him,  
Actually, a satire on the generality of mankind (Arabs)



8. Men have gone astray by reason of their idols  
But as for being seduced by a wind – bag, certainly not!
9. The former are silent, and the latter speaks,  
When he is shaken he breaks wind or raves nonsense
10. When a man's soul is ignorant of his own worth,  
Another sees of him what he does not see.

### **Content Analysis of the Satiric Poem**

The notorious satirical poems in which the Iraqi/Levantine poet Abut-Tayyib al-Mutanabbi insults the ruler of Egypt Abū al-Misk Kāfūr Al-Ikhshidīd for being a former black slave<sup>20</sup> and mocks the people of Egypt for allowing him to rise to power and accepting him as their leader, is often cited as an example of Arab racism<sup>21</sup>. However, Lina<sup>22</sup> in her work titled *Kafur: A testament to Levantine racism and Egyptian tolerance*; regarded it as an example of tolerance, particularly on behalf of the people of Egypt.

Although Abū al-Misk Kāfūr was originally a black slave from Ethiopia. Muhammad bn Tughj- the first of the Ikhshidīd princes of Egypt, purchased Abū al-Misk Kāfūr as a slave in 923 C.E and, recognizing the slave's potential, made him a tutor to his children and a military officer, and later promoted him as minister (Vizier) of Egypt. Eventually, Abū al-Misk Kāfūr gained so much power that he succeeded bn Tughj after his death, becoming the de jure ruler of the Egypt and southern Syria.

For a black slave to climb the power ladder to become a prince or king is quite extraordinary and it took al-Mutanabbī by surprise. Not only was this black slave able to take control of Egypt—one of the most important countries of that time—but the people of Egypt were fine with it.<sup>23</sup>

This is not the only example of slaves rising to power in Egypt. The Mamluks were soldiers of slave origin who converted to Islam, and eventually became a powerful military caste in various Muslim societies, particularly in Egypt. The mamluk phenomenon lasted from the 9th to the 19th century. C.E.



However, Kafūr was not only a slave—he was black. Also remarkable about him is the way he outsmarted and made a fool out of al-Mutanabbī (perhaps the most famous Arab poet in Arabic history).

After trying unsuccessfully to gain political power in the Levant, by praising *Sayf al-Dawlah*—Prince of Aleppo, al-Mutanabbī went to Egypt and tried to get close to Kafūr in hopes of being appointed governor of Sidon in reward for his poetry.<sup>24</sup>

Kāfūr could see through al-Mutanabbī's praise poetry that he was actually a racist and ignored him. Al-Mutanabbī became furious and started mocking him instead.

Al-Mutanabbī was popular with Panegyric from which made his ends meat. He was lucky to have flourished during the Golden era of Islamic\Abbasid period. A Yoruba adage says "*Eni mo eniyan yin, yoo mo eniyan buu*" means "Whoever perfects in eulogy must be also perfect in satire."

Al-Mutanabbī satirized Kāfūr for not fulfilling his promises after he had advertised him to the generality of Muslims. He (Al-Mutanabbī) later turned most of his panegyrics on Kāfūr to a satire and also on Muslims because, they could not awake from their fast-asleep until they allowed a Negro eunuch to direct their affairs. He rained direct insult on him, his race and his alike who thought Egypt could be a training ground for Despotic rulers. He even instigated the Arab youth to seize power from Kāfūr if their elders kept on to be passive.

### Styles and Diction

Al-Mutanabbī used stylistic devices in the embellishment of his poetical composition to ease comprehension and uniqueness in his literary efforts. There are lot of rhetorical devices in his use of diction. Any excerpt of Al-Mutanabbī on any genre could not be regarded as an ordinary poem but a compendium of literary devices. The following are some of the rhetorical features.

(a) *at-Tibāq* (Antithesis) this simply denotes: the placing words together or ideas in order to show a contrast if the words are nouns, we have *Tibāqul-ījāb* (positive antithesis) but if they are verbs, one negative and the other positive—*Tibāq Salbī* for instance:



من علم الأسود المحصي مكرمة أقومه البيض أم أبأؤه السيد

Meaning

Who will ever teach the eunuch Negro Nobility?  
Is it the "white people, or his royal ancestors?"<sup>25</sup>

And that is because white stallions are incapable of administration, so how much about a black Negro?. The word, *Aswad*, meaning "black", depicting darkness and the contrasting word is *Abyad* meaning "white" depicting brightness and light.

Fahlul-Abyad means white stallion, and *al-Khiziyat as-Sūd* means black Negro contrasting status. Al-Mutanabbī ironically applied the word *aswad* – (black) to Kāfūr the king, whom he believed that knew nothing about nobility. While the word *al-abyad* meaning "white," referred to the Arabs whom were known for nobility and hospitality.

*al-Khiziyat as-Sūd* – Black Negro referred to Kāfūr, a slave that knows nothing about administration and Fahlul-Abyad, white stallion is referred to the Arabs whom the poet believed knew much about administration than Kāfūr, but failed to meet up the challenges until they allowed Kāfūr to rule over them. He eventually rebuked them for not seizing the power from ordinary slave, Black Negro.

### Amthāl

The word *Amthal* the plural of "Mathal" which is the derivation of the verb "Maththala" – *Yumaththilu*, means "to expound". It also connotes proverbs, wise sayings or pregnant statement, which gave birth to different interpretations. This is always embedded in Al-Mutanabbī's composition to demonstrate his literary competence. For instance

ومن جهلت نفسه قدره رأي غيره منه ما لا يرى

Meaning:

When a man's soul is ignorant of his own worth  
Another sees him what he does not see.<sup>26</sup>

This could be likened to a Yoruba proverb, which says:

"A tafa s'oke to yi odo bori, bi oba aye ko ri t'orun nri"



“Whoever shoots an arrow and covers himself with mortal, if he feels ordinary person does not see him but the real God sees him”<sup>27</sup>.

This is a sort of reminder for everybody, especially those that constitute authority to be always conscious of their actions.

Simile is another *rhetorical* device, which connotes most derogatory insults someone could pass on his boss; for example:

العبد ليس الحر صالح بأخ      لو أنه في ثياب الحر مولود  
لا تشتري العبد إلا والعصا معه      إن العبيد لأنجاس مناكيد  
ما كنت أحسبني أحيأ إلي زمن      يسيء بي فيه<sup>9</sup> كلب وهو محمود

Meaning:

The slave is no brother to the godly free man  
Even though he may be born in the cloth of a free person.

Do not buy a slave without buying a stick along with him  
For slaves are filthy and have scant good,

I never thought I should live to see a day  
When a dog would do me evil and be praised into the bargain<sup>28</sup>

The poet had seriously lampooned the black race that live amongst the Arabs especially in Egypt. He compared his target Kāfūr – a slave that a man cannot purchase without buying a stick along for day-to-day guidance. He also categorically stated that no matter how a slave mixed with free men, the mentality of being a slave would show his genealogy, as a Yoruba proverb says “*Nda ni yo pe are re leru* (Nda would, himself, proclaim his real status<sup>29</sup>) [Nda was a slave who was worn with a befitting gown because he accompanied his masters; but when they were entertained with all sorts of food and drinks, he (Nda) went to the backyard to eat the peel of the yam which he was used to. From his action, people got to know that he was a slave in a free man’s garment]. In the last hemistich of the last line, he likened him to a dog which never saw that a good thing in his guest. The area of similarity of this comparison is a servant is not resourceful, initiative or mentally balanced due to severe punishments he receives from his master. Therefore, nothing good should be expected of him; because he benefits nothing from his labour. Since Kāfūr is also an alien, he was a dog who could only



rejoice with his play mates but he was so hostile to his guest, that is Arabs, who made him their ruler.

Prosodic Appliance:

He used a complete Basīṭ metre There is an elision called الحين (elimination of second letter that has sukūn) in the 'Arūd 30 of the first hemistich of the poem; that is, it reads فعلى instead of فاعلى this is permissible. The Darb<sup>30</sup> was affected with التشعيب<sup>31</sup> (elision of the first or second letter of *watad majmut* in *ḥāḥūn* and becomes *ḥāḥūn*). This is among the permissible defects that occur to Darb.

### Language

Al-Mutanabbī was unlike many of his contemporaries who engaged in simple and direct language in their compositions. Instead, he rendered most of his poems using aristocratic and jaw-breaking words embellished with high classical style. This is due to the high, powerful and good command of the Arabic Language that he possessed. This is the reason why he preferred praising the Arabs who could understand him more easily than the non-Arabs.

In conclusion; Al-Mutanabbī was known as one of the most celebrated panegyrists who benevolently got the national cake of the Abbasid era. But one should not be surprised as a Yoruba wise saying goes thus: "Whoever knew how to praise will definitely be perfect in lampooning<sup>32</sup>". This could be seen in Al-Mutanabbī in how the lampoon on Kafūr spreads its tentacle to the intended corner; it also instigated the Arabs who ignorantly kept silent on ascendants and descendents, seeing a slave ruling them without using the Indian sword to cut off his head in order to waive insults which lie (Kafūr) had caused for the generosity of the Arabs.



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23. Ahmad al-Iskandari and co (n.d) *Opcit* p. 45.
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25. Line 17 of his satiric poems on Kāfūr II
26. Line 10 of his Satiric Poems on Kāfūr III.
27. The interpretation of the proverb is "whoever does evil and ignorantly thought that nobody is aware, many people aware, but goes into his reckoning file on which is accountable for before God in the hereafter.
28. Lines 10-12 of his satiric Poems on Kāfūr II



29. A proverb used for someone whom you respect and alleviate but disrespect and downgrade himself through his action.
30. '*Anīd*' means the last *Taf'ilah* of the first hemstich of a poem while the *Darb* means the last *Taf'ilah* of the second hemistich
31. al-Tashī'ih is one the permissible defects that affects taf 'ilah by decrease
32. The Yoruba version goes thus: "*Eniti o mo eni yin yio mo' nii bu*".

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