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Acting Associate Professor at the Department of Literature,  
Azerbaijan State Pedagogical University, 68 Uzeyir Hacıbekov, Baku**SCIENTIFIC AND THEORETICAL IDEAS OF CLASSICAL MASTERS  
ON THE ART OF THE WORD IN AZERBAIJANI LITERATURE**

*This study examines the theoretical foundations of literature in the traditional Eastern context, historically conceptualized under the term “Qavaid-i Adabiyat” (Rules and Laws of Literature). Purpose: The research aims to explore how classical Eastern scholars, particularly Azerbaijani poets, articulated literary theory through their creative works rather than through a unified systematic framework. Design/methodology/approach: The study employs a qualitative textual analysis of classical Oriental literary sources, focusing on the concept of the “Word” (Söz) as a synonym for artistic literature and its aesthetic and philosophical implications. Special attention is given to the works and views of Nizami Ganjavi as a representative figure of this tradition.*

*Findings: The analysis reveals that classical poets embedded sophisticated literary doctrines within their writings, emphasizing brevity, depth, and semantic richness. Nizami Ganjavi, in particular, advocates for linguistic economy, arguing that artistic mastery lies in expressing complex socio-ethical ideas through concise and meaningful language. His principle that “out of a hundred words, only one essential word remains” highlights the importance of precision and ethical resonance in literature.*

*Originality/value: This research contributes to modern philology by demonstrating that Eastern literary thought offers an alternative, text-integrated model of literary theory. It underscores the continued relevance of classical Azerbaijani poetic philosophy in contemporary discussions on aesthetics, creativity, and the function of language in literature.*

**Keywords:** *Qavaid-i Adabiyat (Literary Rules), Classical Azerbaijani literature, Nizami Ganjavi, artistic word, literary theory, laconic expression.*

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В АЗЕРБАЙДЖАНСЬКІЙ ЛІТЕРАТУРІ**

*Це дослідження розглядає теоретичні основи літератури в традиційному східному контексті, що історично позначався терміном «Qavaid-i Adabiyat» (Правила і закони літератури). Мета: дослідити, як класичні східні мислителі, зокрема азербайджанські поети, формували літературну теорію через художні тексти, а не через єдину системну модель. Методологія/підхід: використано якісний текстуальний аналіз класичних джерел східної літератури з акцентом на понятті «Слово» (Söz) як синонімі художньої літератури та його естетичному й філософському значенні. Особливу увагу приділено поглядам Nizami Ganjavi.*

*Результати: встановлено, що класичні поети інтегрували глибокі літературні концепції безпосередньо у свої твори, підкреслюючи значення лаконічності, змістовної глибини та семантичної насиченості. Зокрема, Нізамі Гянджеві наголошує на мовній економії, стверджуючи, що справжня майстерність полягає у здатності передавати складні соціально-етичні ідеї стисло та виразно. Його принцип «зі ста слів залишається лише одне необхідне» підкреслює цінність точності та етичної ваги художнього слова.*

*Оригінальність/цінність: дослідження демонструє, що східна літературна традиція пропонує альтернативну модель теорії літератури, інтегровану в сам текст. Воно також підтверджує актуальність класичної азербайджанської поетичної думки для сучасної філології, зокрема в питаннях естетики, творчості та функції мови в літературі.*

**Ключові слова:** *Кавайд-і Адабіят (літературні правила), класична Азербайджанська література, Нізамі Гянджеві, художнє слово, теорія літератури. лаконічність вираження.*

**Problem statement.** The primary objective of literary theory is to investigate literary terms and concepts within a historical framework. In this regard, literary theory interprets and elucidates the primordial meanings of these terminologies. Historically, these terms were coined and solidified in collective memory by master wordsmiths. Nevertheless, on a global scale, preference is generally given to terms of Greco-Roman origin within the field of literary studies. This stems from the fact that foundational courses in the history of literature traditionally commence with Greco-Roman literary history. Consequently, terms such as realism, romanticism, novel, and drama are, by their etymological and historical origins, rooted specifically in the Greco-Roman tradition.

**Analysis of recent research and publications.** While the history of formal scientific and literary criticism in Azerbaijan is fundamentally associated with Mirza Fatali Akhundov, the roots of this thought extend back to the 11th and 12th centuries. Eminent Eastern scholars such as Khatib Tabrizi, Ayn al-Quzat, and Yusif Khoylu articulated compelling scientific-theoretical observations regarding aesthetics and prosody. Furthermore, the creative legacies of masters such as Nizami, Khaqani, and Fuzuli contain a wealth of theoretical propositions regarding the nature of art. In the classical Eastern tradition, this was referred to as "Qavaid-i Adabiyat" (the rules and laws of literature), which served as a precursor to modern systemic literary frameworks.

**Objectives and tasks of the study.** The purpose of this research is to analyze the evolution of Azerbaijani literary-theoretical thought through the works of its most prominent representatives. The study aims to:

- Examine Nizami Ganjavi's concepts of originality and linguistic economy in poetry.
- Analyze Mahammad Fuzuli's synthesis of science and poetry.
- Investigate Mirza Fatali Akhundov's struggle against imitation and his role in establishing the theoretical foundations of drama in the East.

### Main Body

It is widely established that the history of formal scientific and literary criticism in Azerbaijan is fundamentally associated with the name of Mirza Fatali Akhundov. However, as early as the 11th and 12th centuries, eminent Eastern scholars and connoisseurs of art such as Khatib Tabrizi, Ayn al-Quzat, and Yusuf Khoylu articulated compelling scientific-theoretical observations regarding poetry, aesthetics, prosody (meter), and various other literary problems within their commentaries and treatises. These figures represent the earliest professional pioneers of Azerbaijani literary thought. Furthermore, the creative legacies of masters who predated Akhundov—most notably titans of the word such as Nizami, Khaqani, and Fuzuli—contain a wealth of theoretical propositions and profound insights on the nature of art that remain invaluable to this day. In the classical Eastern tradition, literary theory was referred to as "Qavaid-i Adabiyat," which signifies the "rules and laws of literature" (Mustafayev, 2021: 27). While a centralized, systemic framework of literary theory did not emerge in certain Eastern regions, individual scholars consistently engaged with the theoretical dimensions of literature. Prominent representatives of classical Oriental literature frequently integrated their literary-critical perspectives directly into their creative works. Broadly speaking, the "art of the word" was a subject of extensive discourse. In this context, the term "Word" (Söz) was utilized as a comprehensive synonym for artistic literature. The reflections of classical Azerbaijani poets on the "Word" are remarkably profound and didactic, reflecting their unique literary doctrines in an entirely original manner. Nizami Ganjavi evaluated poetry as a significantly more arduous art form than prose, asserting that poetry loses much of its essence when its "garb is changed"—that is, when it is translated. According to Nizami, mastering this difficult craft is a feat of heroism, which "*cavalrymen achieve through daring raids*". He advocated for conciseness in poetry, the expression of profound meaning through minimal wording, and demanded inventiveness and innovation from the artist. In his view, works that are not "ignited by another's fire like a lamp" are virginal, fresh, and original. Nizami maintained that any artist seeking merit in the realm of the "word" must rely on progressive traditions and gather pearls of wisdom from the "table of the predecessors." He acknowledged his own adherence to this path, stating, "*The geniuses of the world gave counsel; from that assembly, we drew our courage*". He believed that a poet can only ascend and earn respect by relying on integrity and moral purity. In Nizami's creative output, artistic thinking and scientific intellect, as well as poetic cognition, complement each other to an astonishing degree, manifesting in a perpetual mutual unity. According to the poet, the mysterious veil drawn by poetry is the "shadow of prophecy"; in terms of honor and dignity, poets occupy the second rank after prophets, standing in the same row as "the valiant and the great." Nizami identified himself with these sublime, sacred figures, claiming that through his art, he created "a statue from a new mold" and performed a "miracle of sorcery." He believed that poetry and art must never evade the truth nor fear exposing tyranny and injustice or confronting the oppressor. Honest speech and truthful thought elevate the artist among the people, scholars, and connoisseurs of the word, increasing their dignity and granting them the right to eternal life. A cornerstone of poetic art in Nizami's view is originality. A true master of the word should never follow a well-trodden path or blindly repeat the utterances of ancient masters. Otherwise, regardless of the effort exerted, one cannot reach the lofty peaks of art. A true poet must resemble a diver who plunges into the "ocean of words" daily to find a new "virginal pearl of speech." Wise individuals cherish only those artists capable of original thought and fresh expression. While discussing the craft of poetry, Nizami also addressed the issues of inspiration and talent.

One of the fundamental characteristics of beauty in both content and form, according to Nizami, is the artist's ability to express and describe grand, didactic events and deep socio-ethical problems in a concise, substantial, and laconic manner. In one of his *mathnavis*, he advises "word-jewelers" to practice linguistic economy and avoid hollow, meaningless judgments and pretentious phrasing, famously stating: "*out of a hundred words, only one essential word should remain*" (Alimirzayev, 2008: 71). Nizami, who set high socio-ethical standards for art and called the poetic word the "treasure of two worlds," regarded poets who traded their craft for money or status as enemies of humanity. He labeled them "thieves of conscience" and "brokers of art," comparing those who exchanged their principles for a meal—losing their dignity and self-worth—to the "lowliest of the low," exposing them everywhere with bitter irony and contempt. He prioritized this genre over others due to its popularity, technical difficulty, demand for artistic skill, accessibility to the fashionable elite, mass appeal, and its fundamental nature as a genre of love. Fuzuli's reflections on the *ghazal* genre are as follows: "*The ghazal is the lover's expression of their heart's anguish to a compassionate beloved, or the beloved's revelation of their own state to a faithful lover. In the style of the ghazal, obscure content and unintelligible expressions fail to evoke any excitement. The ghazal possesses its own distinct language and a unique world of vocabulary. It is a genre that testifies to the poet's taste, intellect, and wit, demonstrating their talent and mastery*" (Shamsizade, 2012: 51). Fuzuli repeatedly emphasized that the *ghazal* must be composed in a language that is both simple and semantically vibrant. He maintained that it should be accessible and intelligible not only to scholars and the intelligentsia but also to the broader masses. In his view, the *ghazal* should be effortless to read and write, providing distinct aesthetic pleasure to the wise and serving as the "ornament and jewel of literary assemblies." Ultimately, it must achieve the status of *mashhuri-davran* (renowned throughout the ages). According to Fuzuli, "*the virtue of poetry is a distinct science and a prestigious category among the perfected disciplines*" (Shamsizade, 2012: 50). Furthermore, Fuzuli argued that the subject matter of poetry should not revolve around superficial revelry, but rather around universal sorrow (*dunva kadari*), social concerns, and existential grief. He posited that no matter how much inspiration an artist possesses, their words will lack resonance and power if they cannot shoulder the heavy burdens of their time. For Fuzuli, "suffering is the primary capital of poetic craft." He famously stated: "*Do not say that pleasure and ease are required to be a poet. Speak of grief so that you may carry the ball in the competition of words. The degree and rank of the Word are exalted. One who masters the word is respected everywhere. There is no dispute regarding the loftiness of the word. Though the word is inherently good, a fine word derives its perfection from truthfulness. Integrity enhances the value of the word; a true ornament is always more radiant*" (Alimirzayev, 2008: 76). Thus, for Fuzuli, the power and poetic beauty of a word lie fundamentally in its loyalty to truth. Fuzuli maintained that great art emerges only from the synthesis of talent and diligent labor. Simultaneously, a master must profoundly



study the classical heritage of their predecessors to avoid the redundant repetition of previously expressed ideas. Describing his own rigorous creative process, Fuzuli wrote: "There were times when I tasted the poison of wakefulness until dawn and captured a concept with my heart's blood. Yet, upon seeing at daybreak that it resembled the work of other poets, I erased what I had written..." "To avoid well-trodden paths, an artist must not settle for a mere search for words but must constantly acquire a "treasury of knowledge" (Aliyev, 2012:56). Fuzuli also asserted that criticism is essential to reveal the true merits of a literary work. However, this criticism is only beneficial if it is accurate, just, and objective. Only a true connoisseur of the word—defined as "masters of perfection" (*fazils*) and "eloquent spirits with enlightened hearts"—can offer a genuine appraisal of poetry. Fuzuli called upon such critics to celebrate the virtues of poetry as the pride of their era and cautioned against baseless objections if they could not rectify the errors. He viewed those who sought trivial flaws or slandered a poet as either biased or spiritually blind. When referring to poetry in its truest sense, Mirza Fatali Akhundov invoked the works of immortal world luminaries such as Homer, Ferdowsi, Nizami, Hafez, and Shakespeare. According to the author, poetry must consist of a narrative—whether celebratory or elegiac—that is consistent with truth and relevant to contemporary reality, thereby resonating with the reader's spirit and exerting a profound positive influence. Akhundov posited that poetry, while maintaining fidelity to the truths of life, must simultaneously be a product of poetic imagination. A true poet should not merely occupy themselves with arranging rhymes but must possess the skill to descend into the depths of the human heart, depicting its most delicate feelings, emotions, and aspirations with the palette of a genuine artist. If a poetic work lacks the capacity to evoke passion, stir the soul, or move the individual—if it fails to provide intellectual and spiritual nourishment—it ceases to be poetry and becomes merely a collection of rhymed words. In articulating his scientific-theoretical perspectives on poetry, Akhundov conducted a consistent struggle against imitation (*teqlidçilik*) in art. He repeatedly demonstrated that imitation diminishes the educational significance of belles-lettres and detaches it from the urgent problems and exigencies of the modern era. He argued that even if an artist following the path of imitation possesses great inspiration and intellect, their works can never transcend the limits of their time. The most detrimental aspect of imitation is that it creates a barrier to innovation and progress in literature, leading to intellectual stagnation and backwardness. In his 1868 critical letter to Aligulu Mirza, the Iranian Minister of Education, regarding Suavi Efendi's convictions, Akhundov expressed his regret concerning imitation: "We are exhausted by imitation. Imitation has destroyed our house. Now, we have resolved to cast off the yoke of imitation, to emerge from darkness into light, and to think freely and independently..." (Mustafayev, 2021:87). As evidenced, Akhundov did not limit his critique to the narrowness of genres that failed to keep pace with changing times; he specifically emphasized the structural limitations of mechanically repeated literary genres in reflecting the complex political, moral, and ethical problems of the contemporary world. While discussing the unity of aesthetic form and substance, Akhundov also provided concrete insights into the characteristics of verse and prose, the specifics of dramatic structure, and the definitions of comedy and tragedy. Here is the academic English translation of the literary and theoretical views of Mirza Fatali Akhundov and Seyid Huseyn regarding drama, language, and the evolution of literary genres. As the first prominent playwright of the East, Mirza Fatali Akhundov did not only create immortal examples of dramatic art but also sought to establish its theoretical foundations.

### Conclusion

Literary theory stands as one of the most ancient fields of scientific inquiry. The development of this discipline's classical foundations has unfolded throughout the history of world literature, alongside the specific evolution of Azerbaijani literature. Historically, literary theory emerged as a distinct branch of science in 4th-century BCE Greece with Aristotle's *Poetics*. In this seminal work, Aristotle synthesized the literary experiences of a single nation—the Greeks—providing a comprehensive treatise dedicated entirely to the theoretical foundations of literature. Furthermore, profound literary insights are also interspersed throughout Aristotle's other works, such as *Politics* and *Rhetoric*.

Literary theorists generally observe that literary studies (*ədəbiyyatşünaslıq*), as a formalized scientific discipline, reached its full formation during the second half of the 18th century and the early 19th century. Nevertheless, the primordial stage of literary-theoretical thought traces its origins back to the history of Ancient Greece. It was during this classical period that literary theory, based on specific aesthetic and theoretical principles, began to take shape. From the Classical era until the mid-18th century, Aristotle's *Rhetoric* and *Poetics* exercised an unconditional dominance over the trajectory of global literary and theoretical discourse.

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