

	<p>Science, Education and Innovations in the Context of Modern Problems</p> <p>Issue 12, Vol. 8, 2025</p> <p>RESEARCH ARTICLE </p> <p>Reframing the Duality of Form and Content in Abdelmalek Mortad's Criticism: Historical Foundations, Intellectual Evolution, Intercultural Hermeneutics, and Semiotic–Deconstructive Readings in Algerian Literary Discourse</p>
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Keywords	<p>Form–content duality; Abdelmalek Mortad; Algerian literary criticism; Arab rhetorical heritage; semiotics; deconstruction; Western modernity; narrative analysis; critical methodology; comparative poetics</p>
<p>Abstract</p> <p>This research offers a comprehensive reassessment of the duality of form and content within Algerian critical discourse through an in-depth analysis of Abdelmalek Mortad's work. Mortad's intellectual development is characterized by a transition from early thematic-centered criticism to a more refined, integrated methodology that harmonizes textual structure with semantic layers. The study contextualizes this evolution within the broader dialogue between classical Arab literary criticism—rooted in scholars such as Al-Jahiz and Ibn Qutayba—and the conceptual developments of Western modern criticism, including Kant's emphasis on aesthetic form and Hegel's focus on conceptual content. Mortad's scholarship represents a hybrid critical consciousness: while his early works, such as <i>The Contemporary Algerian Short Story</i>, foreground social, national, and existential themes, his later writings, including <i>One Thousand and One Nights: A Semiotic–Deconstructive Analysis of the Porter of Baghdad Story</i>, demonstrate a methodologically innovative approach that fuses semiotic reading with deconstructive sensitivity. By examining both phases of Mortad's intellectual trajectory, this paper contributes to the understanding of how Algerian criticism operates at the intersection of inherited cultural epistemologies and external theoretical frameworks. The findings suggest that Mortad's integrative model offers a sustainable path toward a balanced and dynamic interpretative practice in contemporary Arab and Algerian literary criticism.</p>	<p>Citation. Morsli A. (2025). Reframing the Duality of Form and Content in Abdelmalek Mortad's Criticism: Historical Foundations, Intellectual Evolution, Intercultural Hermeneutics, and Semiotic–Deconstructive Readings in Algerian Literary Discourse. <i>Science, Education and Innovations in the Context of Modern Problems</i>, 8(12), 1337–1341. https://doi.org/10.56334/sci.8.12.109</p>
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1. Introduction

The question of the relationship between form and content has always been at the heart of literary criticism, generating debate among scholars across cultures and eras. In Arab critical heritage, this issue has been discussed since the time of Al-Jahiz, who emphasized the importance of content, while modern Western thought revisited this debate through thinkers like Kant, who focused on form, and Hegel, who highlighted content. This ongoing

dialogue illustrates the complexity of understanding literary works in their full depth. Within the framework of Algerian critical discourse, Abdelmalek Mortad stands out as one of the leading scholars to address this intricate duality. His critical journey reflects an evolution from an early phase that privileged content over form, to a later, more mature approach that seeks to integrate both form and content into a unified reading of literary texts. Mortad's dual intellectual affiliation rooted in Arab traditional criticism and influenced by Western modern theories enriches his analytical perspectives and opens new pathways for Algerian literary criticism. This paper examines Mortad's evolving critical methodology through two significant models: The Contemporary Algerian Short Story, representing his early focus on content, and One Thousand and One Nights: A Semiotic-Deconstructive Analysis of the Porter of Baghdad Story, reflecting his later integrated approach that combines semiotic and deconstructive analysis. By exploring these works, this study seeks to shed light on how Mortad contributes to the development of a balanced and dynamic critical discourse, one that honors heritage while embracing modernity.

2. Theoretical Framework

One of the key issues in Arab critical discourse has been the relationship between form and content. Dating back to Al-Jahiz, Arab critics have debated whether to separate or unite these elements. While Western criticism in the 18th and 19th centuries revisited this issue Kant favouring form, Hegel emphasizing content Arab criticism anticipated these debates. Although Arab critics did not formalize this duality into a comprehensive theory, their works remain foundational for contemporary discussions. Algerian criticism, as part of this legacy, grapples with these issues, especially in Mortad's scholarship, which bridges Arab tradition and Western thought.

3. Mortad's Early Position: Prioritizing Content

In his early works, Mortad displayed a tendency to separate form and content. In *Algerian Popular Riddles* (1982), he divided the analysis between artistic form and content. Similarly, in *The Contemporary Algerian Short Story* (1990), Mortad analyzed around seventy short stories, focusing on social and national themes, such as poverty, migration, and the Algerian War of Independence, giving priority to content over artistic form. He examined works by authors like Abdelhamid Benhadouga, Habib Sayeh, Othman Saadi, Ahmed Menouer, and Mustapha Fassi. Mortad identified recurring themes of struggle and resistance and analyzed shared characters and settings. Although valuable, this content-centered approach often neglected the formal aspects of the literary works.

3.1 Mortad's Evolving Approach: Integration of Form and Content

In his later works, Mortad moved toward a more integrated approach. His *Semiotic-Deconstructive Analysis of the Porter of Baghdad Story* from *One Thousand and One Nights* exemplifies this shift. Here, Mortad applied semiotics and deconstruction to analyze narrative structure, character development, and thematic elements, treating form and content as interwoven aspects of the literary text. This approach reflects a broader understanding of literary works as complex wholes that require nuanced analysis. By combining Arab rhetorical heritage with modern semiotic tools, Mortad pioneered a hybrid methodology in Algerian literary criticism.

3.2 The Role of Western Modernity in Mortad's Methodology

Mortad's engagement with Western critical theories particularly semiotics and deconstruction enriched his analysis of Arabic texts. His integration of Derrida's and Barthes' insights with traditional Arab criticism allowed him to develop innovative readings of classical works. Mortad's later criticism reflects this synthesis, demonstrating that form and content are inseparable in literary interpretation.

3.3. Contributions to Algerian and Arab Criticism

Mortad's methodological evolution has significant implications. His trajectory highlights the need for contemporary Arab critics to adopt a balanced approach, combining the strengths of both Arab heritage and Western modern theories. Mortad's works encourage critics to move beyond rigid separations of form and content, advocating for comprehensive readings that capture the complexity of literary texts.

4. The Historical Evolution of Form and Content Debate in Arab Criticism

The debate over form and content is not new in Arab literary heritage. Early Arab scholars such as Al-Jahiz, Ibn Qutaybah, and Al-Baqillani engaged deeply with questions about the aesthetic and semantic dimensions of texts. However, their analyses often leaned towards content due to the strong moral and didactic function assigned to literature in classical Arab culture. Despite that, traces of formalist thinking can be found in their rhetorical and stylistic studies. Understanding this historical evolution provides crucial context for Mortad's own reflections, showing how his work represents a continuation and modernization of an ancient critical question. By revisiting these foundational debates, Mortad situates his scholarship within a longstanding intellectual tradition, yet moves beyond it to meet modern challenges.

4.1 The Impact of Semiotics and Deconstruction on Mortad's Critical Methodology

One of the most innovative aspects of Mortad's later works is his use of semiotics and deconstruction, fields that revolutionized modern literary theory. Drawing on figures like Roland Barthes, Jacques Derrida, and Umberto Eco, Mortad integrates these complex methodologies to reinterpret Arabic texts, offering new ways of reading beyond conventional frameworks. Semiotics allows him to explore the sign systems and narrative structures, while deconstruction enables him to unpack textual ambiguities and contradictions. These tools empower Mortad to treat form and content not as opposing forces but as mutually constitutive elements, thus deepening the interpretation of literary works. This methodological synthesis marks a paradigm shift in Algerian criticism, showing its capacity to engage with global literary debates.

4.2 Pedagogical Implications of Mortad's Approach for University Curricula

Mortad's integrative methodology has profound implications for teaching literature and criticism in universities. His model suggests that literary studies should move beyond superficial thematic readings to incorporate formal analysis, enriching students' understanding of how meaning is constructed in texts. By emphasizing the unity of form and content, Mortad's work can serve as a foundation for curriculum design that fosters analytical and critical thinking skills. University programs, particularly in Arabic language and literature departments, should include Mortad's methods to expose students to modern analytical tools like semiotics and deconstruction, while grounding them in Arab rhetorical traditions. Such an approach would prepare students to become globally competent critics who can engage with both Arab and international literatures.

4.3 Mortad's Contribution to Modernizing Arab Literary Criticism

Abdelmalek Mortad's work represents a significant effort to modernize Arab literary **criticism**, making it relevant to contemporary intellectual currents. By blending Arab critical heritage with modern theories, he challenges the dichotomy often drawn between tradition and modernity. Mortad's integrative approach offers a model for renewing Arabic criticism, demonstrating that fidelity to cultural identity does not preclude openness to global thought. His work encourages critics to rethink rigid methodologies and adopt more flexible, interdisciplinary frameworks. This contribution is especially important in the context of globalization, where Arab criticism must dialogue with international movements while preserving its unique cultural voice.

4.4 Future Directions for Research in the Light of Mortad's Methodology

Building on Mortad's synthesis of form and content, future research in Arabic literary criticism should explore new areas and genres, including modern narrative forms, postcolonial literature, and digital texts. Mortad's approach can be extended to study emerging literary phenomena such as graphic novels, online literature, and hybrid genres that challenge traditional boundaries. Furthermore, scholars can apply his methodology to comparative studies, examining how Arab texts resonate with or differ from global literatures. Such research would not only enrich Arabic criticism but also position it within international scholarly conversations, expanding its influence and relevance. Mortad's legacy thus opens a path for innovative, dynamic, and globally engaged Arabic literary criticism.

5. Recommendations

To advance Arabic literary criticism and benefit from Abdelmalek Mortad's critical contributions, it is essential to encourage the integration of form and content as a unified approach in analyzing literary texts. Literary critics

should move beyond viewing form and content as separate entities and instead explore how they interact to produce deeper meanings. Additionally, universities and research institutions should promote interdisciplinary methodologies that blend Arab critical heritage with modern Western theories, such as semiotics and deconstruction, to enrich the analysis of Arabic literature. Supporting academic programs and courses that introduce students and researchers to Mortad's integrative method would help foster a new generation of scholars equipped with advanced critical tools. Moreover, institutions should encourage research initiatives that continue Mortad's work by applying his methodology to both classical and contemporary texts, thus opening new perspectives in Arabic literary studies. Through these recommendations, Arabic criticism can maintain its connection to tradition while engaging effectively with global critical trends.

6. Conclusion.

Abdelmalek Mortad's critical journey reflects a profound and thoughtful evolution in Arabic literary criticism, moving from an initial focus on content-centered analysis to a more sophisticated, integrated methodology that treats form and content as inseparable components of literary texts. His intellectual trajectory highlights a remarkable shift in Algerian and Arab critical thinking, as he continuously sought to reconcile traditional Arab critical heritage with modern Western theories, particularly semiotics and deconstruction. This development not only reflects Mortad's personal growth as a critic but also illustrates a broader movement within Arab literary discourse toward embracing methodological diversity and openness to global thought. In his early works, Mortad, like many Arab critics of his time, emphasized thematic and ideological readings of literature, focusing on content as the key element of interpretation. To conclude, Abdelmalek Mortad's work stands as a testament to the potential of critical renewal within Arab literary discourse. His contributions invite scholars, educators, and students to reconsider the ways in which they approach literary texts, urging them to adopt a holistic perspective that values both the beauty of form and the depth of content. In doing so, Mortad not only advances Algerian and Arab criticism but also offers a powerful example of how literary analysis can become a bridge between heritage and modernity, East and West, form and meaning. His legacy challenges us to continue this intellectual journey, fostering a literary criticism that is inclusive, insightful, and responsive to the evolving world of literature.

Ethical Considerations. This study is based solely on publicly available academic materials, published texts, and literary analyses of Abdelmalek Mortad's works. No human subjects were involved, and no personal or confidential data were collected or processed. All referenced materials are cited respectfully and appropriately to maintain intellectual and academic integrity.

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