

My Heart is Aflame: Exploring Three Dimensions of the Poet's Voice in Selected Stanzas

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Abstract (English)

My Heart is Aflame by Al-Mutanabbi is a lengthy poem combining personal emotion, panegyric praise, and rhetorical self-pride. This study aims to examine three dimensions of the poet's voice in selected stanzas using a stylistic approach that focuses on diction, imagery, figurative language, and concrete words. The analysis reveals that Al-Mutanabbi consistently constructs a complex lyrical persona: a wounded lover suffering from unrequited affection, an admirer exalting the figure of Saif al-Dawlah in heroic terms, and an individual who proudly affirming his ability as a poet and warrior. Through the use of intense word choices and rich figurative and imagistic elements, the poem conveys the poet's identity as a grand figure within the cultural and literary tradition of classical Arabic society. This analysis highlights Al-Mutanabbi's expressive strength in blending personal sentiment with elevated linguistic strategies, making his poetry a means of affirming his identity and position in society.

Keyword: Al-Mutanabbi, Stylistics, Classical Arab Poetry, Abbasiyah, Figurative Language.

Abstract (Indonesian)

Puisi My Heart is Aflame karya Al-Mutanabbi merupakan karya panjang yang memadukan ekspresi personal, panegirik, dan retorika kebanggaan diri. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis tiga dimensi suara penyair dalam bait-bait terpilih melalui pendekatan stilistik, dengan fokus pada unsur diksi, citraan, bahasa figuratif, dan kata konkret. Hasil analisis menunjukkan bahwa Al-Mutanabbi secara konsisten membangun persona liris yang kompleks: sebagai pecinta yang menderita akibat cinta tak terbalas, pemuja sosok Saif al-Dawlah dengan kekaguman yang heroik, serta individu yang penuh kebanggaan atas kemampuannya sebagai penyair dan pejuang. Melalui pilihan kata yang intens dan penuh simbolisme, serta penggunaan citraan dan figuratif yang kuat, puisi ini mengungkapkan identitas penyair sebagai figur agung dalam konteks sosial dan sastra Arab klasik. Analisis ini menegaskan bahwa kekuatan ekspresif Al-Mutanabbi terletak pada kemampuannya menggabungkan emosi pribadi dengan strategi bahasa yang tinggi, menjadikan puisinya sarana afirmasi identitas dan posisi dalam masyarakat.

Kata Kunci: Al-Mutanabbi, Stalistik, Puisi Arab Klasik, Abbasiyah, Bahasa Figuratif

INTRODUCTION

Imaginative literature represents a form of linguistic expression that carries its own aesthetic value. In the realm of literature, there are three main forms: poetry, prose, and drama.¹ Among these, poetry stands out as a literary work that continues to be remembered and appreciated to this day. Poetry is composed in stanzas that reflect the poet's emotions as well as various issues occurring in their surroundings.² In poetry, a writer can convey a wide range of emotions—not only love or longing, but also their perspectives on social, political, and economic issues of their time. Indeed, poetry often serves as a reflection of the societal conditions prevailing when the work was created.

Classical Arabic poetry is a literary genre that emerged and flourished in the Arab world prior to the 20th century, renowned for its structured form, particularly its consistent use of rhyme and meter. In Arabic, poetry is referred to as *ash-shi'r*, which denotes the eloquent use of language marked by rhythmic patterns (*wāzān*) and rhyme (*qāfiyah*)³. These poems commonly explore universal themes such as love, death, pride, and the beauty of nature, while also reflecting the cultural values and moral principles of Arab society during that era.

Classical Arabic poetry, particularly during the Abbasid Dynasty (750–1258 CE), represents a significant milestone in the tradition of Islamic literature⁴. Within the vibrant courtly setting of Baghdad, poets such as Al-Mutanabbi—whose full name was Abū al-Tayyib Aḥmad ibn al-Ḥusayn al-Mutanabbi al-Kindī (915–965 CE) produced works that combined linguistic aesthetics with socio-political commentary. Al-Mutanabbi, regarded as one of the greatest poets in the classical Arabic tradition, was renowned for his neoclassical style, marked by hyperbole, sharp metaphors, and powerful personal expression, particularly in panegyric (*madh*) and self-glorifying poetry⁵.

¹ Ukhrawiyah, Faizetul, and Fauziyah Kurniawati. "Analisis Semiotik Riffaterre Pada Syair Lagu Man Anā Karya Al-Imam Al-Habib Umar Muḥdhor Bin Abdurrahman Assegaf." *Haluan Sastra Budaya* 5, no. 2 (December 6, 2021): 140. <https://doi.org/10.20961/hsb.v5i2.47238>.

² Raden Muhammad Ardiansyah Kurniawan, Ridwan Ritonga, Arpin Aminuddin Hrp, Puji Kastrawi, Abdul Manan Nasution, and Ismail. "Analisis Semiotika Riffaterre dalam Puisi "Hiya Fil Masāi Waḥīdatin" Karya Mahmoud Darwish." *Kajian Linguistik dan Sastra* 9, no. 1 (June 28, 2024): 43–61. <https://doi.org/10.23917/kls.v9i1.3233>.

³ Fikry Firmansyah and Abdul Basid. "Tren dan Inovasi Pengajaran Bahasa Arab di Perguruan Tinggi: Sebuah Kajian Systematic Literature Review (SLR)". *EDU RESEARCH*. Vol. 6 No. 3 (2025).

⁴ Nur Maulana Zarawaki. "Menelaah Kesusastraan dan Karya Sastra Dinasti Abbasiyah". *KULTURISTIK: Jurnal Bahasa dan Budaya*. Vol. 6, No. 1. 2022, p.64-71. <https://doi.org/10.22225/kulturistik.6.1.3783>

⁵ Miftahur Rohmah. "Struktur dan Nilai Budaya dalam Puisi Al-Mutanabbi: Sebuah Kajian Stilistika". *Journal of Arabic Literature*. 2022.

The poem "My Heart is Aflame" by Al-Mutanabbi stands as a poignant example of poetic expression rich in emotion, symbolism, and rhetoric. The length reflects the thematic breadth and expressive depth of the poet. However, due to spatial limitations and in order to sharpen the focus of analysis, this paper examines only selected stanzas from the poem. These selected parts represent three dominant themes that permeate the entire work: unrequited and painful love, panegyric praise of a prominent figure, and the poet's assertion of personal grandeur and pride (*fakhr*).

This analysis utilizes the translated version of Al-Mutanabbi's poem "My Heart is Aflame" available on the website PoemHunter.com. This translation was selected for its open accessibility, coherent narrative structure, and its retention of the tone and imagery characteristic of the original poem. Nonetheless, the limitations inherent in the translation process are acknowledged, and the stylistic reading is conducted with the understanding that the translation serves as a poetic representation within the target language.

Both classical and modern scholarship have firmly established Al-Mutanabbi's status as one of the most prominent poets of the Abbasid era. He is renowned for his works that exhibit a rich neoclassical style, while also being deeply personal and rhetorically sophisticated⁶. Al-Mutanabbi began his poetic career at a young age and later became the court poet of Sayf al-Dawla in Aleppo, where he composed numerous panegyrics marked by dignity and linguistic brilliance.

Panegyric poetry is one of Al-Mutanabbi's principal genres, particularly in his support of patrons such as Sayf al-Dawla. A study by Smart⁷ emphasizes that such poetry was not merely intended to praise, but also served significant political and social functions. Meanwhile, the theme of *fakhr*—or poetic egoism, characterized by claims of greatness and superiority—is commonly found in classical Arabic poetry, positioning the poet as a dominant figure. Although much of the scholarly focus has centered on Antara, the same principles apply to Al-Mutanabbi. Stylistic analyses of Al-Mutanabbi's works highlight his mastery of metaphor, simile, and other rhetorical devices. Al-Azzam⁸ maps his rich use of natural metaphors, revealing humanistic values in his poetry through a semiotic and literary ecological approach. In addition, research on lexical structures—such as phonetic repetition—by a PhD scholar at the University of

⁶ Alazzam, A. (2021). *Classical and Modern Perspectives on Al-Mutanabbi's Poetic Sophistication*. Journal of Arabic and Islamic Studies.

⁷ Smart, J. R. (Ed.). (1992). *Tradition and Modernity in Arabic Language and Literature*. Routledge.

⁸ Al-Azzam, B. (2021). Natural metaphors in the poetry of Al-Mutanabbi: A semiotic and literary ecological study. *International Journal of Arabic and English Studies*, 21(1),

Sheffield demonstrates that Al-Mutanabbi employed lexical cohesion to create strong rhetorical effects, particularly in his panegyrics and elegies.

METHODOLOGY

This study employs a stylistic approach to analyze selected stanzas from Al-Mutanabbi's poem "My Heart is Aflame." The primary focus is on how linguistic elements—such as diction, imagery, figurative language, and concrete expressions—construct and represent three distinct dimensions of the poet's voice: the voice of a wounded lover, the voice of a loyal praise, and the voice of a poet asserting his own greatness.

Stylistics is a branch of literary studies that examines the use of language and the variety of linguistic styles within literary works⁹. Stylistic analysis can offer significant contributions to literary interpretation, particularly when it succeeds in uncovering the underlying principles that unify a work and in identifying the central aesthetic objectives emerging from its various elements¹⁰. The focus of stylistic inquiry lies in the interpretation of meaning and content within a literary text.

In general, stylistic studies are grounded in a number of interrelated theories. According to these theories serve as foundational frameworks for analyzing linguistic aspects within literary texts¹¹. The main theories include the following:

- 1) Diction: According to Tarigan¹², diction refers to the poet's choice of words. Accurate and deliberate word choice reflect the spatial and temporal setting, philosophical outlook, message, emotional effect, and tone within a poem.
- 2) Imagery: Imagery refers to the use of language to depict objects, actions, emotions, ideas, statements, or sensory experiences—including those that are unique or extraordinary. Specifically, Tarigan¹³ states that in creating a literary work, a poet aims to evoke the reader's imagination and emotions, allowing them to feel as though they are directly experiencing the events and sentiments described.

⁹ Panuti Sudjiman. (1992). *Memahami Cerita Rekaan*. Jakarta: Pustaka Jaya, h.3

¹⁰ Wellek, R. & Warren, A. (1956). *Theory of literature (3rd ed.)* Harcourt, Brace & World. Retrieved from https://books.google.com/books/about/Theory_of_Literature.html?id=-rY3AQAIAAJ

¹¹ Nurhayati, N. (2008). *Teori dan Aplikasi Stilistik*. Palembang: Unsri, h. 30–38.

¹² Tarigan, H. G. (2011). *Prinsip-Prinsip Dasar Sastra*. Angkasa. h.29

¹³ Ibid, h. 31.

- 3) Figurative Language: Figurative language refers to the use of metaphors, similes, and other rhetorical devices employed by poets to create poetic effects in their work¹⁴.
- 4) Concrete Words: Concrete words are those that clearly and precisely depict objects or ideas, making it easier for readers to visualize what the writer intends to convey¹⁵.

The data analyzed in this study consist of stanzas that thematically represent the poem's three primary voices. The analysis was conducted using a descriptive-qualitative approach, tracing the relationship between linguistic form and expressive meaning in the poem, while maintaining awareness of the classical Arabic literary context as the historical background of the work.

DISCUSSION

The Voice of a Wounded Lover

My heart is aflame, burning with love for you
While your heart is frigid-cold toward me
You think so lightly of me, treating me with such indifference
My soul is sickened, my body debilitated
Why should I conceal a love that has consumed my body
When pretenders fake the love of Saif-Al-Dawlah
If what brings us together is our common love for you
I wish we would meritoriously share your bounties
Each according to the love he harbors for you

Diction

The opening stanza of Al-Mutanabbi's "My Heart is Aflame" demonstrates the power of diction in conveying the poet's anguish over unrequited love. The poem's first line, "My heart is aflame, burning with love for you," employs emotionally charged diction through the metaphor of fire. The words aflame and burning not only express intense love, but also evoke an image of love as something consuming and internally destructive. This diction effectively constructs a psychological atmosphere of turmoil and emotional suffering.

In contrast, the second line, "While your heart is frigid-cold toward me," uses the phrase frigid-cold to depict a stark emotional rejection. This choice of words heightens the contrast

¹⁴ Fransori, A. (2017). Analisis Stilistika pada Puisi Kepada Peminta-Minta Karya Chairil Anwar. *Deiksis*, 9(01), 1–12. <https://doi.org/10.30998/DEIKSIS.V9I01.884>

¹⁵ Ibid.

with the previous line, underscoring the emotional distance between the poet and the beloved. The juxtaposition between the burning heart and the cold heart amplifies the sense of isolation and despair.

The line “My soul is sickened, my body debilitated” introduces concrete diction referring to both mental and physical states. The words sickened and debilitated portray love as an experience that literally weakens both body and soul. This reinforces the idea that the poet’s suffering is not only emotional but also physically debilitating, emphasizing the total and destructive nature of his love.

This intense suffering is then contrasted with the superficial love of others: “When pretenders fake the love of Saif-Al-Dawlah.” Here, the terms pretenders and fake carry a strong evaluative charge, denoting insincerity and hypocrisy. Through this diction, the poet distinguishes himself from those who feign love, elevating the authenticity and value of his own feelings as noble and deserving of recognition.

Finally, the use of meritoriously and harbors in the line “I wish we would meritoriously share your bounties / Each according to the love he harbors for you” expresses a longing for just rewards based on the sincerity of love. The term meritoriously emphasizes that true love merits fair compensation, reinforcing the ethical dimension of the poet’s voice. This diction underscores not only the depth of feeling but also the poet’s sense of moral and emotional justice.

Imagery

In the opening stanza of *My Heart is Aflame*, Al-Mutanabbi prominently employs imagery, especially visual and tactile imagery, to heighten the emotional atmosphere of unrequited love. In the first line, “My heart is aflame, burning with love for you,” visual imagery (aflame) and thermal imagery (burning) are used to depict the poet’s inner condition as though he were literally on fire. This imagery not only animates the fire metaphor but also intensifies the emotional expression through the extreme sensation of heat—an experience that can be vividly felt by the reader.

In contrast, the second line— “While your heart is frigid-cold toward me”— introduces an opposing temperature-based image. The phrase frigid-cold evokes an intense freezing sensation, creating strong tactile imagery. The contrast between heat (burning) and cold (frigid-cold) produces a sharp emotional effect, illustrating the vast emotional gulf between the poet

and the one he loves. This imagery carries symbolic meaning, fire represents passion and sincerity, while coldness signifies rejection and indifference.

The line “My soul is sickened, my body debilitated” presents both physical and internal imagery that reinforces the poet’s suffering on bodily and spiritual levels. The reader is invited to envision a weakened body, a sickened soul, and a state of near paralysis caused by the burden of unrequited love. This imagery adds a concrete dimension to what is typically an inner emotional experience, visualizing it as a damaged physical condition.

Figurative Language

In the opening stanza of *My Heart is Aflame*, Al-Mutanabbi makes prominent use of imagery—particularly visual and tactile imagery—to intensify the emotional atmosphere of unrequited love. In the first line, “My heart is aflame, burning with love for you,” visual imagery (aflame) and thermal imagery (burning) vividly portray the poet’s inner state as if he were literally engulfed in flames. This imagery not only animates the fire metaphor, but also conveys the emotional intensity through an extreme sensation of heat—an experience that readers can almost feel.

In contrast, the second line, “While your heart is frigid-cold toward me,” evokes an opposing temperature-based image. The phrase frigid-cold stirs a strong tactile sensation of freezing cold, producing a chilling emotional effect. The contrast between the heat of burning and the coldness of frigid creates a stark emotional juxtaposition, illustrating the vast gulf between the poet and his beloved. This imagery carries symbolic weight: fire represents passion and sincerity, while coldness symbolizes rejection and emotional indifference.

In addition to metaphor, the line “Why should I conceal a love that has consumed my body” contains a clear instance of hyperbole. This expression is not meant to be interpreted literally; rather, it serves a rhetorical purpose—to illustrate the totality of the poet’s love and how it permeates his entire being. The hyperbole emphasizes not only the intensity of his suffering, but also affirms the authenticity and profound depth of his emotions. Through this exaggerated claim, the poet distinguishes his love from the insincere affections of others, elevating it as genuine and all-consuming.

Then, in the line “When pretenders fake the love of Saif-Al-Dawlah”, there is a subtle element of irony. The poet satirizes those who feign affection for the same figure, thereby implicitly positioning himself as the only sincere admirer. Here, figurative language functions as an evaluative tool, emphasizing the poet’s moral superiority over the deceivers. The irony

not only critiques the hypocrisy of others but also reinforces the authenticity and integrity of the poet's own devotion.

Concrete Words

In the opening stanza of *My Heart is Aflame*, Al-Mutanabbi employs several concrete words that enhance the emotional representation of the poet's experience with unrequited love. Lines such as "My heart is aflame" and "burning with love for you" utilize the concrete terms heart and burning to render emotion as something tangible and physically perceptible. The word heart, as a bodily organ, bridges the emotional (love) with the physical (the body), while burning evokes a thermal sensation that can be felt through the sense of touch. These words operate both visually and kinesthetically, grounding abstract emotions in concrete sensory experiences.

Another concrete word with strong symbolic power is "body" in the line "a love that has consumed my body." The poet does not merely express the depth of his love, but concretely illustrates the body as the site of emotional devastation. Here, the body becomes a physical vessel that visibly bears the impact of love, suggesting that emotion has tangible, destructive consequences. Similarly, the line "My soul is sickened, my body debilitated" employs two additional concrete terms that explicitly describe the body's condition. The words sickened and debilitated convey that the suffering caused by love results in real, bodily affliction. These expressions emphasize that the poet's emotional turmoil is not abstract or metaphorical alone, but has materialized into somatic symptoms—pain and weakness that can be felt and observed.

Words such as pretenders and bounties can also be classified as concrete, as they refer to real people and tangible objects, even though they are used within a symbolic context. Pretenders denote individuals who feign love, anchoring the abstract concept of insincerity in identifiable human figures. Meanwhile, bounties refer to things that can be concretely distributed—such as gifts, rewards, or honors, yet the term also carries abstract connotations, symbolizing recognition or appreciation. These concrete terms thus serve a dual function: grounding the poem in a physical reality while simultaneously enriching its symbolic and evaluative dimensions.

The Voice of a Loyal Praiser

I have been in your presence while rapiers sheathed
And gazed at you when swords blood-stained
And found you to be the handsomest of God's creation
Superb in manners, incomparable in character

When you charge an enemy and he escapes
You are the winner just the same
Albeit disappointing, such escape is yet a blessing
You have stricken great fear in the enemy's heart
A fear representing you, even in your absence
You have made your presence awe-inspiring
Far more than the combined power and prowess
Of your valorous knights
You make it a point to run after your enemies in hot pursuit
Depriving them of shelter; they run, but cannot hide
Whenever you target an army, before you it flees
You make after it with relentless chase
It is incumbent upon you to defeat the opponents in every battle
Nor should you feel ashamed if they run away
Rendering you incapable of subduing them
Victory is made sweet to you
Only when claymores and heads join in greeting
You are the fairest of all people, except in my case
You are the controversy, the opponent, and the judge combined

Diction

From the very opening line of this section, “I have been in your presence while rapiers sheathed / And gazed at you when swords blood-stained,” the diction employed draws heavily from the semantic field of warfare: rapiers, swords, and blood-stained. These word choices not only establish a heroic tone but also signal that the poet has been a direct witness to the valor of the praised figure—both in times of peace (sheathed) and in the midst of battle (blood-stained). This battlefield diction legitimizes the poet’s voice as that of a credible panegyrist, positioning him not as a distant admirer but as an engaged observer of the subject’s martial glory.

Words such as “the handsomest of God’s creation,” “superb in manners,” and “incomparable in character” reflect hyperbolic and evaluative diction. The poet is not merely praising the subject’s physical appearance, but also exalting his moral and ethical qualities. The term handsomest does more than denote physical attractiveness—it elevates the figure to the pinnacle of divine creation. These carefully chosen expressions construct an image of a person

who is flawless both outwardly and inwardly, embodying the idealized virtues celebrated in *madīh*, the Arabic tradition of panegyric poetry.

In the line “You are the winner just the same / Albeit disappointing, such escape is yet a blessing,” the words winner, blessing, and escape reflect a rhetorical redefinition of victory. Even when the enemy flees, it is framed not as a failure to conquer, but as a triumph rooted in fear—the enemy retreats not due to physical defeat, but out of terror inspired by the praised figure’s formidable reputation. The word blessing is employed with an ironic yet exalting tone, suggesting that what might conventionally be seen as a missed opportunity is, in fact, a testament to the subject’s terror-based prestige. This diction transforms the absence of direct combat into proof of symbolic domination, reinforcing the subject’s greatness and the poet’s skill in elevating perception through language.

This praise is further reinforced through diction such as “awe-inspiring,” “power,” “prowess,” and “valorous knights,” which collectively construct the image of Sayf al-Dawlah as a figure whose strength surpasses even that of his own warriors. These words elevate him not just as a military leader, but as a singular embodiment of martial excellence. Meanwhile, phrases like “relentless chase” and “depriving them of shelter” highlight his aggressive and tireless nature—traits that define a superior military commander. Through this carefully chosen diction, the poet amplifies the heroic aura of the subject, aligning him with ideals of fearlessness, domination, and unyielding pursuit.

The line “Victory is made sweet to you / Only when claymores and heads join in greeting” employs the words claymores and heads with powerful visual and symbolic force. This diction conveys that true victory, for the praised figure, is not achieved through ease or diplomacy, but through direct and brutal combat. The image of swords meeting heads evokes a visceral scene of battlefield confrontation, underscoring the values of courage, honor, and martial glory. It affirms that the subject finds meaning not in effortless triumph, but in the intensity and danger of personal engagement—a hallmark of heroic valor in classical Arabic panegyric tradition.

The climax of this section lies in the line “You are the controversy, the opponent, and the judge combined.” The diction—controversy, opponent, and judge—is metaphorical, yet lexically rich, signaling that the subject’s significance extends beyond the physical battlefield into the intellectual and ethical realms. He is portrayed as the center of debate (controversy), the force that challenges others (opponent), and the ultimate authority who delivers judgment (judge). Through this triadic metaphor, the poet presents the praised figure as a singular

embodiment of total authority—someone who simultaneously provokes, tests, and resolves. This line encapsulates the elevated stature of Sayf al-Dawlah, affirming his dominance not only in war, but also in discourse and moral governance.

Imagery

The opening line of this section, “I have been in your presence while rapiers sheathed / And gazed at you when swords blood-stained,” presents vivid visual and kinetic imagery. The reader is invited to envision the battlefield both before and after combat—sheathed swords signaling readiness and composure, while blood-stained swords symbolize bravery and triumph. This progression from stillness to action brings a dynamic quality to the scene, reinforcing the physical reality of war. Through such concrete visualizations, the poet transforms abstract praise into something tangible, portraying the praised figure not only as conceptually grand but also as a palpable and heroic presence within the landscape of warfare.

The line “You have stricken great fear in the enemy’s heart / A fear representing you, even in your absence” offers a form of visualized psychological imagery, portraying fear as something that can be implanted, shaped, and sustained—even without the physical presence of its source. This imagery transforms an internal emotion into an almost tangible force, reinforcing the idea that the subject’s presence is not merely physical but also symbolic and pervasive. It suggests a kind of aura of authority—an almost magical or legendary quality—that causes fear to persist beyond immediate confrontation. This elevates the praised figure to a level of mythic power, feared at a distance and remembered through the very emotion he inspires

Praise for Sayf al-Dawlah’s physical strength and leadership is further made concrete through kinetic imagery in the lines: “You make it a point to run after your enemies in hot pursuit / Depriving them of shelter; they run, but cannot hide.” This passage features strong kinesthetic imagery that conveys rapid motion, aggressive pursuit, and total battlefield domination. The subject’s movements become symbolic of power and agility, embodying not just physical prowess but also strategic superiority. His relentless chase signifies not only military excellence but also psychological dominance—asserting that his enemies are not merely defeated, but thoroughly overwhelmed, with no refuge from his reach.

The most striking visual imagery appears in the line: “Victory is made sweet to you / Only when claymores and heads join in greeting.” The vivid depiction of swords meeting heads is a form of graphic and dramatic imagery—characteristic of classical panegyric poetry, which

often highlights valor and violence as emblems of honor. Though intense, this imagery is not merely meant to shock; rather, it reinforces the subject's identity as a military leader who values true victory—earned through direct and brutal confrontation—over hollow or symbolic triumphs. It affirms that for Sayf al-Dawlah, honor is inseparable from the reality of the battlefield, where courage and bloodshed define legitimacy.

Figurative Language

One of the most prominent figures of speech in this section is metaphor. In the line “You have stricken great fear in the enemy's heart / A fear representing you, even in your absence,” fear is depicted as something that can be “implanted” and “represent” the subject. This metaphor strengthens the image of Sayf al-Dawlah as possessing an aura of power that extends beyond his physical presence—he becomes the very embodiment of fear itself. Thus, the metaphor functions not only to praise his military strength, but also to elevate his psychological and symbolic dominance. Sayf al-Dawlah is portrayed as a force whose influence lingers, commanding reverence and dread even from afar.

An example of hyperbole appears in the line “You are the fairest of all people, except in my case.” Here, the poet declares that the praised figure is the most handsome of all people—a deliberately exaggerated statement intended to underscore the depth of admiration. This hyperbole functions as a rhetorical strategy typical of classical panegyric poetry, where extreme praise serves to elevate the subject to a near-mythic status. The use of such overstatement reinforces the poet's reverence, signaling a level of devotion so intense that it transcends realism in favor of glorification.

In the line “You are the controversy, the opponent, and the judge combined,” there is a clear use of both paradox and structural metaphor. The praised figure is described as embodying seemingly contradictory roles—he is simultaneously the debate, the adversary, and the arbiter. This expression is not meant to be taken literally, but rather functions as a metaphor that encapsulates discursive power, intellectual sharpness, and moral authority—all unified within a single individual. Through this layered metaphor, Sayf al-Dawlah is portrayed as the central axis of the social and intellectual order, a figure whose presence shapes discourse, challenges others, and ultimately determines outcomes. It emphasizes his dominance not only in military terms, but as a totalizing force in both thought and governance.

On the other hand, personification is also evident in the line “Victory is made sweet to you / Only when claymores and heads join in greeting.” Here, victory is described as having a taste

(made sweet), and claymores and heads are portrayed as if capable of performing the human action of greeting. This personification enhances the poetic effect by imbuing abstract and inanimate elements with life and agency. It intensifies the militaristic atmosphere and reinforces the heroic tone, casting the brutal realities of battle in a dramatic, almost ceremonial light—where even violence is stylized as an honorable and meaningful encounter.

Concrete Words

In the line “And gazed at you when swords blood-stained,” the words swords and blood-stained create a direct and powerful physical image: bloodied swords as tangible evidence of bravery and victory. This imagery grounds the praise in concrete reality rather than abstract or purely metaphorical terms. The admiration expressed by the poet is not idealized from afar, but rooted in firsthand experience—what he has seen and witnessed. By presenting such visceral imagery, the poet reinforces the authenticity of his voice as a credible observer, and elevates the praised figure’s heroism through vivid, undeniable proof of combat and triumph.

Similarly, in the line “Victory is made sweet to you / Only when claymores and heads join in greeting,” the words claymores and heads construct a concrete, harsh, and dramatic image—yet one that is highly effective in shaping a narrative of valor. These word choices lend physical weight to the glorified notion of victory: it is not achieved through mere strategy or distant command, but through direct, visceral engagement on the battlefield. The collision of sword and body symbolizes the raw intensity of combat, underscoring that true honor and triumph, in the eyes of the poet and the praised figure, are earned through immediate, bodily confrontation.

Beyond the battlefield, concrete language is also employed to depict the psychological and social capacities of Sayf al-Dawlah. The line “You have stricken great fear in the enemy’s heart” uses the word heart in a concrete sense—not merely as a symbol of emotion, but as the literal seat of fear and influence. This grounds the psychological impact in the human body, emphasizing the depth and reach of the subject’s authority.

Likewise, the lines “You make it a point to run after your enemies in hot pursuit / Depriving them of shelter; they run, but cannot hide” contain concrete terms such as enemies and shelter, which evoke a very real and physical chase. These words suggest an unrelenting pursuit in actual space, where no refuge is left for the fleeing adversaries. The use of such concrete diction reinforces the image of Sayf al-Dawlah as a dominant figure whose power is not only symbolic but physically enacted and socially consequential.

The Voice of a Poet Asserting His Own Greatness

Let all present in this assembly know
That I am the greatest, treading the face of this earth
Even the blind man was able to see my verses
Even the deaf man was able to hear my words
I enjoy my sweet repose, not concerning myself with poetry
Whereas others burn the midnight oil, in endless literary disputes
Behold an ignorant man, deceived by my jovial manner
Unaware of my intentions
Until I unexpectedly pounce, hand and word, incapacitating him
When you see a lion bearing his canines
Never fancy him to be smiling
When a knight contrives to snuff out my life
I take away his own instead
Mounting a noble steed, its back inviolable
He runs with a rapid ambling gait
His hind legs moving as one leg, so do his front legs
He works in harmony with his rider's wishes
In a manner best suited for hand and foot
How often I strutted between two mighty armies
Smiting with a thin blade claymore
While the billows of death surged in full brawling roar
Swift steeds, dreary nights, and the desolate wasteland, all know me full well
As do the sword, the spear, the writing paper and the pen

Diction

The line “Let all present in this assembly know / That I am the greatest, treading the face of this earth” opens this section with assertive and absolute diction. The phrase the greatest and the expression treading the face of this earth reflect a direct and confident hyperbole. The poet does not merely compare himself to a specific individual, but to all of humanity—positioning himself above everyone. This is a bold form of self-expression, marked by unwavering self-assurance and pride. It exemplifies the classical Arabic poetic tradition of *fakhr* (boasting), where the poet

asserts personal superiority not as arrogance, but as a culturally valorized declaration of identity and worth.

The expression “Even the blind man was able to see my verses / Even the deaf man was able to hear my words” employs diction marked by sensory contrast—blind, deaf, see, and hear. This contrast intensifies the idea that Al-Mutanabbi’s poetic greatness transcends physical limitations: even those without the faculties of sight or hearing can perceive the power of his words. Such diction functions as a bold declaration of the poet’s linguistic mastery and the extraordinary impact of his work. It is a celebration of poetry’s capacity to move beyond the senses—an exaltation of language so potent, it becomes universally accessible, regardless of physical barriers.

Words such as “ignorant man,” “deceived,” and “unaware of my intentions” reflect diction that is attacking, satirical, and full of irony. The poet mocks those who underestimate him merely by judging his outward cheerfulness, while behind it lies the power of words and sharp strategic thinking. The word ignorant shows a harsh judgment toward an unworthy opponent.

The line “Until I unexpectedly pounce, hand and word, incapacitating him” combines physical diction (pounce, hand) and rhetorical diction (word) to show that the poet’s strength spans two dimensions: the body and language. This conveys the idea that poetry is a weapon, and that Al-Mutanabbi is not only a poet, but also an intellectual combatant. One of the most metaphorical and distinctive lines is: “When you see a lion bearing his canines / Never fancy him to be smiling.”

The words lion, canines, and smiling form a complex metaphor infused with strength and warning. This diction reveals that the poet likens himself to a lion—noble and dangerous—whose silence or stillness conceals latent threat. The word smiling is used ironically, suggesting that outward kindness is often misinterpreted.

One of the dominant visual images that appears is the depiction of the poet as a lion, as seen in the line “When you see a lion bearing his canines / Never fancy him to be smiling.” This image creates a vivid portrayal of hidden strength—a threat concealed beneath calmness. The poet likens himself to a wild beast, suggesting that his power is not always visible on the surface, but can erupt suddenly and incapacitate anyone.

The visual and kinesthetic imagery is further emphasized through the scene of the poet boldly walking between two great armies: “How often I strutted between two mighty armies / Smiting with a thin blade claymore.” This image creates a dramatic and courageous impression,

portraying the poet as a warrior standing at the frontlines of battle. The event is not only presented as a heroic memory, but also as a symbol of his supremacy—both in physical bravery and in his command over danger.

Kinesthetic imagery also appears subtly in the description of his horse: “Mounting a noble steed, its back inviolable / He runs with a rapid ambling gait...” The image reflects the harmony between rider and steed, and symbolically reinforces the poet’s position as a leader—one who can command great power with composure and grace.

Equally important, psychological and paradoxical imagery emerges in the statement: “Even the blind man was able to see my verses / Even the deaf man was able to hear my words.” This expression carries elements of irony and metaphor, while also illustrating the profound impact of the poet’s work. The poet is not merely asserting aesthetic superiority, but claiming a poetic power that transcends the sensory realm—reaching into spiritual and intellectual dimensions.

Figurative Language

One of the most striking figures of speech is the metaphor that portrays the poet as a lion. In the line “When you see a lion bearing his canines / Never fancy him to be smiling,” the poet depicts himself through the image of a powerful, calm, yet deadly beast. The exposed canines are not a smile, but a signal of threat. This metaphor is highly effective in asserting the poet’s identity as someone to be feared and never underestimated, serving as a symbol of power and majesty hidden beneath a composed exterior.

Hyperbole is also frequently used, particularly in the poet’s claims about the greatness of his poetry. The lines “Even the blind man was able to see my verses / Even the deaf man was able to hear my words” are clearly a deliberate exaggeration. By asserting that his works can penetrate sensory limitations, the poet reinforces the idea that his poetry possesses extraordinary power, independent of the physical condition of its readers or listeners. This hyperbole not only reflects the poet’s confidence but also implies a belief that his poetry holds universal and timeless qualities.

In addition, subtle personification can be observed in the lines: “Behold an ignorant man, deceived by my jovial manner / Unaware of my intentions / Until I unexpectedly pounce, hand and word, incapacitating him.” Here, the poet’s hand and word are depicted as active instruments of attack, as if they possess their own will and force. Words are not merely tools of communication, but weapons capable of incapacitating an opponent. This personification

highlights how language, in the hands of Al-Mutanabbi, assumes a destructive and authoritative dimension—demonstrating the real and formidable power of poetic expression.

Concrete Words

In the line “When you see a lion bearing his canines,” for example, the poet employs not only metaphor but also concrete imagery—using real, tangible objects such as the lion and its canines—to evoke a chilling impression of power. This is not an abstract symbolic portrayal, but a vividly visualizable image that conveys strength and latent danger with striking clarity.

Likewise, in the line “How often I strutted between two mighty armies / Smiting with a thin blade claymore,” the presence of armies and blade claymore does more than depict a battlefield—it also reinforces the poet’s position at the center of the action as a principal figure. The word claymore specifically refers to a long, heavy sword, offering a concrete impression of the weapon used while simultaneously emphasizing the poet’s physical strength and martial skill.

Words such as steed and its description in “He runs with a rapid ambling gait / His hind legs moving as one leg, so do his front legs,” reflect the poet’s effort to construct a factual and technical portrayal of his mount. The horse’s movement is not merely background detail, but an integral part of the poet’s self-representation—emphasizing that he is a skilled, disciplined figure, in harmony with natural power. This precise depiction reinforces the image of the poet as a master of both physical strength and poetic control.

Al-Mutanabbi does not limit himself to objects of war; he also includes items from the world of writing, such as writing paper and pen. The line “As do the sword, the spear, the writing paper and the pen” serves as a bridge between the two realms the poet commands: the physical world and the intellectual one. These concrete words reveal that Al-Mutanabbi’s influence extends not only to the battlefield but also to the literary domain he shapes through his writing. In this context, writing paper and pen are placed on equal footing with sword and spear, emphasizing that his poetry, too, is a deadly and decisive weapon.

CONCLUSION

Al-Mutanabbi’s “My Heart is Aflame” reveals the complexity of poetic expression characteristic of the classical Arabic literary tradition. Through a stylistic approach—specifically by analyzing diction, imagery, figurative language, and concrete words, this study

identifies three dominant voices within selected stanzas: the voice of a wounded lover, the voice of a panegyrist, and the voice of a poet asserting his pride (*fakhr*).

These voices do not merely function as expressions of emotion or praise; they also reflect the poet's identity as a rhetorically, socially, and morally empowered figure. Al-Mutanabbi's deliberate linguistic choices enhance the poem's emotional structure, presenting a fusion of tender love, admiration for a leader, and personal grandeur.

By integrating these stylistic elements, Al-Mutanabbi does more than compose poetry—he constructs a narrative of existence and authority as a great poet. This study affirms that a stylistic approach can serve as an effective tool for uncovering the layers of meaning embedded within a poem's linguistic structure, particularly in classical texts rich with symbolism and rhetoric.

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