

RESEARCH ARTICLE

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**Modern Algerian Poetry Criticism in the Works of Mohammed Nasser and
Mohammed Massaif**

Dr. Laadjal lakhal

Batna 1 University – Hadj Lakhdar, Algeria

Email: Laadjal.lakhal@univ-batna.dz

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ABSTRACT:

This article examines the contributions of Mohammed Nasser and Mohammed Massaif to the critique of modern Algerian poetry by tracing their methodological approaches, aesthetic visions, and roles in establishing a contemporary Algerian critical discourse. The article focuses on how Mohammed Nasser engages with modern poetry within a historical and contextual horizon that links artistic transformations to social and cultural changes.

The article also discusses Mohammed Nasser's classification of *Modern Algerian Poetry*, which highlights poetic trends, the characteristics of poetic language, and structural elements in the formation of poetic modernity. In addition, it examines Mohammed Massaif's perspective, as presented in his book *Chapters in Modern Algerian Literary Criticism*, on the role of criticism as an evaluative cognitive practice that seeks to transcend impressionism and construct a methodological reading of the poetic text, combining theoretical awareness with applied analysis.

The article concludes that there is a complementary relationship between the critical efforts of both scholars in tracing the development of modern Algerian poetry criticism.

Keywords:

Criticism, Algerian poetry, Mohammed Nasser, Mohammed Massaif, modernity.



Mohammed Massaif

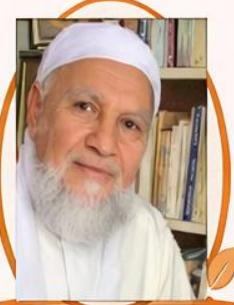
1923–1987

The Realistic Social Approach

Al-Qarawiyin University ✓

Al-Zaytuna University, Tunisia ✓

PhD, Cairo University ✓



Mohammed Nasser

1938–2025

The Historical Approach

Bachelor's degree, Cairo University ✓

PhD, University of Algiers ✓

Poetry Criticism

The Function of Poetry and Criticism

- ✓ A mirror reflecting reality
- ✓ Poetry distances itself from emotional excess and rhetorical discourse
- ✓ Evaluation and guidance
- ✓ Methodological and objective analysis

Linking literature to society

The Function of Poetry and Criticism

- ✓ Expressing collective consciousness
- ✓ Limiting poetic themes to specific purposes
- ✓ Commitment to the issues of the nation
- ✓ Presenting poetic models and analyzing them according to modern critical approaches

FIRST: MOHAMMED MASSAIF (1923–1987)

الدكتور محمد مصايف

فصول

في النقد الأدبي الجزائري الحديث



دراسات ومقالات

القوى حالها وانتفالها والقوى معاً
العاشر ١٩٩٠

Mohammed Massaif is regarded as one of the most prominent figures of realistic social criticism. He was born in the city of Maghnia, memorized the Qur'an in his early childhood, studied at Al-Qarawiyyin University, then at Al-Zaytuna University in Tunisia, and obtained a PhD in modern literary criticism from Cairo University in 1976. He worked as a professor of modern literary criticism at the Universities of Algiers and Adrar.

Massaif belongs to the first generation of critics who engaged with modern scientific methodologies in the aftermath of independence. He was distinguished by a broad cultural background and a deep familiarity with the Arab critical heritage, as well as with modern critical approaches.

Massaif was not detached from his social reality, which was gradually taking shape and striving for renewal in all aspects of life. He sought to approach literature from a social perspective that views literature as a social phenomenon emerging from society, expressing it, and addressing it. Since Algerian reality changed after independence, it became necessary for literature and critical thought to keep pace with these transformations. The concerns of a society that had previously struggled for freedom and basic livelihood shifted toward aspirations for progress and advancement. Consequently, the social approach appeared to be the most appropriate framework for critical analysis.

1. The Concept of Poetry in Mohammed Massaif's Thought

Massaif argues that literature should function as a mirror reflecting reality, and that poetry, as a creative text, must follow this orientation. He called for poetry to move away from emotional excess and rhetorical atmospheres toward a calm mode of expression, or what Mohammed Mandour termed “whispered poetry.”

2. The Concept of Criticism in Mohammed Massaif's Thought

Massaif defines criticism through three main functions:

- Evaluation and Guidance:**

Criticism, in his view, is a process that accompanies and supports literature. By identifying strengths and weaknesses, criticism helps writers refine their talent and develop their experience. The critic assists creative writers in improving their work without flattery or complacency.

- Linking Literature and Society:**

Massaif maintains that the creative text must reflect social reality, address its major issues, and express its concerns and aspirations. Accordingly, the critic should begin from this reality when analyzing and guiding creative works with objectivity.

- Methodological and Objective Analysis:**

As a proponent of the renewal movement, Massaif called for distancing criticism from impressionistic and purely subjective judgments. He emphasized the necessity of adopting a rigorous scientific method that examines content in terms of language and style, interprets the

text for readers without arbitrariness, and ultimately issues an objective artistic and social judgment.

3. The Concept of Commitment in Massaif's Thought

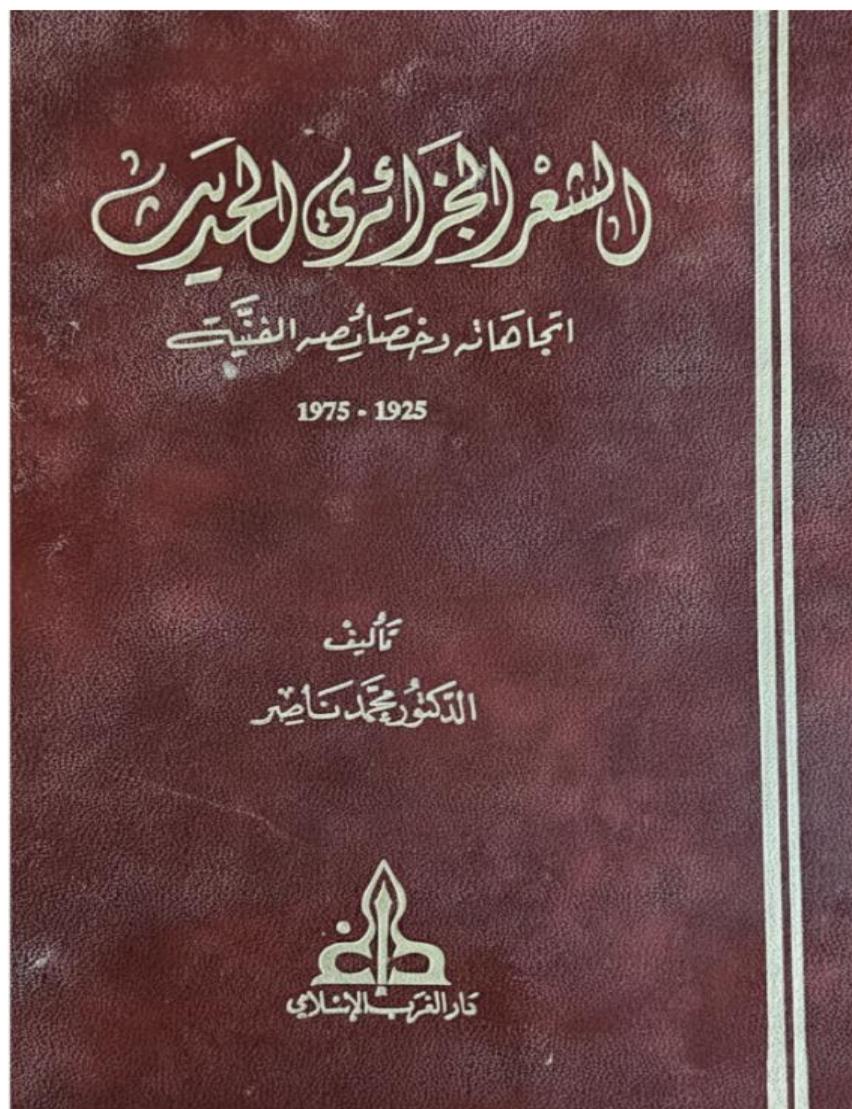
Massaif believes that an author's commitment to the issues of his or her society does not detract from the aesthetic value of art; on the contrary, it enhances its vitality and richness. The more sincere the creator's commitment, the stronger, more refined, and more aesthetically powerful the creative work becomes.

SECOND: MOHAMMED NASSER (1938–2025)

Mohammed Nasser is regarded as one of the leading figures of Algerian criticism who applied the historical method to the critique of poetry. He was among the first Algerian critics to free themselves from reliance on the traditional critical heritage and to approach poetry through a historical methodology that views the text as a link within a sequence of texts produced over time—texts that are shaped by historical events and, in turn, contribute to shaping them.

1. His Position on Reformist Poetry

Mohammed Nasser's perspective differs from that of his predecessors and contemporaries regarding reformist poetry. He argues that the tendency to express collective consciousness, to confine poetic themes to specific purposes, and to strip the poet of subjectivity diverted poetry from being a language



of emotion into a dry discourse performing a role that is not inherently its own, but rather the role of

sermons and moral exhortations. The critic thus seeks to clarify the reformist poet's failure to achieve balance and harmony between content and artistic form.¹

2. The Concept of Commitment in Mohammed Nasser's Thought

Mohammed Nasser maintains that commitment does not require adherence to the traditional poetic form. True commitment, in his view, lies in the poet's dedication to the causes of the nation and its faith, and in making poetry an art that expresses sincere emotion rather than serving external purposes or remaining bound by a traditional form that may hinder its natural and fluid flow.

3. The Concept of Poetry

Mohammed Nasser believes that poetry is not merely the observance of meter and rhyme; rather, it is a spirit of meanings that flows through the body of the poem as a reflection of the spirit of peoples. He asserts that poets embody the spirit of nations: if they remain faithful to it, nations advance; if they betray it, decline and decay ensue². Accordingly, the more sincerely poetry expresses the concerns of people, the more successful the poet becomes. In Nasser's view, the poet is nothing but a clear voice articulating the concerns of the nation, its harsh reality, and its aspirations for the future.

Both Mohammed Massaif and Mohammed Nasser contribute significantly to enriching Algerian poetic criticism and expanding the horizons of its interpretation. Despite differences in their experiences and critical practices, they share a common view of the poetic text as a structure rich in aesthetic and semantic dimensions.

Modern Algerian Poetry: Its Trends and Artistic Characteristics

Identification Card

Author	Mohammed Nasser
Edition	First edition 1985 and second edition 2006
Publishing House	Dar Al-Gharb Al-Islami
Country	Beirut
Type	Critical literary book
Field	Modern Algerian literature

Subject	A study of poetic trends in modern Algeria and an analysis of their artistic characteristics
Adopted Methodology	The historical descriptive analytical method
Period Studied	Modern Algerian poetry from the beginnings of the renaissance to the post-independence period
Language	Classical Arabic
Purpose of the Book	To clarify the development of modern poetry and link it to the historical and cultural context, with emphasis on its artistic features

It is considered that the book “**Modern Algerian Poetry: Its Trends and Artistic Characteristics**” is one of the most important studies in modern Algerian literary criticism. In it, Mohammed Nasser examines the development of Algerian poetry in the modern era in terms of trends and artistic styles of Algerian poets, while linking poetic works to their social, cultural, and historical contexts.

The most important contributions of the book:

- Defining the trends of modern Algerian poetry, analyzing them, and arranging them chronologically.
- Identifying the artistic characteristics of poetic texts.
- A critical reading that links texts to their historical and social contexts.
- Presenting poetic models and analyzing them according to modern critical approaches.

1- The emergence of modern Algerian poetry

Modern Algerian poetry was closely linked to the historical conditions experienced by Algeria, especially during the colonial period, as poetry at that time was a means of expressing popular consciousness and preserving national cultural identity.

2- Trends of modern Algerian poetry

Mohammed Massaif, in his criticism, adopts the method of presenting conflicting views about a work by first introducing the opposing opinion and then correcting and refining it ³. Mohammed Massaif did not leave either classical or modern poetry without delving into it, and he states: “Our Arabic

poetry has undergone great development since the beginning of the renaissance. It has developed in both form and content”⁴.

Mohammed Nasser divides modern Algerian poetry into four trends, relying on the historical context of each stage:

a- The traditional trend:

A conservative traditional trend dominated by vertical poetry, in which poets focused on ethical, religious, and national themes without innovation or renewal, adhering instead to traditional prosody and poetic imagery drawn from the ancient Arab heritage, such as pride and nature metaphors.

b- The romantic trend:

It emerged in the 1930s and 1940s, focusing on the self and emotion and influenced by Arab and Eastern sentiment. Mohammed Nasser discussed the transformation of poetry into a tool for expressing alienation and nostalgia for the homeland, with an emphasis on the poet's personal emotions such as love, rebellion, and hatred. Its artistic characteristics appear in poetic imagery, such as likening the homeland to a mother or a beloved.

c- The realist or revolutionary trend:

It was linked to national issues and made poetry a means of struggle and resistance, especially during the French colonial period. It represents the peak of the poetic phase according to Mohammed Nasser, and its artistic characteristics include national symbols such as the mountain as a symbol of steadfastness and resistance.

d- The modernist trend:

Free verse, which represents an attempt at genuine artistic renewal based on breaking traditional prosody and relying on pure meters rich in musical rhythm.

3- Artistic characteristics of Algerian poetry

a- Language: It moved from obscurity to simplicity, with the use of symbols.

b- Poetic imagery: It developed from the traditional method to a symbolic composite form.

c- Rhythm: Combining the preservation of traditional meter with rhythmic innovation in free verse.

d- Themes: Diverse, such as الحرية (freedom), الهوية (identity), الثورة (revolution), الوطن (the homeland), and الإنسان (the human being).

The book *Modern Algerian Poetry: Its Trends and Artistic Characteristics* by Mohammed Nasser presents a critical study that examines the development of modern Algerian poetry historically and culturally, highlighting its main artistic and intellectual trends from tradition to modernity, and emphasizing artistic transformations at the levels of language, imagery, and rhythm. The book thus becomes an essential reference for studying poetic transformations in Algeria due to its methodological clarity and scientific organization.

CONCLUSION:

We conclude that literary criticism of modern Algerian poetry has benefited from the effective integration of Mohammed Nasser's aesthetic historicism and Mohammed Massaif's analytical and theoretical methodology. This integration has contributed to a comprehensive critical vision that approaches the poetic text as both an artistic and a social phenomenon.

Their writings are distinguished by moving beyond superficial, impressionistic readings, becoming instead a foundational entry point for poetic modernity in Algeria within its historical, cultural, and social contexts.

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4. Tarfaya Amal Yahia Haj Emhamed, *Al-Wahat Journal for Research and Studies*, Volume 14, Issue 01, 2021.

FOOTNOTES:

¹ Tarfaya Amal Yahia Haj Emhamed, *Al-Wahat Journal for Research and Studies*, Volume 14, Issue 01, 2021, p. 859. An article published on the National Platform of Scientific Journals.

² Mohammed Nasser, *Algerian Poetry: Its Trends and Artistic Characteristics*, Dar Al-Gharb Al-Islami, Beirut, Lebanon, 1st edition, p. 33.

³ Khalaf Allah Ben Ali, The Critical Experience of Mohammed Massaif, Contemporary Studies Journal, Laboratory of Contemporary Critical and Literary Studies, University Center of Al-Wancheriss, Tissemsilt, Issue 01, Volume 03, January 2019, p. 45.

⁴ Mohammed Massaif, Studies in Criticism and Literature, National Publishing and Distribution Company, Algeria, 1981, p. 71.