

# Bias and Distinction in the Arabic Elegiac Poetry of Titanic

**Abdulmuneam Jabar Obaid<sup>a</sup>**, <sup>a</sup>Department of Arabic, College of Education, Ibn Rushd, University of Baghdad, Iraq, Email: [abdulmuneam.j@ircoedu.uobaghdad.edu.iq](mailto:abdulmuneam.j@ircoedu.uobaghdad.edu.iq)

The paper frames the two terms “tahayuz” (bias) and “tamayuz” (distinction) in literary criticism by introducing two corresponding concepts. The former is transferred from the field of sciences to the field of criticism, and the latter is given a specific concept, together with a practical application to rare Arabic poetry about the sinking of Titanic in the Atlantic Ocean. It presents negative and positive bias of poets, monitors distinction in this humanitarian poetry which is limitless and expressive of the humanitarianism of its poets, and also sheds light on the possibility that a given poet may bias in a certain poem and be distinct in another position.

**Keywords:** *Bias, Distinction, Titanic, Poetry, Elegy, Ship*

## Introduction

Poetry is generally considered a bias against the pure mental process which adopts logic and truth because it goes away from dealing with the real reasons and original essences in the perception of objects and acts and interaction with them. Poets were banished from Plato’s ideal city for a reason not far away from this one. Indeed, the degree of poeticism in poetry sometimes lies in hiding the real reasons and inventing other imaginative reasons which are satisfactory to the self which craves for new explanations other than those realistic explanations which are boring and tasteless. For the scientist, the sun goes down across half the Earth for scientific reasons. But for the poet, it becomes yellow due to the nice view it will part with. Thus, both the real and artistic reasons differ, and the basis and essence of poetry is bias and subjectivity against anything that would state the scientific and realistic truth behind every event.

It cannot be argued that the poet has to be unbiased in his poetry because poetry consists of imaginations and emotions within its components, and thus he cannot be prevented from bias.

Yet, there should be a regulation on this bias, in addition to taste, which is not distorting the fixed and entrenched truths which are recognised by rational people.

The distinction, in its broad sense, occurs inside the area of bias, avoiding truths and reason to an acceptable degree that does not arouse absurdity or disgust. However, it is still associated with, approximate or equal to the creativity of a certain type.

Since this global event is devoid of research work despite its magnitude and significance to mankind in general, the researcher responds to it without distinction in terms of colour, race, gender or nationality because the human concern is joint and emotions do not hinge on any differences between peoples. This event is the sinking of Titanic in the north of the Atlantic Ocean on 15 April 1912. The ship carried around 2224 passengers, of whom only 750 ones survived. Poets interacted to the event. Therefore, the poetry of this event is selected as an example in this paper for the practical application of the new two terms, and the investigation and disclosure of this poetry.

The paper is divided into an Introduction, and a theoretical background which deals with the two linguistic origins of bias and distinction and frames their two idiomatic concepts clarifies the poetry and elegiac of Titanic, in addition to two parts. Part one deals with bias, and part two deals with distinction in the elegiac of Titanic. Finally, the paper ends with a conclusion involving the most important points arrived at.

### **Theoretical Background: Bias, Distinction and Elegiac of Titanic**

Linguistically, “tahayuz” (bias) is a noun meaning meandering and fluctuation, and a person “yahuz (Al-Saffar, 2014), (possesses) a thing, i.e. money, etc. when he takes it to himself. It is the opposite of “neutral”, as mentioned in the Glorious Quran (Al-Amiri, 1996). Whoever turns his back to them on such a day unless swerving [as a strategy] for war or joining [another] company has certainly returned with anger [upon him] from Allah". Idiomatically, it is “alignment, inclination, preferring a decision or a choice without the proper justifications behind it (American, 1985). It is an act against mentality, conclusive evidence and objectivity in treatment. According to the researcher, it has no established concept in Arabic criticism. Therefore, the researcher transfers it from the field of pure sciences to the field of criticism, to be defined as any stand taken by a poet towards a certain person, issue or event, in which he is far away from the artistic truth which differs from the scientific truth but does not violate an important standard which is the artistic taste which regulates the poetic process according to reasonable and acceptable regulation.

As for “tamayuz” (distinction), linguistically it is a noun meaning individuality, separation and isolation, indicating ingenuity and intelligence, and is close to the concept of creativity.

In the field of criticism, it is artistic attributes, meanings and structures of a specific poet that makes him unique in dealing with a single issue in a single art where he is destined to be excellent over his peers despite their being equal in the tools and information which constitute to them equal viewpoints that need different reactions in which the distinct poet has the greatest amount of his distinction.

Critics did not use these two terms in the meaning assigned in this paper. Still, there are immature attempts from other disciplines, as in Dr. Ibrahim bin Abdulrahman al-Turki's article entitled "Al-Masafa Baina Tahayuz Wal Tamayuz" (The Distance Between Bias and Distinction) (Cronbach, 1970), on sports clubs. Al-Nayira bint Ghilab Al-Mutairi in her article entitled "Al-Tahayuz Wal Tamayuz" (Bias and Distinction) (Eisenman, Peter RH, 1993), on the functional distinction, and Riyadh Ismar in his article entitled "Al-Taleem Tamayuz Am Tahayuz" (Is Teaching A Bias Or A Distinction) (Glass & Stanley, 1977), on teaching, and Ahmed bin Abdulrahman Al-Arfaj in his article entitled "AL-Tahayuz Lishurutul Tamayuz" (Bias For The Conditions of Distinction)(8) on society distinction. An exclusion from these attempts is "Ishkalayat AL-Tahayuz Ruya Maarifiya Wa Daawa Lil Ijtihad" (The Problem of Bias: A Cognitive Vision and A Call for Diligence) which deals very extensively with bias in various sciences, including two studies of bias in literature and criticism "Ma Wara Al-Manhaj: Tahayuzat Al-Naqd Al-Adabi Al-Gharbi" (Paracurriculum: Biases of Western Literature Criticism) by Dr. Saad Abdulrahman Al-Bazi' I who deals with the Western approaches such as structuralism, formalism and deconstructionism and their Western bias due to their civilisation specificity, and believes that these approaches should not be taken as a general material applicable in every time and place, but their intellectual and civilisation content should be considered. Another attempt is "Ashkal Muqawamat Al-Tahayuz Fil Alam Al-Thalith" (Forms of Bias Resistance in the Third World) by Dr. Firyal Juburi Ghazul who studies some literary works for the purpose of resisting bias in the third world and clarify its mechanisms. She believes that there are examples that could express their humanitarian experience and thus proves that their writers are free from bias. However, their two studies do not frame the concept, as mentioned earlier.

The modern Arabic poetry which deals with the sinking of Titanic, sympathises with its victims and sheds light on the tragedy is little. The Arabic poets who deal with this topic are Ali Al-Sharqi, Muhammed Ridha Al-Shibibi, Ibrahim Muneeb Al-Bacha'chi, Rasheed Saleem Al-Qarawi, Muhammed Ali Tawfeeq, and Elia Abu Madhi.

### **Part One: Bias in the Elegiac on Titanic**

Bias in poetry often occurs in the dichotomies. Life and the whole universe are composed of a very large number of dichotomies which together comprise its active existence. A thing can be defined against its natural opposite, but for darkness, there would not be light. If there are

two counteracting things, i.e. one thing cancels the other, it is normal that the poet has a certain bias that may be matched by right and honesty and may be far away from it, which is often the case with poets. In its convergent dichotomies or the dichotomies connected by a link, the Titanic elegiac is biased a lot and has two biases, one negative and one positive, as follows:

**A. Negative Bias:** It is the bias that urges the poet to be inclined to a part of a dichotomy where he should be inclined to its opposing part, such as:

***Bias towards Death against Life:*** Some Titanic poets are biased for life against death in a moment close to sinking and death, and look for proverbs indicating patience to be placed as endings of their poems as if they have been patient and are seeking patience and comfort for the sunken ship. This is an illusion stemming from the mixture of elegy of ships and elegy of humans in whose eulogy elegy writers mention proverbs indicating patience and lamentation for his family, beloved ones and the elegy writer even if it contains passengers. In fact, a ship sinking on Atlantic Ocean floor does not need this. As if having patience is for them to overcome the tragedy. This is a bias for death against life which has been taken suddenly and shockingly, as in Ibrahim Muneeb Al-Bacha'chi's lines, mentioning a proverb:

Titanic! Never be saddened by a life  
That came to an end after such a bliss  
No life, no bliss shall go on forever  
Is there anything after life but extinction? (Ishkalayat AL-Tahayuz, 1996),

And in Elia Abu Madhi's lines, as if he is addressing a person he knows to reach him:

If you cannot be immortal, then live among us as a good footprint  
Because you are passing away just as your footprints,  
No matter how slowly, or proudly, your gait was (Al-Shibibi, 1994),

A poet may mention a proverb in the middle of a poem as if it is entertainment and comfort for a harsh poetry trip, as in the words of Rasheed Saleem Al-Khuri AL-Qarawi:

O Titanic, Lady of the Seas,  
So long was Fate threatening whosoever rule over something (Ishkalayat, 1970),

And the words of Muhammed Ridha Al-Shibibi:

O my soul, endure agony, may be the cause of your agony  
Is the cause of your joy? (Al-Shibibi, 1965),

***Bias for Steel Against Water/Ice:*** Some poets bias for steel on the basis that it is, in their opinion, stronger than water. They argue on the basis that water is a liquid which cannot confront steel and that since ice is derived from water, it is not strong enough to confront cast steel, as in the words of Rasheed Saleem Al-Khuri Al-Qarawi in which there is much affectation in his words when he uses the word (steel) in a poem whose rhyme sound is “dal” (*d* letter):

Two mountains collide  
Who has ever told you that ice may destroy steel?

And as in his words of Muhammed Ali Taqfiq:  
Senseless ice that surprises with Death everyone  
He came nigh, picked it up and turns it to steam! (Ali Al-Sharqi, 1990)

The bias for another reason as they already bias for the ground against water and call the Titanic a mountain, based on their ground view of something on the water. This is a complete illusion as the difference is great between "wood" (a stake) or "mountain" (mountain) and a ship in the sea whatever its size, as in the words of Muhammed Ali Tawfiq

Titanic, you are the greatest Mount whom  
They made walk on the occasion and it did!

The biggest bias which leads them to imagine that Titanic is a mountain is that it is a city. The first bias, where Titanic is a city, leads to another bias built on it, i.e. that it is a mountain. This latter bias leads to a third bias where the mountain/city steel is stronger than water/ice/iceberg, as in the words of Muhammed Ali Al-Sharqi:

O Iceberg, and you shall never find a harbor  
You destroyed all, how about the mount of steel? (15)

***Bias for Love and Hate:*** It is the bias in which a poet imagines deadly love which becomes hate whereas love remains surviving and vital. Namely, as long as the ship is still afloat, it is alive and surviving whether it is loved or not loved by the ocean/sea on which it is afloat. If it sinks and perishes, this does not call for justifying its death as being due to her love to her father (the sea) and his longing to embrace it in its depths. The good justification here is a negative bias for hate instead of love between the father (the ocean/sea) and the daughter (the ship), as in the words of Muhammed Ridha Al-Shibibi:

I swear with your father, O sea-daughter, your father who buried you

Have you seen with your eyes how his own destruction was?  
He did not swallow all your weight in his belly to tease you  
Never. He just was overjoyed in celebrating you!

**a. Positive Bias:** It is the bias that urges a poet to be inclined to one side of a dichotomy where ought to side with, such as:

1. Bias for Light against Darkness: Some Titanic poets have a proper bias where they compare light and darkness and see the light as the life that filled the ship which despises the full moon with the light of its electricity, and in the end, it was dark and sank on the ocean floor. The biased image is further deepened by the image in which the planets are still flowery, and the sea is shining up with light in the words of Ibrahim Muneeb Al-Bacha'chi:

She walked while the moon in the horizon  
Walking by her with the wings of light  
She swims despising the moon in pride  
Illuminated by the light of electricity  
But she then became landing at a bottom  
Of darkness, after all her glamour  
As the planets were all shining?  
And the face of the sea was replete with light

***Bias for the Teardrop Against Laughter:*** In this type, there is the bias for the teardrop in a situation of parting and despair of life and bidding farewell to the beloved ones. As in the words of Muhammed Ridha Al-Shibibi:

The best survival is their own  
For it was with tears, not with bloodshed  
Like peals that scatter away from her  
And then line up in a decent arrangement  
May be there was a couple waiting for the last kiss  
In which a smiling mouth come close to another one.

***Bias for Survival and Destruction:*** In this type, the bias is based on the assumption that there are enough lifeboats that prevent the destruction of the passengers. Therefore, the blame is placed on the manufacturing company for providing little lifeboats that can transport passengers from one ship to another rather than transport all the passengers in case of the ship sinks, as in the words of Rasheed Saleem Al-Khuri Al-Qarawi:

O Star Company, you committed a grand crime

That made the whiteness of your stars turn black  
Had not the number of life-boats been insufficient  
You would have saved lives and protected good creatures.

And Muhammed Ridha Al-Shabibi, in his words:

They did not provide many life-boats, to suffice for your passengers  
Or to suffice for you

***Bias for Mastery Against Slavery:*** In this type, poets bias for Titanic by depicting it as the lady and queen of all ships and boats running in the seas and oceans, as in the words of Ali Al-Sharqi:

O Queen of ships, may you be ransomed  
Had Fate so desired, with all other ships  
It seldom suffices for your grief, you mistress of all vessels,  
To be marked by half-mast flags.

And Muhammed Ridha Al-Shibibi, in his words:

O Queen of the Sea! Listen. You have some condolence in the land  
How many thrones of Kings have collapsed as well?  
Also, there is the aforementioned statement of Rasheed Saleem Al-Khuri Al-Qarawi.

## **Part Two: Distinction in the Elegiac of Titanic**

The distinction does not require the presence of two dichotomies because it is an emergence from a certain set that follows a certain pattern, and an element from among the set is distinct. Elia Abu Madhi expresses distinction when he dedicates the last third of his poem, occupying 12 lines, to the arrival of the news of Titanic sinking, where he focuses his art of expressing this issue in the best depiction, as in the following lines:

I did not forget the death of Titanic, and our own death as we heard the news  
Because of the overwhelming shock of the truth, we wished the telegram was lying  
We spent nights unable to enjoy sleep, and unable to find the water tasty  
My heart has acquired a crack just as the one your own, and it cannot be patched.

He focuses his attention on depicting the tragedy since the arrival of its news. He does not draw adjacent circles like a person drawing on water. Instead, he deals with a certain aspect and deepens his artistic transformation, as is done by Ali Al-Sharqi when he deals with one



passenger, who is the peace activist “Stead” who used to believe in the spirit world, as the onset of the poem states:

The moon reveals to us a plate of glass, broken on an edifice of ice  
Did the gleam break in reflection on it?  
Or it rose up by an image of Stead?

Muhammed Ridha Al-Shibibi takes a distinct approach by implanting humanitarian affiliation in his poetic texture when he expresses the indefiniteness of the affiliation and tragedy of Titanic, linking it to his homeland, Iraq, through Babylon. He uses two extended forms of complete masculine plural “Alimun, Ahlun” (*Worlds, Family*) which have no singular form, in his words:

You made all your people cry, not only the British isles  
All humans are your people for you they cried

.....

O Babylon of the grand sea, you enchanted us with magic  
That made us see Harut in Titanic.

Muhammed Ali Tawfiq expresses distinction by being unique in employing the iceberg, which is ice, which hit the ship and turned it into the fire. He expresses and excels in contradiction in terms of reversing the meaning as ice is supposed to freeze, rather than burn, the thing it touches, in his words:

The ice collider came closer and took it by surprise  
Then its abdomen from the ice has caught fire.

Ibrahim Muneeb Al-Bacha’chi expresses distinction by focusing on the nature surrounding the ship as if he is on board, seeing the sky, water, stars and ice. He mentions this view in a large area of his poetry texture which is dominated by words surrounding the ship from the sea, as in his words:

A blissful town that slides and walks with its own folk upon the water. ....  
As it disappeared from all land and can no longer see

## Conclusion

The paper concludes that the field of criticism derives most of its terminology by transferring them from the other sciences often and that the two terms “al-tahayuz” (bias) and “al-



tamayuz” (distinction) are applicable to any poetry dealing with a certain topic by a group of poets. Bias, for which the paper frames a critical term, is divided into negative and positive and serves to deal with various poetic issues. Likewise, distinction, which the paper frames its new concept, serves to deal with the uniqueness of a given poet among a group of poets dealing with one topic also. It also concludes that the humanitarian concern is joint and unlimited and that a human is a human whatever his colour and origin, gets affected and interacts with the global, especially humanitarian, events, as in the sinking of Titanic. Arab poets express teardrops, sorrows, comfort, proverbs and patience for persons they have never seen. It can also be concluded that a single incident stirs a deep feeling but expressing it differs as it is related to culture, talent, and capability of real interaction and mastery of tools. A group of poets also express negative and positive bias and express distinction as well. Both bias and distinction may be present in one poem, sometimes, if the two concepts framed in this paper are applicable.

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