A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF SEMITIC RHETORICAL ANALYSIS, HERMENEUTICS, AND BIBLICAL CRITICISM IN QUR'ANIC STUDIES: METHODOLOGICAL APPROACHES AND CHALLENGES

Aqdi Rofiq Asnawi[1], Manzilah[2]
[1-2] Universitas Darussalam Gontor, Indonesia
aqdi.asnawi@unida.gontor.ac.id

ABSTRACT

This article examines Semitic Rhetorical Analysis (SRA), Hermeneutics, and Biblical Criticism as applied methodologies for interpreting the Qur'an. Using a qualitative, library-based research approach, the study investigates how each method engages in textual analysis, highlighting their distinctive approaches and areas of intersection. The findings indicate that SRA, with its emphasis on symmetrical patterns and cohesive structures, aligns closely with the Qur'an's rhetorical framework, effectively revealing its intricate composition, as seen in Surah Al-Fajr. In contrast, Hermeneutics and Biblical Criticism- while effective for analyzing Biblical texts- face theological and methodological limitations when applied to the Qur'an due to fundamental differences in the formation and theological contexts of the sacred texts. The study advocates for an integrative methodology that respects the distinct nature of the Qur'anic text while fostering cross-methodological dialogue. This research contributes to the field of religious studies by promoting interfaith engagement and deepening scholarly understanding of the Qur'an within a rigorous comparative framework.

Keywords: *Semitic Rhetorical Analysis (SRA), Hermeneutics, Biblical Criticism, Qur'anic Studies, Comparative Methodology.*

ABSTRAK

Artikel ini menyajikan kajian komparatif mengenai Analisis Retorika Semitik atau *Semitic Rhetorical Analysis* (SRA), Hermeneutika, dan Kritik Alkitab sebagai metode yang diterapkan dalam interpretasi Al-Qur'an. Melalui pendekatan penelitian kualitatif berbasis studi kepustakaan, penelitian ini mengeksplorasi bagaimana masing-masing metode melakukan analisis teks, dengan menyoroti karakteristik metodologisnya serta titik temu di antara ketiganya. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa SRA, dengan fokus pada pola simetris dan struktur kohesif, memiliki keterkaitan yang erat dengan kerangka retoris Al-Qur'an, sehingga mampu mengungkap kompleksitas komposisinya, sebagaimana yang tampak dalam Surah Al-Fajr. Sebaliknya, Hermeneutika dan Kritik Alkitab, meskipun telah terbukti efektif dalam analisis teks Biblikal, menghadapi kendala metodologis dan teologis ketika diterapkan pada Al-Qur'an, mengingat adanya perbedaan dalam proses kodifikasi teks suci serta konteks teologisnya. Studi ini mengusulkan pendekatan metodologis yang bersifat integratif, yang tidak hanya mempertimbangkan karakteristik unik teks Al-Qur'an, tetapi juga mendorong pengembangan kajian lintas-metodologi dalam studi keislaman. Dengan demikian, penelitian ini berkontribusi terhadap wacana akademik dalam studi agama, dengan menfasilitasi dialog lintas agama serta memperdalam pemahaman terhadap Al-Qur'an dalam kerangka kajian komparatif yang berbasis akademik.

Kata Kunci: *Semitic Rhetorical Analysis (SRA), Hermeneutika, Kritik Alkitab, Kajian Al-Qur'an, Metodologi Komparatif.*

A. Introduction

In recent decades, the study of the Qur'an has expanded beyond traditional Islamic exegesis (tafsir) to incorporate methodologies rooted in Western scholarship. While Islamic approaches often emphasize theological and spiritual dimensions, Western methodologies tend to focus on critical analysis and historical context. However, Western scholarship is sometimes influenced by anti-Islamic polemical traditions, which can shape interpretations and reinforce orientalist representations.[1] As a result, these differing perspectives often lead to divergent understandings of Quranic verses.

Recent studies highlight the rise of social literary interpretations and hermeneutics, which differ in origin and methodology from classical tafsir. The social literary stream emphasizes the aesthetic and societal relevance of Qur'anic verses, while hermeneutics, rooted in Western traditions, raises concerns about scepticism towards the text.[2]

The growing interest in these approaches reflects a broader academic trend of exploring religious texts through interdisciplinary lenses, which has sparked both enthusiasm and critique. On one hand, methodologies like Semitic Rhetorical Analysis (SRA) and Biblical Criticism offer novel ways to understand the structure, literary devices, and historical contexts of the Qur'an. For example, SRA has been applied to highlight the Qur'an's intricate rhetorical patterns, demonstrating the depth of its literary composition[3] and aiding scholars in drawing comparisons with other texts.[4] Similarly, Biblical Criticism, adapted from studies of the Bible, provides tools for examining the historical and textual development of the Qur'an.[5]

However, these methodologies bring distinct interpretive challenges. Traditional Islamic scholarship views the Qur'an as a divinely revealed, inimitable text,[6] an approach that contrasts with the historical-critical methods often associated with Biblical Criticism, which assume human involvement in the text's compilation and transmission.[7] This foundational difference raises questions about the appropriateness of certain analytical methods for the Qur'an, as Western approaches may imply assumptions incompatible with Islamic theological principles.

This paper lies in the need to carefully evaluate how these methodologies impact the interpretation of the Qur'an, especially as they gain popularity among both Muslim and non-

---

[1] Sanaa Benmessaoud, Shehdeh Fareh, and Leila Abidi, 'Images of the Qur'an in Western Scholarship: A Socio-Narrative Approach', *Cogent Arts & Humanities*, 11.1 (2024), p. 2303183, doi:10.1080/23311983.2024.2303183.

[2] Selamat Bin Amir and others, 'The Dynamism of the Social Literary and Hermeneutical Streams in Qurʾanic Classical and Modern Exegesis Studies: A Critical Comparative Analysis', *Al-Bayan: Journal of Qur'an and Hadith Studies*, 22.2 (2024), pp. 190–215, doi:10.1163/22321969-20240150.

[3] Aqdi Rofiq Asnawi, Husein Aziz, and Achmad Murtafi Haris, 'Investigating Cohesiveness of QS. Al-Māʾidah: A Review on Michel Cuypers Implementation of Semitic Rhetorical Analysis (SRA)', *Jurnal Studi Ilmu-Ilmu Al-Qur'an Dan Hadis*, 23.1 (2022), pp. 49–68 (p. 49), doi:10.14421/qh.2022.2301-03.

[4] Michel Cuypers, 'Semitic Rhetoric as a Key to the Question of the Naẓm of the Qur'anic Text', *Journal of Qur'anic Studies*, 13.1 (2011), pp. 1–24, doi:10.3366/jqs.2011.0003.

[5] Angelika Neuwirth, 'Qurʾānic Studies and Historical-Critical Philology', *Philological Encounters*, 1.1–4 (2016), pp. 31–60, doi:10.1163/24519197-00000002.

[6] Frank Weigelt, 'Textgeschichte Des Korans', *Saeculum*, 72.1 (2022), pp. 131–84, doi:10.7788/saec.2022.72.1.131.

[7] Aqdi Rofiq Asnawi, 'Manāhij Naqd Al-Kitāb al-Muqaddas Fī al-Dirāsāt al-Qur'āniyyah', *Kalimah: Jurnal Studi Agama Dan Pemikiran Islam*, 18.2 (2020), p. 201, doi:10.21111/klm.v18i2.4870.

Muslim scholars. As Western academic approaches gain traction, Muslim scholars are faced with the challenge of discerning which methodologies can be harmonized with Islamic principles and which may need adaptation or critique. Some are increasingly recognizing the need to adapt methodologies in light of contemporary challenges, particularly in harmonizing Islamic principles with modern scientific and educational paradigms. Reformers like Muhammad Abduh and Fazlur Rahman have emphasized the integration of science with Islamic education, advocating for a multidisciplinary approach that incorporates social sciences and humanities into Islamic law and thought.[8] Furthermore, the application of scientific methods in interpreting Qur'anic texts has been highlighted as essential for addressing contemporary issues, suggesting that scholars must engage with and critique existing methodologies to ensure they align with Islamic values and the realities of modern society.[9]

A comparative study analysing SRA, Hermeneutics, and Biblical Criticism in the context of the Qur'an is crucial for establishing a nuanced understanding of these methodologies, allowing for a productive exchange of ideas while preserving the integrity of the Qur'anic text. By examining both the potential and limitations of these methods, this study aims to contribute to a more refined approach that fosters cross-cultural and interdisciplinary scholarship without compromising Islamic theological foundations.

In recent years, several scholars have explored Western methodologies in Qur'anic studies, each approach presenting insights and limitations that call for comparative analysis. Ilyas Supena's work on hermeneutics emphasizes intersubjectivity in Qur'anic interpretation through historical, sociological, and psychological lenses, underscoring the need for an integrated model that merges *tafsīr*, *ta'wīl*, and hermeneutics for a fuller understanding of Qur'anic meanings.[10] Elass and Bennoudi, meanwhile, advocate for an interpretative approach in Qur'an translation that balances traditional exegesis with contemporary hermeneutic methods, moving beyond purely Western frameworks to capture the Qur'an's distinctive interpretive traditions.[11]

In *New Approaches to Qur'anic Hermeneutics in the Muslim World*, editors Ismail Albayrak and Hakan Çoruh provide a diverse set of perspectives on modern Qur'anic interpretation. The collection features contributions from Muslim scholars globally, addressing topics like decolonization in Qur'anic studies, contextualist interpretations, and comparative theological methods, including cross-references with biblical narratives. These perspectives highlight the evolving discourse around themes such as transempirical exegesis in Said Nursi's *Risale-i Nur*, rhetorical analysis by Fādil al-Samarrā'ī, critiques of *naskh*,

---

[8] M. Amin Abdullah, 'Religion, Science, and Culture: An Integrated, Interconnected Paradigm of Science', *Al-Jami'ah: Journal of Islamic Studies*, 52.1 (2014), pp. 175–203, doi:10.14421/ajis.2014.521.175-203.

[9] Ahmad Thaqif Bin Ismail and Aqdi Rofiq Asnawi, 'Issues in Scientific Approach to Ḥadīth Commentary: A Critical Study of Selected Ḥadīths on Prophetic Medicine', *AL-BURHĀN: JOURNAL OF QUR'ĀN AND SUNNAH STUDIES*, 5.Special Issue 1 (2021), pp. 1–13.

[10] Ilyas Supena, 'Epistemology of Tafsīr, Ta'wīl, and Hermeneutics: Towards an Integrative Approach', *Journal of Islamic Thought and Civilization*, 14.1 (2024), pp. 121–36, doi:10.32350/jitc.141.08.

[11] Hicham Elass and Hanan Bennoudi, 'The Hermeneutic Positioning of the Translator in Quran Translation', *International Journal of Language and Literary Studies*, 5.2 (2023), pp. 61–80, doi:10.36892/ijlls.v5i2.1298.

and thematic interpretation in Indonesian *tafsir*, revealing how scholars adapt Islamic interpretive methods to contemporary concern.[12]

In his book section, Andrew O'Connor critically examines the applicability of biblical criticism techniques, such as form and redaction criticism, to Qur'anic studies. He observes that while the Qur'an engages with biblical figures and themes, it does so in ways that reflect unique theological purposes rather than mere replication. This intertextual engagement has sparked debates on whether Qur'anic references draw from written sources or oral traditions, with a consensus leaning toward the latter, which questions the direct adoption of biblical methodologies without adaptation.[13]

Additionally, recent critiques of Cuypers' Semitic Rhetorical Analysis (SRA), particularly regarding QS. Al-'Alaq, show both the potential of structural analysis for Qur'anic texts and the controversies arising from departures from traditional readings.[14]

Despite these valuable insights, there remains a gap in systematically comparing the effectiveness of SRA, Hermeneutics, and Biblical Criticism within Qur'anic studies. This study addresses this gap by evaluating these methodologies side-by-side, establishing a critical framework that explores their impact on understanding Qur'anic rhetoric and theology, while assessing their alignment with Islamic interpretive principles.

A qualitative research methodology with a library research approach was employed to conduct an in-depth analysis of Semitic Rhetorical Analysis (SRA), Hermeneutics, and Biblical Criticism as applied to the Qur'an. This qualitative approach goes beyond mere data collection; it involves interpreting and contextualizing the data within the framework of both the participants' experiences and the researcher's insights.[15] Library research can be understood as a systematic and structured process aimed at gathering, evaluating, and synthesizing information from a variety of library resources. It encourages students and researchers to engage deeply with texts, transforming initial curiosity into well-founded research projects. This method emphasizes critical thinking throughout all stages, from the formulation of research questions to the analysis of findings. As noted by George, effective library research requires careful consideration of the materials and promotes the generation of new insights and perspectives.[16]

By synthesizing insights from SRA, Hermeneutics, and Biblical Criticism, the study aims to illuminate the complexities of Qur'anic interpretation, exploring how these methodologies interact and enrich the understanding of the text. This approach reflects the notion that research is not merely about gathering information but involves critical thinking at every stage, from formulating research questions to analyzing and synthesizing findings.

---

[12] *New Approaches to Qur'anic Hermeneutics in the Muslim World*, ed. by Ismail Albayrak and Hakan Coruh (MDPI - Multidisciplinary Digital Publishing Institute, 2023), doi:10.3390/books978-3-0365-6707-5.

[13] Andrew O'Connor, 'The Bible and the Qur'an', in *Biblical Studies*, by Andrew O'Connor (Oxford University Press, 2024), doi:10.1093/obo/9780195393361-0322.

[14] Aqdi Rofiq Asnawi, 'Re-Analyzing the Structure of Surah al-"Alaq Using Semitic Rhetorical Analysis (SRA): A Critical Study on Cuypers" Methodology of Analyzing Qur'anic Structure', *QURANICA - International Journal of Quranic Research*, 13.1 (2021), pp. 165–94.

[15] John W. Creswell and Cheryl N. Poth, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches* (SAGE Publications, 2016).

[16] Mary W. George, *The Elements of Library Research: What Every Student Needs to Know*, *Princeton University Press* (Princeton University Press, 2008).

Ultimately, this research seeks to bridge traditional methodologies with contemporary interpretative frameworks, enhancing scholarly discourse in Qur'anic studies.

B. Result and Discussion

1. Definition of Semitic Rhetoric Analysis, Hermeneutics, and Biblical Criticism

Semitic rhetoric, according to Michel Cuypers is the skill or art of organizing speech or writing in Semitic languages. A text is said to follow Semitic Rhetoric if it contains a series of symmetrical structures at different levels of the text, based on certain principles, such as parallelism, mirror symmetry, and concentric structures.[17] This method emerged from the discoveries of Western scholars, beginning when Johann Albrecht Bengel (d. 1752) published his book *"Gnomon Novi Testamenti"* in 1742. In the book, he showed that the New Testament consists of several sections of text that form a pattern of demonstrated that the New Testament consists several sections of text that form a pattern of centered and reversed symmetry. Robert Lowth (1710-1787) supported this idea. In 1753, he published his book *"De sacra poesi Hebraeorum"*, where he explained that the Psalms- a collection of songs, prayers, and hymns found in Scripture, especially in the Old Testament- and other poetic texts in Scripture consist of parallel verses. These verses maintain a relationship based on synonyms, antonyms, or complementarity.[18]

Subsequently, it was discovered that these structural features exist not only within individual verses but also on a larger scale, between groups of verses, and even at the level of the entire book. This early theory became a cornerstone in the study of the Bible.[19] The introduction of these structural principles was initially known as "Biblical Rhetoric". Later, it became known as "Semitic Rhetoric" when scholars found that these principles also applied to ancient non-Biblical Semitic texts, such as Akkadian, Ugaritic, Pharaonic texts, and Arabic. Adnane Mokrani evaluated Michel Cuypers' work in studying the structure of Qur'ānic texts using the principles of Semitic rhetoric. This approach eventually led to the development of the term Semitic Rhetorical Analysis (SRA).[20]

This method of analysis begins by dividing the text into smaller parts and determining the symmetrical order that can be formed from those parts. A group of smaller parts that have been arranged are then ordered are combined with other groups to form a larger structure at a higher level. The symmetrical order is determined again at this level, and this process continues until the entire text has been analyzed.[21] The aim is to make the structure of the text more recognizable, leading to a deeper and clearer understanding of the messages it conveys.[22]

---

[17] Michel Cuypers, 'Semitic Rhetoric as a Key to the Question of the Naẓm of the Qur'anic Text', *Journal of Qur'anic Studies*, 3 (2011), p. 2.

[18] Cuypers, 'Semitic Rhetoric as a Key to the Question of the Naẓm of the Qur'anic Text', p. 3.

[19] Cuypers, 'Semitic Rhetoric as a Key to the Question of the Naẓm of the Qur'anic Text', p. 3.

[20] Aqdi Rofiq Asnawi, 'Koherensi Struktur Al-Qur'an Perspektif Semitic Rhetorical Analysis (SRA) Interpretasi Al-Qur'an Michel Cuypers' (Universitas Islam Negeri Sunan Ampel, 2022), p. 110.

[21] Aqdi Rofiq Asnawi, 'Penerapan Semitic Rhetorical Analysis (SRA) Pada Surah Al-Qiyamah', *Mutawatir: Jurnal Keilmuan Tafsir Hadith*, 8 (2018), p. 148.

[22] Martiyah, 'Struktur Surah Al-Najm Prespektif Semitic Rhetorical Analysis (SRA).' (UIN Walisongo, 2022), p. 22.

Hermeneutics, literally means "interpretation". Etymologically, the term *hermeneutics* comes from the Greek word *hermêneuin,* which means "to interpret". This term refers to Hermes, a mythological figure in Greek mythology (also known as Mercurius in Roman mythology). Some proponent of Hermeneutics connects Hermes with the Prophet Idris. In Greek mythology, Hermes is known as a god responsible for delivering messages from Gods to humans. From the Greek tradition, hermeneutics developed as a methodology of Biblical interpretation, which was later expanded by theologians and philosophers in the West as a general method of interpretation in the social sciences and humanities,[23] This approach has also been applied in contemporary life. Thus, hermeneutics is now a general method for understanding texts, not just limited to scripture.[24]

Farid Esack defines Hermeneutics as the science that seeks to explain how the understanding of an event in the past and a particular cultural context can have existential meaning in our current situation. It assumes that everyone comes to a text with his or her problems and expectations. Consequently, it is unreasonable to expect an interpreter to set aside their subjectivity and interpret the text without relying on their preconceived notions.[25]

In Hermeneutics, the text is considered an independent entity, separate from its author, the time of its creation, the cultural context of the author, and the culture that existed when the text was created. Since the text is written and uses language as its medium, the main focus is on the nature of language. As we know, language is a tool for communication to convey messages. Therefore, there is a connection between the 'means of delivery' and the 'content delivered'. The goal of this method is to understand the content of the message by interpreting the means of delivery, namely the text or written language.[26]

Therefore, the application of Hermeneutics in the interpretation of the Qur'an tends to view the text as a cultural (human) product and ignores aspects of things that are transcendent *(divine)*. Whitin the framework of Hermeneutics, the Qur'an cannot be seen as a revelation of God in word and meaning, as understood by the majority of Muslims. Instead, it is regarded as a cultural product or at least as a revelation from God that has been influenced by Arab culture, the context in which the revelation was given.[27]

For example, Nashr Hamid Abu Zaid, an Egyptian Muslim scholar whose thinking is heavily influenced by modern theories, including Hermeneutics, views the Qur'an as a "product of Arab culture" *(muntaj tsaqafi)*. He argues that he cannot interpret the Qur'an using Hermeneutics without by first downgrading its status from a revelation text to a humanized text. Abu Zaid asserts that the Qur'ān, as spoken by the Prophet Muhammad, is ordinary Arabic, understood by the Arabs of that time. Since language is a product of culture, he contends that the Arabic Qur'ān is also a product of Arab culture. This theory openly

---

[23] Abdurrahman Al-Baghdadi and Adian Husaini, *Hermeneutika danTafsir Al-Qur'an* (Gema Insani, 2007), p. 8.

[24] Muhammad Haekal Thoriq Syach, 'Hermeneutika Sebagai Metode Penafsiran (System of Interpretation)', *Academia*, 2024, p. 5.

[25] Farid Esack, *Membebaskan Yang Tertindas: Al-Qur'an, Liberalisme, Pluralisme*, trans. by Watung A Budiman (Mizan Media Utama, 2000), p. 83.

[26] Alam Tarlam, 'Hermeneutik dan Kritik Bible', *AL-KAINAH: Journal of Islamic Studies*, 1.2 (2022), pp. 103–18 (p. 110), doi:10.69698/jis.v1i2.16.

[27] Al-Baghdadi and Husaini, *Hermeneutika danTafsir Al-Qur'an*, p. 33.

states that Muhammad was the one who actually formulated the words of the Qur'an, placing him in the role of the "author" of the Qur'an.[28]

In Indonesia, the application of Hermeneutics in Qur'anic interpretation still raises pros and cons among Islamic scholars. Some of them totally reject Hermeneutics, such as Adian Husaini.[29] Others, such as Quraish Shihab, have the view that some Hermeneutic theories and methods can be used in understanding the messages of the Qur'an, as long as the Hermeneutics applied does not damage the nature of the Qur'an as God's revelation and considers Hermeneutics as an attempt to understand what He means according to the limits of human ability.[30]

Like Hermeneutics, the word "Bible" is also of Greek origin, later absorbed into various world languages through Latin or French. The word is the plural form of *"biblion"* or *"biblos"* which means "book." In its common form (with a small "b"), the term "bible" can also refer to a library or collection of books. Additionally, it can mean a book of authority, a work of literary excellence, a small sacred object, or even a stone grinding machine. Meanwhile, "Bible" with a large "B" refers specifically to a book containing the sacred writings of various religions, often called *"Holy Books"* or *"Scripture."*[31]

The term "bible" was used by both Jews and Christians. Although these two groups have a long history of conflict, they share a common scripture. Today, the Bible is understood to be the holy book of both Christians and Jews. However, there are differences in how these two religions interpret the same text, particularly regarding what Christians call *The Old Testament*. Jews reject the term *"Old Testament"* because it implies that God's covenant with them was replaced by the Old Testament with the coming Jesus, whom Christian's regard as the Savior. In contrast, Jews do not accept Jesus' claim as the Savior of mankind.[32]

In the absence of the original manuscripts of the *Biblical* texts,[33] the study of *Biblical Criticism* emerged, which focuses on the critical study of the sacred texts of the Bible. Scholars who specialize in this field analyze the content of these texts to assess their authenticity and match them to the original manuscripts. The discipline aims is to produce a scholarly assessment of these sacred writings, taking into account such things as where and when they were written, who the authors were, and the conditions surrounding the writing process that may have influenced the outcome. It also includes the study of the meaning of words, how they are used, their history and origins, and the changes they have undergone.[34]

Biblical Criticism methods fall into two main groups, namely *higher criticism* and *lower criticism.* Higher criticism focuses on all matters relating to the author of the original text, including studying the author's relationship to the time and place in which he lived, as

---

[28] Al-Baghdadi and Husaini, 34.

[29] Sahiron Syamsuddin, *Hermeneutika Dan Pengembangan Ulumul Quran* (Pesantren Nawesea Press, 2017), p. 1.

[30] Syamsuddin, *Hermeneutika Dan Pengembangan Ulumul Quran*, p. 6.

[31] Tarlam, 'Hermeneutik dan Kritik Bible', p. 107.

[32] Adian Husain, 'Problem Teks Bibel', p. 1 <http://www.insistnet.com>.

[33] Rūkid bin Ṣāliḥ al-Tammī Al-Najdī, *Al-Mu'assis Fī Naqd al-Kitāb al-Muqaddas* (Dar al-Fikr, 2010), p. 4.

[34] Al-Najdī, *Al-Mu'assis Fī Naqd al-Kitāb al-Muqaddas*, p. 7.

well as the manner, form, number, and purpose of his writings.[35] Low criticism is textual criticism relating to Scripture including all matters relating to the text itself. It examines how the text came to us, how it was transmitted, who the original author of the text was, who transmitted it to us, as well as the historical aspects of the text. It also examines the different types of manuscripts, and the differences between them, and attempts to identify contradictions within them.[36]

In summary, *lower criticism* focuses on establishing the original form of the text without assessing its veracity, while *higher criticism* evaluates the context, authority, and truth of claims in the Biblical text. Both are important parts of the critical study of the Bible but have different aims and approaches. However, the ultimate goal of both is to strive to reach the original text written by the early authors through the various manuscripts available. This goal is more difficult to achieve because the original texts have been lost, and the manuscripts are diverse and contradictory. The process of copying, adding, and subtracting occurs generally without any overall control.[37]

In addition to the two main groups mention above, there are derivative groups in the Biblical Criticism Method, including:

1. Literary Criticism

   The literary criticism method analyzes literary art forms from their text and writing style.[38]

2. Source Criticism

   This is the science that relates to the purpose for which the text was written and is included in historical criticism.[39]

3. Textual Criticism

   Textual criticism includes the mechanisms of how texts come to us and stages of development that are not tied to history.[40]

4. Form Criticism

   Form criticism looks at the oral sources of the author at the time of writing.[41]

5. Historical Criticism

   This method of criticism involves analyzing the historical context to understand the deeper meaning of the text.[42] It focuses on uncovering the historical realities that influenced the author of the text, taking into account the influence of the historical context on the text.[43]

6. Philological Criticism

---

[35] Al-Najdī, *Al-Mu'assis Fī Naqd al-Kitāb al-Muqaddas*, p. 8.
[36] Al-Najdī, *Al-Mu'assis Fī Naqd al-Kitāb al-Muqaddas*, p. 11.
[37] Al-Najdī, *Al-Mu'assis Fī Naqd al-Kitāb al-Muqaddas*, p. 11.
[38] Al-Najdī, *Al-Mu'assis Fī Naqd al-Kitāb al-Muqaddas*, p. 9.
[39] Al-Najdī, *Al-Mu'assis Fī Naqd al-Kitāb al-Muqaddas*, p. 11.
[40] Al-Najdī, *Al-Mu'assis Fī Naqd al-Kitāb al-Muqaddas*, p. 11.
[41] Al-Najdī, *Al-Mu'assis Fī Naqd al-Kitāb al-Muqaddas*, p. 11.
[42] Al-Najdī, *Al-Mu'assis Fī Naqd al-Kitāb al-Muqaddas*, p. 11.
[43] Sharif Hamid Sal, *Naqd Al-'Ahd al-Qadim* (Maktabah Madbuli, 2011), p. 219.

Philology involves the study of texts about the ancient civilization in which they were composed. This approach includes understanding the political, economic, social, and cultural developments of the society involved in the composition of the text.[44]

In addition to these methods, that are less common approaches, such as *Grammatical Criticism*, *Tradition Criticism*, *Structuralist Criticism*, and *Canonical Criticism.* The vast number of Biblical manuscripts, combined with differing opinions and contradictions in thought, as well as the many translations with unknown authors, presents significant challenges for Biblical scholars. This complexity necessitates the application of these various critical methods to study the Bible effectively.[45]

2. Comparison of Semitic Rhetorical Analysis (SRA), Hermeneutics, and Biblical Criticism Methods

These three methods were originally developed to study the Bible and have subsequently been applied to the study of the Qur'ān. In its application to the Qur'ān, Semitic Rhetorical Analysis, which focuses on analyzing structure and rhetoric in Semitic texts, seeks to uncover how language elements and stylistic feature interact to convey deeper meaning, especially in the context of ancient texts. According to Cuypers, Semitic Rhetorical Analysis is particularly well suited for analyzing the structure of Qur'ānic verses and chapters. It proves to be one of the most effective tools for discerning subtleties of textual harmony, breaking away from fragmentary readings that isolate individual verse from their broader context.[46]

Although the application of this Semitic Rhetoric method originated from Biblical studies and was used by orientalists, Cuypers research supports the harmony and authentically of the structure of verses and chapters in the Qur'ān.[47] Contrary to some orientalists and other Western scholars who wanted to bring down the Qur'ān by doubting its originality and rejecting the coherence between verses and chapters in the Qur'ān.[48] Cuypers also argues that Semitic Rhetorical Analysis (SRA) is very appropriate for analyzing the structure of Qur'ānic verses and chapters.[49] Because, the science of Munasabah, a branch of *'Ulumul Qur'an* which discusses the interrelationship between verses and chapters of the Qur'an, focuses on analyzing how one verse can explains or complement another verse or chapter. Therefore, these two methods- Semitic Rhetorical Analysis and Munasabah- can complement each other in demonstrating the interconnectedness in Qur'anic verses and chapters.

For example, at the beginning of surah al-Fajr verses 1-4, which were critized by orientalists such as Richard Bell, who claimed that the sequence of oaths at the beginning of this surah is not very intelligible, or well arranged, and does not lead up to any important

---

[44] Asnawi, "Manāhij Naqd Al-Kitāb al-Muqaddas Fī al-Dirāsāt al-Qur'āniyyah," 315.

[45] Asnawi, 'Manāhij Naqd Al-Kitāb al-Muqaddas Fī al-Dirāsāt al-Qur'āniyyah', p. 318.

[46] Aqdi Rofiq Asnawi and Idri, 'Examining Semitic Rhetoric A Qur'anic Sciences Perspective', *Jurnal Ushuluddin*, 28 (2020), p. 127.

[47] Asnawi and Idri, 'Examining Semitic Rhetoric A Qur'anic Sciences Perspective', p. 127.

[48] Asnawi, 'Koherensi Struktur Al-Qur'an Perspektif Semitic Rhetorical Analysis (SRA) Interpretasi Al-Qur'an Michel Cuypers', p. 12.

[49] Asnawi, 'Koherensi Struktur Al-Qur'an Perspektif Semitic Rhetorical Analysis (SRA) Interpretasi Al-Qur'an Michel Cuypers', p. 9.

statements.[50] However, Michel Cuypers in his book *A Quranic Apocalypse: A Reading of the Thirty-Three Last Sūrahs of the Qur'ān,* proves the relevance of verses 1-4 of surah al-Fajr by applying Semitic Rhetorical Analysis. Cuypers consolidated the series of oaths into a cohesive unit with one *piece* and three *members*, such as:

-1-2 By the **Dawn**	by the night of ten!
+ 3 For even and	odd!
-4 By night	**when it passes**!

The above verses have been the subject of countless interpretations by *mufassirs*. Cuypers quotes Al-Mawdudi as saying that the phrase *"By the even and the odd"* has thirty-three interpretations. He explains that these oaths must be understood in context. Since the point of the surah is to the just judgment of God regarding good and evil, these oaths should be interpreted as an attestation of the Divine Wisdom which rules all things with order and measure, in the alternation of day and night, the difference of things even and odd, or the divergence of destiny between the just and the impious. And what is above all important to note is that the oaths are sworn by contraries. What counts is not so much to know what lies behind these terms but to see a play of opposition. The ones here lead into the opposition between the destinies of the just (27–30) and the reprobate (6–26) that are evoked in the body of the text.[51]

In contrast, Hermeneutics has been rejected by many Muslim scholars. Hamid Fahmi Zarkasyi, founder of INSIST *(Institute for the Study of Islamic Thought and Civilization)* argues that applying Hermeneutic theory in Qur'anic interpretation is the same as desacralizing the Qur'anic text.[52] However, some figures such as Nasr Hamid Abu Zaid, Muhammad Arkoun, and others agree that Hermeneutics can be applied to the Qur'an. They argue that the contents of the Qur'an are no longer relevant to modern life, so they continue to reconstruct the contents of the Qur'an to fit the times. [53]

Hermeneutics is particularly suited for Biblival texts, as they are understood to be human compotitions with identifiable authors. Biblical texts often require Hermeneutics methods for interpretation.[54] Unlike the Qur'ān, which studies metaphysical matters believed in Islam, this approach is not suitable for understanding the Qur'ānic text because it is based on different belief principles.[55] The difference in textual reality between the Bibel and the Qur'ān also brings the consequence of differences in the methodology of interpretation.[56]

---

[50] Richard Bell, *The Qur'an Translated, with a Critical Re-Arrangement of the Surahs* (Edinburg: T. & T Clark, 1939), II, p. 654.

[51] Michel Cuypers, *A Quranic Apocalypse: A Reading of the Thirty-Three Last Sūrahs of the Qur'ān*, trans. by Jerry Ryan (Lockwood Press, 2018), p. 120.

[52] Hamid Fahmi Zarkasyi, *Misykat: Refleksi Tentang Westernisasi, Liberalisasi, Dan Islam*, 5th edn (INSISTS, 2021), p. 213.

[53] Sarah Busyra, 'Diskursus Hermeneutika dan Kritik Terhadap Studi Qur'an Kontemporer', *Transformatif*, 5.1 (2021), pp. 1–12 (p. 7), doi:10.23971/tf.v5i1.2690.

[54] Al-Baghdadi and Husaini, *Hermeneutika danTafsir Al-Qur'an*, p. 16.

[55] Busyra, 'Diskursus Hermeneutika dan Kritik Terhadap Studi Qur'an Kontemporer', p. 9.

[56] Al-Baghdadi and Husaini, *Hermeneutika danTafsir Al-Qur'an*, p. 16.

The application of the Hermeneutics method in interpreting surah al-Mumtahanah verse 10, regarding interfaith marriage in the book *Fiqh Lintas Agama* published by Paramadina states that:

> " The issue of non-Muslim men marrying Muslim women is an *ijtihadi* matter, bound by spesific contexts, including the historical context of Islamic propagation. At that time, the Muslims community was not as large as it is today, thus interfaith marriage was prohibited. Since this ruling is based on *ijtihad*, it is possible if new opinions to emerge, suggesting that Muslim women can marry non-Muslim men, or that interfaith marriages, in general, should be permitted, regardless of religion affiliation."[57]

The example shows how the Hermeneutic method can be applied in a way that makes legal rulings seem relative and subject to change. In Islam, however religion is a fundamental principle in marriage, and altering such rulings through the lens of Hermeneutic undermines the fixed nature of Islamic law. The Hermeneutics method lacks standardized methodologies, allowing for laws to be changed arbitrarily. Therefore, applying Hermeneutic to the Qur'an is inappropriate because the Qur'an is a divine revelation whose wording *(lafadz)* and meaning are from Allah, not human authorship.[58]

Likewise, the Biblical Criticism method, although it has some similarities with *'Ulumul Qur'an,* has fundamental differences. Theologian Bart D. Ehrman, a graduated of Moody Bible Institute and Princeton University, states in his book *"Lost Scriptures"* that scholars in his country realized they no longer had access to original manuscripts, they did not even have copies of the fifth manuscript.[59] Moreover, many of the Biblical texts have unknown authorship, and scholar have been unable to reliably attribute these works to any specific individuals.[60]

The original language of the Bibles is another important factor contributing to difficulties in interpretation.[61] Over time, various issues have arisen regarding the interpretation of these texts due to the complexity of their original languages. As a result, readers often find the scriptures difficult to comprehend, describing the text as incoherent, disorganized, and lacking clear structure. This disorganization can lead to instances where the first paragraph may be unrelated to the next. This issue stems from changes introduced over centuries of copying, often by different copyists. These copyists, either intentionally or unintentionally, might have adjusted the wording to fit their preferences. Errors, omissions, and misinterpretations, combined with an inability to fully grasp the context, further compounded these textual inconsistencies.[62]

If this process occurs many times-dozens or even hundreds of times-then there is no doubt that the remaining text will suffer significant damage and distortion. Therefore,

---

[57] Nurcholis Majid, *Fiqih Lintas Agama; Membangun Masyarakat Inklusif-Pluralis* (Yayasan Wakaf Paramadina, 2004), p. 164.

[58] Al-Baghdadi and Husaini, *Hermeneutika danTafsir Al-Qur'an*, p. 23.

[59] Dikenal sebagai "Pentaateukh" (Pentateuch), merujuk pada lima buku pertama dalam Alkitab Ibrani yang juga menjadi bagian dari Perjanjian Lama dalam Alkitab Kristen

[60] Al-Najdī, *Al-Mu'assis Fī Naqd al-Kitāb al-Muqaddas*, p. 9.

[61] Husain, 'Problem Teks Bibel', p. 3.

[62] Al-Najdī, *Al-Mu'assis Fī Naqd al-Kitāb al-Muqaddas*, p. 9.

inconsistencies in the text and incoherence are some of the clearest signs of ongoing changes and modifications. What the copyist added to the text may have been due to errors, omissions, lack of understanding, personal bias, or even bad intentions. It is therefore impossible to recover the original texts, and the texts available today, although old, are simply texts that have been modified with various changes and distortions, making them impossible to trust or rely on.[63]

Adian Husain states that the scientific study of the texts of the New Testament, which is growing rapidly among Christian theologians, as well as the historical and scientific facts contained in the Bibel, show that there are many problems encountered. The Qur'ān, on the other hand, retains its authenticity and does not face the problems that the Bibles do. The Qur'ān has its concept of text and method of interpretation that is different from the Bibel and other holy books.[64]

One orientalist, Arthur Jeffery, who applied bible criticism to the Qur'ān, claimed that the Qur'ān was the first Arabic book, for though there was earlier poetry it was not written down till much later, and some doubts have been raised as to the genuineness of what did get written down.[65] He concluded that the Qur'ān was a unique production of the Arabic language, as there was a lot of foreign origin of words in the Qur'ān.[66] Eventually publishing a book entitled *"Foreign Vocabulary of the Qur'an",* Jeffrey believes that the Qur'ān was written by the Prophet Muhammad, so learning the vocabulary in the Qur'ān is important to understand what the Prophet meant in the Qur'ān.[67]

As in the word "*Iram"* in surah al-Fajr (89/7), the city occupied by the people of 'Ad during the time of Prophet Hud As. In his book, Jeffrey argues that the suggests of itself that the word was a foreign one of which the exegetes could make nothing. Therefore, according to him, it is more appropriate to suggest the word *'Iram'* in Allah's words: 'Have you not seen how your Lord dealt with the people of 'Ad, (i.e.) *Iram* who had high buildings?' (QS. Al-Fajr: 6-7) is a borrowed word. Jeffrey also asserts that the different *qiraat* of the word *Iram* show that it is of Hebrew origin, saying, "The mufassirs cannot do anything about this because it is a foreign word."[68]

Thus, the Biblical Criticism method is inappropriate when applied to the Qur'ān, due to the fundamental differences in the history, nature of the texts, and religious views of these two scriptures. Moreover, the Qur'ānic text does not suffer from the same problems that the Biblical text does.[69] Therefore, the Biblical Criticism method is appropriate for the Bibles, as they are the work of several authors with different backgrounds. In this context, it cannot be considered a holy book in the sense commonly understood by the Christian community. When Western scholars, both orientalists, and Islamologists, analyze the Qur'ān, the application of *biblical criticism* is not appropriate in the methodology of Qur'ānic recitation.61 Although these three approaches complement each other in the effort to

---

[63] Al-Najdī, *Al-Mu'assis Fī Naqd al-Kitāb al-Muqaddas*, p. 9.
[64] Husain, 'Problem Teks Bibel', p. 9.
[65] Arthur Jeffery, *Foreign Vocabulary of the Qur'ān* (Oriental Institute, 1938), p.xiii.
[66] Jeffery, *Foreign Vocabulary of the Qur'ān*, p. 2.
[67] Jeffery, *Foreign Vocabulary of the Qur'ān*, p. 2.
[68] Jeffery, *Foreign Vocabulary of the Qur'ān*, p. 53.
[69] Husain, 'Problem Teks Bibel', p. 6.

understand the text, the differences in their methods and objectives create diversity in the way we analyze and interpret works of great religious and literary value.

C. Conclusion

This study highlights key insights regarding the application and critique of Semitic Rhetorical Analysis (SRA) in understanding the structure of the Qur'an. Originating from Biblical studies, SRA analyzes the Qur'anic text through a linguistic and cohesive lens, emphasizing symmetrical patterns such as concentric, parallel, and mirror structures. The findings demonstrate that textual coherence in the Qur'an can be observed through paired words or sentences forming broader structural units. This indicates that the Qur'anic composition is not merely linear but also exhibits parallel and concentric dimensions that enrich its meaning. In this regard, SRA offers valuable contributions to understanding the interconnectedness between verses and chapters.

Conversely, while Hermeneutics and Biblical Criticism have proven effective in Biblical studies, they encounter limitations when applied to the Qur'an due to differing theological foundations and canonical developments. The study underscores the importance of a critical and reflective approach in Qur'anic studies to navigate such interpretive challenges. Ultimately, the research affirms that SRA, as a more contextually appropriate analytical method, can deepen our understanding of the Qur'an while respecting the distinct nature of Islamic scripture. This approach is expected to foster further scholarly inquiry and promote constructive dialogue within the broader field of religious studies

References

Abdullah, M. Amin, 'Religion, Science, and Culture: An Integrated, Interconnected Paradigm of Science', *Al-Jami'ah: Journal of Islamic Studies*, 52.1 (2014), pp. 175–203, doi:10.14421/ajis.2014.521.175-203

Al-Baghdadi, Abdurrahman, and Adian Husaini, *Hermeneutika danTafsir Al-Qur'an* (Gema Insani, 2007)

Albayrak, Ismail, and Hakan Coruh, eds., *New Approaches to Qur'anic Hermeneutics in the Muslim World* (MDPI - Multidisciplinary Digital Publishing Institute, 2023), doi:10.3390/books978-3-0365-6707-5

Al-Najdī, Rūkid bin Ṣāliḥ al-Tammī, *Al-Mu'assis Fī Naqd al-Kitāb al-Muqaddas* (Dar al-Fikr, 2010)

Amir, Selamat Bin, and others, 'The Dynamism of the Social Literary and Hermeneutical Streams in Qurʾanic Classical and Modern Exegesis Studies: A Critical Comparative Analysis', *Al-Bayan: Journal of Qur'an and Hadith Studies*, 22.2 (2024), pp. 190–215, doi:10.1163/22321969-20240150

Asnawi, Aqdi Rofiq, 'Koherensi Struktur Al-Qur'an Perspektif Semitic Rhetorical Analysis (SRA) Interpretasi Al-Qur'an Michel Cuypers' (Universitas Islam Negeri Sunan Ampel, 2022)

——, 'Manāhij Naqd Al-Kitāb al-Muqaddas Fī al-Dirāsāt al-Qur'āniyyah', *Kalimah: Jurnal Studi Agama Dan Pemikiran Islam*, 18.2 (2020), p. 201, doi:10.21111/klm.v18i2.4870

——, 'Penerapan Semitic Rhetorical Analysis (SRA) Pada Surah Al-Qiyamah', *Mutawatir: Jurnal Keilmuan Tafsir Hadith*, 8 (2018)

——, 'Re-Analyzing the Structure of Surah al-"Alaq Using Semitic Rhetorical Analysis (SRA): A Critical Study on Cuypers" Methodology of Analyzing Qur'anic Structure', *QURANICA - International Journal of Quranic Research*, 13.1 (2021), pp. 165–94

Asnawi, Aqdi Rofiq, Husein Aziz, and Achmad Murtafi Haris, 'Investigating Cohesiveness of QS. Al-Mā'idah: A Review on Michel Cuypers Implementation of Semitic Rhetorical Analysis (SRA)', *Jurnal Studi Ilmu-Ilmu Al-Qur'an Dan Hadis*, 23.1 (2022), pp. 49–68, doi:10.14421/qh.2022.2301-03

Asnawi, Aqdi Rofiq, and Idri, 'Examining Semitic Rhetoric A Qur'anic Sciences Perspective', *Jurnal Ushuluddin*, 28 (2020)

Bell, Richard, *The Qur'an Translated, with a Critical Re-Arrangement of the Surahs* (Edinburg: T. & T Clark, 1939), II

Benmessaoud, Sanaa, Shehdeh Fareh, and Leila Abidi, 'Images of the Qur'an in Western Scholarship: A Socio-Narrative Approach', *Cogent Arts & Humanities*, 11.1 (2024), p. 2303183, doi:10.1080/23311983.2024.2303183

Busyra, Sarah, 'Diskursus Hermeneutika dan Kritik Terhadap Studi Qur'an Kontemporer', *Transformatif*, 5.1 (2021), pp. 1–12, doi:10.23971/tf.v5i1.2690

Creswell, John W., and Cheryl N. Poth, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches* (SAGE Publications, 2016)

Cuypers, Michel, *A Quranic Apocalypse: A Reading of the Thirty-Three Last Sūrahs of the Qur'ān*, trans. by Jerry Ryan (Lockwood Press, 2018)

——, 'Semitic Rhetoric as a Key to the Question of the Naẓm of the Qur'anic Text', *Journal of Qur'anic Studies*, 13.1 (2011), pp. 1–24, doi:10.3366/jqs.2011.0003

——, 'Semitic Rhetoric as a Key to the Question of the Naẓm of the Qur'anic Text', *Journal of Qur'anic Studies*, 3 (2011)

Elass, Hicham, and Hanan Bennoudi, 'The Hermeneutic Positioning of the Translator in Quran Translation', *International Journal of Language and Literary Studies*, 5.2 (2023), pp. 61–80, doi:10.36892/ijlls.v5i2.1298

Esack, Farid, *Membebaskan Yang Tertindas: Al-Qur'an, Liberalisme, Pluralisme*, trans. by Watung A Budiman (Mizan Media Utama, 2000)

George, Mary W., *The Elements of Library Research: What Every Student Needs to Know*, *Princeton University Press* (Princeton University Press, 2008)

Husain, Adian, 'Problem Teks Bibel' <http://www.insistnet.com>

Ismail, Ahmad Thaqif Bin, and Aqdi Rofiq Asnawi, 'Issues in Scientific Approach to Ḥadīth Commentary: A Critical Study of Selected Ḥadīths on Prophetic Medicine', *AL-BURHĀN: JOURNAL OF QURʾĀN AND SUNNAH STUDIES*, 5.Special Issue 1 (2021), pp. 1–13

Jeffery, Arthur, *Foreign Vocabulary of the Qur'ān* (Oriental Institute, 1938)

Majid, Nurcholis, *Fiqih Lintas Agama; Membangun Masyarakat Inklusif-Pluralis* (Yayasan Wakaf Paramadina, 2004)

Martiyah, 'Struktur Surah Al-Najm Prespektif Semitic Rhetorical Analysis (SRA).' (UIN Walisongo, 2022)

Neuwirth, Angelika, 'Qurʾānic Studies and Historical-Critical Philology', *Philological Encounters*, 1.1–4 (2016), pp. 31–60, doi:10.1163/24519197-00000002

O'Connor, Andrew, 'The Bible and the Qurʾan', in *Biblical Studies*, by Andrew O'Connor (Oxford University Press, 2024), doi:10.1093/obo/9780195393361-0322

Sal, Sharif Hamid, *Naqd Al-'Ahd al-Qadim* (Maktabah Madbuli, 2011)

Supena, Ilyas, 'Epistemology of Tafsīr, Ta'wīl, and Hermeneutics: Towards an Integrative Approach', *Journal of Islamic Thought and Civilization*, 14.1 (2024), pp. 121–36, doi:10.32350/jitc.141.08

Syach, Muhammad Haekal Thoriq, 'Hermeneutika Sebagai Metode Penafsiran (System of Interpretation)', *Academia*, 2024

Syamsuddin, Sahiron, *Hermeneutika Dan Pengembangan Ulumul Quran* (Pesantren Nawesea Press, 2017)

Tarlam, Alam, 'Hermeneutik dan Kritik Bible', *AL-KAINAH: Journal of Islamic Studies*, 1.2 (2022), pp. 103–18, doi:10.69698/jis.v1i2.16

Weigelt, Frank, 'Textgeschichte Des Korans', *Saeculum*, 72.1 (2022), pp. 131–84, doi:10.7788/saec.2022.72.1.131

Zarkasyi, Hamid Fahmi, *Misykat: Refleksi Tentang Westernisasi, Liberalisasi, Dan Islam*, 5th edn (INSISTS, 2021)