

The Ironic Utterance and the Problematic of Implicit Meaning in *Al-Manām al-Kabīr*: A Pragmatic Approach

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Received : 11/01/2026 ; Accepted : 25/06/2026 ; Published : 04/07/2026

Abstract

This study examines the phenomenon of ironic utterance in *Al-Manām al-Kabīr* by Ibn Muḥriz al-Wahrānī and seeks to uncover the pragmatic mechanisms through which implicit meaning is generated, employing a critical tool for the analysis of classical literary discourse. The study proceeds from the relationship between what is explicitly stated in the utterance and the meanings implicitly conveyed behind it. It draws upon a set of major pragmatic foundations, most notably Speech Act Theory as formulated by Searle, Grice's Cooperative Principle and Conversational Maxims, in addition to Sperber and Wilson's Relevance Theory, which conceives irony as an implicit echoic mention of a proposition manifested through the phenomenon of free indirect discourse.

The study adopts an analytical approach based on selected textual examples that progress from self-directed irony founded upon the collapse of the speaker's discourse about himself, to descriptive irony based on exaggeration, then to dialogic, polyphonic irony, and finally to irony that interweaves historical doctrinal criticism with contemporary social criticism through the technique of internal intertextuality. The study demonstrates that al-Wahrānī does not employ irony merely as a rhetorical device; rather, he elevates it to a complex discursive strategy that deconstructs authority and exposes social and political contradictions through the duality of explicit and implicit meaning.

Keywords: Ironic utterance; implicit meaning; pragmatics; *Al-Manām al-Kabīr*; internal intertextuality.

Introduction

Irony is among the most complex discursive phenomena in literature because it is constructed not upon direct meaning but rather upon suggestion, paradox, deviation, and the disruption of the reader's horizon of expectations. This makes it a distinctly pragmatic practice in which intentions, contexts, and mechanisms of influence and persuasion are intricately intertwined. An ironic text does not state directly what it means; instead, it operates through networks of implicit signs that call for a reader capable of decoding hidden meanings and grasping the intentional dimension of discourse.

Al-Manām al-Kabīr by Ibn Muḥriz al-Wahrānī stands out as one of the most remarkable satirical works of the Arabic literary heritage in its transgression of the dominant discursive conventions of its age. Its author employs the dream as a narrative framework that enables him to deliver a scathing critique of society, political authority, and the religious establishment, while simultaneously using implicit meaning as both a rhetorical shield and a critical instrument. His irony does not remain confined to the traditional rhetorical conception based on semantic inversion; rather, it develops into complex discursive strategies that require the reader to exert a heightened pragmatic effort in order to reach the intended meaning.

Although irony has occupied a prominent place in contemporary linguistic and pragmatic studies, its application as an analytical tool for the study of classical Arabic texts still lacks adequate exploration. Consequently, al-Wahrānī's text constitutes an exceptional model deserving of an in-depth pragmatic investigation. From this perspective, the present study raises the following research question:

How does al-Wahrānī construct ironic utterances in *Al-Manām al-Kabīr*, and what pragmatic mechanisms govern the production and interpretation of implicit meaning?

To answer this question, the study follows a three-part structure. The first section presents the theoretical framework governing the concept of ironic utterance from the perspectives of rhetoric and pragmatics. The second section provides a practical analysis of selected passages from *Al-Manām al-Kabīr*, arranged according to increasing pragmatic complexity. Finally, the third section identifies the strategic characteristics of irony in al-Wahrānī's discourse.

Body

Section One: The Ironic Utterance between Rhetoric and Pragmatics

1.1. The Conceptual Problem and the Multiplicity of Definitions

The concept of irony does not lend itself to a single comprehensive definition. Rather, the perspectives advanced on it vary according to the theoretical frameworks within which it has been examined. From classical Western rhetoric, which regarded irony as a trope, to Quintilian, who classified it among rhetorical figures, and Fontanier, who viewed it as an expressive device based on saying the opposite of what one thinks, the concept has gradually evolved toward broader definitions that extend beyond the individual sentence to encompass the discourse as a whole, as proposed by Molinier. This diversity reveals that irony is, above all, a contextual discursive phenomenon whose meanings emerge from the interaction between what is said and what is implied, as well as from the relationship between speaker, hearer, and the pragmatic context governing communication (Talha, 2025, pp. 364–365).

In the Arabic rhetorical and critical tradition, no comprehensive term was established to encompass the modern concept of irony in all its dimensions. Nevertheless, several rhetorical notions closely approximate it and share a number of its defining features, most notably sarcastic mockery (*tahakkum*), double entendre (*tawriyah*), intentional ambiguity (*īhām*), satire disguised as praise, and affirming praise through what resembles blame (Talha Mahmoud, 2025, pp. 366–369). The common denominator among these phenomena is the duality of meaning: an explicit, surface meaning accompanied by an implicit meaning that contradicts or reverses it. This duality constitutes an indigenous Arabic rhetorical gateway to understanding irony before it was systematically theorized within contemporary pragmatics.

As Ibn Ya'īsh observes:

"The proper field of language use is discourse, and language use takes shape only through the act of utterance known as discourse."

(Muwaffaq al-Dīn Ibn Ya'īsh, *Sharḥ al-Mufaṣṣal*, 'Ālam al-Kutub, Beirut, Vol. 1, p. 18).

This statement reflects a fundamental assumption in modern linguistics and pragmatics: language does not achieve its functional existence as an abstract system but only through discourse as a communicative practice. As a system of signs, language remains a theoretical potential until it is actualized through utterance, whereby abstract linguistic rules become communicative acts embedded within a specific speaker, hearer, and context.

From this perspective, utterance represents the transition from language to discourse. It is not merely the pronunciation of words but a performative act that connects the utterance to its conditions of production, the intentionality that governs it, and the communicative relationship established between the participants in discourse. Consequently, meaning is derived not solely from linguistic structure but from the interaction between the utterance and its pragmatic context.

This principle is particularly significant for the study of ironic discourse, since irony cannot be understood solely through lexical or syntactic meaning. Rather, it is generated during the act of utterance itself, where tone, context, shared assumptions, and conversational implicature interact to produce an implicit meaning that may directly contradict the literal one. Accordingly, the analysis of ironic discourse in *Al-Manām al-Kabīr* must begin with utterance as the framework through which the speaker's communicative intentions become accessible and through which ironic meaning is generated by context rather than by words alone.

Thus, discourse is not simply a collection of sentences but a communicative event grounded in the act of utterance. Consequently, the analysis of ironic discourse requires examining the relationship among the utterance, the speaker, the hearer, and the communicative context in order to uncover the mechanisms through which implicit meaning is produced and ironic effects are achieved. This perspective provides an appropriate methodological framework for interpreting *Al-Manām al-Kabīr*, where meaning extends beyond linguistic structure into the realm of pragmatics and interpretation.

2.1. Irony in the Light of Speech Act Theory

In his treatment of irony, John Searle distinguishes between sentence meaning and speaker's utterance meaning. He argues that in ironic discourse, the speaker utters a sentence while intending a meaning different from and indeed contrary to its literal interpretation. Accordingly, he defines the ironic utterance as one in which the speaker intends to convey the opposite of what is literally said, thereby making irony an instance of indirect speech acts, characterized by multiple illocutionary forces and layered meanings (Talha Mahmoud, p. 371).

What distinguishes irony from metaphor, within this framework, is that the interpretive process in irony obliges the hearer to pass first through the literal meaning of the sentence before moving toward its opposite. This two-stage interpretive process grants the speaker considerable discursive flexibility and enables him to evade direct accountability.

This is precisely the strategy employed by al-Wahrānī in *Al-Manām al-Kabīr*. His utterances are generally constructed upon two successive semantic layers: an apparent level that suggests praise, approval, or objective reporting, and a hidden level that conveys criticism, deconstruction, and ridicule. In doing so, he relies on both the overall context of the text and the cultural and cognitive background possessed by the implied reader, enabling the latter to move beyond the surface meaning toward the intended implicit interpretation.

3.1. Irony According to Grice

In his celebrated essay "Logic and Conversation," H. P. Grice formulated what he termed the Cooperative Principle, which refers to the principle upon which speakers rely to express their intentions while ensuring that hearers are able to interpret and understand them (ʿAbd al-Hādī b. Zāfir al-Shahrī, *Strategies of Ironic Discourse: A Pragmatic Linguistic Approach*, Dar Qayyim for Publishing and Distribution, Riyadh, 3rd ed., 2024).

This principle demonstrates that communication, in Grice's model, depends not merely upon the transmission of literal meanings but upon cooperation between speaker and hearer in constructing

meaning. Speakers do not explicitly articulate everything they intend to communicate; instead, they leave part of the intended meaning to be inferred by the hearer on the basis of context and shared knowledge. Consequently, the Cooperative Principle becomes a mechanism for explaining implicit meanings that are not directly encoded in linguistic structure.

However, this principle does not imply that discourse is devoid of deception, irony, or indirectness. On the contrary, speakers may deliberately violate one of the conversational maxims in order to generate an additional meaning a phenomenon Grice termed conversational implicature. Such violations do not undermine communication; rather, they prompt the hearer to search for the speaker's intended meaning behind the apparent breach.

The significance of this conception becomes especially evident in the study of ironic discourse in *Al-Manām al-Kabīr*. Ibn Muḥriz al-Wahrānī frequently violates the conversational maxims by expressing what appears to be praise while intending blame, or by employing exaggerated descriptions to produce ironic effects. Accordingly, ironic meaning cannot be derived from the words alone but emerges from the interaction between the utterance, the context, and the Cooperative Principle. This makes Grice's theory one of the most effective pragmatic tools for analyzing conversational implicature and uncovering the mechanisms through which irony is generated in the text.

Grice further argues that:

"Human linguistic communication is governed by the Cooperative Principle and its four conversational maxims: Quantity, Quality, Relation, and Manner. Within this framework, irony constitutes a clear violation of the Maxim of Quality, which requires that one's contribution be truthful and that one should not say what one believes to be false." (Talha Mahmoud, p. 370)

Thus, the ironic speaker deliberately produces an utterance whose literal content he knows to be false or inaccurate, thereby generating an implicit meaning that the hearer recognizes precisely because of the presumption of cooperation. In other words, the speaker does not violate communicative norms arbitrarily but strategically directs the hearer toward an alternative interpretation.

In *Al-Manām al-Kabīr*, al-Wahrānī repeatedly and systematically exemplifies this deliberate violation. He frequently attributes laudatory qualities to his characters or describes them in exaggerated terms that exceed the limits of credibility or contradict accepted social values. Such overstatement alerts the reader that the true communicative purpose transcends the literal meaning, pointing instead toward an implicit meaning that either contradicts or subverts the apparent one.

4.1. Irony in the Light of Relevance Theory

Sperber and Wilson propose an alternative account of irony that departs from Grice's approach. In their view, the interpretation of irony cannot be reduced to a simple shift from literal meaning to its opposite. Rather, it requires a deeper mechanism based on the distinction between the use of an expression and its mention or echo. Accordingly, the ironic utterance is essentially an interpretive expression through which the speaker echoes an idea or an utterance attributable to another person or to a particular viewpoint while simultaneously adopting an implicit attitude of rejection or ridicule toward it (Talha, p. 370). This mechanism is realized through what the two scholars describe as free indirect discourse, representing the fourth pattern of the implicit echoic mention of a proposition, whereby the distance between the speaker and the echoed idea remains deliberately open to interpretation.

This concept possesses remarkable explanatory power for the analysis of al-Wahrānī's discourse. Throughout *Al-Manām al-Kabīr*, al-Wahrānī frequently reproduces the statements of his characters and the attitudes prevailing in social reality, recasting them within the dream framework in such a way that he appears merely to narrate rather than endorse them. By maintaining this ironic distance, he exposes their falsity and internal contradictions.

Section Two: Applied Analysis

Mechanisms of Violating Conversational Principles in al-Wahrānī's Discourse

In *Al-Manām al-Kabīr*, al-Wahrānī does not employ irony as an incidental stylistic ornament; rather, he makes it the structural backbone of his entire discourse. This function is primarily realized through a systematic and deliberate violation of Gricean conversational principles, together with a productive exploitation of Sperber and Wilson's notion of echoic mention and the multiplicity of illocutionary forces within a single utterance, as described by Searle.

The selected textual examples demonstrate that these mechanisms do not operate independently. Instead, they interact within four progressively complex patterns, moving from irony generated by an isolated utterance to descriptive irony, then to dialogic polyphonic irony, and finally to a dual-level irony that links doctrinal criticism with contemporary social criticism through the technique of internal intertextuality.

2.2. Exposing Learning before Psychological Collapse

Al-Wahrānī writes, in the scene depicting the narrator's address to Mālik, the Keeper of Hell:

"O my master, O Māl, listen to two words from me for the sake of God Almighty.' He says: 'How can I listen to you when you have omitted a quarter of my name in your address?' You reply: 'By God, I did not omit it for any reason except tarḥīm (apocopation), which is permissible in vocative expressions according to all grammarians.' Yet you become distracted from this and say: 'I omitted it only because of the intensity of my terror and my inability to speak.'" (*Manāmāt al-Wahrānī wa-Maqāmātuḥu wa-Rasā'iluḥu*, p. 29.)

This passage is constructed as an argumentative structure that initially appears coherent but subsequently collapses from within through the speaker's own utterance. The narrator addresses Mālik, the Keeper of Hell, by using the shortened vocative "Yā Māl", then justifies this omission by claiming that it constitutes tarḥīm, "which is permissible in vocative expressions according to all grammarians." On the surface, this justification complies with Grice's Maxim of Quality, since it invokes an entirely correct grammatical rule.

The following sentence, however, immediately demolishes this justification:

"I omitted it only because of the intensity of my terror and my inability to speak."

Here, al-Wahrānī himself reveals that the true reason is not grammatical knowledge but psychological collapse and linguistic paralysis brought about by overwhelming fear. The grammatical citation thus shifts from being a genuine argument into an ironic echo, mocking the discourse of the learned grammarian who prides himself on linguistic mastery, only to invalidate his own argument moments later.

From Searle's perspective, this passage embodies multiple illocutionary forces within a single utterance: a request for attention, followed by an apology for a linguistic error, and finally an implicit confession of complete psychological collapse before the symbolic authority represented by Mālik. The rapid transition from the register of the confident scholar to that of the terrified supplicant generates the ironic implicature. The speaker is not mocking Mālik himself; rather, he ridicules the

fragility of human beings when confronted with ultimate authority and eschatological fear by exposing the contradiction between what he attempts to appear to be a confident scholar arguing through grammatical rules and what he truly is: a frightened man unable to utter coherent speech.

Al-Wahrānī further exploits the dream framework to achieve what is impossible in reality: addressing the Keeper of Hell with intimacy and familiarity ("O my master, O Māl"), as though he were an equal who could be addressed affectionately through abbreviation. This unexpected proximity between the speaker and an inherently terrifying figure constitutes a violation of the principle of relevance or appropriateness. The context of eschatological terror is fundamentally incompatible with the language of affection and familiarity. It is precisely this incongruity that activates the ironic implicit meaning, transforming the scene from one of pure dread into a comic human episode exposing mankind's helplessness even in the gravest circumstances.

Accordingly, the conversational implicature described by Grice is fully realized: the implicit meaning the fragility of human beings and the collapse of their learned pretensions in the face of divine punishment emerges not from any single statement alone, but from the interaction between what is explicitly said and what necessarily follows from it.

3.2. The Second Pattern: Hyperbolic Irony and the Exposure of Appearance

Al-Wahrānī writes in describing the petition of "the Painter":

"This is the petition of a painter who is thoroughly acquainted with every kind of pigment and with the application of gold, yet is utterly ignorant of the art of writing. Ostentatious by nature, he seeks to compensate for the deficiencies of his craft and conceal its defects through brilliant colors, dyed paper, and elegant gilding. Nevertheless, such petitions deserve to be addressed only to beloved singing girls and charming lesbians." (Manāmāt al-Wahrānī wa-Maqāmātuhu wa-Rasā'iluhu, p. 33.)

The passage begins with what appears to be a positive description: "well versed in all pigments and the application of gold," an apparent acknowledgment of professional skill. Yet this elaborate description is not intended as praise. Rather, it serves as a gradual rhetorical preparation designed to widen the gap between superficial craftsmanship and the true essence that such craftsmanship ought to serve namely, the art of writing.

The more extensively al-Wahrānī elaborates upon the painter's decorative abilities, the more devastating becomes the subsequent judgment:

"utterly ignorant of the art of writing."

The hyperbolic description of ornamentation thus generates the ironic implicature. The profusion of visual details does not express admiration but instead exposes their compensatory function; they merely conceal the defects of genuine literary competence.

From a Gricean perspective, the passage violates the Maxim of Quantity, since the extensive discussion of colors and gilding greatly exceeds what is functionally required to describe a written petition. This excessive description generates the conversational implicature that such extravagant ornamentation is itself the true object of ridicule.

From Searle's perspective, the same utterance simultaneously performs two illocutionary acts: an apparent act of description ("This is the petition...") and an implicit act of disparagement. This multiplicity of illocutionary force within a single utterance constitutes the essence of ironic speech.

The passage reaches its climax in the concluding sentence:

"Such petitions deserve to be addressed only to beloved singing girls and charming lesbians."

Here the irony shifts from criticizing the writer himself to criticizing the imagined recipients of such empty, ornamental discourse. The satire thus expands from an individual attack upon a particular painter into a broader critique of a social phenomenon: the glorification of external appearance at the expense of substance and the association of excessive ornamentation with frivolous amusement rather than with serious scholarship.

The passage further exploits the incongruity between the petition, as a literary genre conventionally associated with seriousness and official communication, and its ludicrously frivolous content. This constitutes a violation of contextual appropriateness that encapsulates al-Wahrānī's central rhetorical strategy: invoking serious discursive frameworks only to undermine them from within through content that exposes their presumed dignity as fundamentally hollow.

4.2. The Third Pattern: Dialogic Irony and the Structure of Progressive Disclosure

This pattern represents the most pragmatically sophisticated form encountered thus far. Here, irony emerges not through an isolated utterance but through the interaction of multiple voices. Structurally, it unfolds in three successive stages: grand introduction, restricted echoic mention, and finally explicit judgment accompanied by a practical resolution.

Stage One: Introduction and Magnification

Al-Wahrānī writes:

"One line written in fresh green, another in dazzling white, another in pure gold, upon crimson paper whose borders were embroidered with refined gold. 'Whose petition is this, O Zakī?' he asked. Zakī replied: 'It belongs to one of the leading men of Damascus, the most accomplished of people in decorating manuscripts, corrupting words through faulty writing, and recognizing every variety of fruits and produce...'" (Manāmāt al-Wahrānī wa-Maqāmātuhu wa-Rasā'iluhu, p. 34.)

The passage opens with a dense accumulation of visual imagery, surpassing even the previous example in descriptive intensity. The repeated structure "one line... another... another..." creates an almost poetic rhythm that imitates the elevated descriptive style characteristic of the maqāmāt and refined literary epistles. This formal resemblance to the discourse of literary magnificence prepares the reader to expect that the owner of such an exquisitely decorated document must be a person of exceptional distinction, thereby establishing a definite horizon of expectation.

The question,

"Whose petition is this, O Zakī?"

constitutes a pivotal pragmatic turning point. While superficially neutral, it initiates an argumentative sequence whose expected answer should correspond to the grandeur of the preceding description. The first reply offers three progressively arranged attributes from the highly esteemed skills of manuscript embellishment and textual correction to the comparatively trivial knowledge of fruits and produce. Although these qualities imitate the conventional style of biographical praise, they subtly empty that convention of its genuine scholarly substance, thereby violating both the Maxims of Quantity and Quality and preparing the reader for the subsequent disclosure of irony.

Stage Two: Restricted Echoic Mention

The text continues:

"Ibn Zurayq replied: 'I scarcely understand what you are saying, except that you have stripped this man of the virtues of the learned and instead attributed to him farming, foolishness, and madness. Yet this remains the petition of an insignificant man.'" (Manāmāt al-Wahrānī wa-Rasā'iluhu wa-Maqāmātuhu, p. 34.)

Ibn Zurayq's intervention perfectly illustrates what Sperber and Wilson describe as echoic mention. Rather than directly contradicting the previous speaker, he reformulates his words from a perspective that exposes what had remained implicit. The qualities that initially appeared to constitute praise ("the most accomplished of people...") are revealed to amount instead to a deprivation of scholarly excellence and an attribution of rusticity, foolishness, and insanity.

Thus, Ibn Zurayq uncovers the hidden implicature embedded within the original statement. Through this reinterpretation, the first speaker's utterance retrospectively becomes ironic. The irony reaches completion only through the intervention of a second voice that redirects its interpretation. This mechanism closely resembles Sperber and Wilson's model of free indirect discourse, in which one speaker's words themselves become the object of another speaker's ironic commentary.

Stage Three: Explicit Judgment and Practical Resolution

The passage concludes:

"Do you not see that people attained our company through eloquence and merit, whereas this man has reached us through children's toys and childish ornaments? If the words written in this petition were inscribed upon the thigh of a fat sheep and cast into the road, even the dogs would disdain to eat it!" Then he handed it to one of the attendants and said: 'Give it to your neighbor, the beverage seller, so that he may paste it upon the door of his shop to attract customers.'" (Manāmāt al-Wahrānī wa-Maqāmātuḥu wa-Rasā'iluḥu, pp. 34–35.)

Ibn Zurayq opens his response with an explicit binary comparison between eloquence and merit, representing the values of the learned community, and children's toys and childish ornaments, representing the values of the petition's author. In Sperber and Wilson's terminology, the discourse thus moves from implicit echoic mention to explicit evaluative judgment, completing the methodological progression from concealed meaning to overt interpretation.

The exaggerated image of "the thigh of a fat sheep" and "even the dogs would disdain to eat it" constitutes the climax of hyperbolic irony. This descending sequence of degradation stands in deliberate contrast to the luxurious visual magnificence with which the passage originally began, creating a comprehensive ironic symmetry.

From a Gricean perspective, this simile clearly violates the Maxim of Quality through deliberate exaggeration. No reader is expected literally to believe that dogs would refuse meat because words were written upon it. The obvious departure from factual reality generates the intended conversational implicature: not a literal prediction, but the strongest possible expression of contempt.

Finally, the concluding sentence provides the dramatic resolution. After verbally dismantling the petition, Ibn Zurayq translates his judgment into concrete action by discarding it and assigning it to an attendant, who is instructed to give it to a neighboring beverage seller to display as an advertising sign. Here a final layer of irony emerges: a document originally intended as an instrument of refined literary communication ultimately becomes nothing more than a commercial advertisement for a modest drinks shop. Thus, the highest form of ornamental display is reduced to one of the lowest forms of practical utility.

This conclusion realizes what may appropriately be termed functional irony: the petition, having failed in its original communicative purpose, finally discovers another function perfectly suited to its true nature ornament without substance. In this sense, poetic justice is achieved, as everything ultimately finds its proper place.

5.2. The Fourth Pattern: From Doctrinal Critique to Worldly Burlesque Tracing the Character of al-Naqqāsh across Two Contradictory Levels

This pattern represents the most sophisticated structure in the entire study. Here, al-Wahrānī re-employs a single character al-Naqqāsh within two completely contradictory contexts through the mechanism of internal intertextuality, thereby producing a dual-layered irony that simultaneously links historical-theological criticism with contemporary social satire.

Stage One: al-Naqqāsh as a Criterion of Divine Forgiveness (The Doctrinal Context)

Al-Wahrānī writes:

"Then we came upon a spacious circle surrounded by countless multitudes, all clapping and rejoicing, while four men stood in the middle dancing and playing until they collapsed upon the ground, breathless. We asked one of those present about this celebration and about the four who were dancing. He replied: 'As for the three, they are 'Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Muljam al-Murādī, Shimr ibn Dhī al-Jawshan al-Ḍabbābī, al-Ḥajjāj ibn Yūsuf al-Thaqafī, and the great elder Abū Murrah, Iblīs the greatest criminals among all creation and among this community. As for the joy that distracted them from anticipating punishment and carried them away with delight, despite their former composure, nobility of spirit, and steadfastness, it was their hope in God's mercy after having despaired of it because of the enormity of their crimes. Their hope was strengthened only because God Almighty had, on that very day, forgiven the jurist al-Mujīr and al-Muhadhdhab al-Naqqāsh.'" (Manāmāt al-Wahrānī wa-Maqāmātuḥu wa-Rasā'iluḥu, p. 35.)

This passage draws upon a body of shared cultural knowledge between al-Wahrānī and his audience. The four figures mentioned Ibn Muljam (the assassin of 'Alī), Shimr (the killer of al-Ḥusayn, the Prophet's grandson), al-Ḥajjāj (the notorious tyrant renowned for bloodshed), and Iblīs (the embodiment of absolute evil) collectively represent the highest degree of religious and political wickedness within the Islamic imagination. Their invocation immediately activates deeply ingrained assumptions in the reader, who associates these names with horror, condemnation, and perpetual damnation.

The fundamental irony of the scene lies in the complete reversal of these expectations. These terrifying figures are presented not in torment but in a scene of jubilant dancing, applause, and celebration. The sharp incongruity between the participants symbols of absolute evil and their festive actions constitutes a profound violation of contextual appropriateness, exceeding the incongruities observed in the previous patterns. Here, the incompatibility concerns not merely speech and context, but the complete mismatch between identity and behavior.

Al-Wahrānī again employs the delayed-revelation technique previously observed in the third pattern. The narrative first presents the puzzling spectacle of four men dancing, postponing the disclosure of their identities through an intervening question. This delay intensifies interpretive suspense, so that when the answer finally arrives, the effect is doubled: neither the action nor the actors could have been anticipated.

The explanation offered for their joy

"their hope in God's mercy after despairing of it"

is, on the surface, perfectly consistent with Islamic doctrine concerning the boundlessness of divine mercy and therefore appears to comply with Grice's Maxim of Quality. Yet irony here operates on two interconnected levels.

The first level satirizes the condemned figures themselves by portraying them as ordinary sinners celebrating the possibility of salvation.

The second, and far more profound, level directs irony toward the discourse of universal forgiveness itself. This deeper irony is triggered by the final statement:

"Their hopes were strengthened because God Almighty had forgiven al-Mujīr the jurist and al-Muhadhhab al-Naqqāsh."

The implied comparison is unmistakable: if God has forgiven these contemporary figures, then Iblīs and his companions naturally conclude that their own chances of forgiveness must be even greater. This apparently logical inference, voiced by the demonic characters themselves, completely redirects the satire. No longer are Iblīs and his companions its principal targets; paradoxically, they become the standard against which contemporary scholars are measured. In the dream's ironic logic, the conduct of al-Mujīr and al-Naqqāsh appears so reprehensible that even Satan and history's most infamous murderers derive hope from their example.

From Searle's perspective, the final statement performs two simultaneous illocutionary acts. On the surface, it offers a theological explanation; implicitly, however, it performs an even more forceful act of satire through inverted comparison, whereby contemporary religious scholars become the benchmark against which the decline of moral values is measured, to the point that the archetypes of absolute evil find renewed hope because of them.

Stage Two: al-Naqqāsh as a Trivial Debtor (The Worldly Context)

Al-Wahrānī continues:

"Then Abū al-Majd ibn Abī al-Ḥakam said: 'And those ten dinars that al-Naqqāsh owes you to whom will you entrust them? Hurry after him before he enters Paradise, for you will never see him again!' So I rose and ran at full speed, while you followed behind me, until I reached a great gathering of angels and human beings. They looked toward me saying: 'Here he comes!' I mingled with the crowd and pushed my way to the front, where I beheld a mighty and awe-inspiring angel whose mere gaze caused skins to shudder and souls to recoil." (Manāmāt al-Wahrānī wa-Maqāmātuhu wa-Rasā'iluhu, p. 37.)

This passage derives its full ironic force from its internal intertextual relationship with the previous episode through the recurring figure of al-Naqqāsh. Whereas al-Muhadhhab al-Naqqāsh had previously appeared as an example of one forgiven on the Day of Judgment within an elevated theological context, he now reappears merely as a debtor pursued over ten dinars before entering Paradise.

This abrupt transition from divine forgiveness and eternal bliss to the petty pursuit of a minor financial debt constitutes a striking violation of contextual appropriateness at the highest possible level. Standing at the gates of Paradise, surrounded by angels, one naturally expects discourse befitting the solemnity of the occasion. Instead, the conversation descends to the level of mundane commercial transactions. This incongruity forms the essence of the irony: worldly triviality violently intrudes upon the eschatological realm in one of its most ridiculous manifestations petty financial concern.

Abū al-Majd's question

"And those ten dinars that al-Naqqāsh owes you to whom will you entrust them?"

contains an illocutionary force far stronger than its interrogative form suggests. It completely rearranges the hierarchy of values at the decisive existential moment, making the recovery of a modest

debt the highest possible priority and thereby provoking the narrator to pursue the debtor with frantic haste.

This exaggeration of the importance of a trivial debt, juxtaposed with the relative trivialization of entry into Paradise itself, constitutes another violation of Grice's Maxim of Quality. Here the violation does not arise through factual falsehood but through assigning supreme value to something that no coherent moral system would consider paramount. The resulting contradiction between the values explicitly professed by religion and those implicitly enacted by the characters generates the ironic conversational implicature.

The expression:

"I ran at full speed"

marks the stylistic nadir intentionally cultivated by al-Wahrānī. The vivid, colloquial physicality of the phrase is inserted into one of the most solemn scenes of the afterlife, transforming the narrator into a comic figure rushing with the greed and anxiety of an impatient creditor at the most exalted of moments.

Similarly, the announcement

"Here he comes!"

echoes the solemn formulas traditionally used to welcome great personages or decisive historical events. The assembled multitude reinforces this expectation. Yet the reader already knows that the awaited figure is nothing more than a creditor chasing ten dinars. The grandeur of the anticipation is therefore ironically redirected toward an utterly insignificant objective. This discrepancy between collective expectation and actual reality perfectly illustrates Sperber and Wilson's concept of echoic mention: the expression retains all the resonances of solemn expectation while being deployed in a context that simultaneously ridicules both itself and its protagonist.

The passage concludes with the narrator's arrival before

"a mighty and awe-inspiring angel whose mere gaze caused skins to shudder and souls to recoil."

This majestic description abruptly restores the atmosphere of eschatological terror after the preceding comic descent. The rapid oscillation between burlesque and sublime registers, without any transitional mediation, exemplifies al-Wahrānī's characteristic refusal to allow the reader to remain within a single emotional register. The very instability between seriousness and comedy becomes itself an instrument of irony.

Taken together, the two appearances of al-Naqqāsh demonstrate how al-Wahrānī reuses a single textual element within two radically different contexts one theological and elevated, the other worldly and trivial. Through this strategy of internal intertextuality, he constructs a double-directed satire aimed simultaneously at notorious historical figures and at his own contemporaries. Rather than relying upon overt falsehood or simple exaggeration, he produces irony by relocating otherwise appropriate forms of discourse doctrinal in the first episode, ceremonial in the second into contexts that expose the absurdity of lived reality.

6.2. A Progressive Development in the Employment of Ironic Utterance

The four textual models examined above reveal a systematic progression in al-Wahrānī's use of ironic utterance.

The first pattern (Mālik) represents self-directed irony, emerging entirely within the speaker's own utterance.

The second pattern (the Painter) exemplifies descriptive irony, generated through the distance between narrator and subject by means of hyperbolic description.

The third pattern (Zakī and Ibn Zurayq) illustrates dialogic irony, requiring the intervention of a second voice that retrospectively reinterprets the first speaker's words.

Finally, the fourth pattern (al-Naqqāsh) embodies the highest level of pragmatic complexity. Here, a single textual element is redeployed across two entirely contradictory contexts through the technique of internal intertextuality, transforming irony from a localized phenomenon confined to an isolated utterance or dialogue into a comprehensive structural principle governing the relationships among widely separated parts of the text.

This progression across the four patterns reveals not only the diversity of the pragmatic mechanisms activated by al-Wahrānī but also his implicit awareness of the sophisticated workings of irony. His practice clearly transcends spontaneous stylistic ornamentation and instead reflects a carefully constructed discursive strategy operating at the level of the text as an integrated whole.

Section Three: The Characteristics of Ironic Utterance in al-Wahrānī as a Discursive Strategy

1.3. From Stylistic Device to Discursive Strategy

In *Al-Manām al-Kabīr*, the ironic utterance transcends the limits of a localized stylistic phenomenon associated with individual rhetorical figures to become a comprehensive discursive strategy governing the architecture of the text from beginning to end. From a pragmatic perspective, this distinction is fundamental, for a discursive strategy implies the deliberate and systematic deployment of a range of linguistic and pragmatic mechanisms to achieve a specific communicative purpose that extends beyond the literal meanings of individual utterances.

The examples analyzed in the previous section clearly demonstrate this progressive development: from self-revealing irony within a single utterance (Pattern One), to descriptive hyperbole (Pattern Two), to dialogic polyphony (Pattern Three), and finally to structural intertextuality linking distant textual units (Pattern Four). This progression reveals that irony in al-Wahrānī is not a fixed rhetorical technique mechanically repeated throughout the text; rather, it constitutes a dynamic system of graduated mechanisms adapted to the communicative context and rhetorical purpose of each passage.

Accordingly, the ironic utterance in al-Wahrānī's discourse may be characterized by four principal strategic features.

First: Comprehensiveness

Irony in *Al-Manām al-Kabīr* is not confined to a single object or discursive level. Instead, it simultaneously encompasses multiple domains: political authority (al-Ḥajjāj), the religious establishment (al-Faqīh al-Mujīr), the social order (the Painter and al-Naqqāsh), and prevailing ethical values such as concepts of forgiveness and merit.

As demonstrated most clearly in the fourth pattern, this comprehensiveness consists not merely in addressing multiple themes but in interweaving distinct levels of criticism. Religious critique through the notion of divine forgiveness becomes social criticism directed toward the conduct of al-Faqīh al-Mujīr and al-Naqqāsh, while the apparently individual criticism of the Painter expands into a broader critique of a society that privileges appearance over substance. This interconnectedness renders the work closer to systematic critical discourse than to literature intended merely for amusement.

Second: Deliberate Implicitness

Al-Wahrānī manages implicit meaning with remarkable precision and intentionality. Rather than expressing his criticism openly, he embeds it within the utterance itself, allowing the text to sustain two simultaneous readings: a literal reading that remains within the boundaries of safety, and an interpretive reading that uncovers its genuine critical force.

This strategy reaches its highest degree of sophistication in the fourth pattern. Al-Wahrānī never explicitly condemns either al-Faqīh al-Mujīr or al-Muhadhdhab al-Naqqāsh. Instead, he leaves the reader to infer the criticism from the comparative logic established by the narrative itself specifically, the jubilant celebration of Iblīs and his companions upon hearing of their forgiveness. The reader alone arrives at the shocking implication concerning these two contemporary figures.

Such carefully calculated implicitness serves not merely as protection from political or religious authority; it constitutes an essential component of the text's aesthetic and critical power, transforming the reader from a passive recipient into an active participant in the production of meaning.

Third: The Dream Space as a Pragmatic Mechanism

Within the text, the dream functions as far more than a narrative framework; it becomes a pragmatic mechanism that legitimizes ironic utterance and enables it to transcend the communicative restrictions governing ordinary waking discourse.

Statements that could never be uttered directly within everyday reality such as depicting Iblīs rejoicing over the forgiveness of contemporary figures or addressing Mālik, the Keeper of Hell, with warmth and familiarity become entirely possible within dream discourse.

Al-Wahrānī thus exploits the pragmatic structure of the dream with remarkable ingenuity. The dream expands the possibilities of ironic utterance, intensifies its critical capacity, and permits, as demonstrated particularly in the fourth pattern, the coexistence of two apparently incompatible registers: the terrifying eschatological and the comic worldly. Their coexistence within a single scene never violates the internal coherence of the narrative because the dream itself authorizes precisely such extraordinary juxtapositions.

Fourth: Internal Intertextuality as a Pragmatic Mechanism Linking Discursive Levels

The analysis of the fourth pattern reveals a mechanism that did not appear with equal clarity in the preceding examples: the repeated deployment of a single textual element the character of al-Naqqāsh within two widely separated contexts, thereby producing a meaning that arises not from either context individually but from the relationship established between them.

This mechanism, which may appropriately be termed internal intertextuality or structural echo, expands Sperber and Wilson's concept of echoic mention beyond the limits of the individual utterance or dialogue to encompass the entire textual structure. The second episode concerning al-Naqqāsh's debt echoes the earlier episode of his forgiveness, retrospectively redirecting its interpretation in much the same way that Ibn Zurayq reinterprets the first speaker's words in the third pattern, though here on the broader scale of two complete narrative scenes.

2.3. al-Wahrānī as a Reader of Reality through the Mechanisms of Ironic Utterance

The pragmatic analysis of Al-Manām al-Kabīr demonstrates that al-Wahrānī performs, through ironic utterance, a profound epistemological and critical act that extends well beyond the conventional functions of entertainment or satire.

His discourse offers an implicit yet penetrating critique of the political, social, and religious realities of his age, revealing an acute awareness of their structural contradictions and dismantling

them from within through the deliberate violation of conversational principles and the strategic exploitation of implicit meaning.

In this sense, al-Wahrānī represents a distinctive model of the critical intellectual who mobilizes the pragmatic resources of language from the self-collapse of the utterance, to descriptive hyperbole, dialogic polyphony, and finally structural intertextuality as instruments of resistance and deconstruction within a cultural environment that offered little opportunity for direct confrontation.

This study has reached several principal conclusions, which may be summarized as follows.

First, the ironic utterance in *Al-Manām al-Kabīr* constitutes a complex pragmatic phenomenon that extends beyond the traditional rhetorical conception founded upon the opposition between literal and contrary meanings. Instead, it operates as a comprehensive discursive strategy governing both the structure of the text and its interpretation.

Second, the three major pragmatic approaches complement one another in explaining al-Wahrānī's ironic discourse. Searle's Speech Act Theory reveals the multiplicity of illocutionary forces embedded within al-Wahrānī's utterances; Grice's Cooperative Principle explains the deliberate violation of conversational maxims and the conversational implicatures thereby generated; while Sperber and Wilson's Relevance Theory, particularly their distinction between use and mention, provides the most effective framework for explaining how readers move from the explicit layer of the utterance to its implicit meaning.

Third, the selected textual examples demonstrate a clear progression in the complexity of ironic mechanisms: from self-directed irony generated within a single utterance (the scene with Mālik), to descriptive irony founded upon hyperbole (the Painter's petition), to dialogic polyphonic irony (the exchange between Zakī and Ibn Zurayq), and finally to dual-level irony based upon internal intertextuality linking widely separated episodes (the two appearances of al-Naqqāsh). This progression further suggests that Sperber and Wilson's theory of echoic mention may be extended from the level of the individual utterance to that of the overall textual structure.

Fourth, the dream space in al-Wahrānī's work performs a central pragmatic function by legitimizing ironic utterance, expanding the scope of implicit meaning, and enabling the integration of two otherwise incompatible registers the terrifying and the comic within a single narrative scene without compromising the text's internal coherence. Consequently, the dream should be regarded not merely as a narrative frame but as a fundamental structural principle.

Fifth, this study demonstrates that the corpus of classical Arabic literature offers exceptionally rich material for pragmatic analysis and that al-Wahrānī's text, in particular, constitutes an outstanding example of the deployment of ironic utterance as an instrument of criticism and resistance within a complex cultural and political environment. Through a carefully integrated system of pragmatic techniques, his discourse transcends spontaneous rhetorical ornamentation to achieve the level of a highly sophisticated and coherent discursive strategy.

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