THE POET’S SELF-IMAGE VERSUS AUTHORITY IN ARABIC POETRY: BETWEEN CLASSICAL AND MODERN

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By

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ABSTRACT

This project studies the ways through which poets form their self-image and design its relationship with authority. It explores how poets forge their distinct identities through their responses to the challenges of the time-honored tradition and the demands of the contemporary sociopolitical and cultural authorities.

After establishing its theoretical framework, chapter 1 examines al-Mutanabbī’s (d. 965) self-image versus authority as formed in his poems, and, most importantly, in his reception and counter-reception. It explores how he was transformed into a poetic persona that displaces the Prophet’s miracle as the text to compete with, displaces modern poets’ fears of losing poetic identity, and becomes a site of questioning Arabic culture at large.

Chapter 2 explores the classical poet’s engagement with the text that established the prophetic authority, the Qur’ān, in light of the reception of this engagement in modern Arabic poetry. Revolving around the two themes of incorporation and rejection, the chapter examines this engagement as portrayed in the poetry of two classical poets and one modern, namely Ka’b b. Zuhayr (d. mid 7th cent.), Tamîm b. Muqbil (d. after 656), and the Palestinian poet Maḥmûd Darwîsh (1941-2008) who came to modernize and universalize the classical rejection by resuscitating the classical ode.
The first two chapters will form the foundation for the study of the modernist project of the Saudi poet Muḥammad al-Thubayṭī (1952-2011) in chapters 3 and 4. The latter’s poetry will serve as an example of how the poet’s self-image expresses the anxiety of the modern text in its relationship with tradition, its challenge of a hegemonic narrative, and its disputation with the meaning of the modern by, first and foremost, secularizing the prophetic experience and harmonizing tradition with modernity.

By placing the poet’s self-image vis-à-vis authority as exemplified in the project of one of the most prominent modernist poets of the Arabian Peninsula against the representation of this relationship in the oeuvre of the quintessential panegyrist of Arabic poetry, al-Muṭanabbi, and in two classical poems and their reception in a modernist poem belonging to the so-called “literary center,” this study aims to: 1) better grasp the transformations Arabic poetry has undergone in its articulation of the location of the poet vis-à-vis authority; 2) shed fresh light on an understudied corpus of poetry, i.e., the modern poetry of the Arabian Peninsula, and place it in the continuity of Arabic poetry; and 3) demonstrate the benefits of studying Arabic poetry as one continues tradition rather than adhering to the Eurocentric notion of the inevitable break between tradition and modernity.
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Introduction

This study emerged from a search for a meaning of an opening scene in a modernist poem from Saudi Arabia. When, more than a decade ago, I came across the poem *Mawqif al-rimāl... mawqif al-jinās* (The Stance of the Sand... The Stance of Paronomasia, henceforth referred to as *Mawqif al-jinās*)¹ written in 2000 by the Saudi modernist poet Muḥammad al-Thubaytī (1952-2011),² I was enthralled by what lay before my eyes, more immediately by its first lines:

1. He embraced me,
   Then made me stand on the sands
   
   He called me
   By *mīm* (m), *ḥāʾ* (ḥ), *mīm* (m), and *dāl* (d)

5. And he stood up radiantly in my certainty,
   And said:

   You and the palm trees are two branches

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The allusion to the story of the first revelations of the Qurʾān as transmitted in the Islamic tradition, so obvious in these lines, was the first thing that grabbed my attention and kept me asking why? Why does the poem that was said to usher in a new history of Arabic poetry, in the Arabian Peninsula and beyond, begin by alluding to the first Qurʾānic revelations, the verses that ushered in a new history of the Arab people? In spelling out the name Muḥammad (By mīm, ḥāʾ, mīm, and dāl), why does the poem that has become an emblem of the modernist movement of poetry in the Arabian Peninsula establish a link with the mysterious, disconnected letters of the Qurʾān and identify the poet with the Prophet? Why does it identify the poet with the palm-trees? Why does it choose to refer to the Sūfī mawqif? Moreover, why does it choose to evoke the traditional poetic motif of wuqūf and istīqāf (the poet’s stopping and asking his companions to stop and weep with him over the ruined abodes of the beloved) as is the case in the opening

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3 Al-Thubayfī, al-ʿA ʾmāl al-kāmila, 11.

4 This allusion and the story of the first Qurʾānic revelation, along with the mysterious, disconnected Qurʾānic letters, will be discussed in detail in chapter 4.

5 A statement by the renowned Yemeni poet and critic ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz al-Maqāliḥ (b. 1939). It will be discussed in chapter 4.

6 the Sūfī mawqif will be discussed in detail in chapter 4.
line of the “best achieved qaṣidah in the Arabic language,” namely the magisterial *Muʿallaqa* (Suspended Ode) of Imruʿ al-Qays b. Ḥujr (d. circa 550)? In the *Muʿallaqa*, we read:

24. Halt, two friends, and we will weep
    for the memory of one beloved
    And an abode at Siqṭ al-Liwā
    between al-Dakhūl, then Ḥawmal

قفا نابك من ذكرى حبيب ومنزل
بسقط اللوى بين الدخول فخومل

In the years-long process of reading, re-reading, and trying to make sense of the 180-line (20-page) poem’s myriad structural and thematic complexities, as evident in the multiple voices, metrical schemes, intertextual references, and stylistic choices that the poem hosts in such a fascinating degree of harmony, as will become clear later on in chapter 4, my “why?” was only growing bigger and bigger. I then realized that this poem should be regarded as no less than a

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8 The *Muʿallaqāt* (Suspended Odes) are the most celebrated pre-Islamic poems. Said to be seven odes in the beginning, the list of the *Muʿallaqāt* grew to include two additional poems first, and then another one, making the final list include ten poems for ten different pre-Islamic poets. Multiple accounts were given to explain the etymology of the name, the most common of which was that these odes were so admired by the Arabs of the pre-Islamic era that they wrote them in gold and suspended them on the walls of the Kaʿba (the cube-like sanctuary in the Holy Mosque in Makkah). For more on the *muʿallaqāt*, see: G. Lecomte, “al-Muʿallaḳāt”, in: Encyclopedia of Islam, Second Edition, Edited by: P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, W.P. Heinrichs. Consulted online on 18 February 2019 <http://dx.doi.org.proxy.library.georgetown.edu/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_SIM_5269>


poetic project that, first and foremost, could offer a new understanding of the tradition-modernity nexus in Arabic poetry.

Such a multilayered poem would be difficult, if not outright impossible, to appreciate unless one examines the authority of the main two (inter)textual worlds that the poem struggles to deal with, namely the Arab poet’s poetic ode vis-à-vis the Arab prophet’s prosaic Qurʾān. This examination, I realized, should be done in such a way that takes into account the external context of the poem, i.e., modern Saudi Arabia, and the prevalent narrative about its history and people. My initial assessment was that *Mawqif al-jinās* was a grand metapoetic metaphor of the poet’s self-image versus multiple forms of authority, and that questions of language and identity, and tradition versus modernity were no less than essential to the poem’s argument.

Needless to say, my reading of Arabic poetry informed my first impression of *Mawqif al-jinās*. The questions I asked about language and identity, the Qurʾān and poetry, and the poet versus the Prophet had been in my mind for years, but more clearly ever since I read the Palestinian poet Maḥmūd Darwīsh’s (1941-2008) L-rhymed Free-Verse poem *Qāfiya min ajl al-Muʿallaqāt* (A Rhyme for the Suspended Odes, henceforth referred to as *Qāfiya*), published in his 1995 collection *Limādhā tarakta al-hiṣāna wahīdan* (Why Did You Leave the Horse Behind?).11 This poem’s emphasis on language as an identity of the *Jāhilī* (pre-Islamic) Arab was striking. Darwīsh said:

2. From my language, I was born.
   …

7. Who am I?
   …

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8. … I am my language, I am.
And I am one suspended ode, two suspended odes, ten. This is my language.

10. I am my language.

9. 

At the end, the poem compares the poetic language of the *Muʿallaqāt* to the prosaic language of the Qurʾān, considering each as a miracle in its own right, thus highlighting a contested relationship between the poet and the prophet over language and identity:

51. This is my language and my miracle.

54. And what is sacred to the Arab in the desert,
Worshipping the rhymes that flow
like stars over his cloak,
and worshipping what he says.

59. There has to be prose, then;

There has to be a divine prose for the Prophet to triumph.

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12 Ibid., 381-382.
Darwīsh’s Qāfiya inspired me to further examine my first impression of al-Thubaytī’s Mawqif al-jinās, for both poems evoke themes of language as identity, the pre-Islamic Muʿallaqa versus the prosaic/prophetic text, and a tradition still alive.

Furthermore, both modern poems coincided with my preoccupation then (and now) with their strong precursor al-Mutanabbī (d. 965), generally recognized as the greatest Arab poet of all time. The identification in his sobriquet (the would-be prophet) between the poet and the prophet, which finds echoes in his poetry, his poetic self which leaves little space between the poet and other authority figures (such as patrons), as noticed in classical and modern readings of his oeuvre, and the fascination with his poetic persona in modern Arabic literature, poetry and prose alike—all was crucial in moving forward my search for possible answers regarding the poet’s self-image vis-à-vis authority in Arabic poetry.

In addition to these specific reading questions, my study stems from a central theoretical interest that occupied me for years, that is, how poets shape their self-image and form a network of interdependencies vis-à-vis authority, and how this self-image contributes to the cultural self-image at large.

Hence came this study to place modern texts, such as Darwīsh’s qāfiya and al-Thubaytī’s Mawqif al-jinās, in the continuity of the Arabic poetic experience and in the larger context of the

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13 Ibid., 384.
Arab poet versus authority in classical and modern poetry. It is mainly concerned with the poets’ realization of their location in society by means of comparing themselves to other authority figures and in relation to coercive sociocultural products such as language, tradition, and grand narratives.\textsuperscript{14} The study focuses on the moments when language becomes a contested space between poets and authority, poets’ \textit{raison d’être} is threatened, and therefore they choose to reify their position in society using language as a tool for negotiation and affirmation.

To this end, my dissertation will be divided into four chapters. Chapter 1 will begin by examining the classical ode’s aesthetic and cultural significance. It will then turn to al-Mutanabbī to explore his poetic self-image versus authority as manifested in selected examples of his poems and, most importantly, in the reception and counter-reception of his poetry. It will try to explain how his poetic persona as an equal and counterpart to authority was formed, and then how this persona within his poems was transformed in his reception to displace the prophetic linguistic miracle, i.e., the Qur’ān, as the text to compete with. Moreover, I will explore the ways through which al-Mutanabbī was transfigured in modern Arabic literature into a poetic persona that

\textsuperscript{14} I employ the term “grand narrative,” sometimes referred to as metanarrative or master narrative, as used in critical theory and postmodernism to signify a story organizing history teleologically by explaining the past and predicting the future and its movement towards a specific end. It helps legitimize people’s (and, by extension, societies’ and nations’) actions by viewing them as necessary steps towards that end. People speak, for example, of a Biblical, Qur’ānic, Enlightenment, Marxist, grand narrative of history. In my study I use it specifically to see how literature, in the case of Saudi Arabia, responds to the grand narrative about its history, people, and culture, a grand narrative that I describe as hegemonic because of reasons I explain later in chapter 3. The term metanarrative was given prominence by French Marxist theorist Jean-François Lyotard in an article titled “Defining the Postmodern,” which he later expanded upon and included in his landmark: \textit{The Postmodern Condition}. He defines the postmodern as “incredulity toward metanarratives,” meaning that the main characteristic of postmodernism as a philosophy is its skepticism about or disbelief in modernity’s grand narrative of progress. There is a great deal of criticism and discussion of the postmodern among theorists, including by Lyotard himself on his book, but here I only adopt a general understanding of the term grand narrative, which I explained at the beginning, without necessarily adhering to its philosophical assumptions. For more discussion of grand narrative and the postmodern, see: David H. Richter, ed., \textit{The Critical Tradition: Classical Texts and Contemporary Trends} (Boston: Bedford/St Martin’s, 2007), 1920-1932. Also see Lyotard’s book: Jean-François Lyotard, \textit{The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge}, trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984). Later in chapter 1, I will discuss Suzanne Stetkevych’s reading of the Arabo-Islamic panegyric as propagating a legitimacy myth based a “grand narrative” of what she calls “Islamic Manifest Destiny.”
displaces modern poets’ fears of losing poetic identity and into a site of questioning Arabic culture at large.

Al-Mutanabbi’s poetic self-image, achieved through a verbal contest between the poet and authority, will be read against the moment of the actual encounter between the poet and the Prophet in chapter 2. The chapter will begin by examining issues such as tradition, influence, the classical poet’s response to the burden of an established poetic tradition, and metapoetry to determine how to approach the poems under study within the tradition-modernity nexus.

The chapter will then analyze two of the earliest and most significant responses to the prophetic authority in the tradition of the Arabic qaṣīda. These two classical poems are Kaʿb b. Zuhayr’s (d. mid 7th cent.) L-rhymed poem Bānat Suʿād (Suʿād Has Departed)\(^{15}\) and Tamīm b. Muqbil’s (d. after 656) R-rhymed poem Taʾammal khalīlī (Contemplate, O My Friend).\(^{16}\) It will then build on that analysis to explore the reception of this relationship in modern Arabic poetry as exemplified in Maḥmūd Darwīsh’s Qāfiya. The poetic event established by the first two poems will be taken as having laid the foundation for the modernist poet’s analysis of the relationship between the poetic and prophetic texts.

The chapter will explore how, through looking at themselves as being in cooperation with, or in opposition to, the prophetic authority, poets of the classical period shaped their self-image as possessors of a valuable aesthetic and sociocultural asset, i.e., poetic language and the qaṣīda, which they could use to negotiate their status with a new authority. In the modern era, the


modernist poet builds on that classical experience to provide definitions of the Arab self, be it poetic, political, or cultural, as in Darwīsh’s case, and to treat the poet-versus-Prophet question through the lens of contemporary cultural and critical debates.

The chapter takes the “poet versus the prophet” theme as the intensification of the conflict over language as a contested space between the two, but by no means limiting the analysis to that theme. Given that prophetic authority in the Arabo-Islamic context was legitimized mainly based on a text, i.e., the Qurʾān, poets felt the need to deal with a challenge in the same medium in which they establish their legitimacy, namely language. The study aims to examine the poets’ definitions of the self and the other and how the micro-workings of the poem achieve these definitions.

Chapters 3 and 4 are devoted to the modernist movement in Saudi Arabia, represented by al-Thubaytī’s oeuvre, vis-à-vis the authority of tradition and the religious and oil-based identity of modern Saudi Arabia.17 I present in these two chapters an interpretation of selected poems from al-Thubaytī’s third and fourth collections to argue that his project is centered on a metapoetics that proposes to identify the poet with autochthonous cultural elements, most importantly the sand and palm-trees. I will suggest that al-Thubaytī’s project presents a new imagining of the cultural self through the identification of the poet, as a secular prophet, with the natural and cultural landmarks of Arabia, hence offering a space where the temporal and religious realms dissolve into one coherent autochthonous culture.

Chapter 3 begins by examining the concept of “imagined communities” and other related concepts that explore the mechanisms by which the society’s self-image is formed. After

17 I will discuss in chapter 3 what I call the reductionist narrative about Saudi Arabia and the Saudi identity.
establishing its conceptual framework and its relevance to the imagining of a new Saudi identity in the discussion of al-Thubayī’s project, the chapter proceeds to take a detailed look into the Saudi cultural milieu. In order to place the poems under study in their broader cultural contexts, the chapter examines the broader oil-based grand narrative about Saudi Arabia and al-Thubayī’s response to this reductionist form of identity in his early works, particularly his landmark collection *al-Tadārīs* (Terrains, 1986, henceforth referred to as *al-Tadārīs*). Al-Thubayī’s response was largely characterized by anchoring his modernist poetic project in the autochthonous tradition.

Finally, chapter 4 presents a full translation and an interpretive reading of al-Thubayī’s masterpiece *Mawqif al-jinās*, one of his last and longest poems, arguing that it stands as the poet’s ultimate poetic event, one that both culminates and encapsulates his entire poetic career. It reads the poem’s response to the reductionist narrative about Arabia and its negotiations with the triangular authority of the poetic tradition, the Prophetic experience, and the Şūfī *mawqif*, a response that was mainly trifurcated into three closely related aesthetic domains: thematic division, various metrical schemes, and the extensive use of the rhetorical device of *jinās*.

The inclusion of the poetry of the Arabian Peninsula in the larger debate over tradition versus modernity contributes to the field by filling the gap in the history of modern Arabic poetry. The field of academic inquiry, in English and other European languages, into the modern poetry of the Arabian Peninsula is still in its infancy.\(^\text{18}\) To the best of my knowledge, no major study has been done on al-Thubayī’s works in these languages in spite of his prominent status in

\(^{18}\) Salma Khadra Jayyusi notes how the literature of modern Arabia is always omitted in anthologies of modern Arabic literature. She says that, “the most flagrant omissions [of the literature of Arabia] occur in books that treat modern Arabic literature in general. These general studies make little or no mention of the varied and flourishing literature which the [Arabian] Peninsula has produced in modern times.” See Jayyusi’s preface to: Salma Khadra Jayyusi, ed., *The Literature of Modern Arabia: An Anthology* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1989), 18.
the modernist movement in the Arabian Peninsula. A number of studies in Arabic, however, have dealt with some aspects of his works, but through a largely formalistic approach, occasionally with a somewhat celebratory tone, to the exclusion of the social and political aspects of the poem. This study reads that poetry from an interdisciplinary perspective which allows for interventions that do not deny the agency of a real, historical poet operating within a specific sociocultural context.

Moreover, A great deal of time and effort has been spent in translating literary and critical texts that have hardly been studied (let alone translated) before, and a number of major works in Arabic, in poetry, fiction, and literary and cultural criticism, have been introduced for the first time. Not only does this study explore how poets from the Arabian Peninsula challenge a hegemonic, reductionist narrative about their culture, it actually contributes to the challenging of this narrative by making more texts available for a broader readership in the hope that this will result in a “thick description” of that culture.

This dissertation thus bridges the classical and the modern by exploring the poet’s forging his own distinct identity through negotiating the demands and challenges of the time-honored poetic tradition on the one hand, and the contemporary political and cultural authorities on the other. It is grounded in the study of the classical Arab-Islamic qasida but it offers an original investigation as well of the poetic identity-formation in the Modernist period, including not-yet-studied poets of the Arabian Peninsula and the Gulf.
Chapter 1:

The Battle over al-Mutanabbi’s Poetic Self: From Equality to Displacement

The poet versus authority: Defining the self and the other

This study stems from an interest that occupied me for years, that is, how poets shape their self-image and how they form a network of interrelationships and interdependencies vis-à-vis authority. This interest is further driven by questions such as:

1. How do poets define themselves? How do they seek to find a place in the world with their talents? How do they use language to represent themselves in the larger social arena in such a way as to make their creative activity relevant and appealing but without erasing themselves?

2. How does the poet choose to accommodate or exclude the other, the non-poet, or “he who does not compose poetry,” to use a modified version of Nietzsche’s famous definition of Socrates, “he who does not write”?19

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19 I borrow the term “non-poet” from American contemporary poet, critic, and novelist Ben Lerner in his book Hatred of Poetry, a term denoting all those who did not pursue what he describes as the universal poetic potential. Among the contradictions Lerner emphasizes in this book is the poem’s irreconcilable conflict between individuality and universality, between expressing the self and accommodating the other, which is closely related to my questions above. He takes Whitman’s poetry as the ideal example of this conflict. See: Ben Lerner, The Hatred of Poetry (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2016). As for Nietzsche’s phrase, it was propagated in modern literary theory and philosophy by Jacques Derrida in his landmark Of Grammatology. Derrida quotes Nietzsche’s phrase on Socrates in the beginning of chapter 1, The End of the Book and the Beginning of Writing, to register, as Richter David explains, his concern with “how Western philosophy has built its metaphysics on a pervasive but fragile base, one that privileges the activity of speech over that of writing. (...) In Plato’s Phaedrus, (...) Socrates condemns writing as a bastardized form of communication, separated from the Father (the moment of origin). (...) Socrates prefers speech because the speaker seems so immediately present in the voice.” See: Jacques Derrida, Of Grammatology. Fortieth Anniversary Edition, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Introduction by Judith Butler (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2016). Also, see Richter’s explanation in: Richter, The Critical Tradition, 827. If Socrates is defined by his undisguised contempt for writing, my definition of the other as the non-
3. How does the poem turn into a verbal performance of the rites of negotiation between the poet, or the artist in general, on the one hand, and authority on the other hand, whether in its human form (e.g. political leaders, critics, or the prophet as an all-encompassing authority in the Arabo-Islamic tradition), or even in its more abstract forms, such as tradition, grand narratives, and language itself, to give only a few examples?

4. What tools do poets use to artistically reflect on the forms of this relationship and how are these tools transformed throughout history?

These questions were informed by my own readings of Arabic (and world) poetry, but modern scholarship on the issues under consideration was essential in influencing the questions I asked and the answers I sought. After a short background on the Arabic qaṣīda (ode), the following pages will examine the studies that I deem foundational in shaping my perspective regarding the poet vis-à-vis authority in Arabic poetry.

The qaṣīda: From a free-standing text to an aesthetic, sociocultural performance

Going back as far as the fifth century C.E., the qaṣīda (pl. qaṣāʾid) is the oldest and most prestigious form of Arabic poetry, and one of the two main foundations of Arabo-Islamic culture, the other being the Qurʾan. As far as its technical aspects are concerned, the qaṣīda is a monorhymed and mono-metered ode generally ranging from 15 to 100 two-hemistich lines, composed in one of several simple or compound meters. The qaṣīda has a non-narrative form, and among

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21 Ibid.
its prominent rhetorical devices are *tashbīh* (simile), *istiʿāra* (metaphor), *jinās* (paronomasia, root-play), and *ṭibāq* (antithesis). Building on earlier scholarship, studies of Arabic poetry have in recent decades moved beyond the poem/*qāṣida* as a largely free-standing written text to the interpretation of it as it operates and interacts within literary, sociocultural, economic, and political contexts.

What drew most of this scholarly attention is the *qāṣida*, either in its majestic polythematic, tripartite form (*nasīb*: amatory prelude that includes weeping over the beloved’s deserted campsites; *raḥīl*: the desert journey, and final *gharaḍ*: goal or message, which usually contains praising the patron and boasting about one’s lineage or poetry) or in its bipartite form that it largely assumed at the hands of the great Abbasid panegyrist *nasīb*- *gharaḍ*. However,

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23 In her introduction to the edited volume *Early Islamic Poetry and Poetics*, Suzanne Stetkevych gives an excellent overview of the major trends and studies on Arabic poetry from the 1970s up unit the first decade of the 20th century. Stetkevych’s introduction was no less than crucial in guiding my exploration of modern (Western) scholarship on Arabic poetry. See: Suzanne Stetkevych, ed., Early Islamic Poetry and Poetics. (Farnham, Eng., and Burlington, Vt., Ashgate, 2009), xiii-xxix.

many studies have offered new insights into the various aspects of the so-called lesser genres, such as the *khamriyya* (wine poem), the *ṭardiyya* (hunt poem), and, above all, *ghazal* (love poem).  

In the following lines, I will focus on three projects which I take as leading in this multifaceted approach in the study of the Arabic *qaṣīda*, and which, as indicated above, have helped shape my perspective regarding the poet vis-à-vis authority in Arabic poetry. I will begin by discussing Stefan Sperl’s liturgical reading of the bipartite ode, then I will turn to Suzanne Stetkevych’s ritual and ceremonial readings through the application of the anthropological rites of passage paradigm and the concept of “Islamic Manifest Destiny” and her studies on the correlations between the modernizing poetic movement of the 9th century and the conceptualization of an Arab Golden Age. After that, I will discuss Beatrice Gruendlers’s  

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articulation of the ethics of patronage in light of performance studies, speech-act theory, and
dramatic discourse.

Stefan Sperl: Fate and ruler in the bipartite ode

Counter to the now old-fashioned approach to study Arabic literature, characterized by being
largely limited to textual and philological analysis of the texts, the 1970s witnessed the
emergence of two approaches that were considered important steps towards a more disciplinary
reading of the Arabic qaṣīda. The first one was based on orality studies and it was concerned
with the composition and transmission of the qaṣīda,26 and the second, coming from
structuralism, looked at the overall structure of the qaṣīda and offered an understanding of its
logic based on the binary oppositions idea.27 Studies adopting these two approaches were crucial
in the development of the three above-mentioned projects.

26 In the first approach, studies by James Monroe and Michael Zwettler, for example, offered new insights into
issues such as composition, authorship, authenticity and transmission by applying the theory of oral-formulaic
composition originally proposed by Milman Parry and his graduate student Albert Lord to study epic poetry, which
addresses the so-called “Homeric Question” by asserting that classical poets had a repertoire of formulas readily
available at their disposal to use once the conditions of the poem require them to. The outcome of the two studies
mainly shed some light on the orality and authenticity of pre-Islamic poetry, discuss some of its formulae, and
propose the existence of some composition patterns. They helped turned the focus to the overall form of the qaṣīda.
Michael Zwettler, The Oral Tradition of Classical Arabic Poetry: Its Character and Implications (Columbus, OH,
Ohio State University Press, 1978). Also see Suzanne Stetkevych’s discussion of these studies in her introduction to
Early Islamic Poetry and Poetics.
As for the oral-formulaic composition theory, see: Adam Parry, ed., The Making of Homeric Verse: The Collected
Papers of Milman Parry (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1971). For a discussion of Parry’s work and an overview of
his theory, see chapters 1 and 3 of Lord’s book: Albert B. Lord, The Singer of Tales, ed. Stephen Mitchell and

27 While the oral component of the poem was the target of the first category of studies, the second category,
structuralist studies, was concerned with the question of the formal unity of the poem. Their main goal was to make
a logical sense of the different components of the Arabic qaṣīda, particularly its polythematic form, and to arrive at a
holistic structure of it rather than considering the poem atomistic in nature, a stance that in no small degree was
influenced by classical Arabic criticism and balāgha studies. Two scholars pioneered the application of
structuralism to the study of the Arabic qaṣīda, namely Kamal Abu-Deeb, in his two-part article Towards a
Structural Analysis of Pre-Islamic Poetry, and Adnan Haydar in his article The Mu`allaqa of Imru` al-Qays: Its
Structure and Meaning. The studies understand the poem a series of binary oppositions, but no actual unity has been
revealed. However, in addition to proposing, and turning the scholarly attention to, an underlying structure of the
qaṣīda, these studies introduced the nature-culture binary; two important results that would come to be utilized in
subsequent studies. See: Kamal Abu-Deeb, “Towards a Structural Analysis of Pre-Islamic Poetry,” International
Based on the structuralist binary opposition scheme but widening the critical analysis to incorporate mythical and social elements from outside the text, Stefan Sperl published his landmark article “Islamic Kingship and Arabic Panegyric Poetry in the Early 9th Century” to provide a structuralist-derived exploration of the mythic-religious building blocks of the Abbasid panegyric and how they are played out in the thematic and structural patterns of the poem.\(^\text{28}\) In his analysis of the socio-political functions of the Abbasid panegyric, he was almost the first to point out to its mythical and liturgical features.

According to Sperl, the bipartite structure of the Abbasid panegyric (\textit{nasīb-gharad}), as opposed to the tripartite ode typical of pre-Abbasid poetry, is intended to intensify the antithesis between fate and the ruler. While fate caused suffering and chaos in the first part of the poem, which Sperl terms the “strophe,” the ruler restores order and brings about prosperity in the second part, the “antisrophe,” hence one can say that the bipartite poem becomes the verbal expression of a cosmic state of antithesis. The poet’s endeavor to escape fate and reach the ruler represents the societal need for a human ideal.

To place the ruler in a location where he is capable of fighting fate, and thus to enshrine the institution of the Caliphate in the collective consciousness, poets resort to a set of cultural components that can be divided into three categories: heroic Arab virtues, divine sanction of Islam, and mythic power of Near Eastern kings.\(^\text{29}\) In the first, the ruler is likened to a supreme


\(^{29}\) Ibid.
leader of supreme virtue, always setting an example of high morals by his resolution, nobility, and generosity. These virtues are abundant in tribal pre-Islamic poetry but now bear new meanings to function in the new imperial context. Second, the ruler’s authority is justified as being the actualization of God’s eternal act, hence the sacredness of the divine seeps into the ruler’s authority whose insignia become a symbol of the divine will. Third, the panegyric addresses the ruler as the center for the temporal and religious realms. Just like the ancient Near Eastern king, he brings justice and fertility and fight the forces of darkness, transferring the “waste land” into an earthly heaven. And because he was divinely endowed with his power, the continuation of his rule was the one and only guarantee of life itself. The fine line between the ideal human and nature dissolved.

Sperl’s introduction, in the study of the classical qaṣīda, of the myths of the Ancient Near East, along with the conceptual apparatus with that, was formative for subsequent studies. In my reading of Arabic poetry, it mainly provided me with a window to understand the interplay between the form of the poem and its mythical and sociocultural expressions. This understanding was taken to the next level by Suzanne Stetkevych’s studies.

**Suzanne Stetkevych: Rite of passage, allegiance, and Islamic Manifest Destiny**

Suzanne Stetkevych’s early studies sought, first, to offer a more effective tool to explain the tenacity of the form of the Arabic qaṣīda, and, second, to uncover its mythic dimension by reading it within its sociocultural context. To arrive to this end, she has systematically applied theories from various fields of scholarship, such as anthropology, literary criticism, and history of religion.
Stetkevych’s first contribution came as a critical response to the structuralist studies mentioned above. In her article Structuralist Interpretations of Pre-Islamic Poetry, she offered an alternative to the structuralist binary oppositions scheme by applying van Gennep’s rites of passage pattern to the *Mu’allaga* of Labīd (d. ca. 661) in order to understand the tripartite structure of the pre-Islamic *qaṣīda*. In this context, the three thematic sections of the *qaṣīda* are explained as analogous to the three stages of the rites of passage, hence we have the *nasīb* (elegiac prelude) section corresponding to the separation stage in Gennep’s terms, *raḥīl* (journey) to liminality, and *madiḥ* or *fakhr* to re-aggregation. The result is that pre-Islamic poetry is ritual in form and function, a conclusion she augmented by utilizing the extensive body of *akhbār* as an exegetical tool. This ritual reading of the structure of the pre-Islamic Arabic poem was no less than a paradigm shift, paving the way for more studies to come on the form of the Arabic ode and its mythic, ritual, and sociocultural interactions.

In another article, The Ṣuʿlūk and His Poem, she turned her attention to the poems that did not exhibit the tripartite structure of the majestic *qaṣīda*, but rather tended to deviate from it by omitting the *gharad* section (e.g. *madiḥ* or *fakhr*), such as the poems of the ʿaʿlīk (brigand

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31 Arnold van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage*, trans. Manika B. Vizedom and Gabrielle L. Caffee (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960). Stetkevych likens the three rites of passage (separation, liminality, and incorporation), as used in Gennep’s anthropology to describe the transition (passage) form one social status to another, to the three parts/stages of the pre-Islamic *qaṣīda*.


poets, sing. *ṣu‘lūk*), and thus forming a bipartite structure. Taking her example from Ta‘abbaṭa Sharran, she concluded that, in light of the van Gennepian model and the Douglas and Turner's formulation of the permanent liminal entity, the bipartite structure of the brigand poets as manifested in Ta‘abbaṭa Sharran’s poem can be called *rite de passage manqué*, or a failed rite of passage.

Later on, Stetkevych would include these studies, and others along similar lines, in her book *The Mute Immortals Speak*. The book builds on studies on orality, formulaic composition, architype, gender, and gift exchange to read various pre-Islamic poems and explain some of the issues they present, most important of which is the institution of blood vengeance, which Stetkevych understands to have served as “a ritual exchange of sacrificial victims.” In her reading of what she calls “the master poem,” i.e. Imru’ al-Qays’s *Mu‘allaqa*, in the last chapter

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37 S. Stetkevych, *The Mute Immortals*.

38 Ibid., xiii.

of the book, Stetkevych adds to the rite of passage and rite of sacrifice Theodor Gaster’s seasonal pattern theory,\(^\text{40}\) in light of which she interprets İmruʾ al-Qays’s *Mu’allaqat* to be a sublimated blood vengeance poem; one in which the immediate, tribal battle of blood vengeance is sublimated into an expression of mythic and cosmic power, most specifically through the imagery in the closing storm scene of the poem.

Another field of inquiry with which Suzanne Stetkevych was preoccupied was the court praise ode in light of its socio-political contexts. Jamel Eddine Bencheikh’s article on al-Mutawakkil’s (r. 847–862) poetic circles\(^\text{41}\) describes the competitive court atmosphere, the cultural system in which the poem was operating, and the role of each individual caliph in setting the tone and the taste of his court. Stetkevych published her article “The Abbasid Poet Interprets History\(^\text{42}\)” to examine some of Abū Tammām’s (d. 845) poems in military-political contexts and argue for the mythopoetic role of the poet. Abū Tammām, the caliph’s favored court poet, transformed current political and military events into mythic events that buttressed an ideology of what she in later works termed “Islamic Manifest Destiny” by virtue of which the Islamic ruler’s victory is presented as a fulfillment of a preordained, divine will.

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The ideas of this article would be further developed to make up the main thesis of some of her subsequent works, such as her book *The Poetics of Islamic Legitimacy*.43 Here she traces the development of *qasīdat al-madh* from the pre-Islamic time (al-Nābigha, d. 604) to 10th century Andalusia (Ibn Darrāj al-Qaṣṭallī, d. 1030), along with the great panegyrist in between, including Abū Tammām (d. 845) and al-Mutanabbī (d. 965). The main argument of the book is that the classical panegyric is ritual gift exchange (à la Marcel Mauss) through which the relative and mutually dependent rank and status of the poet and patron are negotiated in essence. In this reading, the classical praise ode is a verbal performance that was aimed mainly at creating and disseminating a myth of Islamic legitimacy for the ruler. In this performance, certain rites of negotiation between the poet and the ruler take place, and the poem becomes the poet’s tool to impress on the polity that he is the one who creates and perpetuates the myth of legitimacy.

Building on her ideas of the ritual function of the praise ode and on her earlier work on the cultural significance of the *badīʿ* movement44 came one of Stetkevyych’s’s latest articles on the link between *badīʿ* poetry and the idea of the Arab Golden Age.45 The article develops a link between the verbal construction of hegemonic might that the Abbasid *badīʿ* panegyrist created and promulgated through their “linguistic correlative” of caliphal power, i.e., *badīʿ*-style poems, and how these verbal constructions were interpreted and utilized in the poetry of the 19th and

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44 *Badīʿ* here denotes the novel/innovative poetic style invented by the Abbasid *muhdathūn* (modern) poets of the 9th century. On the technical term in classical rhetoric, see: Geert Jan van Gelder, “*Badīʿ*”, in: *Encyclopaedia of Islam, THREE*, Edited by: Kate Fleet, Gudrun Krämer, Denis Matringe, John Nawas, Everett Rowson. Consulted online on 23 February 2019 <http://dx.doi.org.proxy.library.georgetown.edu/10.1163/1573-3912_ei3_COM_22907>

I will discuss Suzanne Stetkevych re-conceptualization of *Badīʿ* in chapter 4.

20th century Arab Awakening movement (ʿAṣr al-Nahda) to conceptualize an Arab Golden Age, a native civilizational might that modern poets resorted to in order to counterbalance colonization and defeat by the West. This article came as a contribution to the emerging scholarly tendency to go beyond the prevailing compartmentalization of the history of Arabic literature manifested in the classical-modern dichotomy.

Stetkevych’s studies were crucial in furthering my understanding of the mythic dimension of the Arabic poem, the centrality of the Arabic panegyric in the Arabo-Islamic political and sociocultural institutions, and how the equation of the poet vis-à-vis authority was integral to the history of Arabic poetry. Since this authority in the Arabo-Islamic context was most often represented by the persona of the patron, I then had questions about the minutiae of the relationship between the poet and the patron, how the innerworkings of the poem shape (and are shaped by) the conditions of the patronage, what self-images the poets create in order to meet this conditions while not erasing themselves and denying their agencies, and generally how the interplay between the artistic field and the political field works and takes place. Beatrice Gruendler’s studies were very illuminating in this context.

Beatrice Gruendler: Performance of ethics of patronage

In an attempt to tackle issues such as the interrelationships between poet and patron, Beatrice Gruendler suggested that a pragmatic approach is more suitable than other approaches in this direction. In Her article “Abbasid Praise Poetry in Light of Dramatic Discourse and Speech Act Theory,“46 the basic ideas of which she later developed in her first book in this context Medieval

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46 Beatrice Gruendler, “Abbasid Praise Poetry in the Light of Speech Act Theory and Dramatic Discourse,” in Understanding Near Eastern Literatures: A Spectrum of Interdisciplinary Approaches, eds. B. Gruendler and V. Klemm (Wiesbaden: Reichert, 2000) 157-69. The contemporary use of the term “speech act” was first introduced by ordinary language philosopher J. L. Austin in his acclaimed work How to Do Things with Words. In its basic definition, a speech act is an utterance that, under the right circumstances, performs an action and not only expresses
Arabic Praise Poetry, she applied dramatic discourse and speech act theories into the study of communicative aspects of the Abbasid panegyric.

Taking her examples from the poetry of Diʿbil al-Khuzāʿī (d. 859), ‘Alī b. al-Jahm (d. 863), and Ibn al-Rūmī (d. 896), she argues in the article that the three present a poetic style different from the bāḍīʿ poetry prevalent at the time. Their poetic style is distinguished, first and foremost, by its dramaturgical aspect, consisting of various dramatic scenes and multiple personae. She suggested a composite model of dramatic discourse and speech act theory in studying their poetry; the first part would deal with the macro-level of communicative settings while the second would tackle the specific verbal interactions between the historical figures during the performance (poet, patron, and audience). She finally proposed four levels of analysis, each of which is directed towards an aspect of the performance (verbal or otherwise).

In the book, Medieval Arabic Praise Poetry, she chose Ibn al-Rūmī to be her sole example. To understand how he manipulates the institution of the panegyric to install what she called “an ethics of patronage,” a delineation of the rights and duties of the poet vis-à-vis the patron, she further developed the application of dramatic discourse and speech act theory into the study of Ibn al-Rūmī’s panegyrics. She insists that these panegyrics are distinguished by their “dramatic scenes,” in which the poet creates “fictional personae” who often address each other in


48 The four levels of analysis are: “characterization of the dramatis personae, typology of scenes, supporting verbal ornament, and articulated relationship(s) between praise poet and mamdūḥ.” See: Gruendler, “Abbasid Praise Poetry,” 162.
a manner alluding to how the poet sees the “historical encounter” and its outcome should be. In other words, the “fictional encounter” (or, one might say, the “poetic encounter”) is the poet’s indirect way of addressing the historical characters of the performative scene, mainly the patron. Inside these encounters, fictional and otherwise, Ibn al-Rūmī’s panegyrical form of poem imposes his character on the historical through a series of poetic speech acts. The patron finds himself challenged to act in accordance with the ethics of patronage whose conditions the poet installs within this complex net of speech acts and dramatic scenes.

In terms of the structure of the poem, Gruendler builds on Sperl’s strophe/antistrophe scheme and adds to it a third section which she called the meta-strophe, a section that contains the poet’s metapoetic pronouncements on his craft and his views on how the patron should reward it. However, she insists that, in building on Sperl’s terminology and scheme, she does not necessary accept its underlying structuralist assumption of the antithesis between the first two sections.

**From authority to the poet/agent**

Building on the above-mentioned studies that went beyond the text to adopt an interdisciplinary approach in reading the classical *qasīda*, to shed light on its central concerns, most pertinent to the present discussion is the poet versus authority, and develop a nuanced appreciation of the complexity and the “multi-layeredness” of the dominant form of the *qasīda* and of its relationship with authority, I understand the very public utterance, or in our times the publication, of the poetic verse (and the literary work in general) as a simultaneous aesthetic and social act. It is an aesthetic act because it places the literary work in a continuity and a tradition of aesthetics, and it is a social act because it inserts the poet into the larger network of social
competition over meaning, identity formation, and capital (symbolic or material), to use Pierre Bourdieu’s (d. 2002) term.\textsuperscript{49} In this identity formation process, I search for how poets position themselves in the social field and how they accumulate more symbolic capital by virtue of which they attain higher positions in the cultural field and engage in rites of negotiation with the authorities that govern the other social fields.

Capital and the field are two concepts essential to Bourdieu’s sociology, which, along with the habitus, make up his theory of practice with the aim of going beyond the opposition between structuralist-oriented (objectivism) and agency-oriented (subjectivism) approaches.\textsuperscript{50} In general terms, he looks at society as divided into multiple fields, each with its own rules and power relations (e.g., cultural field, political field, etc.). Fields are structured hierarchically, and agents of each field compete to accumulate more capital, be it material (financial) or symbolic (e.g., prestige), and then use that capital to claim higher positions in the hierarchy of their respective fields.\textsuperscript{51}

Bourdieu introduced the third essential term, habitus, to account for the set of dispositions that drive social agents to operate within their fields, one that enables them to have something like a “feel for the game.” Players in different fields compete to safeguard their autonomy, and sometimes interact towards a shared goal. Within their fields, agents distinguish


\textsuperscript{51} A very good summary of Bourdieu’s theoretical framework and conceptual apparatus can be found in: Richter, \textit{The Critical Tradition}, 1333-1334. Given Bourdieu’s analysis of cultural power and capital, Richter includes him in his chapter on New Historicism and Cultural Studies.
themselves by many ways of representation, an important one of which is language, which has tremendous symbolic power. The choice to use formal or informal language, for example, has its social implications and ramifications, and thus Bourdieu lays a good deal of emphasis on language as a marker of differentiation and a sign of distinction.52

Although Bourdieu’s sociology was developed in a 20th-century European context, it nonetheless provides a useful tool for looking at power relations in contexts where fields are not necessarily autonomous and distinct from each other. In the context of the classical Arabic ode, for example, patronage was critical to the flourishing of the ode and poets played an essential role in the ruler’s courts and institutions, creating and promulgating myths or ideologies of legitimate rule, as indicated in the previous pages.53 Likewise, modern Arabic poetry operates within a sociocultural context where the state wields enormous power in the cultural/literary field. These different contexts notwithstanding, I have adopted as the broader conceptual framework for this study Bourdieu’s notions such as the field, competition over capital, positioning and repositioning, and distinction and differentiation, notions that prove useful in interpreting a broad range of sociocultural contexts.

Hence one can study the relationship between the poet, as a representative of the poetic/secular field, and the prophet, as exemplifying what can be called the Qur’anic/sacred field, and see how the Arab poet looked at the capital he shares with the Prophet, i.e., “literary”


53 Bourdieu discussed the issue of patronage and the “highly ambivalent” form of power relations it entails as part of his analysis of cultural production. He describes that relationship as “temporal and spiritual powers” whereby patronage works as “a sort of paternalistic patronage to the symbolic provocations of the artists, in the name of a not-so-unrealistic image of what the producers of cultural goods really are, that is, deviant children of the bourgeoisie or ‘poor relations’ forced into alternative trajectories.” See: Bourdieu, *Distinction*, 315-316.
language, and how he dealt with this challenge. One can expand the scope of the question and see how modern Arabic poetry deals with the Qur'ānic text as a form of authority, literary and religious, and with tradition at large as a source of both creativity and anxiety. Moreover, the issue of the poet vis-à-vis the ruler throughout the Arabo-Islamic history can be examined in Bourdieusian terms, not merely in the exchange of material capital (money) for symbolic capital (mythmaking), but also in poets’ use of language and poetic strategies to distinguish themselves, to demarcate the boundaries between the poet and the patron, and to create a self-image through the act of performing a panegyric.

By focusing on the poet’s self-image, my study aims to direct more attention to the poet as an agent whose identity is deeply felt and fought for and who, along with playing a significant role in creating and propagating a certain Arabo-Islamic myth or ideology of legitimate authority, manages to engage in a mythmaking of his own, as if responding to imagined (or real) criticism by affirming that he is not merely a cog in the wheel of authority; it is much more complicated than that. Yet it is important to clarify that, while sociological concepts such as those of Bourdieu might inform some questions and provide large frameworks that can shed light on the dynamics surrounding the production of the text, my study is literary in nature and target and thus its focus is on the literary analysis of the inner workings of the poem.

To give one example from the Arabo-Islamic tradition of how poets define themselves vis-à-vis authority in terms that do not deny their agency in the social exchange that is taking place, I turn to Abū al-Ṭayyib al-Mutanabbī (d. 965), who then “came to fill up the world and

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54 Aḥmad b. al-Ḥusayn b. al-Ḥasan al-Ju’fī al-Kindī, nicknamed al-Mutanabbī (d. 965), is generally considered the greatest Arab poet of all time. He frequented the court of more than one literary patron, most important among them, and perhaps most influential on his poetic career, was Sayf al-Dawla al-Ḥamānī (d. 967) who reigned over Aleppo, where al-Mutanabbī was his most-favored poet, from 945 until his death. Al-Mutanabbī spent 9 years in Sayf al-Dawla’s court (948-957) where he composed some of his most famous panegyrics, thus an entire section in his
tragic vision in the pensées of Pascal and the tragedies of Racine, Lucien Goldmann and his conceptual apparatus, see his major work: figures such concludes that poeticize it and turn it into a basis for understanding human activity. In terms of the world vision, the study social application of t materialize the mental structure of certain social classes at certain times of history. Among the main conclusions of the study, one more pertinent to this chapter was that, by looking at the transformations a be understood as a nexus of al be/architec...
Al-Mutanabbī: The poet is king

In al-Mutanabbī’s poetry, one is confronted with a heightened sense of a poetic self that sees the patron/ruler as no more than a counterpart. In one illuminating verse, which, in my view, can provide an excellent window into reading his poetic oeuvre, al-Mutanabbī defines himself as a king, only one with a different tool in the exercise of his authority, namely language. In other words, the space between the poet and the authority figure, or actual “king,” that the poem addresses, here exemplified by his patron in Egypt Kāfūr al-Ikhshīdī,57 the black eunuch slave regent of the Ikhshidids regent, is omitted, for the poet is a king too. In the poem that I would like to call The Poet is King, al-Mutanabbī says:

24. My heart is that of kings although my tongue is seen to be that of poets

وَقُوَادِيِّنَ رُؤْيَيْنِ وَإِن كَأْنَ
ْنَ لِسَانِيْنِيْنِ مِنَ الْشَّعْرَاءِ 58

This verse can be interpreted to show how the poet sees his status as an integral part of the polity, because he is the one who has the cultural means, through the performance of his poems, to decide what it means to be a ruler. In other words, the poet owns the meaning. He is the one who provides the sociocultural definitions of the ruler and sets the societal expectations that the political leader has to meet. Sometimes, when al-Mutanabbī realizes that a political figure does not meet the traditional societal standards of what it means to be a ruler, such as in


the case with Kāfūr al-Ikhsīdī himself, who was a black eunuch, the poet interprets that ruler’s unconventional qualities in such a way as to meet the horizon of expectations of his contemporary audience. In the same poem addressed to Kafūr, from which I quoted the verse above, al-Mutanabbī says:

15. He puts the sun to shame whenever it rises
   with a black, bright sun

16. Your robe, wherein glory lies,
   has brightness that disdains all other brightness

17. Skin is not but apparel, and the whiteness of the soul
   is better than the whiteness of the tunic

18. Generosity with bravery, shrewdness with radiance,
   and competence with fulfillment

19. How could white kings ever replace their colors
   with al-Ustādh’s color and appearance?

20. So that the sons of war see them with the eyes
   that see him on the morning of battle

59 My use of the term “horizon of expectations” comes from Hans Robert Jauss’s reception theory, where he considers the history of the readings of the literary work essential to the history of literature. Although Jauss’s focus is on the aesthetic expectations that readers of a given period and a specific cultural context form when “receiving” a new work of literature, I use the term here mainly for the sociocultural expectations (e.g. in the case of al-Mutanabbī, what a society of readers and receivers of poetry expect in terms of how a leader is praised in a poem). See: Hans Robert Jauss, Toward an Aesthetic of Reception, trans. Timothy Bahti (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982). For more on Jauss and his reception theory, see: Richter, The Critical Tradition, 981-988.
The verses reveal a concern on the poet’s part over the sociocultural expectations regarding the ruler’s personal traits. By resorting to the cultural repertoire of the ruler’s spotless virtue (glory and white soul) and cosmic power (brighter than the sun), the poem interprets these traits in a manner that legitimizes Kāfūr’s rule, on the one hand, and justifies the poet’s decision to include him in the institution of qaṣīda t al-madhī, on the other. The poem as a whole is transformed into a verbal ceremony of negotiation of the stature of poet and the stature of patron by portraying the two as mutually dependent on each other.

As al-Mutanabbī negotiates both his status and that of Kāfūr, he adopts a twofold strategy. First, Kāfūr has to be portrayed as a legitimate ruler, which requires a significant adjustment of concepts of legitimate rule, racial hierarchy, and bodily wholeness—in order for al-Mutanabbī to maintain his stature/status as poet to great rulers, he has to raise the status of

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60 Al-Mutanabbī, Dīwān, 1:34-35.
Kāfūr from black eunuch slave to legitimate ruler. Second, al-Mutanabbī has to establish himself as equal and counterpart; this does not mean being identical to him—rather, the two mutually reinforce each other’s status in each other’s domain: al-Mutanabbī’s in poetry and Kāfūr’s in rulership. This depiction of the two as equals and counterparts links the end of the poem to its beginning, where the claim of equality is explicitly expressed:

1. Felicitations are for equals
   or faraway people who come near

2. And I am part of you; no organ would felicitate
   the other organs with the joys

   ...

24. My heart is that of kings,
    although my tongue is seen to be that of poets

   إنما التهنيئات للكفاءة
   وليمن يَدُني من البُعداء

   وأنا منكم لا يَدُني غضَوء
   بالمسرات سائر الأعضاء

   ...

   وفؤادي من الملوك وإن كا
   ن لساني يَرُى من الشعراء61

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61 Ibid., 1:32, 36.
It is important to note that this was not the first ode that al-Mutanabbī addressed to Kafūr. He had already transferred his allegiance from Sayf al-Dawla to the Ikhshīdid regent through the performance of his famous ode *Kafā bika dā‘ an an tara-l-mawta shāfiyā* (You’ve had enough [sickness] when your death becomes your cure). Suzanne Stetkevych has read this traditional tripartite ode with its conventional elements as to effect the incorporation of Kāfūr, the non-Arab, into the establishment of the Arabic *qāṣīda* for “the conventional elements serve to identify, or establish a cognition or concordance, between Kāfūr and other Arabo-Islamic rulers to whom qaṣīdas are addressed.” My point here is that, after Kafūr is already incorporated into the institution of the Arabic *qāṣīda*, it is suitable in *The Poet is King* poem to proceed to the next step and depict the patron’s unique traits as black eunuch slave in terms relevant to the lexicon of the Arabo-Islamic *qāṣīda*.

To depict the uniqueness of the patron, the ruler who is a slave, the poem finds no more appropriate and expressive poetic way than to emphasize antithesis as a source of distinction, a “marker of differentiation,” in Bourdieu’s terms. Hence, we have a black sun in the cosmic realm against the bright sun, a black ruler in the political realm against the white rulers, a black skin against a white soul, and faraway people versus a close friend, i.e. the poet, in the social level. Al-Mutanabbī’s use of this set of antitheses performs a twofold function: one, it forms the cosmic and moral foundations for legitimizing a black slave as a ruler in an Arabic sociopolitical sphere; and two, and perhaps more importantly, it confers on the patron an illustrious status that renders him worthy of an illustrious poet and his poetry. It is all about mutual dependency for

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high status: the poet’s status is measured by that of his patron, which, in turn, the poet establishes through his madīḥ.

Classical commentary on al-Mutanabbī’s poetry did not fail to notice his attempts to erase the space between the poet and the patron and to portray the two as equal, or, in parlance more fitting to the present discussion, to present his self-image as complementary to that of authority and vice versa. In his commentary on this poem, particularly verse 2, the 11th century philologist and scholar al-Wāḥidī says after explaining the literal meaning, “And this is al-Mutanabbī’s way, most often claiming to be . . . equal to those he praises. This is not for the poet to claim, and I don’t know how it was tolerated from him.” Another 10th/11th century anthologist, Abū Manṣūr al-Thaʿālibī, said in his very long entry on al-Mutanabbī in his most celebrated anthology Yatīmat al-dahr fī maḥāsin ahl al-ʿāṣr that equating himself with the ruler is al-Mutanabbī’s madhhab (style) in his dīwān in general.

It is interesting that some classical critics found a useful tool in calling al-Mutanabbī “the king” for explaining even the aesthetic aspects of his poetry. When comparing al-Mutanabbī to his great predecessor Abū Tammām, Ibn Rashīq al-Qayrawānī says in a very insightful note in al-ʿUmda, ascribing the remarks to someone comparing the two poets:

ило́б [Абу́ Таммам] is but like the just judge: he puts the word in its place and gives the meaning (maʾna) its due after long consideration and search for evidence. Or [he is like] a pious jurist (faqīh): he puts effort into [choosing] his words and eschews [issuing a fatwa] out of fear for his religion. As for Abū al-Ṭayyib [al-

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Mutanabbi], he is like a mighty king: he takes what is around him by force and coercion, or like a brave, audacious [man] who breaks through what he wants with no heed of what he confronts or where he falls.65

Even in modern times, Adûnîs (the nom de plume of Syrian poet and theorist ’Ali Aḥmad Saʿîd, b. 1930), for example, could not help but reuse the words of his predecessor Ibn Rashîq to describe the sway of al-Mutanabbi’s poetry. In Adûnîs’s eyes, al-Mutanabbi is a poet “who created a an entire nature with words, on the same level as that of his ambition; one that shakes, advances, sweeps away, breaks through, forces, and transcends, as if it is the sides of his inner being, its extension, and completion.”66 The dramatized tone and poetic style of Adûnîs’s comments aside, the idea here does not seem far from my analysis of the Poet is King poem, namely that al-Mutanabbi created a poetic persona for his patron on the same level of greatness which he sees himself as a poet worthy of. He considers himself a counterpart and equal to the patron, and his self-image a complementary (or completion in Adûnîs’s words) to that of the great political leader that he established in his poetry. This ability to use words to create is what seems to matter the most in Adûnîs’s reading of al-Mutanabbi.

Al-Mutanabbi’s counter-reception: From al-Ḥātimî’s verbal duel to al-Ghadhdhâmî’s fuḥūla

Critics and poets, contemporary to al-Mutanabbi or contemporary to us, were very much aware of the authority that al-Mutanabbi saw his poetry as capable of bestowing and, most importantly, of the poetic self-image that he seemed to have so consciously cultivated. Al-Mutanabbi’s self-image as an equal and counterpart to authority, to patrons and even to prophets,


66 Adûnîs, Dīwān al-shīʿr al-ʿArabî, 4 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-Sāqî, 2010), 1:73. I will henceforth refer to it as: Adûnîs, Dīwān al-shīʿr.
which can be understood as both a metapoetic statement and a poetic result of his socio-cultural circumstances (e.g., he could make claims of equality to emirs and Ustādhs like Sayf al-Dawla and Kāfūr that he perhaps would not have been able to claim with caliphs) was so essential to his project that critics and poets could not help but comment on it, most often by trying to intervene in shaping that self-image through their reception and counter-reception.

A few examples should suffice to show how al-Mutanabbī’s self-image as equal to authority was a central target of the reception and counter-reception processes. In his acclaimed history of Arabic criticism Tārīkh al-naqd al-adabī `inda al-ʿArab (History of Arabic Literary Criticism) the eminent Palestinian scholar of Arabic literature Iḥsān ʿAbbās (1920–2003) called the critical movement spurred by al-Mutanabbī’s poetry, examined in a chapter of its own in his book, al-Maʿraka al-naqdiyya ḥawl aʿal-Mutanabbī (the critical battle over al-Mutanabbī). This “critical battle” was spearheaded by al-Risāla al-Mūḍiḥa (henceforth referred to as al-Mūḍiḥa), the earliest known critical work on al-Mutanabbī, written by the philologist and literary critic Abū ʿAlī al-Ḥātimī (d. 998). This first critical work on the movement that Iḥsān


68 For more on Iḥsān ʿAbbās’s biography and works, see: Wadād al-Qāḍī, “ʿAbbās, Iḥsān”, in: Encyclopaedia of Islam, THREE, Edited by: Kate Fleet, Gudrun Krämer, Denis Matringe, John Nawas, Everett Rowson. Consulted online on 20 February 2019 <http://dx.doi.org.proxy.library.georgetown.edu/10.1163/1573-3912_ei3_COM_23780>

69 Iḥsān ʿAbbās, Tārīkh al-naqd, 251-336.


ʿAbbās rightfully called “the critical battle over al-Mutanabbi” was, in effect, a verbal battle cast in prose.

Al-Mutanabbi as unequal/loser in a verbal battle: Al-Ḥātimī’s intervention in the poet’s reception

Although it was considered, following the sole claim of al-Ḥātimī, to include an actual, historical debate in tenth-century Baghdād between the poet and the critic, al-Ḥātimī’s work, like most classical Arabic adab literature, is a literary (re)construction of an event whose historicity cannot be definitely established. As an adab text, it is not a documentary record of actual events, but rather a literary work. It can be read as a “competitive” prose work, a case of literary duel to compete for rank and status that claims to record a dispute said to have taken place between al-Mutanabbi and al-Ḥatimī but is in effect a polemic aimed at destroying the poet’s carefully crafted self-image and defending the critic’s name in the literary circles of the time. It shows that al-Ḥātimī was very much aware of al-Mutanabbi’s claim that he was an equal and counterpart to authority, since it seems that al-Ḥātimī’s goal was to demonstrate that al-Mutanabbi, actually, is inferior/unequal to critical authority (himself), and, by extension, to declare the triumph of prose over poetry.71

In her article on al-Mūḍiha, the first, to the best of my knowledge, to explore the literary dimension of al-Ḥātimī’s work, Wen-Chin Ouyang compares al-Mūḍiha to one of al-Mutanabbi’s most famous “epic odes,” namely the ode on the siege of al-Ḥadath,72 suggesting that al-Mūḍiha can be read to constitute a prose contrafaction (muʿāraḍa) of the ode. While the

71 I elucidate this argument regarding al-Mūḍiha at length in: Alzahrani, “Undeclared Literariness.”

72 Al-Mutanabbi’s ode on the siege and recapturing of al-Ḥadath al-Ḥamrā’ by Sayf al-Dawla from the Byzantines in 945 can be found in: al-Mutanabbi, Dīwān, 3:378-392.
poet’s patron triumphs in the poem, and the poet is presented as equal or even superior to his patron, the imaginary combat/debate in the book declares al-Ḥātimī victor in the end.

Wen-Chin Ouyang maintains that *al-Mūḍiḥa* “announces al-Hatimi the winner of the match, for it is he who cracks al-Mutanabbi’s head open, should we, as al-Hatimi does, imagine the encounter as a combat, a duel between two warriors in which conceptual, linguistic and literary weapons of all sorts are used.” This duel between the two individuals (al-Mutanabbi and al-Ḥātimī) is understood to be a metaphor of a larger debate between two genres of court literature, namely poetry and prose, for they “as poets and scholars of poetry as well as language, were competitors for the attention and favors of their patrons.” Hence, *al-Mūḍiḥa*, at least in its shorter version *Jabhat al-adab*, “must be read, in one important sense, as an effort to topple poetry as the dominant ‘cultural institution’ at court.”

In *al-Mūḍiḥa*, al-Mutanabbi, the poet whose poetic self-image is that of an equal to authority, has no voice at all, save for the one affirming his enemy’s tarnishing his poetic image. Al-Ḥātimī has written “an extremely literary first person narrative account of a very literary duel set in the format of duet . . . [where] his voice drowns out that of al-Mutanabbi, the poet, in a

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74 Ibid., 131-132.

75 See on *al-Mūḍiḥa*’s versions: Wen-Chin Ouyang, “Literature as Performance.” She takes the version that came to be known in classical bibliographic literature as *Jabhat al-adab* to be the original one. This version, according to Ouyang, was later incorporated to be the first quarter of the much larger version of *al-Mūḍiḥa*, which she read as a product of a long historical process.

76 Ibid., 134.
self-serving reconstruction of a chain of events all leading to the total public humiliation of a poet silenced by al-Ḥātimī’s omniscient narrative.77"

I argue that claims of equality and inequality were at the core of al-Ḥātimī’s verbal combat. The poetic self-image of al-Mutanabbī as equal to authority was both the target of al-Ḥātimī’s attack and the strategy which he adopts in this verbal combat. On the one hand, al-Mutanabbī’s claims of being equal to his patrons and that no other poets are equal to him were al-Ḥātimī’s targets to topple. On the other hand, al-Ḥātimī’s claims are that, first, he is equal to al-Mutanabbī and, two, that in terms of knowledge of poetry, he is even better than the poet who is portrayed as inferior/unequal to him. These claims and counterclaims form the common thread running throughout al-Ḥātimī’s work.

That the poetic Mutanabbī, the self-fashioned equal to authority and unequalled poet, is the target of al-Ḥātimī’s verbal duel is very clear from the beginning of al-Mūḍiḥa. The opening section reads:

Abū Ḍalī al-Ḥātimī said: Upon his arrival to Madīnat al-Salām (Baghdād), Abū al-Ṭayyib al-Mutanabbī wrapped himself in a gown of arrogance, dragged the trains of lordliness, [contemptuously] averted his cheek, and remained aloof [from friendship]. He also would meet nobody except with a shaking of the two sides of his head, swaggering in a mantle of arrogance, and imagining that knowledge was limited to him and that poetry was a sea whose pure water none but him scooped, and a meadow on whose flowers none but him pastured. He had gloried in that for a long time during which he dragged the loose halter of ignorance. So he continued to strut about until, when he imagined that he was the fighter whom none could defeat, the contender whom none could match or challenge, and the lord of victory and the winner of the race, the men of letters in

77 Ibid., 119, 121.
Madīnat as-Salām could no longer bear him, many of them bent their heads, lowered their wings, and readied their hearts to surrender to him.\(^{78}\)

_Qurʾān, 15:88_. Based on a translation from: Hatem Alzahrani, _Undeclared Literariness_.

\(^{79}\) _Qurʾān, 31:18_. In _al-Mūḍiḥa_, the expression is “ṣā’ _ara khaddahā_,” which refers to the Qurʾānic expression “wa-lā _tuṣaʿaʿ ir khaddaka li-n-nās_,” by which Luqmān the Wise is a father giving pious admonitions to his son as not to lord over other people since God does not love the arrogant and the vainglorious.

\(^{80}\) _Qurʾān, 17:83, 41:51_. The expression “_naʿā bi-ḥānibihī_” comes from the Qurʾān, where it is used in the context of characterizing man as being apt to respond ungratefully to God’s fortunes.

\(^{81}\) _Qurʾān, 15:88, 26:215_, as “_wa-khufḍ _janāḥaka li-l-muʾminān_” and “_wa-khufḍ _janāḥaka li-mani-t-tabaʾa_ _aka mina-l-muʾminān_”, respectively. These are commands to the Prophet to turn his loving attention to the believers. The same expression can also be found in Qurʾān 17:24, as “_wa-khufḍ_ _la-humā_ _janāḥ-ah-_ _a_-dīdhulli min-ar-rahmati” to urge the Believers to show mercy to their parents when they get old.

\(^{82}\) _Al-Ḥātimī, al-Mūḍiḥa_, 253-254.
[Al-Mutanabbi was such that] Abū Muḥammad al-Muhallabi was such that none could compete against him and match him, and manage to feud off any of his insults; and [until when] it saddened Muʿizz al-Dawla that none in his kingdom could match his craftsmanship, or come up to the rank of the man who had returned from his adversary’s presence.

That al-Ḥātimī’s patron was so stunned by al-Mutanabbi that he imagined he had no equal to him is a great threat to al-Ḥātimī’s status as a man of letters. Hence, he made it clear that his intention was to tear al-Mutanabbi’s self-image apart:

At that time, I arose pursuing his flaws, tracing his tracks, extinguishing his fire, tearing down his curtains, clipping his claws, exposing his secrets, and tearing to pieces the cloak of his defects. [To do so,] I looked for the right moment to meet him in some house, so that he and I would race each other in a racetrack to distinguish the winner from the loser.


85 The adversary here is Sayf al-Dawla, al-Mutanabbi’s patron in Aleppo.

86 Al-Ḥātimī, al-Mūḍīḥa, 254.

87 Ibid.
After that, the two protagonists met, and then the one-sided conversation/debate began. Throughout the “debate,” and always through al-Ḥatimī’s omniscient narrative-form reconstruction of the event, the only thing that is equal to his voice is al-Mutanabbī’s silence.\textsuperscript{88} At the end of \textit{al-Mūḍiḥa} comes the scene where the poet (al-Mutanabbī) was defeated by the prose-writer (al-Ḥatimī), apologized for his arrogant behavior, and said, “language is surrendered to you.”\textsuperscript{89} And in what can be considered \textit{bayt al-qaṣīd} (the key paragraph) of his book, al-Ḥatimī responded to al-Mutanabbī’s surrender of language to him by saying:

Once I had defeated him in speech, he said: you there, language is surrendered to you!

I said: How can you surrender it when you are the father of its virginity, to you belong to its origin and secrets, and you are the worthiest to master it, elaborate on its derivations, and discourse upon its varieties? No one is more fitting to be asked about his language than you.

Then the assembly present began to apologize on behalf of him and [ask me to] accept his apology, and each one of them said [to me]: you, more than any others, should be the most fitting to relent and forgive him.

Having soothed my heart’s urge, I knew that exceeding the limits I had reached would be a type of injustice that I did not regard as my way.

And I saw in him the merit of precedence in his art, and accordingly I lowered my shoulder to him and began describing him in beautiful terms.\textsuperscript{90}

\begin{quote}
플라ً علولأة بالكلام قال: يا هذاء، مسلمةّ إنيك اللغةّ.
قلت: وكيفت تسميتها وأنت أبو غذزتها، ومنّ نصابها ومسّها، وأولئك الناس بالتحقيق بها والتوسط في اشتقاقها والكلام على أفانينها؟ ومنا أحدُ أولئك بأن يمسّ عن لغتهك منكّ.
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{88} See: Wen-Chin Ouyang, “Literature as Performance,” 137.

\textsuperscript{89} Al-Ḥatimī, \textit{al-Mūḍiḥa}, 269.

\textsuperscript{90} Ibid., 269.
This ending scene is most pertinent to the present discussion of the poet’s self-image and the sources of his symbolic power, mainly language, since it shows the acute awareness of the two parties that, first, they are engaged in a verbal duel whose weapons are linguistic/poetic/literary merits, and, second, that one of them has to surrender his weapon to the other because the economy of court literature does not allow for the coexistence of both stars.\textsuperscript{92}

While al-Ḥatimī accepted al-Mutanabbī’s apology (or on his behalf), he was surprised that a poet would surrender language. Although he attacked him throughout the book/debate, surrendering language means losing the poet’s \textit{raison d’être}, the very foundation of his symbolic (and material) power. It will also be most damaging to the critic’s career, for, after all, that career is based on the poet’s activity and engagement with language. Even as a prose writer, without al-Mutanabbī, the unequalled poet, al-Ḥatimī would not have been able to establish himself as the unequalled court \textit{adab} writer.

To sum up what I see as the relevance of al-Ḥātimī’s \textit{Mūḍiḥa} to the present discussion, it represents, as the first “counter-reception” of al-Mutanabbī, the critical awareness at the time of the poet’s self-image and its role in the cultural self-image at large. A close reading of \textit{al-Mūḍiḥa} suggests that the “debate” format is a literary conceit for a literary circle of readers, since the

\textsuperscript{91} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{92} On the economy of court literature and the dynamics of patronage, see: Wen-Chin Ouyang, “Literature as Performance,” 132.
idea of competition, which a debate would certainly evoke, is central to this circle as to much *adab* discourse. But however one interprets the *Mūḍiḥa*, it is still an original text in that it represents practical criticism of living poetry at the time (and today), hence it is a document of intellectual history. Furthermore, the growth of the *Mūḍiḥa* in four subsequent versions shows a popularity of this satire-debate genre, and the changes and expansions of constitute an important trajectory for the “counter-reception” that al-Ḥātimī was trying to plant.

What I have termed al-Mutanabbī’s unequalled self-image was the main target of al-Ḥātimī, who attempted to intervene in the process of its formation in the cultural memory. It is worth noting in this context that al-Mutanabbī was the first poet to organize his *Dīwān* himself, i.e. (to try) to control his own reception as a poet. This makes him an important subject, as his attempt shows a new awareness, on the poet’s part, of his legacy as part of society, a legacy al-Ḥātimī was perhaps attempting to intervene in its writing.

Al-Mutanabbī as equal to *fuhūla* and his modernist successors: Al-Ghadhdhāmī’s intervention

The idea that al-Mutanabbī is equal to the institution of Arabic poetry in its most celebrated form, i.e., the praise ode, persists even in the modern reception of him and his poetry. In modern Arabic criticism, the Saudi literary and cultural critic ʿAbdullah al-Ghadhdhāmī (b. 1946) took al-Ḥātimī’s intervention in the re-writing of al-Mutanabbī’s self-image to a higher level whereby not only al-Mutanabbī but the poetic tradition as a whole is attacked for its larger cultural implications.
In his influential and perhaps most controversial work, *al-Naqd al-thaqāfī* (Cultural Criticism),\(^{93}\) considered the first work on cultural criticism in Arabic, al-Ghadhdhāmī’s premise was that poetry created and normalized a certain “*nasaq*,” a term central to his argument. By this term he means a set of cultural norms that penetrates deep into the cultural discourse at large and displays itself in a multiplicity of forms. He further argues that the negative aspects of this *nasaq* are not necessarily realized by those producing, exchanging, and perpetuating the discourse, especially because the aesthetic surface of poetry attracts people and leave them unable to reach the deep *nasaq*.\(^{94}\)

As al-Ghadhdhāmī argues, behind the aesthetic breakthroughs that the likes of al-Mutanabbī achieved, and for which they were celebrated by modernists such as Adūnīs and his followers, there lies the ethically reprehensible *nasaq of fuḥūla* (from *faḥl*, lit. stallion camel).\(^{95}\) Characterized by being egocentric and self-righteous, this “tyrant-producing” discourse “poeticized” Arabic tradition in a negative way; that is, by setting it against rationality, plurality, femininity, and equality. Hence the modernist project in Arabic poetry, led by Adūnīs, was only modern, progressive, and revolutionary on the surface. Deep down in its core, it was a reactionary undertaking thanks to that *nasaq* whose ideal representative was precisely al-

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\(^{94}\) On the term *nasaq*, see chapter 2 of al-Ghadhdhāmī, *al-Naqd al-thaqāfī*, 55-89.

\(^{95}\) Ibid., 91-140. chapter 3 deals with what al-Ghadhdhāmī calls: “the invention of fuḥūla.”
Mutanabbī. Al-Ghadhdhāmī, in a very provocative manner, asked: is al-Mutanabbī a great creator (mubdiʿ) or a great beggar (shahḥādh)?

According to al-Ghadhdhāmī, Adūnīs focused on the aesthetic, formal aspect of poetry in a quest to find a new form for his modernist expression, like his traditional predecessors, poets and theorists alike. Hence when he turned to tradition to look for sources of inspiration, he overlooked what al-Ghadhdhāmī called that “ugly” nasaq of fūḥūla in the traditional poetic experiments. Even worse, Adūnīs, and the modernist movement in general, internalized this “ugly” aspect, gave it a modernist touch, and thus helped normalize it in the modern literary discourse. According to al-Ghadhdhāmī’s reading, Adūnīs’s project was merely “a project in changing the metaphor” and he is nothing but the faḥl of our time.

Al-Ghadhdhāmī’s reading of al-Mutanabbī, which concerns me the most here, shows how salient, tenacious, and influential the latter’s self-image is, so much that he deemed it as central in the formation of the nasaq of fūḥūla in Arabic culture. That said, I should clarify that I do not share al-Ghadhdhāmī’s assessment either of al-Mutanabbī or of Adūnīs, because it places the responsibility on poetry, or even one poet alone, for creating and perpetuating what he calls in such a sweeping generalization: the “ugly” aspects of culture. Such an assessment, coupled with the tendency to read poetry based on principles of modern morality and without taking into account its sociocultural and political exigencies, does not seem to fully appreciate the countless factors that lead to the formation of the cultural self-image, the complicated aspects of the Arabic

96 On how the modernist project in Arabic poetry is reactionary from the perspective of al-Ghadhdhāmī’s cultural criticism, see: Ibid., 243-295.

97 Ibid., 93.

98 Ibid., 295.
panegyric as an institution, and the poets’ fine dealings with authority in it, dealings that are totally eclipsed by declaring that panegyrists are mere mendicants.

**Al-Mutanabbī from equality to displacement: Adūnīs and Ghāzī al-Quṣaybī**

The processes of reception and counter-reception of al-Mutanabbī all constitute a cultural expression of the enormous sense of what Harold Bloom terms “the anxiety of influence” and the burden of the literary past. So famous and influential was al-Mutanabbī that, from his own day until ours, he was the one to beat. Al-Mutanabbī’s poetry, essentially, displaced the Qurʾān as the main point of competition for poets, and just as the Qurʾān was *muʿjiz* to its challengers, an incapacitating and immutable text, so was al-Mutanabbī’s poetry that the great poet and scholar Abū al-‘Alāʾ al-Maʿarrī (d. 1058), one of his most fervent admirers throughout history, called his commentary on al-Mutanabbī’s dīwān: *Muʿjiz Aḥmad*¹⁰⁰ (Aḥmad’s Miracle), where Aḥmad is al-Mutanabbī’s first name but also another name of Prophet Muḥammad. Al-Mutanabbī displaces the Prophet, and the prophecy imbedded in his own *laqab* (the would-be *prophet*) became fulfilled.

The anxiety of influence toward al-Mutanabbī includes all those who interacted with, or intervened in, his reception—al-Ḥatimī being the first among them. He just thought that he could compete with, or displace, al-Mutanabbī by writing a prose *risāla* (epistle). The same applies to al-Ghadhdhāmī, for introducing a new theory that claims to uncover the underlying negative

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aspect of Arabic poetry, and culture at large, whatever this exactly means, required going back to the Qurʾān of Arabic secular culture (al-Mutanabbī’s poetry) and coming to terms with it.

The *risāla* writer of the past and the theory promoter of the present felt compelled to compete with or displace al-Mutanabbī and, in the case of al-Ghadhdhāmī, with his modern reenactment in contemporary Arabic poetry. There can be only one *faḥl*, the belief seems to have been, and thus this *faḥl* has to kill his father, in the Freudian sense, in order to acquire his rank and status. Alternatively, as modern poets most often do, the strategy to gain their father’s status is to represent in their literary interventions with al-Mutanabbī his displacement of the greatest text in Arabic culture, namely the Qurʾān, and of Arabic history at large, and then build on this status to achieve one of their own.

In this context, modern Arabic literature, and poetry in particular, has participated in the conversation over al-Mutanabbī’s self-image, and it seems to have an altogether different take on al-Mutanabbī’s self-image than what Ghadhdhāmī and his precursor al-Ḥātimī thought. In a poem addressed to al-Mutanabbī and the city of Aleppo entitled *al-Mutanabbī wa-al-Shahbā’,* the Lebanese poet Bishāra ʿAbdullah al-Khūrī (nicknamed *al-Akḥṭal al-Ṣaghīr*, d.1968) said, alluding to al-Mutanabbī’s anxiety about his identity and perhaps hinting at his ambition to be appointed a governor, thus surpassing the conventions regarding the poet-ruler relationship into being an actual ruler:

45. Through poetry you asked for something whose status is below poetry

But your God had willed that you did not reach your quest

طَلَبْتَ بِالشَّعْرِ دُونَ الشَّعْرِ مَرْتَنِبَةً
In requesting such an appointment, al-Khūrī’s verse suggests, al-Mutanabbī is trying to cross the conventional boundaries between the poetics field and the political field and claim for himself a new status, which the verse sees as below his own as a poet whose capital is essentially symbolic. But perhaps al-Mutanabbī’s project was not aimed toward abandoning his poetic craft for material gain as the verse suggests. Other poets found al-Mutanabbī’s cultivation of his poetic persona as his ultimate goal even when praising a patron. The Yemeni poet Abdullah al-Baraddūnī (d. 1999) saw al-Mutanabbī’s poetic self as his true identity, a self so famous that it was capable of replacing his inherited name and substituting the powerful institution of lineage. According to al-Baraddūnī, this self was al-Mutanabbī’s beginning and end, as if alluding to the idea that even when praising patrons, al-Mutanabbī was actually praising himself. Al-Baraddūnī said in his poem warda min dam al-Mutanabbī (A Flower from al-Mutanabbī’s Blood), one of his most celebrated poems:

1. From the blaze of his brilliance he nearly became blind

   Because of the fame of his [poetic] name, he almost didn’t need a [real] name

2. From his self he came alone to it

   Throwing away his origin as dust and trace

مِنْ تَنْطُّلْيْ لِشفَعِهِ كَاذَا يَتَنَعَّمُي
كَاذَا مِنْ شَهْرَةِ اسمِهِ لا يُنَسَّمُي
جَاءَ مِنْ تَنَفَّسِهِ إِلَيْهَا وَحِيدًا

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102 Al-Baraddūnī, al-Aʾmāl al-shiʿrīyyah (San’a: Maktabat al-ʿIrshād, 2009), 1:926-934.
The idea of al-Mutanabbī’s relying on himself, rather than his *nasab* (lineage), finds echoes in other poets’ comments on his career. When asked about al-Mutanabbī as a person and persona, Maḥmūd Darwīsh said:

I am so much impressed with his persona. When he was accused of being a [mere] court poet (*shāʿ ir balāṭ* [in the pejorative sense]), he was not understood very well. In that era, and in all Arabic eras in the past, praise was not a vice at all. In my opinion, al-Mutanabbī did not praise anybody and did not praise the authority of the [political] institution; rather, he was establishing his poetic authority. He used his poetic power to establish an authority for poetry, and hence Sayf al-Dawla was [indeed] al-Mutanabbī. He saw himself; he did not see Sayf al-Dawla, and he used Kāfūr [only] in passing in order to expand the influence of his poetic authority.

Therefore al-Mutanabbī is not a *shāʿ ir balāṭ* at all. He is the authority of words, and all poets aspire to establish their aesthetic and linguistic authority, otherwise why would they write?104

As these past comments reveal, prominent modern poets are only half right regarding al-Mutanabbī, since they seem unwilling to admit what he himself admitted—that his praise of others was the source of his own reputation. Nevertheless, what persists in modern assessments of al-Mutanabbī is his self-image as a cultural authority challenging all other forms of authority in Arabo-Islamic history and the image of his *dīwān* as a secular/human replacement of the divine *muʿjiz* book. In the following pages I will focus on two interpretations of al-Mutanabbī’s

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103 Ibid., 1:926.

poetic persona: the first is found in the project of the “Prophet of Arabic Modernism,” i.e., Adūnīs, and the other takes place at the hand of a modern poet from the Arabian Peninsula who found himself facing a challenge from authority similar to what his great literary forefather faced, namely Ghāzī al-Quṣaybī.

Poetry displaces history: Adūnīs’s identification with al-Mutanabbī in *al-Kitāb*

Adūnīs chose al-Mutanabbī as his main character in his most daunting poetic-prosaic project, *al-Kitāb*, which can be read as a grand textual attempt to displace history with poetry as the authoritative record of the Arab past. In Adūnīs’s eyes, al-Mutanabbī “throughout his oeuvre, . . . embraces his self, converses intimately with it . . . in a captivating, worshipful tone. His poetry is a book on the greatness of the human self.” In *al-Kitāb*, Adūnīs writes his own book on Arabo-Islamic history but through al-Mutanabbī’s voice. The title *al-Kitāb*, which is another name of the Arabic divine book the Qurʾān, might suggest that Adūnīs intends this work to be understood as al-Mutanabbī’s displacement of the divine book.

From the subtitle of his trilogy *al-Kitāb*, in which Adūnīs writes, “A manuscript attributed to al-Mutanabbī, edited and published by Adūnīs,” the idea of displacement is simply and vividly manifest. In this book, al-Mutanabbī occupies the central position in the page while historical records are pushed to the margin. This is the strategy Adūnīs adopts to displace history with poetry and counteract what he sees as the marginalization of the creative voice, the different and independent, in Arabic culture. Al-Mutanabbī, as the quintessential Arab poet, is

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107 Adūnīs, *al-Kitāb*. 
here to recover poetry and place it at the center of Arab experience and identity, reclaiming the position that every poet dreams of achieving. In Adūnīs’s work, al-Mutanabbī narrates historical events and modifies them in a way that looks very similar to the idea that Adūnīs himself had already established in his first landmark study of Arabic culture *al-Thābit wa al-mutaḥawwil*.108 One might be justified in entertaining the idea that *al-Kitāb* is a revised and versified version of that work, one in which the innovative, poetic self takes precedence over conformity and imitation, and in which Adūnīs identifies completely as the “author” of *al-Kitāb* with his strong precursor. Al-Mutanabbī, in Adūnīs’s eyes, was the creative embodiment of the challenge to a hegemonic grand narrative; one authority was meant to challenge another, and one text was meant to displace another.

In the first pages of *al-Kitāb*, considered to be Adūnīs’s largest and last project on the issue of rereading tradition and its authority, the speaker says:

1. I seek shade,  
   I emerge from this memory.
   From its cycles and its [ever]-turning wheels.
   I seek the shade of my other ancestors

5. Whose light shines higher and farther than  
   the mire of killing  
   the darkness of the killers.

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In these verses, Adūnīs’s departure from one form of tradition (“this memory”) through a re-invented Mutanabbī is the modern poet’s strategy to subscribe to “another tradition” (“my other ancestors”). As a figure central to the Arabic modernist project, al-Mutanabbī’s poetic persona is resurrected and reconstructed by Adūnīs to effect a revisionist reading of Arabo-Islamic history where poetry becomes the center of cultural experience. Muhsin al-Musawi considers Adūnīs’s al-Kitāb an example of what he calls “textual apprenticeship,” a strategy that modern poets adopt, among many, to engage with tradition. Al-Musawi, indicating the centrality of al-Mutanabbī’s self-image to Adūnīs’s project, says:

al-Mutanabbi is deployed for a purpose in a book that makes use of his personal and poetic record within a historical and cultural context. The poet’s career and reputation, his controversial lineage, glory, majestic presence, and mastery of language make him a central figure in a text that aspires to gather history and culture in a nexus. The use of a major text that voices the precursor’s poetic pronouncements within marginal, but contextualizing, interventions and comments, of opposite claims and positions, is a mechanism to operate on history with power, and even retribution.

. . . Apprenticeship to the strong precursor is there; it culminates a career of innovation and acculturation, very much in line with that of the precursor. Now the poet outgrows association and strives for lineage. The so-called manuscript . . . is a

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109 Adūnīs., al-Kitāb, 37.
text that its present writer, Adūnīs, chooses to put under his newly claimed name, al-Mutanabbī. This culmination of a career sums up affiliations, concerns, inhibitions, aspirations, and frustrations.\textsuperscript{110}

Adūnīs assumes the name and identity of al-Mutanabbī as the persona who composed \textit{al-Kitāb}, which, of course, suggests a displacement of the Qur’ān. This use of al-Mutanabbī, as the strong(est) precursor, to provide a new reading of the past can also be seen in the project of another prominent Arab writer, the renowned Saudi poet, novelist, and statesman Ghāzī al-Quṣaybī (1940-2010) in his acclaimed 1996 novel \textit{al-ʿUṣfūriyya} (Insane Asylum).\textsuperscript{111} This novel presents an interesting case study of how a modern \textit{littérature} attempts to create a poetic persona for himself through a fictional re-writing of al-Mutanabbī’s biography, on the one hand, and, on the other, by means of inviting this historical/poetic persona to the modern world to read against him the cultural, social and political situation of the modern Arab world.

\textbf{The poet resurrected: Ghāzī al-Mutanabbī against the envious}

\textit{Al-ʿUṣfūriyya} narrates an extended dialogue between the main character, Professor Bashshār al-Ghūl, a madman who is nevertheless well-read in a wide variety of subjects, including world and Arabic literature, history, politics, philosophy, and the likes, and who does not admit his mental health condition. The Professor talks to the other main character, the psychiatrist (Dr. Thābit), and the dialogue takes place in the insane asylum, or \textit{al-ʿUṣfūriyya} (approx: “Birdcage”) in the Lebanese dialect. Dr. Thābit’s role is limited to asking some questions and trying to respond to


\textsuperscript{111} Ghāzī Al-Quṣaybī, \textit{al-ʿUṣfūriyya} (Beirut: Dār al-Sāqī, 1996).

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the Professor’s answers, which clearly show his astonishing wealth of knowledge on innumerable topics for which the logic of digression, essential to the narrative, provides a space.

Hence the Professor jumps from speaking about one historical figure to another, from 8th-century poet Abū Nuwās (d. between 813 and 815)\(^\text{112}\) to Syrian poet Nizār Qabbānī (1923-98);\(^\text{113}\) from 9th-century poet Ibn al-Rūmī (d. 896)\(^\text{114}\) to Adūnīs; from 13th/14th-century Ḥanbalī theologian Ibn Taymiyya (d. 1328)\(^\text{115}\) to 18-century Najī reformer and founder of the Wahhabi movement Muḥammad b. ‘Abd al-Wahhāb (1792);\(^\text{116}\) from Sayf al-Dawla al-Ḥamdānī to Jamāl ‘Abd al-Nāṣir (1918-1970);\(^\text{117}\) from Charles de Gaulle (1890-1970) to Michael Jackson (1985-2009); from Ernest Hemingway (1899-1961) to Shakespeare (d. 1616); from Egyptian writer and ideologue of Islamism Sayyid Qūṭb (1906-1966)\(^\text{118}\) to Fidel Castro (1926-2016); to name only a few. Al-Mutanabbī, whom Professor Bashshār calls “Abū Ḫusayd; his real kunya is Abū


Muḥassad,” accompanies him in almost all parts of the novel; in fact, the printed book begins with a verse by al-Mutanabbī, before the dedication page and before the actual novel begins.

In all the stories that the Professor narrates about these figures, al-Mutanabbī is always one of the main characters or a key witness. He recounts stories of his experiences in the many Insane Asylums he has visited, although he has always refused to consider himself mentally ill, citing as the reason for his confinement to the Asylum the misunderstanding on the part of the judges or psychologists of his condition, as a formidably well-informed man who knows more than they do.

From the beginning until the end, the issue of the relationship with the West emerges as one of the central sites of tension. The Professor believes that many Arab intellectuals and politicians have suffered from a complex called the “Khawāja complex” (Khawāja in Egyptian Arabic denotes a Westerner professional who travels or lives in the Arab world, especially in Egypt). This complex leads those intellectuals and politicians to imitate Western customs and traditions without any critical assessment and without paying heed to their own tradition.

The effects of the Khawāja Complex extend throughout the pages of the novel, to the extent that the modern history of Arabic culture and politics is seen to be a result of it. “All intellectuals of `Arabistān [the name the Professor gives to the Arab World] in the 19th and 20th centuries suffered from this complex,” the Professor said,\(^{119}\) and before intellectuals come the

\(^{119}\) Al-Quṣaybī, al-ʿUsfūriyya, 28.
politicians: “Khedive Ismail [Pasha],\textsuperscript{120} Doctor, had a Khawāja complex, Khedive size!\textsuperscript{121}” Even Shakespeare was a victim of this complex, otherwise “why would he have changed his beautiful Arabic name, Sheikh Zubayr, to this crude Anglo-Saxon name?\textsuperscript{122}” The work mixes history with fantasy to show through sarcasm a high degree of richness and complexity in reading history.

The Professor himself was not aware of al-Mutanabbī until he read Shakespeare and felt the urge to find an equal to him in the Arabic tradition. Concerns about being equal or unequalled are, again, at work once al-Mutanabbī enters a literary text. The Professor was envious of the West for having a writer of Shakespeare’s fame, especially since he was introduced to him by his girlfriend. He was trying to resist his own Khawāja Complex and prove to her that the Arabs have their own Shakespeare. This leads me to the other main issue in the novel: envy. The Professor uses envy as an explanation of many events in world history, especially events related to the cultural sphere. Here the Professor summons for the first time the persona of al-Mutanabbī, whom he claims to know personally, and provides explanations of the complex intersections between his biography and poetry.

The first mention, and most pertinent to my discussion here, comes when the Professor discusses al-Mutanabbī’s relationship with Sayf al-Dawla. The relationship between the two protagonists ended because the patron was a poetaster, as al-Mutanabbī told the Professor in the latter’s fanaticized history. Sayf al-Dawla was envious of his poetic excellence, and when al-Mutanabbī criticized his poetry, it was the beginning of the end of their relationship. The key


\textsuperscript{121} Al-Quṣaybī, al-ʿUsfūriyya, 17.

\textsuperscript{122} Ibid., 19.
sentence in this first mention of al-Mutanabbī is his comment on their relationship. He said to the Professor: “Sayf al-Dawla wished that he were a poet like me. Believe me! He was ready and willing to give up his rule to become a poet like me.”

This story stands in a total contrast to what traditional commentaries tell us about the reasons that led to the ending of the relationship between al-Mutanabbī and his patron(s). In these traditional sources, we are told that it was al-Mutanabbī who wanted a political appointment, and once his request was not granted, it was the beginning of the end of the poet’s relationships with two of his patrons: Sayf al-Dawla and Kāfūr. In other words, al-Mutanabbī is resurrected in al-Quṣaybī’s al-ʿUṣfūriyya to change his image in traditional sources from someone who “was ready and willing” to trade the patron his poetry for material gain to the one refusing to give up his poetic name, i.e., his symbolic capital, for the patron’s material capital. Again, al-Mutanabbī’s poetic persona is placed at the center and displaces tradition.

It is beyond the scope of the present study to discuss all aspects of this very complex narrative work that merges together poetry, politics, fantasy, history, different languages, dialects and language registers, and almost every prominent historical figure that one can think of. My main point here is to show how al-Mutanabbī’s persona was reconstructed in his modern reception to displace accepted historical narratives. The poet who loved no one but himself, as the Professor said, is nonetheless still “filling up the world and preoccupying people.”

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123 Ibid., 24.

124 See, for example, al-Thaʿālibī, Yatīmat al-dahr, 1:142.

125 Ibid., 72.

126 Ibid., 70.
The relevance and perceived influence of al-Mutanabbī as a persona who is used to express al-Quṣaybī’s modern anxiety, especially regarding the relationship to authority, is must clearly manifested in the latter’s 1984 poem *Risālat al-Mutanabbī al-akhīra ilā Sayf al-Dawla* (al-Mutanabbī’s Last Letter to Sayf al-Dawla). This work provides a reading of al-Mutanabbī’s dilemma with authority, exemplified by his departure from his patron in Aleppo, Sayf al-Dawla. A modern poet found in al-Mutanabbī’s persona a perfect voice to express a similar challenge from authority to his own self-image.

Ghāzī al-Quṣaybī can be said to best exemplify the tricky and delicate poet-authority relationship in modern Arabic poetry. A well-known poet, he was also a member of an elite family with strong ties to royal families of the Gulf.\(^{127}\) He served in many capacities in the Saudi government, including in the Cabinet where he held four different ministerial portfolios from 1975 until his death in 2010. His second post came in 1984, when King Fahd b. ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz (regn. 1982-2005) appointed him Minister of Health. His activity during the short-lived post was so popular with the public that some powerful people close to the Royal Court perceived him as exceeding his authority and becoming close to a legend. This led to a crisis in his relationship with the king, who, in spite of his high regard of al-Quṣaybī as a successful minister, had to refuse some of his official requests. A crisis between the two was about to rise to the surface.\(^ {128}\)

On March 5, 1984, the Saudi (Arabic-language) newspaper *al-Jazīrah* published al-Quṣaybī’s poem *Risālat al-Mutanabbī al-akhīra ilā Sayf al-Dawla*. As mentioned above, it was a

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\(^ {128}\) Al-Quṣaybī lists two main interrelated factors that were at play at the time and which ultimately led to the crisis: his popularity (the superstar phenomenon, as he calls it) and the enmity it caused towards him on the part of some officials and public figures.
reading of al-Mutanabbī’s political dilemma with his patron when he was forced to leave because of the slanderers. The poem was also a reflection on a modern poet, al-Quṣaybī himself, facing a similar dilemma with his “patron.” In the editor’s preface to the poem, one reads:

Every now and then, our young poet Dr. Ghāzī al-Quṣaybī pleases us with a wonderful poem of his. Perhaps our poet this time intended, by addressing Sayf al-Dawla, to reflect some feelings roaming in his heart, [to talk about] a painful thing that hurt his soul and made him worry, as was the case with Abū al-Ṭayyīb in the time of Sayf al-Dawla.

And whatever this analysis of ours of the dimensions of this poem is, we however believe that Dr. Ghāzī intended to get back something that he lost, or that people lost, which is the purity of the heart and the strength of the foundation [of love] with one whom he sincerely loves, or with those who love him. [We believe] that he is working to consolidate that love.

What we hope is that this poem achieves for the Dr. Minister what he intends [to achieve].

The preface makes it clear that the poem was intended allegorically to allude to Saudi domestic politics, in particular the relationship between the poet (al-Quṣaybī) and his patron (the king). The publication of the poem was the straw that broke the camel’s back! A few weeks later, al-Quṣaybī was dismissed from his position as Minister of Health, as was Khālid al-Mālik from

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his position as editor-in-chief of *al-Jazīrah*. Al-Quṣaybī later admitted that the publication of the poem was a breach of all social and political norms.\(^{130}\)

The 25-verse poem conveys a threefold message: One to Sayf al-Dawla, i.e., the king, that blames him for believing the poet’s “slanderers” despite his loyalty to him and the strong bond of love between the two; the second to the slanderers, attacking them as “unworthy of serious combat” because they are “false knights;” the third message is that of the poet’s pronouncing the merits of his craft to safeguard his self-image. It begins by addressing the patron directly:

1. Between me and you are a thousand slanderers cawing  
   So about what should I sing at length?

2. My voice is wasted, you don’t recognize its echo  
   When before you used to be enraptured when I sang

...  

6. They deceived [you] and you liked the deception  
   When before perfumed falsehoods did not please you

\(^{130}\) See Al-Quṣaybī, *Ḥayāh fī al-ʿidāra*, 265-267, where he recounts the days immediately preceding and following the publication of the poem.
The poem then turns to the slanderers, this time not directly but through asking a third party to convey the message to them. It is as if the poet uses this device to confirm their unworthiness of all types of fighting, physical and verbal alike.

8. Say to the slanderers: I am raising my white flag, so attack me and strike me [as you will]

9. I am not good at fighting these battles. Who would fight when his opponent is a fox?

…

11. Manhood refuses to defile its sword. A fearless man’s defeat might be his triumph

**وَلَمْ تَكَنِّ خَذَّعْوا فَأَغْجَبِيكَ الخُدَّاعُ وَلَمْ تَكِنْ مَنْ قَبْلَٰكَ بِالْأَرْفُغُ رَابِثَي**

**هَذِي النَّمَعْرَكَ لَسْتُ أَحْسَنَ خَوْضَهَا مَنْ ذَا يَنْحَارِبُ وَالْبَغْرِيْمَ التَّغْنِلَبُ؟!**

**تأَبَّى الرُّجُوعَةُ أَنْ تَذْنَبْ مَنْ سَيْغَفْنَاهَا قَدْ يَنْغَلِبُ النَّمَعْرُ مَعَانَةَ بِيْغَلْبَ بٌ**

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131 Al-Quṣaybī, “Risālat al-Mutanabbī.”

132 Ibid.
Immediately after the poem mentions manhood, it returns to the patron and, indirectly this time, presents the ideal picture of manhood, as if warning him that losing your poet is, in effect, losing your own perfect image, since it is construct by the poet himself. He said:

12. At dawn, wilderness will embrace my journey’s mounts, for the freeman escapes once he sees displeasure

3. Wilderness is more generous: not overflowing with gifts for a time
   And then listening to the slanderers and running dry

Nature is presented in these verses to be more humane than man. Even wilderness, with its apparent lack of basic life conditions, embraces the poet and treats him with generosity. It is as if the poet’s voice still has some faith in the patron that, despite the current crisis, his nature will lead him to admitting his mistake in listening to the slanderers and abandoning his poet. By describing the patron as the once-generous man whose gifts have now run dry, the poet hints at his role in shaping the patron’s image, and at the same time sends a friendly warning that this image is subject to modification should the crisis severs the relationship. In fact, the poet is ready to embrace even the wilderness and describe it as generous if need be. However, he is unable to conceal his conflicting feelings towards his patron, the one whom he still loves and respects, thus

133 Ibid.
the poem returns to addressing the patron directly, as if the poet promises to return to him and become present physically:

17. Separation is imminent, so should I say my farewell in silence?  
    Or are you listening to reproof so that I should blame?
    …

20. O my master, injustice is not sweet,  
    But if it has pleased you, then it is sweet\textsuperscript{134}

21. Paid poems will be addressed to you  
    for the hungry panegyrists are at the ready

22. A pen that is bought and sold cannot be equal  
    to a quill writing with the eye’s blood

\begin{align*}
\text{أَزْفَ الْفَرَاقَ، فَهَلَّ أَوَّلَ حَصَبٍ؟} \\
\text{أَمْ أَنْتَ مَنْصُوحٌ لِلْمَسْأَبَابٍ لّمْأَنْتُبَيْبٌ؟} \\
\text{…}
\end{align*}

\begin{align*}
\text{يا سَيْدِي، وَالْطَّلَامَمْ غَنِينَشَ مَحْنَبٌ} \\
\text{أَنْتَ وَقَدْ أَرْضَكَ فَنَهُو مَحْنَبٌ} \\
\text{سَتَتَقَالُ فِي كَفَّارَةَ مَاجُوْرَةُ} \\
\text{فَالْمَا بَنُونَ الْجَانِعُونَ تَأْهِبَوا} \\
\text{لا يَنْسَتَّوْيَ قَنْلَمْ بِبَاغٍ وَيَشَّرَى}
\end{align*}

\textsuperscript{134} Al-Quṣaybī is clearly echoing al-Mutanabbi’s last poem to Sayf al-Dawla before he left him for Egypt. In the M-rhymed, 37-verse poem, al-Mutanabbi said:

26. If you are glad about the words of those who envy me,  
    Then a wound that pleases you will not cause me pain.

\begin{align*}
\text{إِنْ كَانَ شَرَكَتُمْ مَا قَالَ حَاسَنَا} \\
\text{فَمَعَ لَجِنْ لَهُ إِذَا أَرْضَاكُمْ أَلِمُ} \\
\end{align*}

At this point, what remains is for the poet to turn to his self-image and reaffirm his identity as a poet, one whose craft will make those who reject him regret their decision. While kings are temporal and temporary, his poetry is cosmic and immortal:

18. I am the poet of the world, my poetry has covered its surface going through it east and west

36. I am the poet of the cosmos: every small word of mine is shining on the twilight of eternity

The poem ends with the affirmation, in purely Mutanabbian motifs and diction, of the modern poet’s self-image as an independent voice who chooses to praise patrons not merely for material gain but to immortalize himself. It also reads al-Mutanabbī’s authority crisis through the same lens, as his flight from the court of the Arab Emir Sayf al-Dawla to the black slave regent of Egypt signaled a shift in al-Mutanabbī’s career that was not easy to understand. Here, along with justifying al-Mutanabbī’s position, al-Quṣaybī is justifying his own as well, by putting the blame on the part of the patron who did not reward loyalty with due appreciation and defense in the face of slanderers in the competitive literary circles of the time. Al-Mutanabbī’s rift with Sayf al-Dawla was a critical moment in the history of the poet versus authority in Arabic poetry.

135 Al-Quṣaybī, “Risālat al-Mutanabbī.”

136 Ibid.
one that brings the ideal poet and the ideal patron together. Hence, it is the one that modern poets like al-Quṣaybī felt the need to revisit in order to exculpate the poet and, in the process, in the case of al-Quṣaybī in particular, exculpating themselves. Suzanne Stetkevysch writes on the al-Mutanabbī-Sayf al-Dawla moment:

The ideal poet-patron match is celebrated in the Arabic poetic tradition above all in the relationship of Abū al-Ṭayyeb al-Mutanabbī, considered the last and the greatest of the classical poets (*khātam al-shuʿarā*, “the seal of the poets”), and Sayf al-Dawlah, the Ḥamdānid prince of Aleppo, idealized as the consummate embodiment of Arabo-Islamic chivalry.¹³⁷

Al-Quṣaybī’s poem is an intervention in the formation of his predecessor’s self-image while at the same salvaging his own. And just as the Professor in his novel *al-ʿUṣfūriyya* reads the crises that the “the Arab’s greatest poet” faced with his patrons in the context of the envious atmosphere of the competitive literary circles of the time, al-Quṣaybī identifies with his precursor in the poem and reads his own crisis with authority through the same lens. It was his success that made him the object of envy, which ultimately led to his slanderers’ success in removing him from his post.

*Al-Mutanabbī displaces the Muʿjiz: Verbal power and authority immortalized*

While al-Mutanabbī’s image in traditional critical sources, such as that in al-Ḥātimī’s *al-Mūdiḥa*, is of a man given to unbounded pride and arrogance, and thus himself responsible for his fraught relationships with patrons and others, al-Quṣaybī, Adūnīs, Darwīsh, and the other poets whom this chapter has examined, understand it for what it really was: the full self-confidence of al-Mutanabbī in his verbal power to immortalize himself and others (as personas

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of virtue or vice)—a confidence that proved well-founded. His verse, name, and names of those whom he praised or blamed, are immortal. Modern poets have a crisis of confidence in themselves, and in poetry as the institution *par excellence* of the Arabic self, hence they have taken al-Mutanabbī as their model.

Al-Mutanabbī, who was very much aware of the cultural and political turmoil of his time, emphasized his unequalled, irreplaceable poetic persona as an emphasis on the role of poetry in the time where the sociopolitical conditions were threatening the institution of the Arabic ode. Suzanne Stetkevych sums up that context in which al-Mutanabbī’s poetry operated:

The political and military instability of the period and the resultant precariousness of the local dynasts made for a poetry quite grounded in the realpolitik of the time and for a sense on the part of the poet that he, too, could be a player in the atmosphere of increasingly shifting political and military alliances. With true power in the hands of these warlords and petty dynasts, the awe and attraction of the ideologically maintained but practically impotent caliphate waned, and even the greatest panegyric of the day focused on the personal, usually military, accomplishment of individual local patrons. At the same time, the power vacuum at Baghdad opened the field for a fierce competition for authority, legitimacy, and prestige, and thus a market for the skills of a panegyrist who could frame sheer military political success in the myth and ideology of legitimate rule.\(^{138}\)

This lack of trust in long-term alliances and bonds of friendship seems to have found its perfect expression in al-Mutanabbī’s poetry. He saw a political institution shaking, and with it a tradition whose main foundation was poetry. Hence the emphasis of the centrality, uniqueness, and self-reliance on his poetry can be understood as an affirmation of poetry itself in the face of a cultural crisis that threatened the traditional institution of the Arabic *qaṣīda*. Therefore, it is not

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\(^{138}\) Ibid., 181.
surprising that, given his highly felt self-image as a unique, single voice, he claimed to be the only real poet of his time. While he finds “alleged” poets wherever he looks, he is the only one who exemplifies poetry itself:

24. O my two companions,
    I surely see nobody but [alleged] poets.
    So why [is it] from them [comes only] the claim
    while from me [come] the poems?

The claim means that there was no other real poetry; he was the only one who could save that traditional institution. This metaphor of a messianic persona who could save the world is understandable coming from someone who identified himself with a number of prophets in an early age. In one of his earliest poems, the only one in his entire dīwān that is not addressed to anyone, he compares himself to a number of prophets, the first of whom to appear in the poem is no other than the Messiah (al-Masīḥ); the other prophets being Aḥmad (referring to the Prophet Muḥammad), Dāwūd (David), and Sāliḥ.140

In his D-rhymed, 36-verse poem kam qatīlin kamā qutīltu shahīdī (How Many a Slain One Like Me Is a Martyr?),141 al-Mutanabbī claims to displace the Prophet, hence it is not unusual to find accounts in traditional sources, including almost all major commentaries, saying that this poem was the reason he was given his sobriquet al-Mutanabbī (“the would-be

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139 See the verse in al-Mutanabbī, Dīwān, 1:271.
140 Al-Mutanabbī, Dīwān, 1:313-324.
141 Ibid.
The poem is only one example of an entire oeuvre that forms what can be called a “moment of displacement” where authority (here exemplified by prophetic authority) is displaced by the poet. In this poem, he became the ultimate incarnation not only of the Arab Prophet, but all prophets, and hence became part of a continuous divine and transcendental history:

18. My dwelling in the land of Nakhla is only like
The Messiah’s dwelling among the Jewish people

36. I am among a people—may God visit them with favor [or destruction]¹⁴³
A stranger like Sāliḥ among Thamūd

Al-Mutanabbī’s prophecy in his early poetic phase to be a displacement of prophethood as a whole seems to be fulfilled in the poetic and literary generations after him, from Abū al-ʿAlāʾ al-Maʿarrī Muʿjiz Ahmad to Ghāzī al-Quṣaybī’s ‘Uṣfūriyya. It should not come as a surprise, then, that al-Maʿarrī and al-Quṣaybī, two of the most fervent admirers of al-Mutanabbī, have been compared with each other. On the back cover of the book, the renowned Sudanese

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¹⁴² Al-Thaʿālibī, Ṭaʿālibat al-dahr, 1:147.

¹⁴³ The Arabic is “tadārakahā Allāhu,” which could have both meanings: may God visit them with favor “and save them from their meanness,” as in Lane, or may God visit them with destruction “so that I may be safe from them.” See: Root d-r-k in Edward William Lane, *Arabic-English Lexicon*, 8 vols. (New York: Frederick Ungar, 1958 [London, 1863]). I will henceforth cite it as Lane.

¹⁴⁴ Al-Mutanabbī, *Dīwān*, 1/319, 324.
novelist al-Ṭayyib Ṣāliḥ (who was said to be himself a great admirer of the would-be-prophet) writes that al-Quṣaybī’s al-ʿUṣfūriyya is al-Maʿarī’s Risālat al-ghufrān (The Epistle of Forgiveness) of our time.¹⁴⁵

Arab modernity resorts to poetic tradition in moments of rupture in order to restore order to the sociocultural fields, and it is al-Mutanabbī that modern Arabic writers, in poetry and prose, have seen as a displacement, in the sense that his oeuvre displaces the divine text as the point of competition. But the interventions by modern Arab writers with al-Mutanabbī’s self-image as equal to authority reveals another form of displacement, this time in the psychoanalytical sense of the word, where “displacement” denotes metaphor or metonymy, which bring dreams, fantasies or artistic works to manifestation.

To Freud, “Dream-displacement and dream-condensation are the two governing factors to whose activity we may in essence ascribe the form assumed by dreams.”¹⁴⁶” David Richter clarifies that “Freud treats the unconscious psyche of the dreamer as a kind of poet. . . . What Freud calls ‘displacement’ is a process similar to poetic metaphor, and the process can be recursively repeated to create a more complicated code, a signifying chain of metaphors of metaphors. If displacement corresponds to metaphor, condensation corresponds to poetic metonymy or synecdoche, where several different associations to the forbidden fantasy coalesce into a single complex vision.”¹⁴⁷”

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¹⁴⁵ See the back cover of al-Quṣaybī, al-ʿUṣfūriyya.


This anatomy of how dreams and poetry work was taken to the next level by the neo-Freudianism of Jacques Lacan whose revision of Freud “shifts the description of mental processes from a purely biological model to a semiotic one.”\(^{148}\) Lacan holds that, “‘condensation' is the structure of the superimposition of the signifiers, which metaphor takes as its field, and whose name . . . shows how the mechanism is connatural with poetry to the point that it envelops the traditional function proper to poetry. In the case of . . . 'displacement,' [it] is closer to the idea of that veering off of signification that we see in metonymy, and which from its first appearance in Freud is represented as the most appropriate means used by the unconscious to foil censorship.\(^ {149}\)

From the Freudian-Lacanian “displacement,” what is most pertinent to the discussion of al-Mutanabbî’s name and persona in modern Arabic literature is that he was reinterpreted to act as a metaphor or metonymy, a linguistic and psychological displacement of modern Arabic culture’s fears of losing poetry, the foundational expression of Arab identity. In all cases discussed above, al-Mutanabbî appears as an icon who can accommodate the past, the present, and the future. He can be summoned to comment on history, ancient and recent, on national and international political and cultural events and on personal crises; summoned by modernists and traditionalists; by poets and novelists; and by theorists and practitioners and those who wear both hats.

Al-Mutanabbî’s poetic self-image, achieved through a verbal contest or challenge that involves the confrontation between the poet and authority, can be best understood through the

\(^{148}\) Ibid., 1112.

moment, according to tradition, when the actual encounter between the poet and the greatest challenge to his poetic, linguistic, traditional, and visionary authority, i.e., the Prophet and his new text, the Qurʾān, appeared. The next chapter will explore how poetry responded to that challenge and what self-image created for itself to counteract it.
Chapter 2:
Incorporation or Rejection Between the Poet and the Prophet

Can poetic capital be shared?

Since the Prophet in Arabo-Islamic tradition relied for the establishment of his authority on a linguistic medium (the Qurʾān), which seemed to compete with the poet in his own field, the study of the poetic representation of the relationship between the poet and the Prophet in early Islam along with its reception in modern poetry is bound to provide insights on how the poet presented his definitions of the self and the other when negotiating with an authority that enjoys the privilege of a medium of the same kind as his own. The poetic tongue referred to by al-Mutanabbī in chapter 1 of this study (“My heart is that of kings, although my tongue // is seen to be that of poets”) is no longer the poet’s monopoly. The “king” now has his “poetic” tongue too.

The new authority that the Jāhilī poet faced came with a Qurʾānic text, which was based on the same linguistic and cultural foundations of that “tongue,” but now challenges the poets in order to establish its own legitimacy. How did the poet deal with this competition in his verbal medium? How did he define and protect his poetic capital? How can one draw a picture of the relationship between the poet and this new authority? How has the form of this relationship changed throughout history, between the time when the Prophet exercised his political and cultural authority on the ground and the modern situation when the Qurʾānic text itself has become the emblem of prophetic and divine authority? And finally, what does this tell us about the definitions that poets adopt for poetry and its relation to prose?
To answer these questions, this chapter explores the relationship between the poet and the Prophet in Arabic poetry as manifested in three poems: Kaʿb ibn Zuhayr’s L-rhymed poem *Bānat Suʿād* (Suʿād Has Departed), Tamīm Ibn Muqbil’s R-rhymed poem *Taʿammal khalīlī* (Contemplate, O My Friend), and Maḥmūd Darwīsh’s L-rhymed poem *Qāfiya min afl al-Muʿallaqāt* (A Rhyme for the Suspended Odes). It attempts to uncover the ways through which the poetic and cultural self-image of poets from the classical and modern periods was articulated vis-à-vis prophetic authority.

Taking into consideration the poetry/prose dichotomy, I adopt the view that the first two poems reveal two drastically different “poetic events.” While Kaʿb’s poem constitutes the “Poem of Incorporation” type of poetic event, by incorporating the Prophet and his prosaic text into the tradition of the classical ode, and incorporating the poet and his classical ode into the Islamic cultural establishment and its Qurʾānic text, Ibn Muqbil’s poem, by contrast, establishes a “Poem of Rejection;” a rejection of the typical tripartite form of the classical ode, a rejection of a possible reconciliation between two times and two cultural/textual systems, and, most importantly, between the Prophet and the poet. I read Ibn Muqbil’s poem as an aesthetic and cultural precursor or proto-type of Darwīsh’s *Qāfiya*, which came only to intensify this rejection by universalizing it and placing it within an archetypal narrative of an inevitable conflict, not only between the poet and the prophet, but also between the poet and the divine. Darwīsh’s *Qāfiya* is, ultimately, a double-rejection poem, for it also rejects the modernist rejection of the *turāth* as exemplified by the traditional metrical system and its modern continuity in *shiʿr al-taḥfīla* (Free-Verse).

I devote the bulk of this chapter to Darwīsh’s *Qāfiya*. I will first contextualize it within the poet’s larger aesthetic and cultural project, and then I will provide a full translation of the
poem and read it in light of the two poems and poetic events mentioned above. But since I read three texts belonging to two different cultural periods, perhaps I should first say a few words on how I see the relationship between these texts take place.

**Tradition and influence: Sariga, intertextuality, and metapoetry**

Since pre-Islamic times, poets were aware that their predecessors had paved the way for them to compose poetry. Later poets understood that their poems had a lineage and that they should strive for originality of form and theme in order to secure a place in the poetic tradition. And although it is not always safe to try to understand classical notions through the lens of modern concepts, one can say that classical Arabic poets’ awareness of their forebears’ aesthetic achievements, on the one hand, and of their need to surpass them, on the other, does not seem remote from the main thesis of Harold Bloom’s Anxiety of Influence, which maintains that poets who produced great works of poetry were chiefly driven by a thirst for originality stemming from a sense of anxiety towards their predecessors.

Such awareness of the location of the individual talent within a long-standing tradition, to use T. S. Eliot’s words, can be found even in pre-Islamic poetry, the time when tradition was still evolving, at least according to what has been passed down to us. Most famous in this regard is the opening line of the *Mu‘allaqa* (Suspended Ode) of ’Antara b. Shaddād (d. early seventh

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150 Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence*. One must mention here a very important work that preceded Bloom’s study of the influence of poetic tradition, namely Walter Jackson Bate’s *The Burden of the Past and the English Poet*. In this 1970 study, Bate raised important questions about the pressure exerted on modern poets by their precursors, questions that, three years later, Bloom expanded based on a Freudian understanding of that pressure. See: Walter Jackson Bate, *The Burden of the Past and the English Poet* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1970).

century), which somehow indicates a sense of the “burden of established poetic tradition,” as put by Suzanne Stetkevych. ‘Antara says:

1. Have the poets left a single spot to sew a patch on?  
   Or did you, after long contemplation, recognize the abode  
   [where your loved ones once dwelt]?  

A more specific example comes from the poetry of Imruʾ al-Qays, the poet whose originality was so widely acknowledged that he was credited with establishing some of the central conventions of the Arabic qaṣīda, such as the wuqūf and istīqāf motif of the nasīb section where the poet stops to weep over the departed beloved and asks his companions to do the same).

In a verse attributed to him, he said:

4. Halt, [my] two [companions] on the ruins that have changed, perhaps we can  
   Weep over the abodes as Ibn Khidhāmi wept [over them]

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153 S. Stetkevych, “Arabic.”


156 Imruʾ al-Qays, Dīwān, 474.
The verse refers to a fifth (or sixth) century poet, Ibn Khidhām (or Ibn Ḥidhām) as the one who invented the nasībic motif of elegizing the deserted campsites (al-bukāʾ ʿalā al-ḍūḍūl). In this verse, Imruʿ al-Qays seems to imply that tradition is a source of creativity. Moreover, the verse explicitly indicates his awareness of the lineage of this highly celebrated motif, and it might suggest an implicit attempt on his part to preemptively vindicate himself from charges of poetic theft, or sariqa, a term that would later come to dominate the discussion in pre-modern Arabic poetics of something similar to what is called in modern parlance: intertextuality.

Generally speaking, the question of the interaction between poets and their literary antecedents has been central in the study of poetry, both in classical Arabic criticism and modern literary theory. Many answers to that question have been mooted, which resulted in a voluminous body of works directing the inquiry toward different components of the author-text-reader triangle. In classical Arabic criticism, terms such as sariqāt (poetic plagiarisms) and muʿāraḍāt (poetic contrafactions; emulations), with various attempts at tracing their instances in poetic works and theorizing their implications, are only two examples that attest to the

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159 Ibid., 438.


significance the Arabic critical canon has attached to issues at the very heart of the poetic process, such as originality, creativity, and influence.

In modern literary theory, the debate about the abovementioned question has been intense, perhaps most famously since T. S. Eliot published his essay “Tradition and the Individual Talent,” in which he contested the hitherto unchallenged “European” notion of poetic creativity, which had been seen as directly proportional to the abandonment of tradition; that is, the more poets depart from tradition, the more talented they are and the more creative and original their works are. Quite to the contrary, Eliot insists that any new artistic work actually takes place within a well-established literary order, only to modify it and add new meanings to it.\textsuperscript{162}

A few decades after the publication of Eliot’s essay, Harold Bloom’s theory of intra-poetic influence transformed the relationship between creative individuals and their tradition into a Freudian-informed notion of anxiety, arriving at what he calls “creative misreading” as an explanatory paradigm that accounts for the development of literary history. “Misreading” is a central concept in Bloom’s study of influence, where he sees the history of poetry as nothing but later poets’ creative reproduction, or misreading, of their precursors’ works.\textsuperscript{163}

As for the question of influence in modern scholarship on Arabic poetry, recent studies have emphasized continuity in this poetic tradition,\textsuperscript{164} especially with regard to its preeminent form, the \textit{qaṣīda} (ode), whose proper reading depends to a large degree on a considerable

\textsuperscript{162} Eliot, \textit{The Sacred Wood}, 42-53.

\textsuperscript{163} Harold Bloom, \textit{A Map of Misreading} (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975), 83-105.

familiarity with its tradition, coupled with a great sensitivity to its inter-textual and inter-referential nature.\textsuperscript{165} Suzanne Stetkevych maintains that, when dealing with the Arabic ode, not only do we find ourselves with “textual” influence, but with the reenactment of ritual and ceremonial scenes well-established in the pre-Islamic and the Arabo-Islamic traditions.\textsuperscript{166} Hence a new Arabic poetic work can be said to engage in constant dialog with earlier poems, and gradually with subsequent ones, even if a first glance at its features tends to suggest otherwise.\textsuperscript{167} At the same time, by placing itself in an ever-expanding continuity, this new poem alters the way we read preceding works, making the process of reading and interpretation highly dynamic and productively multidirectional.

This dynamic dialogue between poets and their predecessors and the reenactment of the poetic past has been an important field of inquiry in studies on metapoetry in the Arabic tradition, which have contributed to our understanding of poetic influence and the ways in which later poets responded to the challenge of originality and creativity within a tradition characterized by continuity. As “metapoetry” can be understood as the poem talking about itself, poets had to deal with the tradition of that poem when voicing their pronouncements about its form and their adjustments of it. Simply put, metapoetry takes place when the poet is preoccupied with issues pertaining to the nature of poetry, its stylistic features, its engagement with the literary debates of the time, its referential and intertextual utterances, and the role of its


\textsuperscript{166} Suzanne Stetkevych, \textit{The Mantle Odes: Arabic Praise Poems to the Prophet Muhammad} (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010), 53.

\textsuperscript{167} Even modern poetry, with its form differing drastically, in some cases, from that of the classical ode, still places literary tradition at the core of its poetic project. For more information, see chapter 2 (The Tradition-Modernity Nexus in Arabic Poetics) in: Al-Musawi, \textit{Arabic Poetry}, 30-67.
aesthetics at large. Poets often resort to this type of poetic experimentation in moments of
rupure, when identity (literary, cultural, or otherwise) is in crisis. The poem hence becomes a
medium through which the poet expresses his/her views regarding significant issues such as the
self versus the other, innovation versus tradition, and what it is like to explore uncharted creative
territory.

Some studies of note have addressed the metapoetic aspect of classical Arabic poetry.
One example is Suzanne Stetkevych’s interpretation of Abbasid Badīʿ (novel/innovative) poetry
as a metapoetic undertaking whose main function was to decode (and re-encode) the ancient
poetic tradition so as to accommodate and respond to the new, urban sensibilities of the Abbasid
era. Another example, which I mentioned in chapter 1, is Beatrice Gruendler’s reading of the
last part of the classical ode, particularly Ibn al-Rūmī’s panegyrics, as a “meta-strophe” that
contains the poet’s comments on his craft and tackles issues related to the function of poetry and
the conditions of patronage.

As for the study of metapoetry in modern Arabic poetry, one important work is Jaroslav
Stetkevych’s “Modernity and Metapoetry in Muḥammad Ṭarīq Maṭar’s Hunt Poem: Ṭardiyyah,”
where he argues that the modernist poem of Egyptian poet Muḥammad Ṭarīq Maṭar (d. 2010)
takes the traditional hunt poem as an allegory for the poet’s quest for the perfect and final
poem. In addition to J. Stetkevych’s study, Yair Huri has explored the metapoetic phenomenon

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169 Gruendler, Medieval Arabic Praise Poetry.
of Arabic Literature 43, no. 2/3 (2012): 137–171. This study would become part of the author’s most recent book:
Jaroslav Stetkevych, The Hunt in Arabic Poetry: From Heroic to Lyric to Metapoetic (Notre Dame, Indiana:
University of Notre Dame Press, 2016).
in the works of the Bahraini poet Qāsim Ḥaddād (b. 1948), arguing that his poetry, from the early 1980s onward, witnessed a shift from a declamatory poetics of commitment that characterized his early works towards a more metapoetry-focused poetics concerned with the mechanisms of the poetic process and the multifaceted relationship between the poet and expression, in general, and language, in particular.171

In a similar vein to Huri’s article, Aida Azouqa’s study of the poetry of Iraqi poet Ḥabd al-Wahhāb al-Bayāṭī argues for the pioneering role of al-Bayāṭī in Arabic metapoetry and compares his poetry to some Western poets.172 Her starting point was that metapoetry is originally a Western phenomenon, an idea which other scholars, such as Huda Fakhreddine, do not agree with. And most recently, Waed Athamneh’s took al-Bayāṭī as representative of the metapoetic turn that modern Arabic poetry has taken as a response to changing sociopolitical conditions in the modern Arab world. The metapoetic is one of three major poetic responses; the other two are what she calls “recommitted” and the “humanist.”173

Representing a significant contribution to the growing body of scholarship that has gone beyond the “classical/modern” dichotomy in Arabic literary and critical studies to present a more integrated view of a continuous tradition, rather than the modernist view of a radical break with,

171 Yair Huri, “‘The Queen Who Serves the Slaves’: From Politics to Metapoetics in the Poetry of Qāsim Ḥaddād,” Journal of Arabic Literature 34, no. 3 (2003): 252–279. Of note also is the recent Master’s thesis by Miguel Merino on Qāsim Ḥaddād’s later works, from 2000 to 2013, where he argues that by employing a holy persona in his poetry, Ḥaddād’s collections of this artistic phase reveal the trajectory through which he passed to a destination where the divine, the artistic, and the universal united. See: Miguel Merino, “Al-Kawn Mawqifun: Poetry and Prophecy in Works of Qassim Haddad, 2000-2013” (master’s thesis, Georgetown University, 2016). Also see the most recent English translation of some of Ḥaddād’s later works: Hatem al-Zahrani, Huda Fakhreddine, and Roger Allen, “Poems by Qāsim Ḥaddād,” Middle Eastern Literatures 21, no. 1 (2018): 100-104.


and rejection of the past, Huda Fakhreddine’s Metapoesis in the Arabic Tradition stands as one of the most original attempts to explore metapoetry and its role in Arabic poetry throughout its history. Building on the work of Suzanne Stetkevych, Fakhreddine argued that, in response to a socio-cultural moment which enjoyed the urban life of the Abbasid court, on the one hand, and which on the other hand inherited the classical ode from the past, Abbasid muḥdathūn poets (Moderns) embarked upon a project of modernizing Arabic poetry that can be principally characterized as metapoetic.

Fakhreddine asserts that, at the hands of the muḥdathūn poets, Arabic poetry witnessed a project of change underpinned by the poets’ metapoetic concerns about their craft and their acute awareness “of themselves as creators of something new.” She contends that the muḥdathūn’s concerns were, in essence, the same as those found in the modern project of change in Arabic poetry in the twentieth century, i.e., the Free Verse movement. The muḥdathūn poets were preoccupied with the same self-questioning as their modernist successors. This introspective mode stems from an anxiety about the function of poetry, the inner workings of the poetic process, and the location of the poet in the world and within the continuity of tradition.

According to Fakhreddine, the metapoetic aspect of the muḥdathūn project of change can be divided into two types: thematic metapoetry, where poetry is the expressed subject matter of the poem, and a more complicated type that she calls contextual or referential where the medium


175 “Muḥdathūn” denotes a group of poets who founded and nurtured a movement of modernity in Arabic poetry that stretched roughly from the second/eighth century to the end of the fourth/tenth century. The group includes: Bashshār b. Burd (d. 783), Muslim b. al-Walīd (d. 823), Abū Nuwās (d. 813), Abū Tammām (d. 845), al-Buḥturī (d. 897), Ibn al-Rūmī (d. 889), and al-Mutanabbī (d. 965).

176 Fakhreddine, Metapoesis in the Arabic Tradition, 10.
of expression, i.e., the poem, becomes in and of itself a metapoetic statement. Following Suzanne Stetkevych’s reading of Abū Tammām’s poetry and the Abbasid Badīʿ movement as exegetical of the ancient tradition and a reinterpretation of it, Fakhreddine explores the uses and re-uses of the two first thematic sections of the tripartite qaṣīda, namely nasīb and rahīl, in Abbasid muḥdath poetry. Like S. Stetkevych, she argues that, far from being mannered and stereotypical, that is, lacking the introspective element, the Abbasid poets used the traditional elements of the qaṣīda very self-consciously, linking themselves to tradition and transforming this tradition to the new generations of readers. Here, the two opening sections became metapoetic passages that helped the poets and their audience understand the archetypal metaphors of the ancient poets. The nasīb section in a muḥdath poem was a meta-nasīb whose role was to explicate the Jāhilī precursors’ fascination with the ruined abode,178 and the journey, in muḥdath terms, was a metapoetic riḥla in a poetic topography.179

Fakhreddine’s analysis of the reuses of traditional elements in a modern poem belonging to the Abbasid poetic project will prove useful when discussing the metapoetic techniques that modern poets, such as Maḥmūd Darwīsh in the present chapter and Muḥammad al-Thubaytī in chapters 3 and 4, use as a foundation to claim authority by linking themselves to the well-established tradition of the Arabic qaṣīda and thus placing their projects in the continuity of Arabic poetry. When modern poets perceive their cultural identity to be threatened, resorting to the cultural forefathers helps them gain a strong ground against their adversaries, real or perceived.

177 Ibid., 7.
178 Ibid., 93-132.
179 Ibid., 133-161.
Ka‘b Ibn Zuhayr’s incorporation versus Ibn Muqbil’s rejection: Two antithetical poetic events

This chapter presents a reading of two “poetic events” composed of three moments of poetic production and reproduction in Arabic poetry. It highlights specific aspects of the poems under study in order to test the feasibility of the argument that the three poems can be read as events in a poetic history of the relationship between the poet and the prophet.

I use T. S. Eliot’s dynamic understanding of tradition to indicate that later poems alter the way we understand their textual antecedents. I also adopt a general understanding of Bloom’s concept of creative misreading, but by no means accepting all its Freudian-driven Oedipal interpretations. Suffice it to say that while Bloom assumes that belated poets fall under the “anxiety of the influence” of earlier poets (i.e., literary fathers) and then react by misreading the latter’s poems to “kill” them and their textual authority, I modify this by expanding the anxiety to include the reader as well. For me, I first thought of the relationship between the poet and the Prophet when I read Maḥmūd Darwīsh’s A Rhyme for the Suspended Odes. Thus, my reading of it informed my readings of the previous poems. This chapter makes the reader responsible for designing a “poetic event” composed of two poetic moments regardless of the poet’s actual relationship with his precursors. The anxiety of this reading is that of its reader’s, a result of the attempt to arrive at a meaningful reading of one image (the poet vis-à-vis the Prophet) in three poems created at various times throughout a period of nearly fifteen centuries to constitute two poetic events.

This chapter employs the term “poetic event” in the sense that Judith Balso introduced it in her book Affirmation of Poetry. In this book, which is meant to present a philosophy of

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poetry and suggest a new window onto reading poems, each poetic work, or each group of poetic works, is seen to form what she calls “a figure of thought,” by which she means a way of seeing the world, or of "thinking the world." By thinking the world poetically, an event circumscribed by the textual arena of the poem emerges, hence its ontology is of a totally poetic nature: it does not exist outside the poem. The poetic event is named not according to the contents of the poem, but by the way in which the poem “treats” its subject matters.

Balso suggests seven types of poetic events, citing one poet (or one group of like-minded contemporary poets) for each type. In my reading, I modify Balso’s methodology by allowing the poetic event to include poets of different literary periods as long as their poems exhibit a similar way of thinking about the world. Also, I understand the poetic event to be dynamic and constantly changing, not stagnant or static, thus allowing changes and transformations to take place within the same poetic event. Furthermore, I read the formal aspects of the poem (tropes, rhymes, devices, and the like) as “doing” and performing something within the poem, a reading that will become clear once the poems are analyzed.

The main poetic event of the present chapter is that established by Kaʿb ibn Zuhayr’s L-rhymed poem Bānat Suʿād (Suʿād Has Departed). As it will soon become clear, in Kaʿb ibn Zuhayr’s poem, which forms an event that I term “The Poem of Incorporation,” the poet harnesses his talents to the service of the Prophet, relinquishing his past and enlisting himself in the poetic army of the new power. At the same time, the poet signals the incorporation of Jāhilī poetic tradition into Islamic culture, thus paving the way for the incorporation of himself (the

181 Ibid., 16.

182 Ibid., 16-17.

183 Ibid.
poet), as a representative of the *Jāhili* poetic tradition and the pre-Islamic creativity in general, into the new society.

Quite to the contrary, Tamām ibn Muqbil’s R-rhymed poem *Taʾammal khalīlī* (Contemplate, O My Friend) designs the event that can be called “The Poem of Rejection,” through which the poem expresses dismay over the new cultural force (i.e., Islam) which was seen to commandeer the *Jāhili* (i.e., pre-Islamic) cultural tradition and replace it with a new value system, a process spearheaded by a man with a prosaic “text,” i.e. the Prophet with the Qurʾān. The poem’s directionality intensifies its conflicting nature by reversing the trajectory of time to be form the present to the past.

Along the same lines, Maḥmūd Darwīsh’s L-rhymed poem *Qāfiya min ajl al-Muʿallaqāt* (A Rhyme for the Suspended Odes) revisits the origin of the story of the relationship between the poet and the Prophet and invents it anew. Darwīsh’s poem constructs a new origin myth, whereby the Arabic pre-Islamic *qaṣīda*, as his poem reads, was so beautifully crafted, just like the wonders of the ancient world, that the Arabs worshipped it. Therefore, when God wanted them to worship Him instead, he sent a Prophet with a prosaic text. A language was meant to challenge a language. But were it not for the divine power behind the Prophet’s prosaic text, the poetic text would have swept to victory and the poet would have triumphed over the Prophet.

The two poems of Ibn Muqbil and Darwīsh represent the poetic event that I term “the Poem of Rejection,” in the sense that they fail to coopt the prophetic text into the tradition of the poetic text and vice versa. They see their ideal times as part of the bygone days, which were destroyed by the new text and its culture. Both poems, Ibn Muqbil’s and Darwīsh’s, were
composed within a tradition-bound genre, which makes it possible for subsequent “texts” to be directly or indirectly influenced by previous ones.

The Poem of Incorporation: Ka‘b Ibn Zuhayr’s L-rhymed poem

As I indicated above, I follow the understanding of the classical panegyric ode as a poetic performance of rituals that, through a particular use of form, imagery, and diction transfers current events into mythical manifestation of divine will and conveys a message of allegiance or disloyalty.184 Political concerns were at the core of the pre-Islamic (and the Islamic) poetic project, although, in some cases, poets would employ certain poetic devices to modify the conventional qaṣīda and exceed its structural and thematic boundaries, arriving at a poem that transcends the immediate by means of artistic imagery (such as in Imru’ al-Qays’s Mu’allaqā).185

After the advent of Islam, people witnessed the establishment and consolidation of an unprecedented political and cultural power (i.e., Islamic empire). The response of poetry to, and its participation in the formation of, the new power was no less than crucial. Revolving mainly around the two themes of allegiance and sedition, qaṣīdas excelled in performing the rituals that the structure of the new system required, and poets (and poetesses, for that matter) pronounced their anxieties and enacted their new sensibilities and allegiances using the form of the classical ode.

As for Ka‘b’s L-rhymed poem Bānat Suʿād (Suʿād Has Departed), it holds a special place in the history of Arabic poetry, for it was the poem that inaugurated the incorporation of the

184 See Suzanne Stetkevych’s studies: “The ʿAbbasid Poet Interprets History;” The Mute Immortals Speak; and The Poetics of Islamic Legitimacy.

185 S. Stetkevych, The Mute Immortals Speak.
tradition of the Jāhilī ode into the Islamic cultural system,\textsuperscript{186} thus, as this chapter reads it, initiating the history of the relationship between the poet and the Prophet as representatives of two different “textual” cultures. But before examining the passages of the poem that highlight this relationship, how did this incorporation come about? What was the story of the poem?

Arabic literary tradition has read Kaʿb’s poem as an apology. The story tells us that the poet recited the poem before the Prophet, admitting his mistaken conception of Islam and its Messenger and responding, the tradition adds, to the threats he received from the Prophet and his companions as a result of composing invectives against them. This pre-poem story is further substantiated by post-poem anecdotal materials, in which we have the Prophet taking off his mantle and bestowing it upon the poet. The pre-poem and post-poem anecdotes coalesce to create a prosaic framework very dramatic to intensify the ritual function and effect of the poem.\textsuperscript{187}

The questions about the historicity of this traditional prosaic framework and whether or not it was only a result of the poem itself, and issues such as the poet’s sincerity, purposes, or intentions, need not detain us here. What concerns our literary reading of the entire scene is the poem as a linguistic/artistic performance of the rituals of surrender and transfer of allegiance from the jāhiliyya into Islam, a performance very highly valued that a physical mantle was given in exchange for the poetic “mantle.”\textsuperscript{188} How can Kaʿb’s poem be read to shed some light on the

\textsuperscript{186} S. Stetkevych, The Mantle Odes.

\textsuperscript{187} Ibid., 33-37.

relationship between the poet and the Prophet, and to exhibit the kind of poetic event that this chapter calls “the Poem of Incorporation”?

From a performative point of view, the very act of reciting a poem before a religious/political leader, with the entire ritual package that it entails, is a self-evaluation of the poet as essential in the new prophetic value system. The poet’s weapon, i.e. the classical ode, was viewed as crucial in establishing and sustaining the emerging political power and its various institutions. This evaluation had to be measured by the poet based on a deep-rooted cultural understanding of the classical ode as containing a tacit contract between the poet and the praised leader, in which each one recognizes the significance of the other.

Ka‘b’s case, however, was not normal, since the leader he is praising is a Prophet, already endowed with and supported by a linguistic “weapon,” the Qurʾān, that claimed to be divine and inimitable, incapacitating anyone who tried to produce its like. How could the poet, then, navigate through this divine linguistic field to find a place for his human, imitable words?

From a formalistic point of view, there are three steps that Ka‘b has taken to reconcile the poetic text with the prophetic text:

1. Qurʾānic Diction: In her analysis of the poem, Suzanne Stetkevych noted that Ka‘b’s poem, while upholding the tripartite structure of the pre-Islamic ode (elegiac prelude, journey, and praise), is imbued with Islamic (Qurʾānic) diction. This diction contains terms such as abāṭīl (false statements, verse 10) and taḍlīl (delusion, verse 12) to describe Su‘ād’s promises, which came to mean, in ritual terms, the Jāhilī ways of life:

189 S. Stetkevych, The Mantle Odes, 41.
10. The false promises of ʿUrqūb were her model; Her promises were nothing except empty prattle.

12. Don’t be deceived by the desires she aroused, the promises she made, For hopes and dreams are a delusion.¹⁹⁰

¹⁹⁰ Translation by Suzanne Stetkevych, Ibid.

These terms, which are associated in the Qurʾān with *kufr* (disbelief), were utilized by Kaʿb’s poem in an attempt to reassure its audiences, presumably the nascent Islamic community and its leader, that the classical ode could actually embrace and convey the new developments in society, and that it was capable of embedding what were now Qurʾānic concepts, such as *bāṭil* and *dalāl*, in human (mundane), concrete experience. In other words, this embrace of some aspects of the Qurʾān is the poem’s strategy to, first, showcase poetry’s transferability (and transformability) into the new cultural realm, and, second, defend its cultural role.

2. **Performative recognition of the Qurʾān:** The Qurʾān, as the Prophet’s miracle, is found in the poem (verse 37) as God’s *nāfila* (gift) that contains *mawāʾīẓ* (lessons/warnings) and *tafsīl* (discernment):

37. Go easy, and let Him be your guide
who gave to you
The gift of the Qurʾān in which
are warnings and discernment!\(^{192}\)

Here the poet delineates, not the similarities, but the differences between the poetic and prophetic texts but without mentioning poetry at all, since it is already there as the medium that conveys this delineation. The prophetic text is a hortatory and salvific, newly revealed divine text, while poetry is of human origin and of political concerns and is something that fellow Arabs can relate to because it is a continuation of their long-lived tradition. These descriptions of poetry are not explicitly expressed, but rather implicitly conveyed through the very act of performing the poem itself. In this division of cultural roles, the poem encodes the idea of incorporation and cooperation.

3. **“Prosaic” transition into the ritual core:** Suzanne Stetkevych also noted that the transitional verse (verse 32) from the journey into the praise section, which she calls “the ritual core” of the poem, signals a shift “from the lexically rich and metaphorically dense poetic metalanguage that has characterized the elegiac prelude and the journey section to a stripped-down, univocal,

\(^{192}\) Translation by Suzanne Stetkevych. See: S. Stetkevych, *The Mantle Odes*.

apparently “prosaic” style.194” Verse 33 is also composed in the same style, and the voice in both is that of the slanderers. Verse 34 is the poet’s reply; verse 35 is an aphorism about life and death; verse 36 is an expression of the poet’s fear and hope; and then verse 37 is the description of the Qur’ān as mawāʿīz (lessons/warnings) and tafsīl (discernment), as noted above:

32. My slanderers at her two sides
denounced me saying,
“You, O Son of Abū Sulmā, are
as good as dead.”

33. And every trusted friend in whom
I put my hopes
Said, “I cannot help you, I am occupied
with other things.”

34. So I replied, “Out of my way,
you bastards!”
For all that the All-Merciful decrees
will come to pass!

35. For every man of woman born,
though he be long secure,
Will one day be borne

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on humpbacked bier.

36. I was told God’s Messenger
    had threatened me,
    But from God’s Messenger
    pardon is hoped.

37. Go easy, and let Him be your guide
    who gave to you
    The gift of the Qur’ān in which
    are warnings and discernment!195

195 Translation by S. Stetkevych, Ibid.
In light of the location of this “prosaic” style, one can interpret it as the poem’s incorporation of what was perceived as the “Qur’ānic” style. Verses 32-34 are warnings which the poet is receiving from his treacherous kinsmen, and verse 35-36 are the lessons he learned from that betrayal and the action he decided to take afterwards. Hence the stylistic shift of the “prosaic” ritual core facilitates the poetic text with its otherwise “lexically rich and metaphorically dense poetic metalanguage” in its submission to and embrace of the Qur’ānic revelation, and thus further reassures the Prophet (the leader of the new community) and his companions (its members) that the poetic text and the prophetic text can harmoniously coexist and mutually reinforce one another, albeit only on the basis of the submission of the poetic to the Prophetic.

To sum up, Kaʿb’s poem has established the poetic event that I call “the Poem of Incorporation” through a number of strategies:

1. Making room for the Qur’ānic diction to appear in a poetic text, thus performing a twofold act of mutual incorporation; the Prophet into the jahilī ode and the poet into the Islamic text and culture.

2. Schematizing the differences between the poetic text and the prophetic text, only to emphasize their ability to coexist and mutually reinforce one another, albeit in the third step.

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3. Composing a number of verses that resemble what the poet seems to think of the Qur’ānic style, while upholding the Jāhilī tripartite ode.

With the very act of performing a Jāhilī-born and Jāhilī-nurtured poetic ritual in the center of the Islamic establishment, and with the widely accepted story of the Prophet’s bestowing his mantle upon the poet, and thus embracing the tradition of the classical ode into the Islamic milieu, the poem becomes a poetic event of incorporation. This poetic event will be better understood when compared to its antithetical.

The Poem of Rejection: Tamīm Ibn Muqbil’s moment

The “Poem of Incorporation,” established by Ka‘b’s L-rhymed poem, will be better grasped if we compare it to the “Poem of Rejection,” represented first by Tamīm Ibn Muqbil’s R-rhymed poem Ta’ammal khalīlī (Contemplate, O My Friend), and then universalized by Maḥmūd Darwīsh’s Qāfiya min ajl al-Mu’allaqāt (A Rhyme for the Suspended Odes).

Ibn Muqbil, just like Ka‘b, is a mukhaḍram “bridging” poet, one who witnessed both the Jāhiliyya and Islam, but one who appears to be in constant conflict, unable to reconcile the two, a case that was first observed by traditional scholars. This chapter reads his poem Ta’ammal khalīlī (Contemplate, O My Friend) as a poetic representation of the rituals of rejection of the reconciliation between two times, two cultural systems, two ways of life, and above all, between

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197 According to ʿAbdullah al-Fayfī, Ibn Muqbil’s name can be found in traditional sources in five different forms. The first four are: Tamīm ibn Ubayy ibn Muqbil, Tamīm ibn Muqbil, Ibn Muqbil, or just Tamīm, with the last three being only short forms of the first one. The fifth form is Tamīm ibn Abī Muqbil, which al-Fayfī understands as a mistake stemming from similarity between Ubayy (أب) and (إب) in the Arabic script. See: ʿAbdullah al-Fayfī, Shiʿr Ibn Muqbil: qalaq al-khadrama bayn al-Jāhili wa-al-Islāmī: Dirāsa Tahliyya Naqdiyya, 2 vols. (Riyadh: Nādī Jāzān al-Adabī, 1999), 31-36.

the poet and the Prophet. Whereas in Ka‘b’s poem the poet is not specifically mentioned but rather enacted through performance, the missing part of the equation in Ibn Muqbil’s poem is the Prophet. This absence is in and of itself a writing of the premise of the poem that the Prophet and the poet cannot coexist in one textual, cultural, or ritual field.

Doubtful about, and resentful of, the fledgling political and cultural power, the poet found rescue in his verse. He applied metapoetic techniques to showcase his poetic capabilities and advance a claim of the poet’s distinction. The poetic verse itself was, first, his tangible evidence of a great past, and second, in light of the Arabic meaning of the word verse (bayt), was his actual safe haven. The poetic persona in the poem under study has no clear direction, and is perplexed between two times, with passages glorifying and lamenting the past following passages rejecting the present, only to proceed to other passages that take pride in the glorious past again, a process that transforms the poem into a network of organically conflicting antitheses. In general, the trajectory of the poem, as noted by Jaroslav Stetkevych, is reversed, with the past gaining precedence over the present:

11. Oh, how I see this time reversed,
The wadi bed of Ar-Rikāʿ of my confederates laid waste,

12. How many a road-side water-hole, its folk now perished,
Its bounty reversed, unrecognized!

13. Sand-grouse of uncased water-holes flocked in from everywhere;

199 Ibid.
They pecked clean our camel’s resting spots, then flew off. They pecked clean our camel’s resting spots, then flew off. 

وُجِلَنَّ الزَّنَادَةَ مَنْ مَوَالِيٍّ أَقْنَفْرَا
وُكَنَّ نُزْرِى مِنْ مَنْهَلٍ بَادَّ أُهْلَة
وُعِيدَ عَلَى مَعْرُوفِهِ فَفَنَّكَرَا
أَتَأَقْتَفُ فَقْطَا الأَجْهَابِ مِنْ كُلِّ جَانِبٍ
فَنَفَّزَ فِي أَغْطَاسِهِ ثُمَّ طَيْرًا

J. Stetkevych also noted that the poem does not follow a clear structure (tripartite or bipartite); it unfolds instead based on a direct emotional expression that highlights ego, individual and tribal, as a way to express resistance to the nascent political power. The poet takes pride in the Jāhili ethics of his tribal society as an indirect expression of the lack of need for a new (divine) dispensation to organize social relationships. These celebrated Jāhilī moral values, such as courage and generosity, are further reinforced by other “values” that have a linguistic/artistic character, namely poetry:

25. For I would be shamed, as indeed a man must be,
If a supplicant came to me, and I made excuses.

26. When I die and fall silent in my verses, to follow them
You will find no one like me, no one more skilled, more excelling,

200 Translation by J. Stetkevych, Ibid.

201 Ibn Muqbil, Dīwān, 109.
27. No one more imperious of verse, for which
Poetry’s rough highlands were beaten smooth.

28. Radiant, like nothing ever heard before, men stroke its face²⁰³
As hands stroke the famed, blazoned stallion.

In terms of the relationship between the poet and the Prophet, I noted above that the absence of the Prophet from a poem that concerns the relationship between Jāhiliyya and Islam is tantamount to a refusal to incorporating him in the tradition of the classical ode and the tribal ethos that it embodies and codifies. This view is further substantiated by the fact that in one metapoetic section of the poem, poetry is being described as mārid (rebellious), which is the very description of the Satan in the Qurʾān,²⁰⁵ the Satan being the absolute antithesis of the Prophet.

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²⁰³ It seems that there is a typo in J. Stetkevych’s translation of this verse. In the article, it reads: “Radiant, like nothing ever heard before, men stroke its face people stroked.” See: Jaroslav Stetkevych, “A Qaṣīdah by Ibn Muqbil,” 330.
²⁰⁴ Ibn Muqbil, Dīwān, 111.
²⁰⁵ See: Qurʾān, 37:7. The verse describes how God adorned the sky with stars, which have the other function of protecting the sky from every “rebellious devil” (shayṭān mārid). As noted by Th. Bianquis, the word mārid has a
Just as the Prophet and the Satan cannot coexist, so do the poet and the Prophet in this poem’s view. This rejection seems to be mutual, for the new dispensation (Islam) has not made a political “place at the table” for Ibn Muqbil’s tribe; in fact, it has disenfranchised the tribe whose recognized poet and spokesman he was. The poet, in turn, “makes no place” for the Prophet/Islam in his poem.

With its rejection and de-construction of the conventional thematic structure of the classical ode and its rejection of the reconciliation between two times and two cultural systems; furthermore, and perhaps most importantly, with its refusal to incorporate the poet and the Prophet into each other’s fields of, this poem performs the poetic event that I call here the “Poem of Rejection.” This rejection was taken to a universal level by Maḥmūd Darwīsh, who builds on his strong predecessor’s moment to establish his rejection of surrendering the ancient poetic capital to the divine prosaic text, and his rejection of the modernists’ rejection of the poetic tradition. In so doing, Darwīsh injected his poetic project within the continuity of the Arabic tradition, and thus performed an act of resistance and challenge to sociopolitical forces that threaten to uproot him and his people from their physical and cultural place. But before reading Darwīsh’s Qāfiya, a contextualization of it within the poet’s evolving poetic project is warranted, a project that was part of, and responding to, the larger project of the Free Verse movement of Arabic poetry.

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negative connotation of rejecting and rebelling against authority. He said that, “in classical Arabic, the term mārid has negative connotations and that, in the unconscious collective mind, it goes back to the revolt of Iblīs against God and refers likewise to that of a member of the community against the ruling power, considered as a fatal source of trouble and instability.” See; Th. Bianquis, “Mārid”, in: Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition, Edited by: P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, W.P. Heinrichs. Consulted online on 16 April 2019 <http://dx.doi.org.proxy.library.georgetown.edu/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_SIM_8815>

206 Ibn Muqbil occupied a central position in the hierarchical system of his tribe that it was sometimes referred to after his name: the people of Ibn Muqbil. See: al-Fayfī, Shi‘r Ibn Muqbil, 103.
Contextualization Mahmūd Darwīsh’s poem of double rejection:
Traveling on a horse of song

A brief introduction to the metrical system of Arabic Free-Verse poetry

Darwīsh’s Qāfiya is an Arabic poem of al-shī’r al-ḥurr (Free-Verse) in the metrical form termed
in modern Arabic shī’r al-tafʿīla (lit. poetry of the metrical foot), a new invention in the classical
Arabic metrical system, the discipline called ʿIlm al-ʿArūḍ (prosody). This system was first
formulated by the linguist al-Khalīl b. Aḥmad al-Farāhīdī (d. 791 or 786 or 776), the founder of
Arabic philology who was the first to compile a lexicon of the Arabic language in his Kitāb al-
ʿAyn.

In the Khalīlī metrical system (usually referred to the poetry written according to this
system as al-shī’r al-ʿamūdī or al-Khalīlī), Arabic poetry has fifteen meters (buḥūr or awzān, s.
bahr, wazn, most often used interchangeably), to which one was added later by al-Akhfash al-
Awsaṭ (d. between 825-835), making the final list of Arabic meters sixteen. The Arabic poetic
line (bayt al-shī’r) consists of two equal hemistiches, each of which is called miṣrāʿ; the first

Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, W.P. Heinrichs. Consulted online on 29 January 2018
<http://dx.doi.org.proxy.library.georgetown.edu/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_COM_0066>


209 Most accurately, the buḥūr are the ideal meters as theorized by al-Khalīlī; the awzān are their actual application

210 Abu al-Hasan Saʿīd b. masʿada (al-Akhfash al-Awsat) was a luminary disciple of Sībawayhi (Sībawayhi, d.
approx. 796) who was a pupil of al-Khalīl. Whether or not al-Akhfash studied with al-Khalīl is not settled. See: C.
Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, W.P. Heinrichs. Consulted online on 19 April 2019
<http://dx.doi.org.proxy.library.georgetown.edu/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_COM_0034>
miṣrāʿ being al-ṣadr, the second al-ʿajuz. A conventional poem can have as many verses as the poet sees fit, but it has to maintain one meter and one rhyme throughout.

In each one of the two equal hemistiches, a number of metrical-feet are maintained and repeated in the same order throughout the poem. We have eight metrical-feet (or rhythmic-feet) and they are called in al-Khalīl’s terminology ajzāʾ (plural of juzʾ: part). Al-Khalīl “in accordance with the common practice of Arabic grammarians. . . represents each of these 8 "parts" by a mnemonic word, derived from the root fʿl.211” These eight parts are: fāʿ īlun, fāʿ ilun, mafāʿ īlun, mustafʿ ilun, fāʿ ālātun, mutafāʿ ilun, and mafʿ ālātu. Since the names of these metrical-feet (parts) are derived from the generic root of Arabic grammar and morphology, fʿl, the metrical-foot is also called tafʿila.

This metrical system remained unchallenged from the time of al-Khalīl until the 20th century; unchallenged in the sense that, despite experimentations with the metrical form that Arabic poetry has witnessed in some phases of its history, no alternative viable system has been put forth.212 Beginning from the turn of the 20 century, and as a result of a host of complicated factors, chief among them Western influence, Arab poets began to challenge the Khalīlī structure by freeing the poetic verse, more or less, from what they saw as the traditional strictures of al-Khalīl’s metrical schemes. After decades of experimentation with a new poetic form, the final and most viable result was the Free-Verse poem (al-shiʿr al-ḥurr).

211 G. Weil and G. M. Meredith-Owens, “ʿArūḍ”. The idea that fʿl is the basis for the metrical-feet and the generic root of the Arabic root-and-pattern system will be of great importance in chapter 4 when I read Muhammad al-Thubaytī’s Mwaqif al-jinās.

212 While the experimentation with new metrical forms predates the Free-Verse movement, the latter was the first in the history of Arabic poetry to replace the classical system with a new system. For more on the modern trends in Arabic poetry prior to the Free-Verse movement, see the sources in the previous footnote, and also see: Salma Khadra Jayyusi, Trends and Movements in Modern Arabic Poetry (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 1977).
It is common knowledge now that the Arabic Free Verse Movement, which has become almost synonymous with Arabic modernism in its early stages, saw the light in the late nineteen-forties, first in Iraq. While changing the thematic aspects of the poem, its structural composition, and its “world-view” at large were critical components of the Arab modernist project, its principal target was to free Arabic poetry from most of its traditional conventions, particularly the mono-rhymed, mono-metered form which the traditional Arabic qaṣīda has enjoyed for centuries. The Modernists (and the Moderns) sought to replace the traditional metrical system, which is based on the sixteen meters (buhūr) and requires the poet to maintain one full meter (bahr) and one rhyme (qāfiya), with a new system which takes the single metrical foot (tafīla) as the basic metrical unit. With the centrality of the new tafīla-based metrical system in the modernist movement, the poetry that it produced became known as shīr al-tafīla.

In shīr al-tafīla, the metrical “system” is not as strict as that of al-Khalīlī. Since the publication of the ‘Irāqi poet-critic Nāzik al-Malāʾika’s book Qaḍāyā al-shīr al-muʾāṣir in 1963, considered the first serious theoretical work on shīr al-tafīla and its formal aspects,

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214 Nāzik al-Malāʾika, Qaḍāyā al-shīr al-muʾāṣir (Beirut: Dār al-Ādāb, 1962). In the book, she expanded on her previous notes and proposed a theory of Free-Verse poetry, its metrical “system” in particular. She also argues for her pioneering role in introducing the “proper” Free-Verse form to Arabic poetry in her 1947 poem al-Kūṭirā (Cholera), which was published a couple weeks before the publication of the collection Azhār dhābila (Withered Flowers) by the other pioneering ‘Irāqi poet of her generation Badr Shākir al-Sayyāb (d. 1964), which included the Free-Verse poem Hal kāna hubban (Was it Love?). Nāzik’s theorizing role in the Free-Verse began with her short introduction to her second poetry collection Shazāyā wa-ramād (Sparks and Ashes, or Ashes and Shrapnel, 1949), in which she argues for the need to modernize Arabic poetry in all its formal and thematic aspects, including its metrical system. See: Nāzik al-Malāʾika, Dīwān Nāzik al-Malāʾika (Beirut: Dār al-ʿAwda, 1997), 27-29.
most importantly the new metrical system it proposed, the debate over how much metrical freedom the Free-Verse poem can enjoy has not been settled. Al-Malāʾika asserts that a Free-Verse poem must maintain one meter throughout the poem (mono-metered), but the poet can choose more than, or less than, the number of metrical-feet required in the Khalīlī system.\footnote{215}{al-Malāʾika, Qadāyā al-shīʿ, 65.} She also advocates for the use of the homogeneous meters (those based on the repetition of the same tafīla) because they are easier.\footnote{216}{Ibid., 64.}

mono-meter, although poets might divide their longer poems into sections with varying metrical schemes (as we will see in some of al-Thubaytī’s poems in chapter 3 and in his Mawqif al-jinās in chapter 4).

This brief introduction to the Free-Verse movement and its metrical system will prove useful when I discuss the metrical aspect of Darwīsh’s Qāfiya, an aspect that is no less than essential to the poem’s message. But before that, a discussion of the larger aesthetic and cultural context where Qāfiya operated is warranted, particularly the collection where the poem appears: Limādhā tarakta al-ḥişāna waḥīdan “Why Did You Leave the Horse Behind.”

Darwīsh’s Qāfiya min ajl al-muʿallaqāt: A context

To begin with, reading a modern poem requires reading it within a poetry collection, the latter taken as a larger poetic work (or framework) that provides a poetic environment for poems so that each one has its role in the meaning-making process of the entire collection. Qāfiya is part of the collection Limādhā tarakta al-ḥişāna waḥīdan “Why Did You Leave the Horse Behind,” published in 1995 as Darwīsh’s first collection after, and response to, the 1993 Oslo Accord. The Accord meant, effectively, that the Palestinians, represented politically by the Palestinian Liberation Organization (P.L.O.), have agreed to come to terms with the Israelis who, in the Palestinian public’s eye, have taken their homes and homeland.

Darwīsh, who had been an important figure in the P.L.O. for nearly two decades prior to the Oslo Accord, was opposed to it and resigned from the P.L.O.’s Executive Committee in protest. In these contexts, “Why did You Leave the Horse Behind” was published to intensify the intersection between the public and the personal, the collective and the self, the epic and the
lyrical, the historical and the poetic, and the traditional and the modern, an intersection which is characteristic of Darwīsh’s late poetry.\textsuperscript{220}

The collection can be said to exemplify Darwīsh’s experiment with poetry as a form of rewriting the biography of the self, personal and collective,\textsuperscript{221} and hence it offers glimpses of the past both in its individual and collective dimensions. It is divided into six sections preceded by one opening poem, \textit{Arā shabahī qādiman min baʿīd} (I See My Shadow Coming from Afar), which does not belong to any section. This poem begins with the voice of the poem’s speaker saying:

32. I overlook, like a house balcony, what I want

أطلُ كنْشَرْفَةً بَنْتَيْنِ، عَلَى مَا أُرَيَّ. \textsuperscript{222}

This sentence will function as a refrain throughout the poem. The speaker of this poem/biography “overlooks” his place, family, history, and friends, personal and cultural, of whom the most important are poets. The reason this poem is not part of any section is that it functions as a balcony that overlooks the other poems/sections in the collection.

What the first poem’s speaker as balcony overlooks are the six sections of the collection. These six sections are:

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{222}Darwīsh, \textit{al-ʿmA l al-jadīda}, 1:277.
\end{itemize}
I. *Ayqūnātun min billawr al-makān* (Icons of the Places’ Crystals):

This section details the journey that a boy and his father were forced to take away from their home and homeland. Its main theme is the place, which corresponds to the speaker’s voice in the first poem *Arā shabaḥī qādiman min baʿīd* when he looks at, or remembers, discrete images of the place that spark further memory and recollection. Examples are trucks carrying soldiers that change the trees “of the place,” trees that guard the night, the dog of an immigrant neighbor, and a trunk of an olive tree that concealed the Prophet Zakariyyā (Zachariah).

II. *Fadāʾu Hābīl* (Abel’s Open Space):

The theme of this section is human tragedy, and its most expressive example in the *Arā shabaḥī* poem is Aeschylus (often recognized as the father of Greek Tragedy). In this interpretation, Aeschylus represents the writing of tragedy and Abel stands for the actualization of it, or, say, the former is literature and the latter is history.

III. *Fawdāʾ alā bāb al-Qiyāma* (Chaos at the Door of Resurrection):

The self, family, and friends constitute the theme of this third section of the collection, where the poet speaks of the self’s memory of the family, and it contains a poem on the poet’s mother. In this section, the speaker in the first poem remembers mementos and moments of himself with his family and friends. He overlooks his picture as a child, his mother’s scarf, and his friends carrying the evening mail, drinking wine, eating bread, reading novels, and listening to music. This section will act to prepare the collection to solve the chaos, by, first and foremost, turning the deep self, i.e., the poetic one, and talk to it.
IV. *Ghurfatun li-l-kalāmi maʿa al-nafs* (A Room to Speak to the Self):

Language and poetry, i.e., *metapoetry*, is the obvious theme of this section. To bring its metapoetic concern to the fore, the section begins with a poem titled *Tadābiru shiʿriyya* (Poetic Measures). The section contains a poem on the poet Abū Firās al-Ḥamdānī (d. 968), in addition to the poem that this chapter is concerned with, namely *Qāfiya min ajl al-Muʿallaqāt* (A Rhyme for the Suspended Odes), among others. Similarly, in the *Arā shabahī* poem, the speaker overlooks/considers al-Mutanabbi’s name, words that became extinct from the dictionary *Lisān al-ʿArab* (or the Arabs’ tongue), and his own language.

V. *Matarun fawqa burji al-kanīsa* (Rain on the Steeple):

This section, centered around love and the female, constitutes an elaboration on the few love and flesh moments in the *Arā shabahī* poem. The experience of love and the flesh is what the speaker of the first poem recalls when he overlooks a woman sunbathing within herself, and when he says that a woman’s hand is enough to embrace freedom and let the tide ebb and flow within his body.

VI. *Aghlaqū al-mashhad* (They Closed the Scene):

This section speaks of beauty versus power and the declaration of the triumph of power over beauty in closing the scene. The character that exemplifies beauty defeated by power in this section is Imruʿ al-Qays b. Ḥujr, the pre-Islamic poet whose persona is portrayed in

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<http://dx.doi.org.proxy.library.georgetown.edu/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_SIM_0183>

224 *Lisān al-ʿArab* is one of the most famous and comprehensive classical dictionaries of the Arabic language. Compiled based on five earlier works, it was completed in 1290 by Ibn Manẓūr (d. 1311/1312). See: J. W. Fück, “Ibn Manẓūr”, in *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*, Edited by: P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, W.P. Heinrichs. Consulted online on 07 March 2019
<http://dx.doi.org.proxy.library.georgetown.edu/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_SIM_3284>
the *akhbār* literature as to be centered, first, around his youthful erotic exploits and, second, his unbounded quest to avenge his slain royal father. An entire poem is dedicated to Imruʿ al-Qays in this section, titled *Khilāfun ghayru lughawiyin maʿa Imriʿi al-Qays* (A Non-Linguistic Dispute with Imruʿ al-Qays). Corresponding to this section in the opening poem is the speaker’s “overlooking”/observing the neckless of a poor woman being ground beneath a handsome prince’s carriage, and the hoopoe becoming exhausted by the king’s admonition.

Sections I, III, and IV contain six poems each; sections II and V contain five poems each; and section VI comes with only four poems. The collection, particularly section I, tells the story of the tragedy of the 1948 Palestinian exodus and its personal and collective ramifications. In his preface to the English translation of another Darwīshī landmark poem *Aḥada ʿashara kawkaban ʿalā ʾakhir al-mashhad al-andalusī* (Eleven Stars to Andalusia), Edward Said noted that in Darwīsh’s poems of this period, “poetry now replaces history as the site of actuality.” This is equally applicable here.

After the exodus, the Palestinians were expelled from their home and had to find another one; yet they “left the horse behind” as the title of the collection reads, because the horse would “keep the house inhabited.” But beyond the literal meaning, what could the cultural/poetic significance of the horse be? How does Darwīsh draw from his poetic capital to negotiate his place and affirm his position in the face of a force that threatens to uproot him from his own land and culture? I argue that what Darwīsh did was mainly to resort to the Arabic cultural repertoire

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to challenge the occupying force, to place himself and his people within a cultural continuity that is impossible to uproot, and to transform agony into poetry.

Your horse is your tongue/your song

The title “Why Did you Leave the Horse Behind?” is a quotation from the poem *Abadu al-ṣabbār* (The Eternity of Cactus), the fourth in section I:

1. -Where are you taking me, father?
   -In the wind’s direction, my son.
   …
11. -And who will inhabit the house after us, father?
   -It will remain the same as it [always] was, my son.
   …
23. -Why did you leave the horse behind?
   -To keep the house inhabited, my son, for houses die when their inhabitants are gone.
   …
32. … So hold out with me
   so that we return.
   -When, father?
   -Tomorrow. Perhaps in two days, my son.

The son asks his father four questions in this poem, all of them end with the vocative “yā abī” (father) except for the question: (Why did you leave the horse behind?), which is the title of the collection. I do not think that this is arbitrary. In the poem Kam marratan yantahī amruna (How Many Times Will Our Situation End?), immediately following (The Eternity of Cactus) in the same section, the son addresses his father six times, all of them with the vocative “yā abī” (father). In the poem following this one, Ilā ’ākhirī wa-ilā ’ākhirih (To My End and to Its End), the son uses the same vocative when addressing his father in four cases out of six, the remaining two cases being a question for his father to expand upon his previous answer and the

228 Ibid., 1:299.
229 Ibid, 1:299-300.
230 Ibid., 1:300.
231 Ibid., 1:303-305.
232 Ibid., 1:306-308.
father’s asking his son the same thing. There seems to be a poetic significance behind dropping the vocative “yā abī” (O father) when the son asks about the horse’s being left behind.

Not mentioning the father when asking about the reason why the horse was left behind suggests that the son was in a state of shock or sadness because the horse was abandoned, which made him forget the expected, intimate manners of how to address his father—the manners that the collection itself emphasizes in all other instances. As there was no place for the horse in the journey away from home, as the journey was emptied from his presence, poetic language is now filled with the word (horse) in its definite form (al-ḥiṣān). That is, the poem substitutes its physical absence with a textual presence. The father is the one who is dropped from the text or, one might say, the text is emptied from the word (father) because he already filled the place with his actual presence. A linguistic presence is meant to resist a physical absence.

The word “horse” is mentioned nine times in the collection, in a manner that supports my interpretation of the previous verse as revealing a pattern of verbal substitution and an intimate relationship between the triad of land, horse, and father. In addition to the question of the title: (Why Did You Leave the Horse Behind?), the horse and the father are associated in three more instances in a fashion that makes each one of them evoke the other. The two are not identical, however; every party retains its own identity, but they operate within a very close textual field. And because of this closeness, emptying the text from the father is the linguistic correlative of emptying the land from the horse, who, in its turn, now fills the textual terrain. Moreover, the

233 Ibid., 1:307.

234 The four examples can be found in pp. 288-298 (quoted in this page); p. 299 (the title); p. 326 (the horse and the father are mentioned in two separate sentences but immediately following each other); and pp. 345-346 (“her father flew on the wedding’s horse,” with the pronoun “her” apparently referring to Darwīsh’s mom, Ḥūriyya (d. 2009), since the poem is titled Taʿālīm Ḥūriyya (Ḥūriyya’s Teachings). Here I use the mere linguistic association between the word “horse” and the word “father” to support my claim above.
horse’s remaining behind functions as an image of its owner’s absence. It is this image of absence and emptiness, embodied by the horse, that recurs throughout the poem. It is like the aṭlāl (ruined abode) of the nasīb section of the classical ode, but rather than leaving it behind to move on and beyond, the poetic persona in Darwīsh’s poem keeps returning to this image as he wants to return to his homeland.

The most expressive example of this intimate relationship between the horse and the father comes early on in the collection. In the first poem in section I, *Fī yadī ghaymatun* (In My Hand Is a Cloud), the scene of the interaction between the horse and the father is all what the self wants from Earth:

49. A cloud in my hand wounds me: I do not want from Earth more than this land: the scent of cardamom and hay between my father and the horse.

The land/place (this earth) is defined, above all, by the speaker’s memory of the interaction between the horse and the father, because the image of the abandoned horse indicates what is missing (those who fled) and, unlike the aṭlāl and rusūm al-dār of nasīb, it awaits and assumes their return. The horse was left behind to keep the house inhabited and occupied “li-kay yu ’nisa al-bayt,” which is, in poetic diction, the opposite of abandoned, wild, and ruined. As

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long as the horse is there (even if alone), the abode is not abandoned but still inhabited awaiting their return.

But if the significance of the father and the land is easily understandable, why does the horse enjoy such a remarkable presence in Darwish’s poem? What does it signify? To answer this question, one can go back to the first time the horse is mentioned in this collection and see how it figures there.236

The first “horse” instance comes in the first poem in the collection Arā shabahī qādiman min baʿīd (I See My Shadow Coming from Afar), in which there is a refrain in the poet’s voice that reads, “I overlook, like a house balcony, what I want.” As mentioned above, one of the elements that the speaker recollects is the name of al-Mutanabbī, but he recollects that name in a very specific way. The poem reads:

9. I overlook the name of “Abū al-Ṭayyib al-Mutanabbī” that travels from Tiberius to Egypt on the horse of song

The tremendous poetic connotation of the word “horse” in this collection can be explained by this verse on al-Mutanabbī, for associating him with the horse is likely an allusion

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236 As I said above, the horse is mentioned nine times in the collection, seven times in the singular, definite form, one in the plural definite, and only one in the singular indefinite. In all these instances, the horse is either associated with the father, with the place, or, as will be explained later, with poetry.

237 Darwish, al-Aʾmāl al-jadīda, 1:278.
to al-Mutanabbī’s horse when he was forced to leave home (i.e. Sayf al-Dawla’s court in Aleppo) to Egypt. Al-Mutanabbī said:

12. Horses are just like friends: scarce
   Even if they seem many to an inexperienced eye.

13. If you see only the beauty of their markings
   And [of] their limbs, then their beauty is concealed from you

   وَمَا الخَنْيَلُ إِلَّا الْكَتَبُ الدِّيْقَ قَلِيلَةَ
   وَإِنْ كِتَبَتْ فِي عَينٍ مَنْ لَا يُجِرِّبُ
   إِذَا لم تَشاهِدَ غَيْرِ حَمْسِن شَيَانِهَا
   وَأَعْضَاسِهَا فَالْحَمْسِنِ عَنْكَ مُخْتَيْبٌ

Al-Mutanabbī’s trust in the horse to carry him from the Levant to Egypt and his personification of the horse as a true friend who would show him loyalty when human friends (i.e., Sayf al-Dawla) betray him take on the metaphorical meaning of poetry itself. Al-Mutanabbī’s horse is the only horse in the collection that takes a metaphorical form (the horse of song), which suggests that, not only does the horse have a metaphorical function, but so too does al-Mutanabbī.239 The horse being left behind, then, must also be metaphor for poetry, that “holds the place” of the poet/nation when they are in exile.

In light of this interpretation, the horse in the collection is a symbol for poetry (the horse of song) which helped the greatest Arab poet overcome betrayal and continue on his poetic

238 Al-Mutanabbī, Dīwān, 1:180.

239 Al-Mutanabbī figures prominently in Darwīsh’s oeuvre, and his forced departure to Egypt is the sole topic of one of Darwīsh’s famous poems: Rihlat al-Mutanabbī ʾilā miṣr (Al-Mutanabbī’s Journey to Egypt) in the 1984 collection Ḥiṣār li-madāʾ ih al-bahr (Siege of the Panegyrics of the Sea). See: Darwīsh, al-ʾAʾmāl al-ʿūlā, 2:419-430.
journey. Likewise, the modern Arab poet is relying on poetry to construct his own version of history, personal and collective, and travel throughout it on the back of his own “horse of song.” Poetry here is used to “overlook like a house balcony” the past, comment on the present, and envision the future.

Therefore, the close association between the father and the horse in the collection is indeed an association between the two sources of the poet’s identity. While the father gave him his official and lineage name, the “horse of song”, i.e., poetry, gave him his artistic name and his poetic identity. This appears to be the reason why he overlooks, not al-Mutanabbī, but his name: “I overlook the name of Abū al-Ṭayyib al-Mutanabbī,” as the poem reads. Darwīsh, then, develops the metaphor of the colloquial Arabic proverb lisānak Huṣānak “Your tongue is your horse” as his Mutanabbian horse of song that allows the modern poet to travel throughout history and make his own. At the same time, then, the horse left behind in the homeland must be the poet’s tongue/poetry holding the place until the exiles’ return.

This vision of the self as split into two, one inherited from the father and one functioning as a name given by poetry, occurs with some consistency in Darwīsh’s poetry. In the poem before the last one in the collection, Mutatāliyāt li-zamanin ʾākhar (Sequences for Another Time), the first passage reads:

4. I see myself split into two: me, and my name.
In another poem *Tadābiru shiʿriyya* (Poetic Measures), the first poem in the metapoetic section, Section IV *Ghurfatun li-l-kalāmi maʿa al-nafs* (A Room to Speak to the Self), and the only poem in the collection whose title refers explicitly to poetry, Darwīsh understands poetry as recurrent questioning of identity:

42. The poem is between my two hands, and it is capable of managing the affairs of myths, using handwork, but I have,

20. since I found the poem, displaced my self and questioned it:
Who am I?
Who am I?

The topoi of poetry as identity, language as a departure from the place, and poetry as a miracle of a magnitude and an authority commensurate with that of prophethood can be found in many places in the collection, but it is the poem *Qāfiya min ajl al-Muʿallaqāt* (A Rhyme for the Suspended Odes) that best exemplifies Darwīsh’s fascination with all these themes. In this poem, song is Darwīsh’s horse to explore the Arab soul and travel throughout the history of the Arabs

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241 Ibid., 1:368.
and their greatest miracle, i.e., poetry. He begins the exploration of Arabic poetry from its origins, the *Muʿallaqāt*, to create a myth of how it came to existence by, chiefly, putting it in the context of the miracles of the previous nations. My argument is that Darwīsh’s *Qāfiya* constructs a self-image of the poet that culminates in setting it, as a poetic system of meaning, against the Qurʿān, the prosaic writing system that Prophet Muḥammad transmitted to the Arab people.

Darwīsh’s poem, which I read here as the second moment in the “Poem of Rejection” poetic event established by Ibn Muqbil, will be analyzed after I provide a full translation of it.
Mahmūd Darwīsh’s A Rhyme for the Suspended Odes: A translation

1. No one has guided me to myself. I am the guide; I am the guide…

…To myself between the sea and the desert. From my language, I was born on the road to India between two small tribes, above whom the moon of the ancient religions, and the impossible peace,

5. And whose task it was to preserve the orbit of the adjacent Persians and the Byzantines’s great apprehension, so that the heavy time falls from the Arab’s tent. Who am I? This is the others’ question, and there is no answer to it. I am my own language, And I am one suspended ode… two suspended odes… ten. This is my language.

10. I am my language. I am what the words said:

Be my body, then to their tone, I was a body. I am what I said to the words: Be the junction of my body and eternity – the desert. Be, so that I be as I say!

15. No land on earth bears me, so my words bear me like a bird, spreading out from me, and building the nest of its journey before me. In my rubble, in the rubble of the magical world around me, on a wind I stopped. And my long night was too long for me. This is my language: necklaces of stars around the necks of those I love: they migrated

20. They took the place and migrated
They took the time and migrated
They took their scents from the pottery and [from] the scarce pasture, and migrated

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242 See the full Arabic text in Appendix [1].
They took the words, and the slain heart migrated…

. . .With them. Does the echo diffuse? This echo, This white, vocal mirage of a name whose hoarseness fills the unknown, and which departure fills with divinity?

The sky places over me a window, so I look: I don’t

I see anyone but myself. . .
I found myself outside of it just as it was with me, and my visions did not stray from the desert, Of wind and sand are my steps

And my world is my body and what my hands possess. I am the traveler and the path

Gods appear to me and depart. And we don’t prolong our conversation about what is to come. There is no tomorrow in this desert but what we saw yesterday,

So, let me raise my suspended ode so that the cyclical era is broken and the beautiful time is born!

How often the past comes tomorrow! I left my self to itself, [my self] which had taken its fill of its present And the journey emptied me…

…of the temples. Heaven has its peoples and its wars. But me, I have the gazelle as a wife, and for me the palms. . .

. . . are suspended odes in the book of sand. What I see is past. Man possesses the kingdom of dust and its crown. So, let my language triumph over time – the enemy, over my progeny,
over me, over my father, and over an ending that never ends.

This is my language and my miracle: the staff of my magic;
the Gardens of my Babylon, and my obelisk, my first identity,
and my polished blade

And what is sacred to the Arab in the desert,

worshipping the rhymes
that flow like stars over his cloak,
and worshipping what he says.

There has to be prose, then,
There has to be a divine prose for the Prophet to triumph…
Resuscitating the Muʿallaqāt: The identification between the poet and his language

Darwīsh’s Qāfiya is a seminal work in modern Arabic poetry when it comes to pronouncing one’s anxiety regarding language, identity, and a place that was once called home. It raises the Arabic bayt (poetic verse) to the status of the true “home/homeland” of the Arab people. I will read the poem to explore the idea of language as an identity, poetry as an Arab home, and modernity as continuity. Based on my reading of the poem, I will argue that Darwīsh’s Qāfiya exhibits a double rejection. First, its thematic dimension exhibits a refusal to host the poet and the Prophet in one textual field, and instead treats them as representatives of two conflicting forms of literary production (poetry and prose). This rejection is influenced Ibn Muqbil’s moment, which Darwīsh seems to take as a point of reference throughout his career as I will explain later. Second, this rejection of the classical Prophet has a scaffolding effect, which helps the poem raise its voice of rejection of the modernist rejection of the poetic turāth. In claiming to resuscitate the Muʿallaqāt, Darwīsh is also rejecting the modernist rejection of the classical tradition and re-claiming it as his heritage. In rejecting both types of prophet, the prophet of tradition and the prophet of modernism, Darwīsh is searching for a new prophet whose prophethood is not based on dichotomies like poetry and prose, or tradition and modernity. He says in the first poem of the collection:

20. I overlook the procession of the ancient prophets
    Ascending barefoot and questioned it:
    And I ask: is there a new prophet
    For this new age?

 أطلُ علَى منْ كُبِ الأئِلِاء القدامِي
وهم يتصاعدون حُضنًا إلى أوزُلْلِي
وأسْتَالِ: هلْ مَنْ نبِيٌّ جديدٌ
The *Qāfiya* falls within Section IV *Ghurfatun li-kalāmi maʿa al-nafs* (A Room to Speak to the Self), which I described above as the metapoetic section of the collection because it expresses the modern poet’s preoccupation with poetry and the poetic language, and its function in the world at large. It is a room in which the modern Arab poet speaks with the collective self and its history, and his means to do so is certainly poetry, or *Dīwān al-ʿArab* (the Register of the Arabs). The metapoetic character of the section intensifies in the poem *Qāfiya*, which, in addition to taking poetry as its subject-matter, constitutes, as I will show later, what Huda Fakhreddine terms “referential poetry,” where the medium of the poem itself becomes a metapoetic statement.

The poem can be thematically divided into six sections. In lines 1-7, the poem provides the geographical and political settings of the pre-Islamic *Muʿallaqa*, especially within the ancient Arabs’ precarious position between the two great powers of the time, namely the Sasanian Persians and the Byzantines. The fear of an authoritative other and the need to protect the self leads to the question of identity (who am I?), which is the topic of the second section (lines 7-14). In this section, the self appears incarnated in language and is born from it, a critical foundation for the argument of a poem that sees itself in conflict with the authority of the Arab Prophet because of the different system of meaning that he brought to Arabia. Then, lines 15-26 describe the land as ruined after the departure of the poet’s loved ones, a departure that created a tragic feeling of sorrow and emptiness (lines 26-47) which transformed the Arab desert into an infinity, or an eternity as the poem reads, whose days are cyclical and whose future is a repeated

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past, a feeling that even Gods couldn’t help overcome. To resist the monotony of life and the tragic feeling of loss, the *Mu‘allaqa* was born (or raised), and hence language became the ancient Arab’s miracle to reclaim power and authority over his temporal space (line 48-57). However, his linguistic miracle became so powerful that he worshiped it, then God intervened by sending a Prophet with a divinely-supported prose to challenge the ancient Arab’s ode. Finally, the prosaic text triumphed, and the Prophet was victorious.

The poem designs for the *Jāhilī* Arab an identity that revolves entirely around language, specifically poetry. Language is his mother, his real self, the music of which he is a body, a bird that carries him away, and necklaces of stars around the necks of those he loves. Additionally, language is a means of survival. The poem begins with the negation: “No one has guided me to myself,” only to go directly to the affirmation: “I am the guide, I am the guide.” This grammatical structure has a deep connotation. The harshness of the desert and its tragic, endless space almost “negated/extirminated” the ancient Arabs, but they resisted that existential threat with one tool: language, hence the poem proceeds, “I am the guide to myself. From my language I was born.” Acknowledging the necessity of the “guide” in the pathless desert, the poem declares the ancient poet as an earthly guide, in what it seems to render irrelevant the prophetic guidance to *al-ṣirāṭ al-mustaqīm* (the Straight Path).

The modern Arab also resists with language. Palestinian Darwīsh resists with a poem the forces that deny him his homeland and seek to force him into exile. His resistance here is deeper, more cultural and poetic than his earlier poems, such as *Biṭāqat huwiyya* (Identity Card): *Sajjil*.

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244 *Al-ṣirāṭ al-mustaqīm* is a common Qur’anic concept. In the first Sūra of the Qur’ān, *al-Fātiha* (The Opening), the speaker (the Prophet and all believers) ask God for his guidance to the straight path, which means asking for moral and religious guidance. See: Qur’ān: 1:6.
In the Qāfiya, the absence of the divine made language the means by which the Jāhilī Arab realized his existence. Darwīsh’s resistance here is formed by inserting the modern Palestinian/Arab’s tragedy within a poetic continuity of affirming identity and experimenting with language as a means of survival, of resisting existential and cultural negation, as if Darwīsh’s statement is: if the ancient Arab resisted by language the harsh conditions that tried to annihilate him, then the modern Arab will be able through language to defend himself and retain his identity in the face of modern challenges.

The monotony and repetitiveness of life, or the “cyclical” as the poem reads, and the infinite extension of the place, which suggests the disappearance of the new and the transformative, are also conditions that almost denied the ancient Arab his existence. The solution was to “raise” the ancient ode and discover the unknown and go beyond the physical boundaries of life, just as believers “raise the adhān” to reach the same goal:

37. ...we don’t prolong our conversation about what is to come. There is no tomorrow in this desert but what we saw yesterday,

40. So, let me raise my suspended ode so that cyclical era is broken and the beautiful time is born!

...لا نُطِيلُ...
حديثنا عُمَّان السَّبَيْتِيُّ لَا غَدَّ في هذِه الصَّحْرَاءِ إِلَّا ما رَأَيْنَا أَسْءَ,
فَلَا فَرْغَ مُعَطَّلَتَى لِبِنْتِيِّ كَسِيرَ الرَّماَنَ الدَّائِرَيْ
وَيَوْلُونَ النَّوْفَةَ الجَمِيمَةُ ُ

245 Darwīsh, al-A`māl al-`ūlā, 1:80-84.

This beautiful time is the absolute opposite of the heavy time that stands on top of the ancient Arab’s tent in the first section of the poem:

5. And whose task it was to preserve the orbit of the adjacent Persians and the Byzantines’s great apprehension, so that the heavy time falls from the Arab’s tent. Who am I? This is the others’ question, and there is no answer to it. I am my own language,

وَعَلَّمُوهُمَا أَنَّهُ فَتَحَفَّظَ فَنَبَتُ الْجِبَارَ الْفَارْسِيَ
وَهَاجَسَ الْرُّومَ الْكَبِيرَ، لِيَهْبُطَ الْزَّوْنُ السَّمْحَٰل
عَنْ خَيْنَةُ الْعَرْبِيِّ أَكْثَرَ. مَنْ أَنَا؟ هَذَا
سُؤَالُ الْأَخَرِينَ وَلَا جِنَابٌ لَّنَا. أَنَا لِنْغُنِيُّ أَنَا ٢٤٧

The tent is the dwelling (bayt = house) of the ancient Arab, but it is also the etymological origin of the poetic verse (bayt al-shiʿr). Interestingly enough, the question that arises immediately after mentioning the Arab’s tent is the question of identity, as if the actual Arab’s bayt, i.e. the tent, and the cultural bayt, the poetic verse, are identical. They both protect the self and give it security in the face of the surrounding threatening forces, and thus they provide him with a sense of selfhood. In fact, not only does the poetic bayt give the ancient poet his identity, he himself becomes a suspended ode, making the fine line between the self and the ode, the subject and the object, the seer and the seen, and the sayer and the said disappear:

And I am one suspended ode… two suspended odes… ten. This is my language.

10. I am my language. I am what the words said:

Be
my body, then to their tone, I was a body. I am what
I said to the words: Be the junction of my body
and eternity – the desert. Be, so that I be as I say!

وَأَنَا مُنْطَقٌ... مُنْطَقٌ... عَشَرُ... هَذِهٌ لِنْغَنِيُّ

247 Ibid.
The use of the imperative *kun* (be) is the first hint to the competition or conflict between the poetic/human language and the prosaic/divine language, for it refers to the Qurʾānic recurrent phrase of creation “*kun fa-yakūn*”,249 which is not mere words, but a divine speech-act that brings things from nonexistence into existence. Language here functions as the *Jāhilī* Arab’s God who says to him: be, and then he exists, but the difference is that the poet is also creating language: “I am what I said to the words: be, so that I be as I say.” This interdependency between man and language is absent in the divine version of creation, where the relationship between God’s language and man is always unidirectional: from God to man. In addition to being the first hint at the conflict between the two forms of literary production, the poetic/human and the prosaic/divine, this passage is critical in that it lays the foundation for the climax of the poem when the *Jāhilī* Arab becomes so attached to his language that he worshiped it. In other words, in its first and last appearances in the poem, poetic language assumes the authority of a God.

In addition to being interdependent, man and language in this human/secular reading of the pre-Islamic era are identical: he is a body of its tone, and language is a bird that carries him away from the wasteland:

15. No land on earth bears me, so my words bear me

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249 This speech-act phrase of divine creation is mentioned eight times in the Qurʾān: 2:117, 3:47, 3:59, 6:73, 16:40, 19:35, 36:82, and 40:68.
like a bird, spreading out from me, and building the nest of its journey before me.  
In my rubble, in the rubble of the magical world around me,  
on a wind I stopped. And my long night was too long for me.

In these verses, poetry (kalāmī) appears as an Arabic phoenix that takes the Jāhilī Arab to a new journey every time his tragedy turns his abode to rubble, a scene that alludes to the atlāl (ruined abodes) of the pre-Islamic ode. This allusion is further strengthened by the last line in the passage above, which evokes three moments in classical Arabic poetry all at once: al-Mutanabbī’s famous verse (Anxious as if the wind was beneath me, directing it south or north), the traditional wuqūf and istīqāf motif of the nasīb section typical of pre-Islamic odes (elegiac prelude where the poet stops and asks his companions to stop to weep and remember the departed beloved), and Imru’ al-Qays’s complaint in his Mu’allaqa about the endless night, where he says:

45. Many a night like the billowing sea  
let down its veils over me  
With all kinds of cares  
between al-Dakhūl, then to test me.

46. Then I said to it when

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251 Al-Mutanabbī, Dīwān, 3:225.

16. Anxious as if the wind was beneath me,  
directing it south or north.
it stretched out its spine,
Followed with its hindquarters,
and heaved its ponderous breast,

47. Alas, long night, will you not dispel,
revealing dawn,
Though the dawn of day will be
no better for me.

252

وَلَيْلَةَ كِمْوَةَ الْبَحْرِ أَرْخَى سَدوْنَةٌ
عَلَىٰ بَنِوَاتِ الْهَمَمِ لِيْتَلِي
فَغَلِّطْتَ لَمَّا تَمْطَى بِصَلْبِهِ
وَأَرْفَ أُعْجَارَا وَنَاهَأَ بِكَكَكَلٍ
أَلَا أَلَا اللَّيْلَ الطَّوِيلَ أَلَا أَلْجِلَ
بَصْبُحُ وَمَا الإِصْبَاحُ مَنْكَ بِأَمْثَلٍ

In Darwîsh’s poem, the ancient Arab lives in a constant state of anxiety (On a wind I
stood,) and a constant concern of the other (India, the two small tribes, impossible peace, the
Persian sphere of influence, and the great fear of the Byzantines). It seems that Darwîsh is
painting the geopolitical picture here to hint at the extra-literary function of the Arabic ode, and
perhaps to indicate that the stylistic features of the ode such as the similes, metaphors, structure,
and so on and so forth are to be explained with that context in mind because poetry was a
response to the challenges of life. Additionally, setting poetry against the great powers of the
pre-Islamic period strengthens the idea that poetry was a form of authority itself, which the poem
is trying to establish throughout, and hence paves the way for understanding the divine decision


253 Imru’ al-Qays, Dīwan, 239-242 (this version has the verses in numbers 42, 43, and 45 respectively).
to send a prosaic text to counter that authority. All these references to the great powers of the past are, in a different level, allegorical to the present—the Arab’s, particularly Palestinian, struggle with modern imperial powers.

Moreover, as I said above, Darwīsh is claiming authority for the modern Arab poet, himself first, by injecting his own verse in the re-writing of the history of the ode, and thus rejecting the modernist rejection of classical poetry. Darwīsh is very aware of the fact that “history” is owned by those who write it, hence he writes a “history” of the origin of the Arabic qaṣīda and its extra-literary function within the authority structure of the time. Emphasizing the significance of writing one’s history, he said in the poem Qāla al-musāfiru li-musāfīri: lan aʿūda kamā (The Traveler Said to the Traveler: I Will not Come Back as…) in Section IV (A Room to Speak to the Self):

39. Whoever writes his story will inherit the land of words and own the meaning entirely!

من يكتتب حكايتك يروث
أرض الكلام، ويبنَّك المعنى تمامًا!٢٥٤

**Continuity through a cultural taḍmīn: An interdependent frame of reference**

In order to create a continuity between his poetry and that of his predecessors, Darwīsh ingeniously employs taḍmīn (enjambment), the instance where the complete meaning of the line of poetry, or verse in pre-modern poems, is dependent, syntactically or semantically, on the line or verse following it.٢٥٥ Other meanings of taḍmīn includes the instance where one verse contains

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٢٥٤ Darwīsh, al-struments of the new, 1:378.

٢٥٥ Generally considered a defect that poets should avoid, “enjambment” is only one meaning of the word taḍmīn. Amidu Sanni lists three main categories of taḍmīn as discussed in classical rhetoric: grammatical (syntactic or semantic, this is enjambment), rhetorical (quotational borrowing from one line into another), and hermeneutic.
a quotation from another (which is called in modern Arabic parlance *iqṭībās*), a phenomenon that I will comment on later to explore the place of Tamīm b. Muqbil’s poetry of resentment toward prophetic authority in Darwīsh’s oeuvre.\(^{256}\) I call the first type the *taḍmīn* of continuation, and the second the *taḍmīn* of containment.

To appreciate the significance of the use of *taḍmīn* in Dawrīsh’s *Qāfiya*, the metrical system of the poem should be first introduced. *Qāfiya* is a mono-rhymed, mono-metered *tafʿīla* poem. Although it does not completely adhere to the metrical system of the classical poem, which requires a fixed number of metrical-feet in each line/verse as I explained above, it still maintains one metrical-foot and a consistent mono-rhyme, meaning that all its verses end with the same rhyme, or *qāfiya*. This *qāfiya* is the letter L (*lām*) with a *damma* short vowel, preceded by either of the two long vowels ū or ū. Although the *damma* is a short vowel (*lu*), it receives the sound of a long vowel (īlū or ūlū) because the *qāfiya* is *muṭlaqa* (loosened).\(^{257}\) The *tafʿīla* of this poem, *mutafāʿ ilun* of the meter al-Kāmil, accepts the variant of *mustafʿ ilun*, which is a flexibility within the Khalīlī system. The lines of the poem, in their alternating between *mutafāʿ ilun* and *mustafʿ ilun*, rhyme 15 times, and these rhyming-verses vary in length, meaning in the number of *tafʿīlas* that each “verse” contains.

The following table shows how much the “verses” vary in metrical length. I will give the verse the abbreviation Vr. with its corresponding number (e.g., Vr. 1), and by “verse” I mean the

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\(^{256}\) Ibid.

continuous flow of sentences before the break of a Qāfiya. The taf’īlas will be abbreviated as Tf.
preceded by the number of taf’īlas (e.g., 4 Tf.). Under each Vr., I will write the number for the
line(s) that this given verse covers. For example, verse number 2 (Vr. 2) begins with “Ilayya
bayna” (To myself between) in line 2 and ends with the rhyming word al-mustahīlū at the end of
line 4 (= Ln. 2-4). All the words between these two textual boundaries form verse number 2,
which means that Vr.2 is 13-taf’īla long:

2. To myself between the sea and the desert. From my language, I was born
on the road to India between two small tribes, above whom
the moon of the ancient religions, and the impossible peace,

إلى بنيت النجاح والصحراء. من لغتي ولدت
على طريق بينين بنيت قبيلتين صغيرتين عليهم
قمر الديانات القديمة والسلاط المستحيل.

Table 1: Metrical length of each verse

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Vr.1</th>
<th>Vr.2</th>
<th>Vr.3</th>
<th>Vr.4</th>
<th>Vr.5</th>
<th>Vr.6</th>
<th>Vr.7</th>
<th>Vr.8</th>
<th>Vr.9</th>
<th>Vr.10</th>
<th>Vr.11</th>
<th>Vr.12</th>
<th>Vr.13</th>
<th>Vr.14</th>
<th>Vr.15</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4 Tf.</td>
<td>13 Tf.</td>
<td>8 Tf.</td>
<td>27 Tf.</td>
<td>17 Tf.</td>
<td>18 Tf.</td>
<td>30 Tf.</td>
<td>17 Tf.</td>
<td>8 Tf.</td>
<td>8 Tf.</td>
<td>15 Tf.</td>
<td>9 Tf.</td>
<td>4 Tf.</td>
<td>5 Tf.</td>
<td>6 Tf.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Going back to taḍmīn, my argument here is that, although taḍmīn can be found in other
Arabic Free-Verse poems, employing it in Darwīsh’s Qāfiya seems to have a metaphorical and
metapoetic significance. Forming a continuity of meaning within the textual field of a modern

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258 Darwīsh, al-ʿmāl al-jadīda, 1:381.
poem that evokes tradition is Darwīsh’s overarching claim of how the meaning of ancient poetry, i.e. the Mu’allaqāt, becomes complete only through modern Arabic poetry and vice versa. The traditional and the modern complete each other in sense that the two bodies of poetry form two grand verses dependent upon each other, the ancient as a frame of reference to the latter; the latter as a repertoire of the potential meanings of the former. This will become clear once the instances of taḍmīn are analyzed.

Darwīsh’s poem is titled Qāfiya min ajl al-Muʿallaqāt (A Rhyme for the Suspended Odes). From the title, one can deduce that the actual qāfiyas (rhyme words) of the poem are of significant role in the meaning-making process of the poem. To borrow related concepts from cognitive poetics for interpreting the function of the qāfiyas, one finds that “figures and ground” for the most applicable framework to the emphasis Darwīsh’s poem places on the rhyming words. Within this framework, literary works are seen as textual fields with contrasting relationships between the ground of the field and some of its prominent elements (figures) whose prominence differentiates them from the ground. As Peter Stockwell explains:

The part of a visual field or textual field that is most likely to be seen as the figure will have one or more of the following features that make it prominent:
• it will be regarded as a self-contained object or feature in its own right, with well-defined edges separating it from the ground;
• it will be moving in relation to the static ground;
• it will precede the ground in time or space;
• it will be a part of the ground that has broken away, or emerges to become the figure;
• it will be more detailed, better focused, brighter, or more attractive than the rest of the field;
• it will be on top of, or in front of, or above, or larger than the rest of the
field that is then the ground.\textsuperscript{259}

It is precisely the last feature that is especially applicable to the rhyming words in Darwīsh’s poem, because what the title does is foregrounding the word “rhyme” by putting it on top, in front of, and above all other words in the poem. By placing the word qāfiya in the first position in the title, Darwīsh is foregrounding the rhyming words and granting them a prominent role. The poem is mono-rhymed in the letter L (lām), which is preceded by either of the two long vowels ī or ā. It has fifteen qāfiyās (rhyming words),\textsuperscript{260} eleven ending in the rhyme ī and lām with a damma short vowel (īlū),\textsuperscript{261} and only four ending with the rhyme ā and lām (ūlū),\textsuperscript{262} including the last verse which ends with the word the Messenger (al-rasūlū). The poem exhibits tadmīn in almost half of the qāfiyās (seven out of fifteen), which, going back to Stockwell’s “figure and ground” features, makes tadmīn “detailed, better focused, brighter, or more attractive than the rest of the field.”\textsuperscript{263} This hyper use of tadmīn justifies searching for a metaphorical and metapoetic significance of it. If one takes all the qāfiyās as a minor textual field, tadmīn is also “on top of, or in front of, or above… the field that is then the ground,”\textsuperscript{264} because it is right from the first qāfiya that we are faced with tadmīn, where Darwīsh had to break the “sentence” with the qāfiya in order to achieve tadmīn. Here are all the tadmīn instances:

\begin{enumerate}
\item No one has guided me to myself. I am the guide, I am the guide.
\end{enumerate}


\textsuperscript{260} The rhyming words can be found in lines: 1, 4, 6, 14, 18, 25, 36, 41, 44, 46, 50, 53, 55, 57, and 59.

\textsuperscript{261} Lines: 1, 6, 14, 18, 25, 36, 41, 44, 46, 53, and 55.

\textsuperscript{262} Lines: 14, 50, 57, and 59.

\textsuperscript{263} Stockwell, \textit{Cognitive Poetics}, 15.

\textsuperscript{264} Ibid.
2. To myself between the sea and the desert.

ما ذلني أحدّ علنٍ. أنا الذليل، أنا الذليل.

إلى بينين النينجر والصَّحَنّراء. 265

(2)

6. . . so that the heavy time falls

7. from the Arab’s tent.

266

(3)

25. They took the words, and the slain heart migrated . . .

26. . . With them.

أفتحوا الكلام وهاجز النقلب القليل... 267

(4)

44. And the journey empties me . . .

45. ...of the temples. Heaven has its peoples and its wars.

(5)

46. But me, I have the gazelle is a wife, and for me the palms . . .

47. . . Are suspended odes in the book of sand.

وأفتحوني النَّحْيل... 268

مِن المنعابي للسماة شُعْوَبها وحَرْوَبها.

اَمَا أنا، فلني النَّغْزِالَة زُرْجَة، ولي النَّخَنْجَة...

مَسْتَشْغَالات فِي كِتَاب الرُّمَمِ. 268

265 Darwīsh, al-Aʾmāl al-jādīda, 1:381.

266 Ibid.

267 Ibid., 1:382-383.

268 Ibid., 1:384.
(6)
53. . . and my polished blade
54. And the sacred of the Arab in the desert,

(7)
55. worshipping the rhymes
56. that flow like starts over his cloak,

In five instances (1, 2, 3, 4, and 7) *taḍmīn* links the two lines through a prepositional phrase, which is to say that the second line only adds extra information to the first, but the second has no meaning or function without the first line; it will be a merely free-standing prepositional phrase. In instance number (6), the second line after *taḍmīn* is a continuation of a list which begins before the *taḍmīn*. The phrase (And what is sacred to the Arab in the desert) in line 54 is an addition to the list that contains, among other elements, (my polished blade) in line 53. Again, line 54 will make sense only if the preceding line is taken into account. In these six cases (1, 2, 3, 4, 6, and 7), the first line before *taḍmīn* is syntactically complete, but semantically not; as for the second line after *taḍmīn*, it is neither syntactically nor semantically independent.

It is only in case number 5 that both lines, before and after *taḍmīn*, are grammatically dependent on each other. Interestingly enough, the word that comes first in the next line after this fully interdependent *taḍmīn* is *Muʿallaqāt* (suspended odes), which functions as a predicate (*khabar*) to a subject (*mubtadaʾ*) that comes before *taḍmīn*: (for me, the palms… are suspended

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269 Ibid.
odes in the book of sand). I take this fully interdependent case of taḍmīn, in the syntactic and semantic levels, as a metaphor of the relationship between what comes before (tradition) and what comes after (modernity), by the virtue of which the meaning of tradition, exemplified by the muʿallaqāt, is incomplete unless its reception and interpretation in what comes after (modern poetry) are taken into account. Likewise, the latter is only a continuation of the former and without it, it lacks its significance. Here, the poetic and cultural significance of taḍmīn is so beautifully exhibited in Darwīsh’s poem.

The title of the poem also lends legitimacy to this claim. If the qāfiyas of this poem link one multi-line verse of poetry to the next, the title (qāfiya) links one body of poetry (classical ode) to the next (modern poetry). This poem is written not to the Muʿallaqāt, not about the Muʿallaqāt, but for the Muʿallaqāt, as if the classical ode was in need of modern poetry in order to be complete or to survive. Likewise, by the very act of giving the name qāfiya to a modern poem, the text alludes to the idea that a critical element of the identity of modern poetry is provided by the classical ode. The modern poet is creating a self-image in which he completes the work of the classical ode while simultaneously being completed by it.

Moreover, Darwīsh’s use of taḍmīn in almost half of the qāfiyas creates a circular text in which the movement of the lines is continuous. The sonority of the repetition and circularity of rhyme provides an auditory expression of the circularity and repetitiveness of time. This is a “poetic event” that the ancient poet creates in his suspended ode, which is “raised like a polished blade” to break circular time:

37. . . . we don’t prolong

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270 The close association between the Muʿallaqāt and palms can also be found in Darwīsh’s 1999 poem-Dīwān Jidāriyya. He said in one instance: “My last Muʿallaqa fell of my palm-tree.” See: Ibid., 1:468.
our conversation about what is to come. There is no tomorrow in this desert but what we saw yesterday,

40. So, let me raise my suspended ode so that cyclical era is broken and the beautiful time is born!

As the ancient Arab is perceived in Darwīsh’s *Qāfiya* to be a victim of the never-changing, circular time, the modern text in its typographical level (the formal aspect of rhyme) and its grammatical links creates a circular or at least repetitive work of some sort. The poem here does not only express the idea of circularity and repetitiveness; it actually performs that in its own form. This is a “poetic event” performed by the poem and not just an expression of a content existing prior to the poem.

To link this formal circularity and repetition to my claim that the use of *taḍmīn* in this poem is a metaphor for continuity, I argue that Darwīsh’s poem alludes to the idea that poetic modernism in its formal dimensions, as in this text, saves the old Arabic poem from the annihilation of the circular time by incorporating the *Mu’allaqāt* in the corpus of modern poetry. Likewise, the modern poet turns to the *Mu’allaqāt* to claim continuity and autochthony, and hence to express cultural resistance and rejection: the classical poet’s rejection of submission to the Prophetic prose, and Darwīsh’s rejection of the modernists’ rejection of classical poetry, in its metrical system and the stylistic features it entails.

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This is a mutual exchange of cultural roles through which each party saves the other, and thus the meaning of taḍmīn takes on a cultural dimension in which the memory of the modern Arab and the deep meaning of his life is a continuation of his Jāhilī forefather’s ode, just as the latter's visions are continued in subsequent interpretations at the hands of modern poets such as Darwīsh. The grammatical structure of the verse becomes a cultural construct through which the relationship transforms from the interconnection of two poetic verses into a cultural interdependence of two cultural products separated by more than fourteen centuries.

This prosodic/grammatical and cultural interdependence between modern poetry (Darwīsh) and classical poetry (Ibn Muqbil) is also augmented in another form of taḍmīn, which I call the taḍmīn of containment. This type of taḍmīn denotes a quotational borrowing from one line of poetry or Qur’ān,272 and it establishes very clearly that Darwīsh is by no means a stranger to Ibn Muqbil’s poetry of resentment.

In as early as 1984, Darwīsh published his poetry collection Ḥiṣār li-madāʾiḥ al-baẖr (Siege of the Panegyrics of the Sea), with its first poem, Mūṣīqā ʿArabiyya (Arabic Music), beginning with this quotation (taḍmīn): “Layta al-fatā ḥajarun” (If only man could be a stone?).273 The poem then takes out the quotation marks and transforms the sentence into: “Yā laytanī ḥajarū” (If only I could be a stone?).274 Then the poem proceeds, only to end with the same two sentences about the stone in the beginning: Layta al-fatā ḥajarun, yā laytanī ḥajarū (If only man could be a stone? If only I could be a stone?), but this time without putting the first

272 See: Sanni, “Again on ‘Taḍmīn’.”
274 Ibid., 2:395.
quotation (Layta l-fatā ḥajaru) between quotation marks, since it has already become part of the modern poem itself.

The first quotation is an amendment of part of a famous line by no other than Tamīm b. Muqbil. In an M-rhymed poem of forty-seven verses, Ibn Muqbil expresses how Islam (al-ḍīn, in his words) prevented him from the joys of the Jāhiliyya. His frustration is best expressed in the khabar that he was forced to divorce his wife Dahmāʾ (the persona in the nasīb section of this poem) because she had been his father’s wife before the latter’s death, a marriage permitted in the Jāhiliyya but forbidden in Islam. In a short transitional section from the nasīb to the fakhr (boast), line 25 reads:

25. How sweet life would be if man could be a stone
    that vicissitudes glance off while it remains unscathed

Here Darwīsh’s poem employs what I called above the taḍmīn of containment. In Darwīsh’s use of this type of taḍmīn, the classical verse and its poet are contained within the modern poem and its poet, whose experience, on its part, is contained within a classical verse. The capacity of classical poetry to express the anxiety of the modern poet is this containment.

Darwīsh’s selection of this particular verse is by no means arbitrary. It is true that the verse could be interpreted in general terms as to indicate a certain existential attitude towards time and its changes, but since these changes were perceived by Ibn Muqbil as brought about by

\[\text{Ibn Muqbil, Dīwān, 194-202.}\]
\[\text{276 See: al-Fayfī, Shi’r Ibn Muqbil, 65-70.}\]
\[\text{277 Ibn Muqbil, Dīwān, 198.}\]
Islam, then one can at least use this verse as a background against which to read Darwīsh’s moment in the “Poem of rejection”, a poem that provides a reading of the relationship between the pre-Islamic poet and the Prophet.

Ibn Muqbil’s verse (How sweet life would be if man could be a stone) is central to the modernist understating of pre-Islamic poetry. Adūnīs, the modernist movement’s theorist par excellence, says in his *Muqaddima li-al-shi‘r al-‘arabi* that this verse is “a key to understand the Arab people in the pre-Islamic period . . . [since] it reveals the [ancient] Arab’s feeling of how fragile life is . . . [and his] longing to overcome that fragility.” This statement by Adūnīs here is a re-print (with only minor revisions) of a statement he made in the introduction to his *Dīwān al-shī‘r al-‘Arabī*. Since Adūnīs’s *Dīwān al-shī‘r* was first printed in 1964, this leaves little doubt that Darwīsh is aware of the modernist interpretation of Ibn Muqbil’s verse.

Using Darwīsh’s *taḏmīn* of Ibn Muqbil’s verse as a background to read the former’s comments on the poet-versus-prophet equation is further legitimatized by the fact that the same quote, “*Layta al-fatā ḥajarun*” (If only man could be a stone?) can also be found in the collection (Why Did You Leave the Horse Behind?, 1995) where the poem *Qāfiya* appears. When a verse of poetry appears in two poetry collections separated by more than a decade of productive writing, one is safe to conclude that this verse and the poetic project of its poet are significant to the modern poet’s project.²⁷⁸

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In the present collection, (Why Did You Leave the Horse Behind?), the quote “Layta al-fatā hajarun” (If only man could be a stone?) is found in a poem titled “Marra al-qīṭāru” (The Train Has Passed), the last poem in Section II (Abel’s Open Space). Darwīsh says:

30. Here I was found and wasn’t found
    I will, in this train, come across
    My self that was filled by
    Two banks of a river that died between them
    As man dies
    “If only man could be a stone?”

The poem speaks of a train that took “travelers to their days” but left the speaker of the poem waiting in a “different hour,” which conveyed a sense of “longing for vague things” in the past after “the day when the break occurred between yesterday and the morrow” and “the river died between two banks.” The antithesis between two times seems to be the main theme of this poem, which makes it all the more suitable to employ what I called the taḍmīn of containment and bring a mukhaḍram poet like Ibn Muqbil, who lived before Islam and then witnessed its “speeding train” separating time into the dichotomy of Islamic and pre-Islamic, to voice a modern poet’s anxiety over time, change, and fate. Ibn Muqbil, therefore, seems to occupy an

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279 Darwīsh, al-‘A’māl al-jadīda, 1:328-331.

280 Ibid., 1:330.

important position in Darwīsh’s poetry, which justifies using his poem (Contemplate O My Two Companions) as the first moment in the Poem of Rejection event, and Darwīsh’s Qāfiya as the second.

This act of creating an interdependent frame of reference, whereby modern poetry and classical poetry are continuing, and referring to, each other is further evidenced in the structural level of the poem, for it exhibits what Huda Fakhreddine called “referential metapoetry” as I said above. In the structural level, Darwīsh’s Qāfiya contains some elements that can be found in the typical tripartite Ḧāhilī (pre-Islamic) ode, particularly in the nasīb (elegiac prelude) and the rahīl (journey) sections, but in an innovative way in which the two sections overlap, such as in this illuminating passage:

15. No land on earth bears me, so my words bear me
like a bird, spreading out from me, and building the nest of its journey before me.
In my rubble, in the rubble of the magical world around me,
on a wind I stopped. And my long night was too long for me.

This is my language: necklaces of stars around the necks of

20. those I love: they migrated
They took the place and migrated
They took the time and migrated
They took their scents from the pottery
and [from] the scarce pasture, and migrated

25. They took the words, and the slain heart migrated…

...With them.

لا أُرِين فوق الأرض تحملائي، فيحميَّلي كلامي
طائِرًا مستُفرِّعا مني، ويبني عشّ رحلته أسامي
في حُطابي، في حُطاب العالم المستحري من حنولي،
على ريح وقفش، وطانّ بي لنبتلي الطويل
In this section, one finds expressions that allude to the *nasīb* section: “In my rubble, in the rubble of the magical world around me. on a wind I stopped,” which remind one of the ruined abodes and the *wuqūf* and *istīqāf* motif of the *nasīb* section, along with expressions and scenes typical of the journey section of the classical ode: “They took the place/the time/their scents . . . [from] the scarce pasture and migrated.” In another layer, the modern poem is referring here to classical poets as the beloved people who “took the words” and migrated. In this interpretation, the modern poet is not only describing the classical poet’s situation, he himself is also standing on the “ruined abodes” of his departed people, i.e., his predecessors. In other words, through the mask of the ancient poet, the modern poet is lamenting the departure of words from the Arab land and the abandonment of poetry, which is, again, the same question to be found in the title: (Why Did You Leave the Horse Behind?), with the horse taken here as the “horse of song” as the first poem in the collection states.

Lamenting the loss of poetry and its defeat in the modern world reminds the poet of the first moment the Arabic verse was defeated, the moment when the Prophet came with a prosaic
text that enjoyed the divine support and challenged and displaced the authority of the institution of the classical ode. As the taḍmīn technique establishes an extended line of aesthetic and cultural continuity between the classical and the modern, the poet-versus-prophet conflict places the modern poet’s anxiety over the significance and the role of his craft in the modern world in the continuity of the poet versus authority.

The poetic versus the prosaic: Shifting the ground

It is essential to first sum up my main points in the preceding pages of this chapter in order to understand how the modern poet sees the relationship between the poet and the Prophet. What I have been arguing for in this chapter is that:

1. Building upon the readings of S. Stetkevych and J. Stetkevych, I adopt the view that Ka‘b’s L-rhymed poem Bānat Su‘ād (Su‘ād Has Departed) and Tamim Ibn Muqbil’s R-rhymed poem Taʾammal khalīlī (Contemplate, O My Friend) were among the first, and certainly the most important, responses to the Prophetic authority in the tradition of the Arabic qaṣīda, form two antithetical poetic events. While Ka‘b’s poem constitutes the “Poem of Incorporation” type of poetic events, by incorporating the Prophet and his prosaic text into the tradition of the classical ode and incorporating the poet and his classical ode into the Islamic cultural establishment, Ibn Muqbil’s poem establishes a “Poem of Rejection;” a rejection of the typical form of the classical ode, a rejection of a reconciliation between two times and two cultural systems, and most importantly between the Prophet and the poet.

2. Darwīsh’s Qāfiya, which I read as a “Poem of Double Rejection”, is an essential part of a poetry collection which can be understood as a grand metaphor of how the modern Arab
poet sees poetry as a “horse of song” that the Arabs have left behind, and which he is reclaiming to rewrite the personal and collective history of the self and of Palestine as a synecdoche of the larger Arab politico-cultural situation.

3. While the topoi of poetry as identity and language as the poet’s authority with which he resists annihilation and the denial of his agency is the main theme of the collection, the poem Qāfiya exemplifies theses topoi through the construction of a self-image for the poet that reaches its climax in framing poetry as an anti-text to the new prosaic system of writing that was the Prophet’s miracle, namely the Qur’ān, and also as a rejection of the modernist project that rejects the classical ode and its stylistic features.

4. In the world of the classical Muʿallaqāt prior to the Qurʾānic dispensation where “Gods appear and go,” the poet identifies with language in its highest form, poetry, in order to resist the harshness of the place, the monotony of life, and the repetitiveness and circularity of time, or the “cyclical era” as the poem reads. In his turn, the modern Arab poet claims authority by placing his kalām in the re-writing of the history of the classical ode. Among other important means to create an interdependent frame of reference between his poetry and that of the classical poet, the modern poet employs the taḍmīn, which, in a multiplicity of metaphorical layers, makes for the argument that what came before (the first verse, but also classical poetry) is connected to, and continued and contained in, what comes after (the next verse, but also modern poetry). The modern and the classical continue and complete each other.

5. The authority of the poet, as the head of the classical ode institution, saw its first challenge in the moment of the revelation of the Qurʾānic text, which was based on the
same language that the classical poet had been monopolizing as his poetic capital alone. This is the reason that promoted a modern poem like Darwīsh’s Qāfiya to go back to that moment in order to re-write the history of the classical ode.

Qāfiya, as I said above, is 15 bayts/verses out of 59 line mono-rhymed Arabic Free-Verse poem in the letter L (lām), preceded by either of the two long vowels ī or ā. The poem is also called a rhyme, which means that its rhyme word is an essential part of its identity. It is of note that the rhyme of Darwīsh’s Qāfiya (ālā / īlā) is identical to that of Ka’b’s Poem of Incorporation Bānat Suʿād (Suʿād Has Departed), although the two poems’ meters are different (al-Kāmil for Darwīsh’s; al-Basīṭ for Ka’b’s). This shared sonority, in addition to thematic aspects, suggests reading Darwīsh’s Qāfiya as against or counter to Ka’b’s Poem of Incorporation. At the same time, Darwīsh’s Qāfiya is an anti-text to the modernist qaṣīdat al-nathr, which claims to reject the classical tradition, particularly its metrical system.283

While Ka’b’s Poem of Incorporation, as analyzed above, recognizes and submits to the role God plays in the world by revealing the Prophet’s text to guide people, the world that Darwīsh’s Qāfiya designs for the pre-Islamic poet existed without the need for Gods. Moreover, the language that this Jāhilī world commanded became the Arab’s great weapon in the face of every enemy, from father (apparently in the Freudian sense) to fate. A step farther, then it became his miracle. One more step, then he was worshipping it. The poem places language (and the ode) within the history of the human miracles, as opposed to the divine miracles, whereby the Arab poet’s language became his miracle and, subsequently, his God. The poem reads:

283 In his study of the modernist movement of the Beirūtī Shiʿr periodical, Robyn Creswell notes that rejecting the Khalīlī system and the concept of tarab closely associated with the classical poem was, for aesthetic, cultural, and ideological reasons, essential to the argument of the prose poem advocates of Shiʿr and the modernist movement in general. See: Creswell, City of Beginnings, 124-127.
Man possesses the kingdom of dust and its crown. So, let my language triumph over time – the enemy, over my progeny, over me, over my father, and over an ending that never ends.

This is my language and my miracle: the staff of my magic; the Gardens of my Babylon, and my obelisk, my first identity, and my polished blade

And what is sacred to the Arab in the desert, worshipping the rhymes that flow like stars over his cloak, and worshipping what he says.

It is interesting that almost all these miracles, which the poem likens to the classical poet’s language, are human, or man-made, a strategy that helps the poem empty its world from any presence of the divine and thus pave the way to present the Arabic ode as the absolute

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antithesis, and displacement, of the divine miracle, i.e., the Prophetic divine prose. This strategy of humanizing and secularizing the artistic experience is consistent in Darwīş’s project. In the longest poem in his oeuvre, Jidāriyya (Mural, 1999), the 79-page poem that constitutes an entire dīwān and chronicles Darwīş’s experience with what appeared to him as the closest state to death during open-heart surgery, he said of art versus death:

486/12. O Death, all the arts have defeated you.285
O Death, the songs in Bilād al-Rāfidayn (Mesopotamia) have defeated you.
The Egyptian’s obelisk. The Pharaohs’ tombs,
487/1. the inscriptions of a temple’s stones, [all] have defeated you
and triumphed [over you], and eternity escaped your ambush.

Placing people’s songs together with the human miracles in the continuity of the arts is exactly what Darwīş’s Qāfiya does when dealing with the pre-Islamic suspended ode. That the Arab poet became so mesmerized by his language (read: his ode) to the extent that he made a God out of it, this prepares the poem for its “punch line.” Here God intervened to challenge this artistic/poetic language by a prosaic language that is transmitted by a human being, but with a divine power. The story comes to an end, and the Prophet triumphs:

58. There has to be prose, then,

285 486 is the page number; 12 the line number in that page. This poem is too long to include all its verses in one line-number system.

286 Darwīş, al-A’māl al-jadīda, 1:386-487.
There has to be a divine prose for the Prophet to triumph…

لا يدَّ من نَثْرٍ إِذَا،
لا يدَّ من نَثْرٍ لَيْنَتَحْصَرُ الرَّسُولُ.  ٢٨٧

With this ending, which follows the dramatic description of the captivation of the pre-Islamic poet in his ode, the relationship between the poet and the Prophet proves to be of a contradictory nature. They compete, not cooperate or incorporate each other, in their respective fields of authority. This poem takes Ibn Muqbil’s tribal rejection of the Prophetic text to a universal level, dividing human history between a prophetic/divine history, which is totally ignored in the poem, and a poetic/human history, which could have won had it not been for the divine assistance to the Prophet.

**Universalizing and modernizing rejection**

It is important to notice that Darwīsh’s poem specifies that the conflict lies essentially in the two differing forms of literary production that the poet and the Prophet reveal. Here the poetic/literary form becomes more than a formal tradition. It is the bayt (home/homeland) of the self, as defined by Tamīm b. Muqbil, in which its identity can be found. Therefore, the difference in the literary genre is the lens through which the modern poet examines the relationship between the poet and the prophet, and also the basis of the definitions that the poet sets for himself and for the other.

This differentiation between the two forms, poetry and prose, is echoed in another Darwīshī poem in the same collection (Why Did You Leave the Horse Behind?), where he depicts the poet as receiving revelation from “The Unknown” and in the desert. In the poem (The

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287 Ibid., 1:384.
Traveler Said to the Traveler: I Will not Come Back as…) in the metapoetic Section IV (A Room to Speak to the Self), which I quoted above to demonstrate that Darwīsh was aware of how critical it was to write one’s history and own one’s narrative, he said:

25. I don’t know the desert, however often I visit its concerns And in the desert the Unknown said to me: Write! Then I said: On the mirage there is another writing

30. He said: Write, so that the mirage becomes green Then I said: I lack absence And I said: I haven’t learned the words yet Then he said to me: Write, so that you know them And you know where you were, where you are

35. And how you came, and what you will be tomorrow Put your name in my hand and write so that you know who I am, and go like a cloud…

…in the open space Then I wrote: whoever writes his story will inherit

40. the land of words and own the meaning entirely!

لا أعرف الصحراء،
مهما رُزِت هاجستها,
وفي الصحراء قال الغيبي لي:
أكتب!
فقلت: على السراب كتابة أخرى
قال: اكتب لينخصّ السراب
فقلت: يتنقّصني الغيب
وقلت: لن أتعلّم الكلمات بعدن
فقال لي: أكتب لتنعرفها
وتعلّرت أنين كنت، وأنين كنت!
The allusion in this passage to the story of the first revelation of the Qurʾān is striking. According to the Islamic tradition, the Angel Jibrīl (Gabriel) was sent to Prophet Muḥammad when he was in seclusion worshipping God in a cave on top of a mountain in the city of Makkah. The Angel grabbed the Prophet and said to him, three times: Recite! The Prophet responded to all three commands: I cannot recite! After the third time, the Angel said: “recite, by the name of your Lord who created,” and then continued to recite what will become the first five verses of the Qurʾān to be revealed to the Prophet.289

What the section from Darwīsh’s poem does is contrasting the Prophet’s reciting/reading with the Poet’s writing, thus reinforcing the idea that the origin of the conflict between the poet and the Prophet is the different forms of literary production. Each party is putting forth a story, a narrative about the personal self and the collective self, and the poet is aware that writing, not reciting, is his tool. While the act of reciting denotes a reading of a pre-existing content, writing in Darwīsh’s poem, it seems, denotes originality and creativity and indicates a sense of agency. And regardless of whether or not one is convinced with this differentiation, the point I am making here is that, this is what Darwīsh’s poem seems to argue for, that the poet and the

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288 Ibid., 1:386-487.

289 I will discuss the full story of the first Qurʾānic revelation in chapter 4.
Prophet are representatives of two conflicting forms of literary production.

In this highly metapoetic collection, which includes a section designated as offering a room to talk to the self, the modern poet constructs a self-image to challenge the forces that threaten to make poetry lose its significance in the Arab world, to deprive modern Arabic culture of its memory, and to abandon the “horse of song.” By creating a world of poets referring to other poets, Darwīsh’s argument seems to be that poetry is in no need of other authorities to guide it; it can guide itself: (I am the guide, I am the guide. To myself) as the opening lines in his Qāfiya read.

The rejection of displacing poetry with other texts (revealed to either classical or modern prophets) and the emphasis on its role as replacing history and on the poet as one who owns and inherits meaning, Darwīsh rewrote the “history” of the Arabic ode by, first, reading it within the human continuity of the arts and, second, by placing his verse within the continuity of Arabic poetry through metapoetry and the taqīmān technique; the former to universalize the Arabic poetic tradition and the latter to modernize it. Finally, Darwīsh’s Qāfiya came to intensify the rejection expressed by Ibn Muqbil’s poem by universalizing it and placing it within an archetypal story of an inevitable conflict, not only between the poet and the Prophet per se, but between the forms of literary production that they revealed: poetry and prose.

The conflict between the poetic and the prophetic seems to be diffused in the project of another modern poet, the Saudi modernist Muḥammad al-Thubaytī. His project, I argue, offers a space where the poet and the prophet become incarnated in a modern secular prophetic persona who sees his mission as to redefine the modern, re-write history, and re-imagine the identity of a people whose story was dehumanized, agency denied, and narrative reduced to a newly
discovered commodity or a newly invented religious dogma. Chapters 3 and 4 will discuss this in detail.
Chapter 3:
The Saudi Arabian Poet versus Misrepresentation of the Cultural Self

Muhammad al-Thubayti: Reimagining the pre-oil identity of Arabia

The aesthetic project of the Saudi modernist poet Muḥammad al-Thubayti (1952-2011) can be best approached by analyzing the poems that belong to what can be called the poetic peak of his literary career, the phase that began, as critics almost unanimously agree, with his third collection *al-Taḍārīs* (Terrains, 1986). The Saudi critic Saʿīd al-Surayḥī, who penned a number of books and articles on al-Thubayti’s project, considered *al-Taḍārīs* an enormous transition from the traditional and romantic poetics that characterized the poet’s earlier works into “a highly opaque language that constitutes a unique model of modernist poetry and surpasses many of the poetic experiments in contemporary Arabic poetry.” Al-Thubayti’s project continued afterwards, albeit sporadically, to make breakthroughs that inspired the experiments of the literary avant-garde of Saudi Arabia, the Arabian Peninsula, and beyond.

Al-Thubayti’s works, particularly since the publication of the collection *al-Taḍārīs*, considered by and large one of the defining moments of the modernist movement in the Arabian Peninsula in general and in Saudi literature in particular, attest to an acute awareness of tradition

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290 Critics who have examined al-Thubayti’s oeuvre agreed that, starting from his third collection, *al-Taḍārīs* (*Terrains*, 1986), the poet was able to find a special voice for himself, one that combines the traditional and modernist experiences in a text full of myths and references to the cultural experience of the Arabian Peninsula. See, for instance, al-Bazei, *New Voices of Arabia*, 257.


and present a creative misreading of it. Furthermore, the overarching theme of his oeuvre hinges upon the idea of the poet as a preserver of a collective, pre-oil identity, and a creator of new forms of expressions capable of redefining the self, often in ways deeply rooted in the culture of the place. This is a dynamic poetic project aimed at (re)creating and reimagining the pre-oil natural and cultural worlds of Arabia, while at the same time charting a course for a post-oil cultural identity. The poet’s self-image versus a prevalent de-humanizing narrative about the place and its people appears central to al-Thubaytī’s project.

I was primarily concerned with the poet’s self-image al-Thubaytī constructs versus the reductionist, oil-based narrative about modern Saudi Arabia, a self-image that all so often transforms the poem into a site of commemoration, something like a ṭalal (ruined abode) that, however, is not yet ruined but that the poet fears might very well be, a ṭalal upon which the poet stands, just as his classical precursors did, and remembers the past before taking his journey into the future. This site of commemoration provides the poet with a vantage point for deconstructing the current image, or narrative, about the place and for making it possible for a new re-imagining of the past, the present, and the future to take place. al-Thubaytī says:

1. He embraced me,
   Then made me stand on the sands

   He called me:
   By mīm (m), ḥāʾ (ḥ), mīm (m), and dāl (d)

5. And he stood up radiantly in my certainty,
   And said:

   You and the palm tree are two branches
12. The fruit of the poor
And the fruit of the poets
You poured each other the two blended drinks:

15. Innocent wine and lawful magic

To examine the overarching theme in al-Thubaytī’s oeuvre, I have chosen in chapter 4 to present an interpretive reading of his Mawṣiq al-rimāl ... mawṣiq al-jinās (The Stance of the Sand... The Stance of Paronomasia, henceforth referred to as Mawṣiq al-jinās), from whose opening lines come the verses quoted above. The reason I chose to analyze this particular poem,
one of the poet’s last and longest poems, is that it stands as a heteroglossic, multi-layered masterpiece that culminates a lifelong project of experimentation with poetry as a way of redefining identity. This identity, while firmly anchored in the tradition of the place as seen by the poet, is flexible enough to accommodate the innovations of modernity and, to use al-Thubaytī’s words, to “make friends with them,” as friendship signifies understanding, willingness to cooperate, and complementarity. The poem reads:

I make friends with the streets
The sand and the fields

I make friends with the palm trees

I make friends with the city
The sea and the ship
And the beautiful beach

I make friends with the nightingales

I make friends with the stones
The lighted square
And the long season
What is striking to me in the two excerpts above is the harmonious hosting of tradition and modernity in one text. While the poem’s voice makes friends with the streets and the city, as emblems of modernity, he summons tradition through the allusion in the first excerpt to two fundamental moments in the history of Arabic language, namely the birth of the Qur’ānic text (by alluding to the first Qur’ānic revelation to Prophet Muḥammad, as will be explained in detail later) and the birth of the first and “best achieved qaṣidah in the Arabic language,” i.e., the Muʿallaqa of Imruʿ al-Qays (through the motif of wuqūf and ʾistīqāf).

And not only does the dichotomy between tradition and modernity disappear, but also the internal dichotomies in each one of them. Hence the Prophet and the poet in tradition, and the sand and the streets in modernity, to give only one example from each, operate harmoniously within the textual field of the poem. The Prophet and the poet do not incorporate each other, as in Kaʿb’s Poem of Incorporation, nor do they reject each other, as in Ibn Muqbil’s and Darwīsh’s Poem of Rejection; they simply co-exist incarnate in the poetic persona of the poet whose self-image neutralizes multiple forms of authority and reclaims the agency of his people by being

294 Ibid., 14. The verses are written in bold in the collection.

295 S. Stetkevych, The Mute Immortals Speak, xiv.
incarnated in the nature of Arabia and the word of the Arabic language, as will become clear later.

In order to appreciate al-Thubaytī’s poetic project and be better equipped to listen to the subtle voices of resistance in his poems, one ought to situate it, first and foremost, within the cultural context of 1980s Saudi Arabia, the time when al-Thubaytī’s poetic project was evolving. Taking into account a domestic atmosphere very hostile, at the time, to the modernist project, and a prevalent, taken-for-granted reductionist narrative about Saudi culture, history, and people, as I shall explain in this chapter, one can better grasp the significance of al-Thubaytī’s breakthroughs. Chief among his poetic characteristics is the distinctive utilization of the classical diction and mythology of pre-Islamic Arabia, the references and intertextual allusions to the Arabic literary canon, and the interpretive reproduction of some of the core aspects of the classical ode, all harmoniously playing out in a modernist textual network too dense for the reader to unpack without strong foundation in Arabo-Islamic tradition.

The density of al-Thubaytī’s text and its strong bond with tradition, as this chapter will elucidate, which he does not seem to see as a restriction to his poetic freedom (to his free verse), was arguably the poet’s act of resistance to two dominating forces. The first was formed by the Islamist domestic opponents who accused the modernists of being “Westernizing agents” who

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297 “Islamists” is a term that encompasses a wide variety of politicoreligious movements that emerged beginning from the early decades of the 20th century with the aim to restore “true Islam” and revive Muslim societies based on Islamic principles. What is referred to as “Islamists” now are, generally speaking, activist organizations (such as
disregarded tradition, this accusation itself part of a larger debate over tradition versus modernity in modern Arabic cultural discourse.\(^{298}\) One might say that the brand of identity promoted by the modernists, which stresses the local and secular aspects of the collective self, was seen as if it were antithetical to the universal Umma-based identity the Islamists were propagating, which seeks to highlight the Saudi nation’s religious mission as the leader of the Muslim world.\(^{299}\) The

\(^{298}\) It is beyond the purview of this study to write a history of the \textit{turāth}-\textit{hadīthā} (tradition-modernity) dichotomy in the modern Arabic literary and intellectual discourses, or to trace the historical trajectory of the multiple literary schools and intellectual movements that have existed, since the 19th century, to respond to the challenge of modernity. Suffice it to say that the Saudi debate over modernism and tradition can be read as part of the larger intellectual debate in the Arab and Muslim worlds. In this study, I zoom in on the Saudi case. One symbolic event that took place in another part of the Arab world but had far-reaching consequences, which may lend a better understanding of how traditionalists (not necessarily Islamists) compete with modernists over the meaning of identity and what can and cannot be accepted in terms of cultural renovation, is the controversy that followed the publication of Egyptian thinker, writer, and scholar of Arabic literature Ṭahā Ḥusayn’s (d. 1973) \textit{Fī al-shīr al-Jāhilī} (On pre-Islamic Poetry) in 1926. Building on ideas from D. S. Margoliouth, the book argued that most pre-Islamic poetry was \textit{muntahāl/maḥtīl} (forged) by the transmitters of the Islamic era. Moreover, the book contends that the historicity of the Qur’ānic stories of the prophets, such as that of Prophet Ibrāhīm (Abraham), is not to be taken at face-value, for the Qur’ān is not a history book. These arguments in the book sparked a storm of controversy in which Ḥusayn was accused of heresy and his book was banned. He then had to omit some parts of the book and republish it under a slightly different title, \textit{Fī al-adab al-Jāhilī}. The symbolic significance of the whole episode is that it speaks of the mechanisms and strategies of how a modern method of dealing with tradition is confronted; usually by resorting to the fundamental religious lexicon which treats the cultural field in theological terms and thus includes or excludes certain practices based on its adherence to the perceived religious truth. This is not so far from what happened to Saudi modernists as this chapter will clarify in the coming pages. On Ṭahā Ḥusayn, see: P. Cachia, “Ṭahā Ḥusayn”, in: \textit{Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition}, Edited by: P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, W.P. Heinrichs. Consulted online on 14 March 2019 <http://dx.doi.org.proxy.library.georgetown.edu/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_COM_1148> See also the new edition of \textit{Fī al-shīr al-Jāhilī}, which includes an introduction on the controversy: Ṭahā Ḥusayn, \textit{Fī al-shīr al-Jāhilī: al-ḥith wa-al-qāfiyya}, Taqdim wa-dirāṣat ‘Abd al-Mun im Tallima (Cairo: Ru’ya li-al-Nashr wa-al-Tawzi‘, 2007). See also Margoliouth’s article which contains his ideas on pre-Islamic poetry: D. S. Margoliouth, “The Origins of Arabic Poetry,” \textit{Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland}, no. 3 (1925): 417–449.

\(^{299}\) On his two-part personal account of the modernist movement in Saudi Arabia, the modernist poet, novelist, essayist, and activist ‘Alī al-Dumaynī (b. 1948) emphasizes that the modernist movement provoked a conflict that was essentially cultural and not only literary or esthetic, because, at the core, it aimed to redefine identity. See: ‘Alī
second force was the prevailing narrative about the Saudi Arabian history. The Western-inspired construction of a modern Saudi Arabian history promulgated the ideology of an oil-based “Saudi exceptionalism,” with its concomitant representation of the Saudi populace as mere “Bedouins” with camels, oil, and a bunch of religious, Kharijite-like300 fanatics who had no history prior to the discovery of oil. In this narrative, the Saudi nation appears as “a set of tribes with a flag, manifestly not like other imagined real or authentic nations,” as Robert Vitalis puts it more plainly.301

The impact of these two forces contributed to a Saudi Arabia that is an “enigma,302” a situation that, as Stéphane Lacroix rightly noted, left those who approach the Saudi history and society “between caricature and outrageous oversimplification. Saudi Arabia is said to export a


The term travelled throughout history, and nowadays it is mostly used to describe extremist, religious fanatics (or even religiously-inspired terrorist organizations) who do not hesitate to excommunicate people (practice takfîr) from the Islamic faith even for minor sins.


retrograde Islam, homogeneous and unchanged since the eighteenth century, when it was revived at the instigation of a preacher from central Arabia, Sheikh Muhammad bin Abd al-Wahhab. In this picture, modernity enters into play only indirectly, through the discovery of oil, which provided a religious idiosyncrasy with the resources for global expansion.303”

One of the principal sources of inspiration in al-Thubaytī’s poetic project, I argue, was to deploy a counter-narrative to the prevalent, hegemonic one that the two dominating forces mentioned above helped create and promote. Al-Thubaytī says in a very moving verse in Mawqīf al-jīnās:

145. In the field of missteps  
Between the Kharijites and the battleships  
My patience  
Clamored inside of me  
And my stance

150. Made me worry.

This chapter argues that Muḥammad al-Thubaytī’s primary “poetic event,” to use Judith Balso’s term again, is to devise a new imagining of the place and its people, or, say, to reimagine Saudi Arabian identity. To this end, the chapter will proceed as follows:


1. Examine the concept of “imagined communities,” first put forth and expanded upon by the historian and political scientist Benedict Anderson, and explain its relevance to the imagining of a new Saudi identity in the discussion of al-Thubayti’s project, with particular emphasis on Anderson’s explanation of how the modern understanding of ideas such as national identity, narrative, history, and tradition was calibrated and re-calibrated over time.

2. Take a detailed look into the Saudi cultural context and how it created a sui generis Saudi modernism.

3. Examine the reductionist oil-based narrative of Saudi history and identity and explore al-Thubayti’s response to it in his works prior to Mawqif al-jinās—a response largely characterized by anchoring his poetic project on the tradition of the place.

Imagined communities and national identity: Reconstructing society’s self-image

In his 1983 work *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, Benedict Anderson develops a theory and a set of concepts to study the phenomenon of the modern nation-state and the origins of national consciousness and nationalism, first in Europe and then elsewhere.305 Admitting from the outset that “nation, nationality, nationalism . . . have proved notoriously difficult to define, let alone to analyse,” he modestly explains the aim of his book as “to offer some tentative suggestions for a more satisfactory interpretation of the ‘anomaly’ of nationalism.”306

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306 Ibid., 4.
Considering nationalism a “cultural artifact” and attempting to find its cultural roots, he defines it from an anthropological perspective as “an imagined political community – and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign.”\(^{307}\) It is imagined because all the people of a certain nation share a certain national image about “their communion” even though each one of them will not know but a small number of their fellow nationals.\(^{308}\) This communion is imagined as limited since every nation has political boundaries; sovereign because it was developed in an age in which the political model of the divinely ordained dynasty was in a process of losing its legitimacy thanks to the Enlightenment and Revolution; and it is imagined as a community because “the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship.”\(^{309}\)

According to Anderson’s definition, perception precedes reality when it comes to nationalism and nations’ self-image. People imagine themselves as a nation before the actual realization of that imagined nation in reality; in fact, the latter is a result of the former. This new perception of national togetherness can best be understood if read against two preceding cultural systems that are most relevant to it, namely the cultural systems of “the religious community and the dynastic realm. For both of these, in their heydays, were taken-for-granted frames of reference, very much as nationality is today.”\(^{310}\) The question now is how these frames of reference were considered self-evident? And what caused that self-evidentiality to lose currency?

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\(^{307}\) Ibid., 6.

\(^{308}\) Ibid.

\(^{309}\) Ibid., 7. Anderson’s definition of nationalism and his conceptual framework in general was criticized by many, especially by scholars from feminist (for its “masculinity bias”) and postcolonial backgrounds. Later in this chapter, I will discuss one of the most vocal postcolonial criticisms, by Partha Chatterjee, for it is most pertinent to my present discussion of how cultural products, such as al-Thubayti’s poetry, contribute to the re-imagining of national identity.

\(^{310}\) Ibid., 12.
All religiously imagined communities of the classical world, Anderson contends, “conceived of themselves as cosmically central, through the medium of a sacred language linked to a superterrestrial order of power.” Classical communities such as the Islamic Umma, the “Chinese” Middle Kingdom, but particularly Christendom were, to various degrees, first challenged by the European Age of Discovery and Exploration, which made it possible to think of new models of the human life.

But it was the “gradual demotion” of the once thought of as sacred languages and, consequently, the written script of the religions of these classical communities that brought an end to their dominance, since it was only through these mediums that it was possible to imagine them. If we take the realm of Christendom as an example, Anderson posits that “the fall of Latin exemplified a larger process in which the sacred communities integrated by old sacred languages were gradually fragmented, pluralized, and territorialized.”

As for the dynastic realm, contrary to our “modern” conception of the nation in which “state sovereignty is fully, flatly, and evenly operative over each square centimetre of a legally demarcated territory,” in dynasties, “kingship organizes everything around a high centre. Its legitimacy derives from divinity, not from populations, who, after all, are subjects, not

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311 Ibid., 13.

312 This is one of only few instances in which the realm of Arabo-Islamic culture is mentioned in Imagined Communities. In the beginning of the book, Anderson lamented the fact that previous studies on nationalism were largely Euro-centric. Being a European-American specialist in East Asian political history, his examples come mostly from the historical experiences of Europe, the Americas, Russia, and East Asia. The vast territorial stretch of the Islamic empire (or empires) over much of the pre-20c world is largely, yet understandably, glossed over in Anderson’s account of nationalism.

313 Ibid., 18.

314 Ibid., 19.
citizens.\textsuperscript{315} Hence in the imagination of these classical communities, “borders were porous and indistinct, and sovereignties faded imperceptibly into one another.\textsuperscript{316} The great puissance of the political system of the dynastic realm notwithstanding, its sway and the self-evident legitimacy it so entailed began to wane during the seventeenth century, first in Western Europe.\textsuperscript{317}

During the time in which, 1) the dynasts’ legitimacy became questionable and, later on, something to revolt against, and 2) religiously imagined communities began to lose the very medium through which their worldviews could be conveyed and promoted, i.e., sacred languages and written script, another significant cultural change was emerging. People’s understanding of how the world works was being radically altered, particularly regarding the apprehension of time, how historical events are related to each other, and what is actually man’s place in the cosmos. Without this unprecedent change of conception, the very idea of the nation would have been unimaginable.\textsuperscript{318}

In the religiously imagined communities, people “had no conception of history as an endless chain of cause and effect or of radical separations between past and present,\textsuperscript{319} Anderson contends. To the contrary, time was linked to a pre-determined, Divine grand plan whereby historical events are interpreted as either promises for upcoming, or fulfillments of previous, ones. This interpretive understanding of historical events is what Erich Auerbach calls “figural

\textsuperscript{315} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{316} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{317} Ibid., 21.
\textsuperscript{318} Ibid., 22.
\textsuperscript{319} Ibid., 23.
interpretation” in his article “Figura,” and which he later employed in his magnum opus Mimesis. Auerbach minutely delineates the foundational differences in the conception of time between classical antiquity, exemplified by Homer, and “divine” texts as manifested in the hermeneutic tradition of the Old and New Testaments. Figural interpretation began with St. Paul in the first century of the Christian era. In Mimesis, Auerbach states:

Paul and the Church Fathers reinterpreted the entire Jewish tradition as a succession of figures prognosticating the appearance of Christ, and assigned the Roman Empire its proper place in the divine plan of salvation. Thus while, on the one hand, the reality of the Old Testament presents itself as complete truth with a claim to sole authority, on the other hand that very claim forces it to a constant interpretative change in its own content; for millennia it undergoes an incessant and active development with the life of man in Europe.

In other words, the entire history of mankind up to Paul’s time was seen to be encapsulated in a divine text and thus was understood in divine, not human, terms. Additionally, focusing more and more on the concept of history, Auerbach adds that “the claim of the Old Testament stories to represent universal history, their insistent relation . . . to a single and hidden God, who . . . guides universal history by promise and exaction, gives these stories an entirely different perspective from any the Homeric poems can possess.”

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322 Ibid., 16.

323 Ibid., 16-17.
This pattern of figural interpretation of history persists well into later Christian writings. Taking Augustine as an example, Auerbach notes that “all the more frequently . . . do we find the Fathers pursuing the interpretation of reality . . . for the purpose of bringing them into harmony with the Judaeo-Christian view of history. The method employed is almost exclusively that of figures.”

Auerbach then concludes, “This type of interpretation obviously introduces an entirely new and alien element into the antique conception of history.”

On his part, Anderson makes use of Auerbach’s figural interpretation to distinguish not between the antique concept of history and that of Christianity, but between the latter’s, as exemplary of the religiously imagined communities, on the one hand, and that of modernity, on the other. He quotes a long passage from Auerbach’s Mimesis which illustrates the Christian concept of history using the example of the sacrifice of Isaac. According to Auerbach, the Christian figural interpretation of this Old Testament story was such that the sacrifice of Isaac was understood to be a necessary prefiguration of the sacrifice of Christ, the former promising the latter who in turn fulfills the former. These two events are linked “neither temporally nor causally” and in ways “impossible to establish by reason in the horizontal dimension . . . It can

324 Ibid., 73.

325 Ibid.


327 Auerbach, Mimesis, 73.
be established only if both occurrences are vertically linked to Divine Providence, which alone is able to devise such a plan of history and supply the key to its understanding."

In such an interpretation of historical events, Auerbach asserts that “the here and now is no longer a mere link in an earthly chain of events, it is simultaneously something which has always been, and will be fulfilled in the future; and strictly, in the eyes of God. It is something eternal, something omni-temporal, something already consummated in the realm of fragmentary earthly event.” Anderson likens this religious perception of time to what Walter Benjamin called “Messianic time,” a perception by which appears “a simultaneity of past and future in an instantaneous present. In such a view of things, the word ‘meanwhile’ cannot be of real significance.”

The modern perception of time and history is radically different. To clarify this difference, Anderson resorts again to Walter Benjamin. He borrows from him the idea of a “homogeneous, empty time,” where the religious idea of “simultaneity-along-time” is replaced by a simultaneity that is “transverse, cross-time, marked not by prefiguring and fulfilment, but by temporal coincidence, and measured by clock and calendar.”

328 Ibid., 73-74.
329 Ibid., 74. Quoted in Anderson’s *Imagined Communities*. Commenting on Auerbach’s text, Anderson says, “He rightly stresses that such an idea of simultaneity is wholly alien to our own.” But Auerbach is talking about how this understanding is alien to that of classical antiquity. See: Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 24.
330 Ibid., 24.
331 Ibid.
To make Benjamin’s idea much clearer, one finds an illuminating passage in the acclaimed study *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference*, by the historian Dipesh Chakrabarty.334 In chapter three, where Chakrabarty reflects on the limitations of the modern conception of history as a secular subject for examining the political experience in South Asia, secular in the sense that “Gods, spirits, and other ‘supernatural’ forces can claim no agency in our narratives,”335 he turns to Benjamin’s “homogeneous, empty time” idea and explains that “this time is empty because it acts as a bottomless sack: any number of events can be put inside it; and it is homogeneous because it is not affected by any particular events; its existence is independent of such events and in a sense it exists prior to them.336”

Going back to Anderson, he posits that the two modern forms of imagining that can best typify the radical shift in the perception of time are the novel and the newspaper, for both of these forms granted the imagined community that is the modern nation its technical means of representation.337 In a classical novel structure, there are different characters embedded in their own societies, or literary societies, one might say, who are going about their daily actions without necessarily knowing of each other’s situation. It is only because they are also embedded in the minds of the omniscient readers, who act like God, the All-Knowing, that a link between their actions can be established. The novel, Anderson concludes, “is clearly a device for the

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335 Ibid., 73.

336 Ibid.

presentation of simultaneity in ‘homogeneous, empty time,’ or a complex gloss upon the word ‘meanwhile’."

Authors conjure up this imagined world in the minds of the readers in a fashion very similar, if not identical, to how nations are imagined. The characters’ actions in their textual worlds are performed according to the clock and the calendar, by which the time of real people’s actions in the “real” world is measured. Hence Anderson likens the two processes of imagining to each other saying that, “the idea of a sociological organism moving calendrically through homogeneous, empty time is a precise analogue of the idea of the nation, which also is conceived as a solid community moving steadily down (or up) history.” In the novel, just as in the imagined nation, people have “complete confidence in their steady, anonymous, simultaneous activity.” Without this confidence, it would have been almost impossible for the imagining of the modern nation to take place.

As for the newspaper, Anderson argues that it is no less literary than the novel and, moreover, the calendar plays a more significant role in making sense of the simultaneous movement of its characters. The newspaper creates an internal fictive community whose characters are linked together because of a mere calendrical coincidence (all events and actions happened on the same day). Additionally, being “an extreme form” of the book, it creates an external community of extremely large number of readers who simultaneously consume it with full confidence in the existence of this huge number of readers, on the one hand, and in the

338 Ibid.
339 Ibid., 26.
340 Ibid.
341 Ibid., 35.
firmness of the imagined community (i.e., nation) which the newspaper is representing, on the other.\textsuperscript{342}

Now three of the most powerful conceptions of the classical world regarding language and truth, rulers and the Divine, and temporality, have been replaced by three equally powerful modern conceptions.\textsuperscript{343} Thanks to geographical, social, and scientific discoveries, on the one hand, and the rapid change in the technology of communication, on the other, a script-language inseparable from truth was weakened by countless vernaculars; a taken-for-granted form of polity centered around a ruler divinely sanctioned was called into question and later rejected altogether; and a time of prophecy and fulfillment was substituted with a conception of time as empty and homogeneous. In a word, the indistinguishability between history and cosmology was no longer an acceptable framework for imagining the human life.\textsuperscript{344} The single most important factor that made it possible for people to devise a new imagining of their communities was what Anderson terms \textit{print-capitalism}.

With Johannes Gutenberg's fifteenth-century invention of the movable-type printing press, more affordable books became available, more people became literate, and a broader readership base among the European populace was emerging. Compounded with the Protestant Reformation’s insistence on the need for a scripture written in the vernacular (German first) so that average people who did not have access to elitist Latin institutions could read it, the demand for reading scripture and popular literature in the vernacular grew rapidly. The economic

\textsuperscript{342} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{343} Ibid., 36-37.

\textsuperscript{344} Ibid., 37.
response to this demand by creating new markets for print-languages is what Anderson calls print-capitalism.\textsuperscript{345}

The spread of the vernaculars following these developments and the roles that they assumed later on as administrative languages and official mediums for education were crucial in the decline of the religious imagination and in the creation of the possibility of imagining new communities that share the same vernaculars, read the same books, and, most significantly, go through the same daily ritual of reading a newspaper about their particular place, in their particular moments, and using their “own” vernacular. Anderson sums this up by saying that, “the convergence of capitalism and print technology on the fatal diversity of human language created the possibility of a new form of imagined community, which in its basic morphology set the stage for the modern nation.\textsuperscript{346}"

Among the ways in which print-languages contributed to the concretization of national consciousness, three are the most important, Anderson argued. These three are founding a “unified field of . . . communication below Latin and above the spoken vernacular;\textsuperscript{347}” creating “languages-of-power;\textsuperscript{348}” and, most relevant to the subject-matter of this chapter, the way in which “print-capitalism gave a new fixity to language, which . . . helped to build that image of antiquity so central to the subjective idea of the nation.\textsuperscript{349}” Through the study of folklore and classical

\textsuperscript{345} Ibid., 37, 42-47.
\textsuperscript{346} Ibid., 48.
\textsuperscript{347} Ibid., 46.
\textsuperscript{348} Ibid., 47.
\textsuperscript{349} Ibid., 46.
literature, nations created new national narratives to link themselves to a perceived “golden” past and claim profound cultural roots.\textsuperscript{350}

With this emphasis on the role of language, literature, and tradition--real or perceived--in the formation of a new national identity, several general points can be taken from Anderson’s \textit{Imagined Communities} in order to construct a general conceptual framework through which to read al-Thubayti’s modernist project:

First: language was the most crucial factor in imagining how modern societies and identities are perceived. Second: imagining a new community necessitates an imagining of a certain past, a tradition on the basis of which the new community can claim one form of antiquity or another. In other words, an argument for novelty always entails an argument for continuity with a tradition that most often is not but invented. In the introduction to \textit{The Invention of Tradition}, Eric Hobsbawm (Anderson’s teacher at Cambridge) notes that, although “modern nations and all their impedimenta generally claim to be the opposite of novel, namely rooted in the remotest antiquity, and the opposite of constructed, namely human communities so 'natural' as to require no definition other than self-assertion . . . ,” modern concepts such as nationalism “must include a constructed or 'invented' component” for “the national phenomenon cannot be adequately investigated without careful attention to the 'invention of tradition’.”\textsuperscript{351}

Third: literary works were important sites where claims of antiquity, deep-rootedness, and continuity were created and disseminated. Among the relevant examples that Anderson gives to illustrate how cultures strived to establish through literature an antiquity for themselves, a

\textsuperscript{350} Ibid., 77.

cultural root in some ways, is what happened in the Arab world in the second half of the 19th century, where “Maronites and Copts, many of them products of Beirut’s American College (founded in 1866) and the Jesuit College of St. Joseph (founded in 1875) were major contributors to the revival of classical Arabic and the spread of Arab nationalism.”

This third point which gives literature a crucial role in the imagining of the past, and by extension of the cultural self-image, goes in line with what recent studies have shown in regard to the role of literature in fostering a nationalist reading of the past in the Arabo-Islamic context. As I indicated in chapter 1, Suzanne Stetkevych quite convincingly argued that the idea of an Arab Golden Age, albeit now lost, was in no small degree constructed by the poetry of the 19th and 20th centuries Arab Awakening movement (ʿAṣr al-Nahḍa) in order to counterbalance defeat by the West.

When they interpreted current events by locating them within a continuity of perceived Golden Age of their ancestors, Nahḍa poets were effectively following the example of their Abbasid predecessors who applied the same strategy, for the Abbasid poet “took it upon himself to interpret contemporary events, give them dimensionality and meaning and locate them with respect to the two axes of his past: the Jahiliyah and the Islamic.”

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352 Anderson, Imagined Communities, 77. By “Beirut’s American College” Anderson means the Syrian Protestant College, named the American University of Beirut (AUB) after 1920.

353 S. Stetkevych, “Abbasid Panegyric.”

354 S. Stetkevych, “The ʿAbbasid Poet.” Michael Cooperson attributed the idea of an Abbasid Golden Age to a mere “convergence of contingencies” whereby the availability of paper in the mid-eighth century allowed for archiving the cultural experiences of the pre-Abbasid and Abbasid periods. Archiving these cultural experiences in vivid details brought them into being, and when revivalists of the Nahḍa period, such as Jurjī Zaydān (d. 1914), wanted to write a cultural history of the Arabo-Islamic civilization, they selected the Abbasid age as their example because of its vivid availability. Thus, the idea of an Abbasid Golden Age is a result of the encounter between the archive and modern expectations and positions aiming at re-imagining the past and writing a secular nationalist history. See: Michael Cooperson, “The Abbasid “Golden Age”: An Excavation,” Al-ʿUṣūr al-Wusṭā 25 (2017): 41-65.
This capacity to reconstruct a certain past that meets the society’s current needs and positions is one important characteristic in Jan Assman’s theory of cultural memory, which was intended to relate the three poles of “memory (the contemporized past), culture, and (society) . . . to each other.” Since preserving the past is impossible, “what remains is only that “which society in each era can reconstruct within its contemporary frame of reference.” In order to relate current events to a certain past and vice versa, “cultural memory exists in two modes: first in the mode of potentiality of the archive whose accumulated texts, images, and rules of conduct act as a total horizon, and second in the mode of actuality, whereby each contemporary context puts the objectivized meaning into its own perspective, giving it its own relevance.”

With its capacity to reconstruct, cultural memory is selective. Cultures, societies and nations differ in what aspects of their past they highlight and in how to deal with it in order to cultivate a certain self-image. Hence, in the repertoire of knowledge and symbols that societies construct, “There are important and unimportant, central and peripheral . . . symbols, depending on how they function in the representation, and reproduction of this self-image.” Cultural memory as a concept “comprises that body of reusable texts, images, and rituals specific to each society in each epoch, whose "cultivation" serves to stabilize and convey that society's self-image.”

356 Ibid., 130 (Quotation from Halbwachs’s Das Gedächtnis.)
357 Ibid.
358 Ibid., 131.
359 Ibid., 132.
The processes of constructing and reconstructing the identities and self-images of societies, whether through textual artifacts, such as literary works, or through habitual and ritual performances as Paul Connerton explains, and bringing about a new imagining of a certain community all require referring to a constellation of particularities, specific sites that indicate the belonging of a certain place to a specific community, which is my fourth concluding points here. In other words, a discourse characterized by an abstract claim of universality cannot create an imagining of a specific community. In the preface to the second edition of his book, Anderson realized that his insistence on the significant contribution to the new perception of time in creating the modern perception of the nation lacked an insistence on an equally significant factor, which is a changing perception of space. Hence, he added a chapter on census, map, and museum to study the contribution of these “institutions of power” in shaping the modern nation’s understanding of the domain of the legitimacy of its rule over the place and its people.

Fifth: The imagining of a modern community entails a break away from the strictures of an old, religiously imagined one, and this process not only takes a very long time, but it usually results in a confrontation with the authority that sees its interest in preserving the status quo. While this new imagining is in the making, and, in certain cultural contexts, even after the new conception of the nation outweighs the old notions, I would claim that there is no reason to exclude the possibility of multiple imagined communities, or perhaps competing sub-communities, existing at the same time within the larger community.

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361 Ibid., 167.
This last point should serve as a good spot to transition (or, say, to make a takhallus) into the question of the Saudi imagined community(ies) in particular, an interesting case of how a religiously imagined community fights very hard to keep its perceptions intact and to prevent the emergence of modern(ist) proposals and negotiations of new forms of the national self-image and its cultural representations. In the process of discussing that, I shall examine al-Thubaytī’s aesthetic project and his role in the creation and promotion of the modernist cultural self-imagining in order to establish a foundation for examining his poetic construction of a new imagining of a new Saudi (and Arabian) nation.

**Literary modernism in Saudi Arabia: A clash of imaginings**

On May 3rd, 2018, the official Twitter account of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) posted a tweet, in Arabic, hailing Muḥammad al-Thubayitī as one of the prominent pioneers of literary modernism in Saudi Arabia. To place his poetic career in the broader context of Arabic modernism, the tweet rightfully described him as an important figure in the Arabic Free Verse Movement. The Thubaytī tweet was part of a sporadic series called *Creative Saudis*, which the Saudi MOFA updates every now and then to celebrate and promote the works of Saudi writers, poets, journalists, or artists.

On al-Thubaytī, the MOFA quotes a verse from the poet’s *Mawqif al-jinās*, the poem that chapter 4 will read to explore the poet’s re-imagining of the Saudi self-image versus a hegemonic, dehumanizing narrative. The Arabic quote reads:

70. O palm tree

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362 [https://twitter.com/KSAMOFA/status/992084265331580928](https://twitter.com/KSAMOFA/status/992084265331580928)

363 In Arabic: ‪ibdāʿ ʿat Saʿādiyya: https://twitter.com/hashtag/‎‬Saudi?src=hash
The weak trees slander you
And the lowly tent-peg looks down on you
While you keep ascending in God’s space
With legendary pollen
75. And gracious patience

The Communication and Media Center at the MOFA followed the Arabic tweet with two, one in English (translating a different verse) and another one in French (translating the same verse as the Arabic tweet). The tweet was received with great excitement and was the subject of discussion among many prominent Saudi writers on Twitter and other mediums for a couple of days. Some people read it as emblematic of the country’s new embrace of modern art and literature at the highest level of its leadership, following the official announcement of the country’s economic and cultural blueprint, known officially as Vision 2030.364

It might seem normal for a nation to celebrate its creative talents and present their works to the world, but the story of literary modernism in Saudi Arabia is much more complicated. This high-profile celebration of Saudi modernists was almost unthinkable in the context of the 1980s Saudi Arabia when al-Thubaytī’s project was evolving. In fact, the entire Saudi modernist project was on the verge of collapsing towards the end of that decade due to many factors, the

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364 Officially announced on April 25, 2016, the Vision is an economic grand plan to diversify Saudi economy, underpinned by social and cultural reform. It is led directly by Saudi Arabia’s Crown Prince Muhammad b. Salmān. For more on the Vision 2030, see: https://vision2030.gov.sa/en
most important of which was the conservative Islamists’ vicious attack on the modernists who were deemed sinners, an attack that, it is fair to say, was sanctioned, one way or another, by the political institution itself (the Saudi government). The religiously-imagined community (part of which is the powerful, government-supported religious establishment) and the guards of the dynastic political order, in Anderson’s terms, embodied the authority that the modernist project was seen as challenging.

It is beyond the scope of this chapter to lay out a detailed history of the Saudi modernist movement; to see whether the MOFA tweets constitute a genuine shift from demonizing to sanctifying the modernists and why, or to situate this shift within the larger trajectory that Saudi Arabia is taking under the current leadership. What concerns this chapter is how the protagonists of the modernist project in Saudi Arabia had to fight very hard to have their voices heard, to propose a new imagining of the nation, and to safeguard the relative autonomy of their cultural field in the 1980s Saudi Arabia. Most importantly, this chapter is concerned with how al-Thubaytī’s works can be better understood within that context.

A very short introduction to the 1980s war over modernism in Saudi Arabia

Although one could argue that there was no Arab country in which the literary experiments of modernism did not meet with controversy, it is safe to say that the Arabic modernist movement has fought its fiercest wars in Saudi Arabia. There, “modernism” was a keyword in the battles over symbolic capital between the Saudi modernists, on the one hand, and the group opposing the modernist project, on the other, which included conservative elements in academia and the literary class establishment and, most importantly, Saudi Islamists, the groups that represented the religiously imagined community (conservative religious establishment) in the Saudi context. These wars were most intensely fought during the modernist movement’s heyday in the 1980s.
The modernist literati were a specific group of the Saudi intelligentsia, or the *muthaqqaf* (modern intellectual) class. From the time this class was first created in Saudi history, it was meant to lead the modernizing economic and sociocultural efforts by the government and thus to counterbalance the religiously imagined community (religious establishment) within the Saudi society. Stéphane Lacroix explains the context where the *muthaqqaf* class was created:

To make this modernizing claim effective, the regime had to create a body of “clerics of modernity,” counterparts of the *ulema* or “clerics of tradition,” who would be the spokesmen of the kingdom’s development and modernization. Hence, under the auspices of the royal family, there came into being a new social type, the *muthaqqaf*, or recognized “intellectual.” This birth of the *muthaqqaf* was accompanied and made possible by the emergence alongside the religious field of a second field of cultural production, the intellectual field. The *muthaqqaf*, as instituted in the 1970s, appeared as the symbolic extension of a new social group that had come into being as a result of the modernizing efforts exerted since the first decades of Abd al-Aziz’s rule: the intelligentsia (in the sense of an educated class drawn to Western modes of thinking, which it identified with modernity). The creation of this group was closely connected to the dispatch of Saudi students to foreign schools and universities, at first in Egypt, Lebanon, and Iraq, beginning in the 1940s. This movement was made possible by the Saudi regime’s ever-increasing income from oil, large quantities of which had been discovered in the Eastern Province and were now being extracted by an American company, Aramco. For the royal family, the goal of this policy was to train a generation of bureaucrats capable of turning the wheels of a rapidly growing administration.365

The Saudi *muthaqqaf* class consisted of many groups, prominent among them were theorists and critics, on the one hand, and writers, on the other hand. While the theorists and

critics aimed to introduce modern literary theory and philosophy to Saudi cultural discourse and to establish a Saudi school of literary criticism, theory, and thought, the poets and, to a lesser degree, prose writers represented the Saudi avant-garde trend and provided the critics with materials on which to apply the imported theories they were propagating. Muḥammad al-Thubayṭī was a central voice in the latter group, but it was the theorists and critics, such as ‘Abdullah al-Ghadhdhāmī, who have come to embody Saudi modernism because their new imagining of the cultural self-image was more visible to the public than the opaque literary experiments of mainly poets writing in high-modernist style.\footnote{It is important to note that not all non-traditionalists were Ḥadāthīs (modernists). The modernists are a specific group of poets and writers, and theorists and critics, who took inspiration for their literary and theoretical projects from Western and Arabic modernisms. It is also important to mention that a growing body of literature on the Saudi modernist movement has become more critical of its very modernist claims, suggesting that modernism as a total break with the past was not even remotely achieved by al-Ghadhdhāmī and his followers. A leading work in this critical literature is the prominent Saudi novelist and cultural critic ‘Alī al-Shadawī’s book al-Ḥadāthā wa-al-muṣṭama’ al-Saʿūdī. In this book, he describes al-Ghadhdhāmī as a prototype of what he calls al-ʾaql ghayr al-Ḥadāthī (the non-modernist mind) which is in a state of transition between traditionalism and “real” modernism. See: ‘Alī al-Shadawī, al-Ḥadāthā wa-al-muṣṭama’ al-Saʿūdī (1924-1953) (Casablanca: al-Markaz al-Thaqāfī al-ʿArabī & Riyadh: al-Nāḍī al-Adabī, 2009), 7-54. Although al-Shadawī’s book begins with an essay on “the non-modernist mind” of the 1980s, it is mainly concerned with the roots of modernity/modernism in the Saudi society, particularly the period between 1924 and 1953 in the region of al-Hijāz.}

In 1985, al-Ghadhdhāmī published his first book al-Khaṭṭī’ā wa-al-takfīr: min al-binyawiyya ilā al-tashrīḥiyya (Sin and Atonement: From Structuralism to Deconstruction),\footnote{‘Abdullah al-Ghadhdhāmī, al-Khaṭṭī’ā wa-al-takfīr: min al-binyawiyya ilā al-tashrīḥiyya (Jeddah: The Jeddah Cultural Club, 1985).} which employs analytical methods from French theory to study the works of the Saudi poet and littérature Ḥamza Shīḥāta (1908/10-1972/73).\footnote{On Shīḥāta and the different generations of Saudi modern literature, see: Jayyusi, The Literature of Modern Arabia. Also see: Mansour al-Hazimi et al, eds., Beyond the Dunes: An Anthology of Modern Saudi Literature (London & New York: I. B. Tauris, 2006). In this anthology, Shīḥāta is described as the poet who took the Saudi poem to “a high point in terms of language, composition and vision.” See: al-Hazimi, Beyond the Dunes, 15. This anthology is a partial translation of Mawsūʿa at al-adāb al-ʿArabī al-Saʿūdī al-hadīth, a 10-volume compendium of modern Saudi literature that spans one Hijrī century, 1319-1418 H, roughly corresponding to 1902-1998 C.E., where 1902 is the year of King ‘Abd al-ʿAzīz’s (d. 1953, founder of modern day Saudi Arabia) reconquest of Riyadh, which was the beginning of a series of reconquests that would later form the modern (third) Saudi state. The Mawsūʿa covers seven genres: poetry, short story, novel, autobiography, essay, criticism, and play. See: al-Lajna al-}
modernism in its early stages, and al-Ghadhdhāmī was convinced that the latter’s very complex and multi-layered texts, in prose and poetry, made him the most suitable model on which to gauge the exegetical possibilities of the then new theoretical enterprise in the Arab world. The book received the prize of the Arab Bureau of Education for the Gulf States (first season, 1985) for its originality as the first systematic introduction and application of structuralism and deconstruction for an Arab readership. Almost one year after the release of al-Ghadhdhāmī’s book, Moḥammed al-Thubaytī published his third collection al-Taḍārīs. This period, in general, witnessed a profusion of literary output along the same lines, all constituting a breakthrough in Saudi intellectual discourse. However, not everybody was happy with the success the modernist movement was achieving.

Beginning from the second half of the 1980s, the movement was harshly attacked by its conservative Islamist opponents, and al-Ghadhdhāmī, deemed the doyen of Saudi modernists, but also al-Thubaytī and other Hadāthīs (modernists), came under fire. They were accused of “corrupting” the Arabic language, Westernization, importing “atheistic” or anti-religious methods, blasphemy, heresy and even treason against the state. The literary aspect of the movement, which was characterized by a considerable degree of ambiguity not uncommon in high modernism worldwide, was seen as only a deceptive coating disguising a core very dangerous to the “cultural well-being” of the society, a threat to its traditional mores and practices, and a “secret war” on the Islamic faith.

The backlash against the modernists took many forms and involved many players, but it was spearheaded by a book entitled *Al-Ḥadāثa fi mīzān al-Islām* (Modernism on the Scales of Islam), first published in 1988.\(^{369}\) It bore the name of a certain ʿAwaḍ al-Qarnī (b. 1957, currently in prison), a then little-known cleric of mainstream Saudi Islamism, or the so-called Ṣāḥwa (Awakening) movement, the group that emerged in Saudi Arabia as a product of the fusion of selected aspects of Salafi theology and the activism of the Muslim Brotherhood.\(^{370}\)

The Ṣāḥwa movement was gaining prominence and popularity in Saudi Arabia starting from the late 1960s and 1970s, benefiting from a pan-Islamist government policy that enlarged the size of the religious establishment in order to ensure the efficacy of a unified religious message that was aimed to counteract leftist and communist enemies, at home and abroad, and to further legitimize the state (with U.S. backing to counteract the Soviet influence).\(^{371}\) Additionally,\(^{369}\) ʿAwaḍ al-Qarnī, *Al-Ḥadāθa fi mīzān al-Islām*, with a forward by ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz bin Bāz (Cairo: Dār Hajar, 1988). Efforts to hinder the Ḥadāthī project preceded al-Qarnī’s book, to be sure. These efforts were so confrontational that some Ḥadāthīs called them “Neo McCarthyism.” However, al-Qarnī’s book was a turning point in the history of the development of the modernist project because, first and foremost, it was more organized, mobilized, and endorsed by the highest religious establishment, itself an integral part of the Saudi polity. See: ʿAbdullah al-Ghādḥāmī, *Ḥikāyat al-Ḥadāθa fi al-mamlaka al-ʿarabiyya al-saʿūdiyya* (Beirut: al-Markaz al-Thaqāfī al-ʿArabi, 2004).


On Ṣāḥwa as a blend of Salafism and Muslim Brotherhood, see: Lacroix, *Awakening Islam*, 52. He explains that, “the ideology of the Ṣāḥwa is located at the juncture of two distinct schools of thought with different views of the world: the Wahhabi tradition and the tradition of the Muslim Brotherhood. . . . On theological questions connected to creed and on the major aspects of Islamic jurisprudence, the Ṣāḥwis adhered to the Wahhabi tradition and considered themselves its faithful heirs. But on political and cultural questions, their view of the world tended toward that of the Muslim Brotherhood, although it was partly reformulated in terms derived from the Wahhabi tradition.” On my part, I refrain from using the word “Wahhabism” in describing the Salafī component of the discourse of the Saudi religious establishment, for the word is sometimes used as derogatory slur by the movement’s detractors to bash Saudi Salafism in a fashion that does not antagonize other Muslim Salafists.

the Saudi context was made more favorable to developing a local brand of Islamism when a good many number of Muslim Brotherhood leaders, who fled from repression and imprisonment by the Syrian and Egyptian regimes and sought refuge in Saudi Arabia, quickly took the lead in the country’s nascent education sector.\textsuperscript{372}

In addition to the growing religious body in the policy sphere, The Ṣaḥwa movement seems to have been a product of the growing sociocultural tension ensuing the rapid modernizing effort of the 1970s’ “dogma of development,” as per Toby Jones’s words,\textsuperscript{373} the tension that culminated in the calamitous event of the Siege of the Holy Mosque in Makkah in 1979.\textsuperscript{374} This event, among other factors, compelled the Saudi government to shift its policy and discourse from the emphasis on development to religion in order to deal with the legitimacy crisis that the Siege seemed to provoke.\textsuperscript{375} All these factors, compounded with the advent of a theocratic Shiite Islamist government in Iran following the so-called Iranian Revolution in February 1979 and the religious, activist spirit it helped spread across the Muslim world, presented a golden opportunity

\textsuperscript{372} Ibid.


\textsuperscript{375} Jones, “The Dogma of Development.” Stéphane Lacroix reads the change of the King Fahd’s title to be \textit{Khādim al-Haramayn al-Sharīfayn} (The Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques) in 1986 in the context of the Saudi government’s shift to emphasize its religious character in order to deal with the legitimacy crisis that ensued the 1979 event. See: Lacroix, \textit{Awakening Islam}, 137-138.
for the Şaḥwa movement to solidify its social and cultural dominance in the kingdom in the 1980s.  

Now that Şaḥwa had become a very powerful movement in Saudi Arabia and one of the most important players in the sociocultural field, and religion was becoming more and more the source of legitimacy for prominent social and political players, al-Qarnī found the time propitious to attack his opponents through a book which claimed that the modernist project constituted a deviation from the Islamic faith. In a shrewd tactical move, the book was prefaced with an endorsement by Sheikh ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz bin Bāz (d. 1999), the head of the General Presidency for the Management of [Religious] Scholarship, Predication, and Guidance, and unofficial Grand Mufti of Saudi Arabia at the time.

Bin Bāz himself had published a book earlier in the same year condemning Pan-Arabism, a step that can be understood as part of a broader trend, especially pronounced at the time, of defending “true” Islamic thought from what was perceived as “cultural invasion.” The social fabric of Saudi Arabia was becoming increasingly religious in character, and exclusion was seen as the only method of interaction between the social players of different fields. Although their goals were not entirely identical, the Islamist, activist group of the religious class, on the one hand, and on the other hand the more traditional, politically conformist, or quietist, official religious establishment were working together to outflank their common Ḥadāthī rivals.

376 Ibid. As Stéphane Lacroix noted, the influence of the Şaḥwa movement reached its peak “Sahwa Insurrection” after the invasion of Kuwait by Şaddām Ḥusayn’s (d. 2006) forces in 1990. See: Lacroix, Awakening Islam, 52.

377 For more on Bin Bāz, see: Natana J. DeLong-Bas, “Bin Bāz”, in: Encyclopaedia of Islam, THREE, Edited by: Kate Fleet, Gudrun Krämer, Denis Matringe, John Nawas, Everett Rowson. Consulted online on 18 March 2019 <http://dx.doi.org.proxy.library.georgetown.edu/10.1163/1573-3912_ei3_COM_23796>

Bin Baz’s preface furnished al-Qarnī’s book with the necessary legitimacy and gave it a great potential for popularity, but another factor was crucial in spreading al-Qarnī’s word. The book drew extensively from a cassette released shortly before its publication and recorded by Saʿīd al-Ghāmidī (b. 1961, currently a dissident living outside Saudi Arabia), another young, relatively obscure Ṣaḥwī at the time. This cassette became so popular that it was one of the main factors that transformed the elitist discussion on modernism in Saudi Arabia into an intense public debate over Islam’s friends and foes.\(^{379}\)

Al-Qarnī’s book served as a manifesto to demonize the modernists, their theoretical stances, and their aesthetic experimentations. In his Ḥikāyat al-Ḥadāṭha fī al-mamlaka al-ʿArabiyya al-Saʿīdiyya (The Tale of Modernism in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia),\(^{380}\) al-Ghadhdhāmī gives a first-hand, very gloomy account of the Saudi intellectual milieu following the publication of al-Qarnī’s book. Similarly, the Saudi modernist poet, novelist, essayist, and activist ‘Alī al-Dumaynī called the conservative attack against the modernist movement at the time Majzarat al-Ḥadāṭha (The Ḥadāṭha Massacre) where al-Qarnī’s book was crucial in mobilizing the public against the modernist project. He says:

This book spread its fires throughout the country, attempting to bury alive the nascent cultural experiment. . . . Most importantly, this battle was a pilot test for the Ṣaḥwa movement to mobilize its supporters around a tangible cause, without


\(^{380}\) See: al-Ghadhdhāmī, Ḥikāyat al-Ḥadāṭha.
[directly] confronting the official [political] institution. In the meanwhile, [the Ṣaḥwa movement] was testing [the scale of] its power, capabilities, and success in front of everybody (the [political] authority and the society), and mobilizing all its capacities waiting for the right moment to transition to the phase of [direct] confrontation with the state.\(^{381}\)

Even independent, non-Ḥadāthī observers who wrote about the Ḥadātha-Ṣaḥwa conflict acknowledged the essential role of al-Qarnī’s book in demonizing the Ḥadātha project. In his voluminous 880-page book \textit{al-Saʿūdiyya: sīrat dawla wa-mujtamaʿ}, the Saudi journalist and writer ‘Abd al-ʿAzīz al-Khiḍr says:

This historic book . . . was the most important book to make a huge impact in a short period of time in broad segments of the [Saudi] society. . . . Its importance lies in that it made a real impact in the conservative mentality of the society.\(^{382}\) And despite its many methodological weaknesses, one must acknowledge that it was the most important book in the Saudi milieu in the 1980s, [for] it easily achieved its goal of condemning an entire movement and its figures inside and outside Saudi Arabia, to the extent that the word Ḥadātha changed from a source of pride for the Ḥadāthīs into a source of shame.\(^{383}\)

The aftermath of the Islamist attack

The Ṣaḥwī attack was so consequential that most Ḥadāthīs had to endure repeated unfounded accusations of blasphemy, but three figures experienced more than just vitriolic verbal attacks. ʿAbdullah al-Ghadhdhāmī, the critic and theorist Saʿīd al-Surayḥī, and Muḥammad al-Thubaytī faced the most vicious campaigns of intimidation and character assassination. It seemed that the

\(^{381}\) Al-Dumaynī, \textit{Ayyām fī al-Qāhira}, 206-208.


\(^{383}\) Ibid., 405.
response from the official institution, i.e. the government, was no more than “sympathy with the extremist current and its allegations.”

Al-Ghadhdhāmī had to transfer to King Saud University (KSU) in Riyadh and leave the Department of Arabic Language and Literature at King Abdulaziz University (KAU) in Jeddah, the department that, ironically enough, he himself had established after finishing his Ph.D. studies in the University of Exeter, England, in 1978. In his *The Tale of Modernism*, al-Ghadhdhāmī describes in vivid detail how it was becoming unbearable, for him and his family as well, to endure the hate campaigns in his department and elsewhere in Jeddah:

There was nothing that would prevent them [his opponents in the department] from doing anything against me, beginning with sticking newspaper clippings on my office door until the door was full of clippings against me. And how much did they rejoice over the preface to the book *al-Ḥadātha fī mīzān al-Islām*, which was written by the late Sheikh ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz bin Bāz, that they stuck it along the other critical and vilifying newspaper clippings on my office door. They used to write [intelligence] reports and send them to every possible [governmental] body, including official, security, religious, and to the press. They would help each other in that [effort]. My stay in the university was a source of concern for everybody, for friends and foes alike. I did not see any solution in staying. I saw the solution in moving to Riyadh, to keep what is left of my mind and my health. Had I stayed in that department, I would have experienced a mental problem or a health-related issue, as a result of

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385 Ibid., 227.
386 Ibid., 228.
387 Ibid., 231.
the serious hostility that surrounded me in the department that I had established to be at the end a snake trying to swallow me.\textsuperscript{388}

This rather lengthy quotation shows clearly how the “war on modernist ideas” was getting so vicious and that the Islamist opponents to the Ḥadāthī project were being helped and supported by academics as well. That is what made al-Ghadhdhāmī conclude that the hostility towards him was not necessarily personal; rather, it was what he calls \textit{al-nasaq al-thaqāfī}, which I explained in chapter 1 as the underlying cultural norms that operate beneath the surface of modernity and materialist development, that prompted the hostility campaign, although the personal factors cannot be entirely ruled out.

Saʿīd Al-Surayḥī’s experience was more appalling and his opponents resorted to what can be described as abhorrent tactics, by which he was stripped of his doctoral degree altogether in 1989\textsuperscript{389} (although he had already passed the Ph.D. viva) because the dissertation included “ideas, expressions, and methods incompatible with the teachings and principles of our religion and our Muslim society,” as the final Ph.D. report by Umm al-Qura University (UQU) in Makkah, in which al-Surayḥī defended his dissertation, concluded.\textsuperscript{390} The phrase “Muslim society” is key here, because, together with al-Ghadhdhāmī’s analysis of the entire hostility campaign as motivated by the hidden cultural \textit{nasaq}, this can justify reading this episode in the Saudi cultural history as a clash, not only between individuals of different world views, but between two imaginings of the community.

\textsuperscript{388} Ibid., 233.


\textsuperscript{390} Umm al-Qura University, Arabic Language Faculty, \textit{Report No. 876/8/5} (June 5, 1989).
In that hostile atmosphere towards everything modernist, and as part of the well-organized anti-Ḥadāthī campaign, Muḥammad al-Thubaytī was prevented from accepting the Jeddah Literary Club Award for poetry, which was awarded to him in 1989 in recognition of his collection al-Taḍārīs, only an hour before he was set to receive it. This collection was particularly infuriating to the Islamist conservatives, especially expressions such as: “yā kāhina al-hayy” (O soothsayer of the neighborhood), or “subba lanā waṭanan fī-l-kuʿūs” (pour for us a homeland in the glasses), or the use of some Qur’ānic verses in a context totally different from the original one and in a manner that was seen as irreverent toward the sacred words of the Quran. One example is the following lines from the poem al-Asʾīla (Questions) from the collection al-Taḍārīs:

12. Tell Layla she can come on Sunday morning

She is standing now between the pure water and the foam

Tell her:

15. Water is salt on the outside and foam on the inside

Tell her:

You are free [of restrictions] in this land


392 Al-Thubaytī, al-ʾAʾmāl al-kāmila, 99, 101, 106. In his book al-Ḥadāthā fi mīzān al-islām, ʿAwāḍ al-Qarnī mentioned the section from al-Thubaytī’s poem where the expression “yā kāhina al-hayy” (O soothsayer of the neighborhood) can be found in six occasions, and then said, hinting that this expression is mere kufr, “Among what we have learned in our childhood of the ABC’s of Islam is that al-duʾ āʾ mukhhk al-ʾibāda (supplication is the essence of worship) and that making supplication to other than Allah is shirk (associating partners with Allah; polytheism). So who is this kāhin (soothsayer) that al-Thubaytī is beseeching and making invocations to?” See: al-Qarnī, al-Ḥadāthā fi mīzān al-islām, 77.

393 Al-Thubaytī, al-ʾAʾmāl al-kāmila, 97.
You are an absolution for this boy.

قل لنبيّي تجسي صنياع الأحذة

إنهما تخفف أن بنيت الولاء وبنيت الرزدة

قل لنها:
ظاهر النعاء ملنح وباطنة مين رزدة

قل لنها:
أنت جمل بلهذا النبلذ
أنت حسن للهذا النولد

Al-Thubayti feminization and secularization of the addressee in “anti ہیلیں بی-ہتھا ال-بالاد” (You [feminine] are free [of restriction] in this land) was immediately noticeable. Using the feminine pronoun anti, and not the masculine anta as in Sūrat al-Balad (The Land) of the Qur’ān “wa-anta ہیلیں بی-ہتھا ال-بالاد” (While you [masculine] are free [of restriction] in this land) [Qur’ān 90:2], thereby changing the addressee from Prophet Muḥammad to a woman in an intimate relationship with a man, as well as other expressions of a similar kind, caught the conservatives off-guard, for they interpreted these incidents as transgressions of accepted religious and social norms.395

On the night when al-Thubayti was set to receive the prize, the conservative Islamists filled the club halls in order to prevent him from receiving it. And as a result of their noisy campaign of opposition to al-Thubayti’ that night, the club administration finally had to raise the

394 Ibid., 127.

white flag. Abd al-Fattāḥ Abū Madyan (b. 1926), an eminent cultural pioneer in Saudi Arabia, who was a member of the first Board of Directors of the club when it was established in 1975 and who was the president of club from 1980 to 2006, said that they canceled the ceremony that night because they “felt the imminent danger and recalled the threatening calls and the inciting (mosque) sermons” all against modernist figures such as al-Thubaytī. Not only was al-Thubaytī deprived of the prize, but he had to be smuggled out of the club to avoid an imminent clash with his Islamist and traditionalist opponents. To make matters worse, al-Thubayti’s above-mentioned collection was later banned from distribution by the General Presidency of Youth Welfare (GPYW), the governmental body that used to oversee literary clubs and monitor their activities.

Modernists were literally silenced by al-Qarnī’s book and the events that ensued. In fact, they were banned even from responding to the books’ accusations and clearing their names in Saudi journals and magazines. When Muḥammad al-ʿAlī (b. 1932), one of the fathers of Saudi literary modernism, wanted to respond, no one in the Saudi press dared to publish his response. At the end, he had to send it as a series of articles to the Kuwaiti Arabic daily al-Waṭan and they were then published between March 13 and 21, 1989, under the title Qirāʾah sākhinah fī kitāb bārid (A Hot Reading of a Cold Book). Al-ʿAlī’s response notwithstanding, the Ṣaḥwīs and their condemnation of the modernist project prevailed and their brand of imagining the community proved more powerful at the time.

Consequently, “the takfīr fever and the Islamist partisanship prevailed in the country,” hence many Ḥadāthīs withdrew from public life, and al-Thubaytī in particular almost

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disappeared from the cultural scene for more than a decade. The label Ḥadāthī (modernist) at that time amounted to something close to heretic, with all its serious repercussions. One might go as far as to say that the word Ḥadātha became increasingly taboo for quite some time in the Saudi context. In fact, the Ministry of Information issued in a ministerial decree banning the use of the word Ḥadātha in all media outlets.398

The Ṣaḥwa movement and the religious establishment saw something threatening in literary modernism, such as that of al-Thubaytī, and cooperated, with some direct or indirect support from the political institution, to counteract its growing influences in the Saudi intellectual milieu. They all worked together to outflank their common Ḥadāṭhī rivals. It is in this context, one in which the religious aspect of the Saudi identity was re-interpreted to reflect a very strict understanding of Islam, that the Ḥadāṭhī project grew to devise a new way of imagining the community, defining identity, and challenging a narrative that ignored significant aspects of the cultural history of Arabia.

It seems that, for al-Thubaytī, to emancipate Saudi Arabian identity from subjection to this narrowminded, hegemonic narrative required a twofold strategy. The first was going back to pre-Islamic Arabia in order to revive the autochthonous culture of the place. The second strategy was to liberate the religious discourse itself from its historically constructed theological aspect, ultimately allowing for the spiritual and mystical dimensions of the religious phenomenon to come to the fore, while at the same time humanizing and localizing the transcendental experience at large. In other words, one of the main goals of al-Thubaytī’s project, it seems, was to reduce

397 Al-Dumaynī, Ayyām fī al-Qāhira, 208.

398 The ban was issued in 1988 but did not last for long: people resumed using the term Ḥadātha after a period of time without a new decree overruling the old one. See: al-Ghadhdhāmī, Ḥikāyat al-Ḥadāṭha, 33.
religion to myth, which is essentially a secular stance. This will become clear when analyzing some of the central texts in al-Thubaytī’s ḍīwāns, especially his poem Mawqif al-jinās, as next chapter will show. But first, the larger context of al-Thubaytī works should be examined.

“In my language is a Jāhilī stone”: The modern harmonized with the traditional

For al-Thubaytī, the novel begins from the old, a stance which reminds one of Benedict Anderson’s insistence on how the modern nation-state was always keen on claiming a tradition for itself in order to anchor the new imagining in it.399 Here the new Saudi (Arabian) narrative can be re-told using linguistic and literary artifacts from the earliest known past of the place, i.e. Jāhilī Arabia, and thus “inventing” a certain tradition of it, as per Hobsbawm’s words,400 which serves “to stabilize and convey that society’s self-image.”401 In this regard, some scholars have noticed the recent effort by governments in the Arabian Gulf to recover the very ancient past of their nations in order to fuel nationalistic sentiments. This past goes beyond the “oil moment” of the twentieth century and dates back to pre-Islamic civilizations.402

399 Anderson, Imagined Communities, 77.

400 Hobsbawm, The Invention of Tradition, 14.


402 Elias Muhanna of Brown University, wrote on May 21, 2018, in the New Yorker that research activity on early Arabic based on rock inscriptions is now met with a regional interest in pre-Islamic history. By showcasing, for example, the glory of the ancient Nabataean kingdom, Saudi Arabia is linking itself to a glorious, ancient past, on the basis of which she can compete with her neighbors. Other Gulf countries are doing the same thing in order to construct a new narrative. See: Elias Muhanna, “A New History of Arabia, Written in Stone,” The New Yorker (May 2018). Also see: Loring Danforth, Crossing the Kingdom: Portraits of Saudi Arabia (Oakland, California: University of California Press. 2016). In chapter 5 (pp. 134-167), Danforth analyzes the Saudi government’s attempt to advance a more ancient Saudi identity through promoting joint (Saudi-international) archeological expeditions on its ancient heritage sites and showcasing some of their artifacts in international exhibitions, most important of which is Roads of Arabia which was first held in the Louvre, Paris, in 2010, and toured, so far, more than fifteen different institutions and museums throughout the world. The Saudi agency responsible for this endeavor is Saudi Commission for Tourism and National Heritage. For more on the Roads of Arabia exhibition and other related exhibitions by the Commission, see: SCTH. The “Roads of Arabia Masterpieces of Antiquities in Saudi Arabia
Similarly, al-Thubaytī’s works can be read as an allusion to the ancient rock inscriptions referred to in pre-Islamic poetry, a sign of the glorious past of a modern nation whose autochthonous tradition is lost between its development and religious discourses. However, whereas the state’s effort to ignite the nationalistic sentiment among the masses is by nature politically inspired and is meant to utilize that sentiment for political gain, the objective of al-Thubaytī’s modernist project was arguably to link the new imagining of the community to the artistic project of the past as exemplified by classical poetry. No wonder, then, that al-Thubaytī seems to be obsessed with the idea of searching for linguistic, particularly literary and poetic, artifacts from pre-Islamic Arabia and the classical Arabic canon and then linking them to modern Saudi Arabia so as to create a continuous narrative of the place that stretches from modern-day Makkah all the way back to Jāḥili Arabia. The critic Saʿīd al-Surayḥī once said of al-Thubaytī that what distinguished him from other Ḥadāthic readers was that “al-Thubaytī was an exceptional reader of tradition.”

This Jāḥili tradition, of which modern Saudi Arabia is a continuation or, one might say, is a geographically and culturally legitimate heir, is often overlooked, negatively portrayed, or even rejected altogether. It is beyond the purview of this chapter to trace the genesis of such historical mis-understandings, traditional and modern alike, of the pre-Islamic era which, tellingly enough, was called the Age of “Ignorance,” as one meaning of the word jāhiliyyah suggests. Suffice it to say that Islam, and the political and cultural institutions developed since its advent, were largely

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perceived as a break from the Jāhilī norms and ways of life, with Islam in this case being the “modernity” which necessarily entails a break with its past.

Islamist traditionalists, among them those opposing the modernist enterprise in Saudi Arabia, seemed to the modernists to be unaware of the rich, multifaceted Arabic tradition, especially that which dated back to pre-Islamic Arabia. Due to their Islamist ideology, they seemed to have an understanding of tradition that restricts it to its Islamic character; a different version of imagining the past than that which the modernists, such as al-Thubaytī, were proposing. They were so detached from the Jāhilī tradition of the place, al-Thubaytī’s following poem suggests, that his poems, immersed in the rich cultural world of pre-Islamic Arabia, seemed to speak a different, ancient language. He says in the poem al-As'ila (Questions) from the collection al-Taḍārīs:

1. They came out like sparrows, inflamed by song,
   So I looked inside myself:
   How shall I read these faces,
   when in my language is a Jāhilī stone?

5. Between two fires, I emptied my glass
   Called upon my heart to relax
   Will youth once more become open
   to perfumed song
   or eloquent/faṣīḥ weeping

أُفْتَقَّنَا كَالْعَصَائِفِ يَشْنَّطَهُمْ غَيْناً
فَحَدَّثَتْ فِي دَاخِلِي
كِيِّنَفْ أَقْرَأْ هَذِى الْهُجَوَة
وَفِي لِغْنِتي حَنْجَرُ جَاهِلِيُّ؟
The obvious classical tone of al-Thubaytī’s poem, such as the allusion in the last line to the weeping over the ruined abodes in the *nasīb* section of the classical ode, is taken here as a *Jāhilī* stone, an artifact that the poet holds as a proof of the ancient history of the place and its undying cultural significance. With tradition being an essential part of the poet’s language, he struggles to find in it words that are mutually intelligible between him and those sparrows, the latter can be understood to symbolize a cultural group detached from its traditional roots. With this *Jāhilī* language, the poem laments that the Bedouin knight’s Arabic is now a foreign language and thus his “*faṣīḥ* weeping” is nothing but an “*aʿjamī* (obscure or non-Arab) blood.”

al-Thubaytī:

23. Well, Bedouin knight

Did you gulp down morning sadness
and the patience of the evening?

Today I see your face a map for weeping
and your eyes streaming an *aʿjamī* blood

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To be true, proposing a secular identity closely linked to the ancient tradition of the place was not something new in modern Arabic poetry. Several studies have noticed this trend in the poetry of the Free Verse movement, particularly in the poetry of the Tammūzī poets. Poets utilized the mythology of the ancient Near East in order to claim an indigenous, prototypical or nationalist identity of some sort that existed prior to the collective, cultural and linguistic Arabo-Islamic identity that was seen to eclipse other religious, racial, and cultural sub-identities. In their eyes, in order to be true modernists, poets tended to make a break from one tradition, which was regarded as hegemonic, and link themselves to a tradition very customized and self-interpreted so as to suit the goals of their modernist project.

In al-Thubayti’s project, however, there seems to be a greater interest in claiming a continuity of the modernist project and the modern identity of the people of Arabia, although this continuity could only be achieved by making creative breaks from a multiplicity of currently held “traditions,” which can be summed up as follows:

1. An imagined pre-Islamic Arabian past whose creation was necessary in order to define Islam as a breakthrough.

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405 Al-Thubayti, al-A`māl al-kāmila, 129.


407 Ibid.

2. A perceived Islamic history largely devoid of spiritual experience and rather reduced to a political institution and mechanical daily practices.

3. Most importantly, an oil-based narrative about Saudi Arabia in particular, and the Arabian Peninsula in general, following the discovery of oil and the establishment of the new nation-states on the Arabian side of the Gulf.

It is against the backdrop of this latter narrative that, in my view, al-Thubayti’s project can best be approached. All the “traditions” from which this project makes breaks are condensed in that reductionist Saudi narrative, and it seems that al-Thubayti’s quest was to link the particular, modern identity of the people of that place to a cultural continuity that stretches back to the pre-Islamic era. This chapter argues that debunking a coercive, totalizing, dehumanizing, and stereotypical narrative about the people of Arabia in general and Saudi Arabia in particular is exactly the "poetic event" of al-Thubayti’s project. In so doing, this project is advancing a new narrative about this particular “imagined community,” i.e., the people of (Saudi) Arabia that allows them a worthy place in the continuity of Arabic culture and counteracts the narrative that reduces their history to an oil moment and a religious movement, which together formed a certain Saudi exceptionalism.

In the currently accepted historical narrative about the modern Saudi identity, as Robert Vitalis has shown, the cultural, economic, and political institutions emanating from the oil industry, particularly in Saudi Arabia and the United States of America, played a crucial role in establishing and promoting an exceptional Saudi identity in a fashion reminiscent of the idea of
“American Exceptionalism,” now based on the moment of the discovery of oil in 1938. The details about this enterprise need not detain us here, for what matters about this “oil moment” is that it was used to advance a purely materialistic discourse of development, which eventually led to the formation of a Saudi identity that sacrificed the diverse, pre-oil Arabian culture. After the discovery of oil and the ensuing projects and initiatives, “development” became part and parcel of what it meant to be a Saudi, as Toby Jones points out.

This exceptional oil moment was combined with another exceptional Saudi moment, this time created and disseminated by the religious and political players whose discourses were designed to reinforce one another in propagating the “foundation myth” of Saudi Arabia. According to this myth, the political leaders hold the sword to support the “true word” that the religious leaders wanted to spread across Arabia, and later the world, in order to urge people to abandon shirk (polytheism) and return to the true Islam of the Salaf. This myth was first reified in the 1744 Dir‘iyya Pact between Muḥammad b. Suʿūd (d. 1765) and the Najdī scholar Muḥammad b. ʿabd al-Wahhāb (d. 1791), the eponymous leader of the reformist movement that is usually referred to as Wahhabism.

Whether or not one agrees with those scholars who argue that the underlying causes that ultimately lead to the Dir‘iyya Pact were not primarily religious but rather economic, social, and

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409 See my discussion of Robert Vitalis’s ideas of the interplay between Saudi and American exceptionalisms earlier in this chapter.


political, at a time when the people of Arabia were looking for some kind of political wahda (unification) and not necessarily tawḥīḍ ( monotheism).\(^{412}\) what matters the most in the present discussion is the impact of that pact. There is an almost unanimous agreement that the pact changed life in Arabia in an unprecedented fashion. It was the first time in Islamic history, since the transfer of the capital of the Islamic Caliphate from Medina in the Ḥijāz to Kufa in Iraq in 657 CE, that Arabia became a political center in the Islamic world.\(^{413}\)

These two factors, the discovery of oil and the religious-political unification, resulted in creating a state of what can be called a “cultural amnesia,” through which the identity of the people of Arabia was reduced to the Salafī movement of the eighteenth century or the oil moment of 1938. The political pact was taken to symbolize a new beginning of the cultural history of Arabia, which has its foundations in the first three generations of the Muslim community; i.e. the Salaf. In the end, the oil moment and the religious movement became the two pillars of Saudi identity and, by extension, of the people of Arabia. complaining about this reductionist narrative, the well-known Saudi poet and statesman Ghāzī al-Quṣaybī (d. 2010) said:

“Oil,” people call my country.
They were not fair; my country is glory!

\(بِفَتُّ يَقُولُ النَّاسُ عَنِّي وَطَنِيٍّ.
ما أَنْصَفُ لَا وَطَنِي وَهُوَ الْمَجْدُ!\)


\(^{413}\) See: Silverstein, Islamic History, 112-113.
It is not without significance that this verse was part of the poem al-Quṣaybī composed in 1993 for the operetta of the National Festival for Tradition and Culture in Janādiriyya (al-
mahrajān al-waṭanī li-l-turāth wa-al-thaqāfā), aka the Janādiriyya Festival, which the Saudi Arabian National Guard organized annually to both celebrate Saudi tradition and promote Saudi Arabia as a center for high-profile cultural debate that includes leading Arab intellectual figures. The opening musical operetta of the annual festival and the accompanying folk dances represent a performative re-enactment of the local cultural components of the national identity. However, whereas al-Quṣaybī’s poem chose to tackle the oil-based narrative in a rather declaratory manner that left no room for allusions, al-Thubaytī let the poem cultivate its ultimate statement.

Arab autochthony as a site of pre-oil memory

In al-Thubaytī’s oeuvre, we see a poet self-consciously utilizing the introspective mode of metapoetry, among other modes, in a quest to create a poetic site of commemoration through which to position himself in the world, create a collective identity of the people of the place, and affirm their agency. In so doing, al-Thubaytī creates a self-image of the poet as a secular prophet who harnesses the powers of language to neutralize the authority of the de-humanizing narrative about the place and its culture. For this self-image, the poet relies upon nature as a cultural refuge. This topos is most commonly exemplified in al-Thubaytī’s works by the sand and the palm-tree as forces of resistance against the totalizing oil-based narrative that threatens to dehumanize the place.

414 For more on the Janadiriyya Festival and how it can be understood within the context of the Saudi polity, see: Lacroix, *Awakening Islam*, 137-138.
The palm-tree and the sand can be traced back to al-Thubayṭī’s second and third collections, *Tahajjaytu hulman tahajjaytu wahman* (I Spelled Out a Dream, I Spelled Out an Illusion, 1982) and *al-Taḍārīs* (Terrains, 1986), as Saʿīd al-Surayḥī has shown. He reads the two elements of the natural and cultural worlds as forming a thread that connects these two collections together, and then the poetic phase they represented with that of *Mawqif al-rimāl*, the poem in which his entire project culminates. In *Tahajjaytu ḥulman*, the “history” of the palm-tree is that of the poet, and in *Mawqif al-rimāl*, the poet and the palm-tree are one and the same. As for the sand, al-Surayḥī says that the collection *Tahajjaytu ḥulman*: 

celebrates the elements of creation . . . with which the sand becomes a favorite material for the poet, repeated in fourteen places in the collection, and which the poet examines in all its variations. . . . If we realize what the sand refers to and what transformations it undergoes in the collection *Tahajjaytu ḥulman tahajjaytu wahman*, then we will understand how tartīlat al-ḥadʾ (Hymn of Beginning), [the first section] in the poem *al-Taḍārīs*, celebrates the sand to the extent that the poet becomes a sand diviner, . . . then the sand appears shining in the title of the fourth collection *mawqif al-rimāl*. 

In a poem entitled *al-Bashīr* (*The Bearer of Glad Tidings*), a very visceral image of the poet’s coming to save the land emerges. The land is corrupt because the palm-trees made their necks bend down and the sands turned into pus:

5. I am the last of death
   The first child to climb its body
   and to see the orbit of wilderness

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416 Ibid., 63, 68.
417 Ibid., 19.
and the time fossilized in it

And to see a nation of fog
And a desert penetrating the mirage
To see a red time

To see cities with their insides torn by labor pains
And beneath their fingernails the water turn to pus
Until the palm trees make their necks bend down to them [the cities]

And stay a long time in them, and settle down
And empty them of the pus of the sands.

What is striking in this section of the poem is that the bearer of glad tidings is bringing a new life to the “wasteland” by means of death. Death becomes a source of life just as the ruined abodes of the classical ode lead to a journey into a new beginning. Furthermore, the bearer of
glad tidings is described as the “last of death” who “climbs its body” to bring about a new life, a poetic/prophetic persona that reminds the reader of Prophet Muḥammad who used to climb Jabal al-Nūr (Mountain of Light) in Makkah in a regular basis in order to find the right place and atmosphere to contemplate the state of affairs of his people and time. The Prophet then received the first revelation of the Quran on that same mountain, and since he was the last of Prophets, he was called khātam al-anbiyāʾ (The Seal of Prophets) [Qurʾān 33:40], the term, this is khatam, that al-Thubayṭī makes use of in the beginning of this poem. In the passage preceding “the last of death” passage, al-Thubayṭī says:

1. I am the seal of those standing on the naṭʿ (leather [execution] mat)\(^{419}\)
   This is the sword of sin crossing over my flank
   And then I make a spring of fire flow with blood
   In the veins of the virgins

\[\text{Ana khātimu′ l-manshiliyyīn ʿan li-nṭūf}
\text{Huṣnā l-khatībīn yahnabū ʾl-khāṣṣī}
\text{Fi ʿürūq al-zalārī}^{420}\]

\(^{419}\) The use of the word naṭʿ in this context refers to a leather mat with a specific purpose, the one placed under the person who is about to be beheaded. A very famous poem which helped imbue the word naṭʿ with a certain poetic symbolism that evokes the meanings of death and the power of poetry to change fate is attributed to the Kharijite poet Tamīm b. Jamīl al-Ṭaghlibī. According to traditional sources, Tamīm was about to be beheaded by the Caliph al-Muʿtaṣim (re. 833-42) for rebelling against the Caliph. When he was captured and brought to al-Muʿtaṣim’s majlis, the caliph asked him to say his last words. He began with some supplications, and then recited a short poem that begins with this verse:

I see death lurking between the naṭʿ (leather execution mat) and the sword
Glancing at me from whatever direction I look
Ari al-maut bi-nṭūf wa-sīf kāmā
Yalḥatlīn min kāmā l-ṭūf

The story goes that al-Muʿtaṣim was so impressed by the poem that he granted Tamīm a Caliphal pardon and commanded that he be given an award. See: al-Ḥusṣī, Zahr al-ʿādāb wa-thamar al-albāb, ed. `Alī Muḥammad al-Ṭaghlibī (Cairo, 1953), 784-785.

\(^{420}\) Ibid., 91.
The poem merges the poetic with the Quranic, a strategy typical of al-Thubaytī’s oeuvre as many cases in this chapter have shown. This strategy seems to have a twofold objective. The first is breaking the barriers between the poetic and the prophetic aesthetic traditions and thus creating a field of creativity in which a continuous linguistic experience takes place. The second is linking the modern experience of a poet from Arabia to the culture of the place, be it prophetic or poetic, and thus making the claim, by the very referential act of the poem, that voices from the so-called “classical” culture have the capacity to be renewed and utilized to express a modern anxiety. Dichotomies such as the prophet and the poet and modernity and tradition can harmoniously coexist in this new field of creativity by, essentially, secularizing the prophetic experience.

Moreover, the image of “the last of death” bringing life and good tidings to the dead land does not seem far from the myth of the phoenix that endlessly arises to life from the ashes. The bloody time, or the “read age” as the poem reads, is in need of a new life, here symbolized by the child climbing the body of death. The poem takes this myth of death and rebirth and anchors it in the poet’s cultural world, hence the allusion to the story of Maryam (Mary) in the Qurʿān, particularly the story of the Annunciation. In Sūrat Maryam (Mary), she is depicted experiencing the pain of childbirth near a trunk of a palm tree. Now that she is extremely worried about her life and that of her baby, and with so excruciating a pain in her body, she wishes she were dead:

{And the pains of childbirth drove her to the trunk of the palm tree.
She said, "Oh, I wish I had died before this and were forgotten, utterly forgotten."}

[Qurʿān 19:23]

(فَأَجَاءَهَا الْمَخَابِضُ إِلَى جَذْعَ النَّخلَةِ قَالَتْ يَا لَيْتَنِي مَتْ قَبْلُ هَذَا وَكُنتُ نَسْئًا مَنْسِيًا)
Then, the Angel Jibrīl appears to comfort her, reassure her that God is looking after her, and then to instruct her to shake the trunk of the palm tree so that fresh dates fall down and she can eat to regain her energy:⁴²¹

Then he called out to her from below her:  
Grieve not; your Lord has placed a rivulet beneath you.  
And shake toward you the trunk of the palm tree; it will drop upon you ripe, fresh dates.  
So eat and drink and cool your eye. [Qurʾān 19:24-26]⁴²²

Likewise, the palm-tree in al-Thubaytī’s poem is portrayed as the source of a new birth. It bends down to the city that experiences the pain of labor and empties the pus from its sands in order to usher in a new era. The moribund corrupt condition of the contemporary city is symbolized here by suppuration and festering (like an infected wound), that is pus. I would argue that by pus here the poet refers to oil, whose removal from the sand is a prerequisite for the purification and creation of the new narrative. Quite similar to the death-rebirth mythology of the Tammūzī movement in Arabic modernism and the function of blood in that myth, the bloody land in Arabia is reborn at the hands of the palm tree, the mother and giver of life.

12. To see cities with their insides torn by labor pains  
And beneath their fingernails the water turn to pus


Until the palm trees make their necks bend down to them [the cities] 
And stay a long time in them, and settle down 
And empty them of the pus of the sands

وَرَأَى مَسْتَنَا مَرَّقَ الطَّلْقَ أَحَشْاءُهَا 
وَتَقَطَّعَتْ تَحْتَ أَطَافَرَهَا النَّمَا 
حَتَّى أَنَاَخَ لَنَا النَّخْلُ أَعْنَافُهَا 
فَأَطَالَ بِهَا... وَأَقْضَالُ 
وَأَفْرَزَ مِنْهَا صَنْدِيدُ الرَّمَالُ ٤٢٣

The Qur’ānic Maryam enters the picture to anchor the Tammūzī myth of death and rebirth in the cultural world of the poet, the world of the Arabic/Arabian Qur’ān, on the one hand, and to serve as a poetic act that acknowledges the ability of the literary text to preserve the stories and traditions of the place, thus providing the poet with the necessary justification to claim such a function for his own text.⁴²⁴ Furthermore, the selection of the story of Mary serves perfectly to back the poem’s claim of a mythical, life-giving function of the palm-tree, which seems to function as a leitmotif throughout al-Thubaytī’s works providing them with identity and coherence. As the boundaries between them dissolve, the natural and the cultural worlds become one and the same.

But in al-Thubaytī’s pre-Mawqif al-jinās phase, the poem that exemplifies his project of anchoring the modernist experience in the culture of the place is Taghrībat al-qawāfil wa-al-maṭar (The Westward Voyage of the Caravans and the Rain, henceforth referred to as Taghrība),

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⁴²³ Al-Thubaytī, al-A’māl al-kāmila, 92.

⁴²⁴ In her readings of the pre-Islamic praise ode, such as al-Nābigha al-Dhubyānī’s “O Abode of Mayyah” (Yā Dāra Mayyata), Suzanne Stetkevych demonstrates how Arabic poetry from its beginning, by virtue of its condensed, non-narrative form, played the role of preserving the ancient myth and legend of Jāhiliyya, and later conveying it into the Islamic context. Al-Nābigha’s evocation in this poem of the story of Solomon to make a “mythic concordance” between him and the praised leader, al-Nu’mān b. al-Mundhir, “condenses a body of ancient lore and myth and brings it to bear on al-Nu’mān.” See: Stetkevych, The Poetics of Islamic Legitimacy, 29, 35.
one of al-Thubaytī’s longest and most popular poems throughout his career, and the longest in his third collection, *al-Tadārīs*. It creates a mythology of the place based on a re-reading of the saga of the *Banū Hilāl*, a confederation of tribes originally from Najd and Hijāz who were forced to emigrate to North Africa beginning from the mid eleventh-century C.E. (fifth-century A.H.).425

In this poem, oil appears as the antithesis of the palm tree, the former depicted as blood full of warts; the latter a savior and a guide to the right path:

86. O you who come to water, give the herds [of camels] a drink once more
And pour for us a homeland in the young girls’ eyes
For there remains in the unknown a pasture ground[426] for misery
And the wind still bears the remnants of the voyagers’ exhaustion

90. When we drink a well-aged sun as our morning-draught
And we get intoxicated with the smell of the land as it boils up with the lantern oil
O land, stop [the] wart-soaked blood
O palm tree, take us to the beginning of night

<http://dx.doi.org.proxy.library.georgetown.edu/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_COM_0287>

426 *Muntaja*’ is a place where herbage is sought. See: Root *n-j-* in Lane.
Al-Thubaytī’s *Taghrība* is comprised of multiple sections that alternate between the *tafīla* and *ʿamūdī* metrical systems, with a collective voice asking the *kāhin* (soothsayer) of the neighborhood to bring water to the desert so that the modern Banū Hilāl, i.e. the people of Arabia, can finally end their mythical journey and arrive to the “awaited nation.” It begins with a section in which the main voice is asking someone, perhaps the *nādil* (cup-bearer or waiter) as in a classical *Khamriyya* (wine poem,)[428] to pour for him and his companions (or tribesmen) *qahwa* and a homeland:

1. Pass around [the cup of] the *muhja*[429] of the morning
   Pour for us in the cups a homeland
   that makes heads spin
   And give us more of the *Shādhiliyya*[430]

5. until the cloud comes back

   Pass around [the cup of] the *muhja* of the morning
   And shed on the people’s jars

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428 For an overview on the Khamriyya, see footnote 25 in chapter 1 of this study.

429 The word *muhja* means the heart’s blood, which evokes meaning of grief and sorrow. See: Root *m-h-j* in Lane. This goes in line with how morning-wine is usually depicted in a classical poem. According to Philip Kennedy, the *Jāhilī* description of the morning-wine tends to associate it with grief and anxiety, as opposed to evening-wine which is a source of “high-spirit, pleasure and luxury.” See: Philip Kennedy, “Khamr and Hikma in Jāhilī Poetry,” *Journal of Arabic Literature* 20, no. 2 (1989): 97–114.

430 The epithet *Shādhiliyya* [lit. the *Shādhilī* drink] functions here as a reference to *qahwa* (coffee), which is sometimes associated with wine, or any intoxicating drink. *Shādhiliyya* proper is a Sūfī order whose founder is said to have discovered and promulgated the drink that is *qahwa* (coffee) in the 9th/15th century and ascribed to it mystic significance by which the drinking was thought of as facilitating the experience of the Divine. While *qahwa* means wine in classical Arabic poetry, its usage in poetry (and in this poem in particular) evokes all the connotations of the mystic experience and the ones associated with wine-drinking gatherings. See: C. Van Arendonk and K. N. Chaudhuri, “Ḳahwa”, in: Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition, Edited by: P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, W.P. Heinrichs. Consulted online on 22 March 2019 <http://dx.doi.org.proxy.library.georgetown.edu/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_COM_0418>
your bitter yet pleasant *gahwa*\(^{431}\)

Pass around [the cup of] the *muhjah* of the morning

blended with the blaze

And stir our agonies over the embers of the *ghadā*\(^{432}\) trees

And then bring me the *rabāba*\(^{433}\)

Bring me the *rabāba*

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The poem, composed in the Free-Verse (*tafīla*) form, with *faʿūlun* as its meter-foot, changes the meter after the verse (Bring me the *rabāba*) to include a section of five mono-

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\(^{431}\) See the previous note.


rhymed, mono-metered verses in the ِتَيْلٌ meter, as if the Bedouin connotations of the ِرَبَّةٌ entails a change of the meter to the archaic (read Bedouin) ِعَمْدِي meter, and particularly to the meter of ِتَيْلٌ, which is a majestic meter found in many pre-Islamic and Islamic odes, such as the ِعَلْقا of ِعَلْقا of ِعَلْقا. In other words, it is as if the poet is introducing a traditional song played on the ِرَبَّةٌ to the modern Free-Verse poem. Al-Thubayıٰ says:

12. Is there no blue rain-cloud filled with blood?
So that it draws back [the veil of] black water from the thirsty shore

Is there no moon to redden in the first glow of dawn?

15. And pour forth upon the desert as rain and stars
So that we clothe it [the moon] in a robe of our white sorrows
And recite at its gates the Sūra of the Sanctuary

O you who is hidden among our tents,
You stayed too long in the sand that it became swollen

20. You stayed too long in the sand, so make a hand for it
And extend a season for it in the tavern of time

لاَ يُبِينُهُ رَزَقًا تَكْتَنِطُ بِالْبَلَّاءَ
فَتَتَجْلِلُو سَنَوَايَ السَّحَاءِ عَنْ سَاحِلِ الْبَلَّاءَ

لاَ قَمَّرَ اِبْحَمْرُ فِي غَرَّةٍ الدُّجُّي
وَيَنْهِي عَلَى الصَّحَائِرَةِ غِيْنَتَهُ وَأَنْجُمَهُ
فَتَسْتَخْمُو مِنَ أَحْزَائِنا النَّبِيْسِ حَنَّةٌ
وَتَتَتْلَو عَلَى أَبْوَابِ سَنْوَةَ الْحَيْمِ
To argue for a possible aesthetic and cultural significance of the transition from a Free-Verse meter-foot into the traditional metrical system is in line with al-Thubaytī’s own statements regarding the meaning of the meter. He makes it clear, in another poem in the same collection, that he takes the bahr (meter) to have a certain cultural significance beyond its technical function, particularly the meter of al-tawīl which is one of the great classical meters. It is an “eight-foot meter, and the only one which does not have shorter forms. It is the main meter of qaṣīd poetry, almost half of which is written in this meter." Al-Thubaytī says in the poem al-Mughannī (The Singer):

5. The singer said:
   Every day, the absence of the caravans haunts me.

   I said:
   The opposing times keep you awake.

   The wound has two gates:

10. Of wine and of ginger.

   The poem has a ṭawīl (long) meter
   A long night

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435 Ibid., 98.

<http://dx.doi.org.proxy.library.georgetown.edu/10.1163/1570-6699_eall_EALL_COM_vol3_0212>
And a long age

The long age of the poem is the poetic correlative of the long cultural age of the place, an assertion of the deep-rootedness of the culture of Arabia and of its rich verbal art tradition. The phrase “long night” following the “long meter” is an unmistakable allusion to the celebrated long-night scene in the *Mu‘allaqa* of Imru‘ al-Qays, in which the poet calls for the long night to “dispel, revealing dawn.” Al-Thubaytī thus establishes a link between his poem and that of his greatest predecessor, and in the process affirms the long tradition of the place. Imru‘ al-Qays says:

45. Many a night like the billowing sea
   let down its veils over me
   With all kinds of cares
   to test me.

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Then I said to it when
it stretched out its spine,
Followed with its hindquarters,
and heaved its ponderous breast,

Alas, long night, will you not dispel,
revealing dawn,
Though the dawn of day will be
no better for me.\textsuperscript{439}

Following the ʿamūdī, five-verse rabāba section, the poem returns back to the faʿīlun
meter-foot, or, say, to modernity as exemplified by the modernist tafʿīla (Free-Verse) poem. It
proceeds with the repeated call “yā kāhin al-ḥayy” (O soothsayer of the neighborhood) followed
by the main voice of the poem, which is in the plural to convey the collective identity of the
people of the Arabian tribes (Banū Hilāl), asking for directions to the water and, most

\textsuperscript{439} Translation by Suzanne Stetkevych. See: Ibid., 254.

\textsuperscript{440} Imruʿ al-Qays, Dīwan, 239-242 (this version has the verses in numbers 42, 43, and 45 respectively).
importantly, asking the kāhin to recite upon them at hazīʿ al-layl (the third part of the five divisions of the night)\textsuperscript{441} something on al-waṭan al-muntażar” (the awaited nation).\textsuperscript{442}

After this Free-Verse section, another ’amūdī section is inserted into the body of the poem, this time evoking the story of the pre-Islamic šu’lūk (brigand) poet al-Sulayk b. al-Sulaka, a black captive who used to be a slave for Banū al-Ḥārith b. Ka’b and who is considered one of the three original aghribat al-ʿArab (Ravens of the Arabs).\textsuperscript{443} Al-Sulayk was known for his notorious raids on various tribes thanks to his fleet-footedness and his knowledge of every corner of the desert. In other words, al-Sulayk was known for his ability to traverse the land very quickly, or in Arabic: yaṭwī al-bilād.

Likewise, the voice of the poem asks kāhin al-ḥayy in this section: iṭwi aḥlām al-tharā (traverse the dreams of the earth), as if al-Sulayk’s story as a šu’lūk, a marginalized poet who was able to cross the desert, is evoked here to help the modern Banū Hilāl (people of Arabia) to cross the harsh modern conditions of their existence and arrive at the “the dreams of the earth.”

Moreover, the poem itself traverses and travels from meter to meter, age to age, in a very fast manner, just like the šu’lūk poet al-Sulayk. This movement was signaled first by the shift to traditional meter al-ṭawīl and the traditional musical instrument al-rabāba. But what does the rabāba say?

\textsuperscript{441} See: Root h-z-’ in Lane.

\textsuperscript{442} See the verses in: al-Thubaytī, al-Aʿmāl al-kāmilah, 101.

From a Muʿallaqa to a secularized sūra: Pure himā and dangerous oil

Going back to the mono-rhymed, mono-metered, short rabāba section, the verses in the beginning make use of the archaic interrogative particle *alā* (لا) followed by the accusative noun (*alā dîmatan; alā qamaran*). The use of this interrogative particle *alā* (لا) further strengthens the link established between the poem and classical poetry, in particular with the *Muʿallaqa* of Imruʾ al-Qays where the same particle is used to call out to the long night to dispel (*alā ayyuha al-laylu at-tawīlu*). Moreover, al-Thubaytī’s rabāba verses ask for the ending of the condition in which black water is covering the thirsty shore with a veil, which is similar to asking for the long (black) night to dispel. Even the diction is almost identical; al-Thubaytī’s verses use the word *yajlū* (present tense of *jalā*), and Imruʾ al-Qays’s verses use *injal*i (imperative of form VII in *jalā*), both longing for a new beginning and dreaming of an end to a dark chapter in their individual or collective history.

Al-Thubaytī’s five-verse rabāba section employs the poetic convention of *istisqāʾ*, typical of the *nasīb* section of the classical ode, to create a fertility myth that helps usher in a new beginning. Myth creation is not unusual for a poet who defines himself as diviner who came to the sand to “buy myths, time, and ashes.” Just as the imagery of “the last of death” in the above-

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444 On the meaning and uses of *alā*, see: ‘-l in Lane, p. 75.

445 As a poetic convention, *istisqāʾ* means asking God to send down rain upon the beloved’s land. See: Root *s-q-i* in Lane.

446 In the poem *tartīlat al-bad* (Hymn of Beginning), the first section in the poem *al-Tadārīs* in the collection *al-Tadārīs*, al-Thubaytī says:

1. I came to this sand as a diviner, examining dark possibilities.
I came to purchase myths, time, and ashes.

جئت عنفاً لهذا الرمل
استنثقي ابتعاث الشوام
جئت عنفاً مساطير ووقتًا وجمعا

See: al-Thubaytī, *al-A māl al-kāmilā*, 59. The diviner (*arrāf al-raml*) is so prominent a character in al-Thubayti’s oeuvre that it is used sometimes as an epithet of al-Thubayīf himself. The Saudi noted critic Muḥammad al-ʿAbbās
mentioned section from the poem *al-Bashīr* brings life to the deadland, here a cloud becomes full of blood and a moon reddens in order to let the rain and stars “draw back the veil” of darkness from the desert. The moon then will turn into white thanks to the people of the desert who will clothe it in a robe of their “white sorrow.” Taking the act of changing clothes as transformation in human society, the moon then is civilized by wearing a robe, for this is the introduction of it into the human community, as if the line between nature and culture dissolves. This use of textile imagery is very close to what one can find in the storm scene of Imru’ al-Qays’s *Mu‘allaqa*.447

People’s white sorrow, which then becomes the moon’s robe, is also a reference to the story of Yaʿqūb (Jacob) in the Qurʾān, when his intense, continuous weeping over the loss of his son Yūsuf (Joseph) turned his eyes white out of grief [Qurʾān 12:84]. This particular Qurʾānic reference is reinforced by the fact that people’s white sorrows are transformed into a robe with which they clothe the moon. The robe bringing back sight, or bright in the case of the moon, alludes to the end of Yaʿqūb’s story, when Yūsuf asked his brothers to take his shirt and go back to their father, i.e. Yaʿqūb, to cast it over his face, promising that by doing so, he will become seeing again [Qurʾān 12:93]. This is another case of al-Thubaytī’s use of Qurʾānic references in a context totally devoid of religious significance, one in which religion is reduced to myth about the particular place of Arabia. The process of dissolving the boundaries between the cultural (Qurʾānic references and robe) and the natural (moon-sand), between the expression and the expressed, and between the religious and the secular is at work once again.


Imagining the establishment of a new community for a modern Banū Hilāl, who have been in a long voyage across the desert, finds its mythic equivalent in imagining a bright (white) moon that “pours forth upon the desert as rain and stars.” Now that the new community is imagined, its people begin to define themselves and create distinctions between the self and the other through building the boundaries of their community. The poem introduces the idea of building boundaries through the imagery of the gates by which people recite what the poem calls Sūrat al-ḥimā (Sanctuary), which is not an actual Qur’ānic Sūra, but one which the poet creates to please the moon.

The name of the sūra is very revealing, since the word himā, which literally means a forbidden place or sanctuary, denotes an institution that had a significant role in pre-Islamic and early Islamic Arabia, one that affected people’s lives in a profound way. It refers to a designated area of land protected by certain tribe leaders (forbidden to others) where pasture is available only for their herds. If herds belonging to other people stray into someone’s himā, then they have the right to claim these herds for themselves. The Ḥimā institution was restricted in Islam to God and Prophet Muḥammad, who have the sole authority to designate a certain place as such.448

The name of this “sūra” reinforces the argument that in al-Thubayṭī’s project, oil is antithetical to the natural and cultural worlds of pre-oil Arabia, and that it is almost always pre-Islamic Arabia that provides the poet with the frame work necessary to counteract the oil-based narrative. It is as if the poet proposes to re-implement the pre-Islamic institution of himā in order to protect modern Arabia from the exploitation of the oil industry, or of material modernity in

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general. It also speaks of how the people of the place actually had a deep-rooted cultural practice to organize their social affairs, a secular institution that can be used symbolically to indicate the validity of ancient cultural practices even in the modern world. The ḥimā here is called a sūra, which is another example of breaking the barriers between religious and secular practices.

The institution of al-_marshall plays a prominent role in the lore of pre-Islamic Arabia. According to traditional sources, it was because of the violation of the rules of the himā institution that the roughly forty-year war of al-Basūs erupted between the tribes of Taghlib and Bakr. The story goes that a she-camel belonging to a Bakrī woman by the name of al-Basūs strayed into the himā of the leader of the Taghlib tribe, i.e. Kulayb b. Rabīʿa, upon al-Basūs’s visit to her niece Jalīla bt. Murra, wife of Kulayb. When Kulayb saw the stray she-camel pasturing in his himā, he took his bow and arrow and shot it to death in its udder where its blood and milk mixed. This enraged al-Basūs who felt that her honor had been violated, so she brought the matter to her nephew Jassās b. Murra, Jalīla’s brother. He then killed Kulayb, his brother-in-law, thereby sparking the 40-odd year blood-feud, Ḥarb al-Basūs, between the two tribes. In this war and the literary akhbār about it, Jassās was the last to be killed, and the figure of al-Muhallil b. Rabīʿa, Kulayb’s brother, was the warrior-poet of the war.

Notions of honor, rights of kinship, and arrogance of power, encroaching forbidden land, conflict between two cousin tribes and confusion of kinship ties, and the poet as a hero (Jassās

\[\text{\footnotesize 449} \text{ Ibid.}\]
was a noted poet, and al-Muhalhil composed a number of poems on the death of his brother and
the need for vengeance), are all at work in al-Thubaytī’s reference to the himā.451 Suzaane
Stetkevych sums up the ritual significance of the whole episode of Ḥarb al-Basūs as follows:

The mixture of blood and milk suggests a confusion of kinship ties—the blood tie
through the male and the ancient Arab milk kinship through the female. One
message is clear: that to arrogate power and privilege to oneself is to abrogate
one’s responsibilities to others. Further, al-Basus’s gesture and cry are the
emblems of disgraced womanhood, which the menfolk must either avenge or
assume themselves . . .
The confusion of personal privilege and kinship obligation results in the “improper
sacrifice” in which the udder that should give milk gives blood. The outrageous
slaughter of the she-camel, the source of life and prosperity, the symbol of the
polity, signals the demise and disintegration of that polity.452

Ṣūrat al-ḥimā (sanctuary) that the modern Banū Hilāl (people of Arabia) are reciting by
the gates of the bright moon is, as I said above, the first thing the imagined community uses to
distinguish itself from the others. This can be understood in light of Mary Douglas’s theory in
Purity and Danger, which, in part, explains how cultures, usually under threat, create sharp borders
(i.e., ḥimā) between insides (conceived of as pure) and outsides (conceived of as dangerous and
contaminated). She said that “ideas about separating, purifying, demarcating and punishing
transgressions have as their main function to impose system on an inherently untidy experience. It
is only by exaggerating the difference between within and without . . . with and against, that a
semblance of order is created.453”

451 See: S. Stetkevych’s readings of these poems in chapter 6 of The Mute Immortals, 206-238.
452 Ibid., 208.
453 Douglas, Purity and Danger, 4.
The reference to the ḥimā in the context of al-Thubaytī’s project suggests that oil exploration and the exploitation of the natural patrimony of the nation and its people constitutes a violation of this “sacred” territory of Arabia. By demarcating their territorial and cultural boundaries into what is ḥimā and what is not, the modern Banū Hilāl, i.e., the people of Arabia, are imagined in al-Thubaytī’s Taghrība as distinguishing themselves by resorting to their tradition in order to resist the dangers of defiling their land and culture by the oil industry. In this understanding, oil came and violated the honor of the sands by exploiting its riches in order to serve power, but the imagined people of Arabia can actually develop a secular institution based on the cultural practice of the place to prevent that exploitation and the negative narrative it helped produce, and to protect their identity (perceived as distinct) from the fluidity of modernity.

Since the physical place of Arabia is perceived as already exploited and defiled by a foreign oil industry, al-Thubaytī imagines his community in the cultural sphere, in the textual/literary arena that is untouched by foreign power and exploitation. This is similar to what Partha Chatterjee sees, in his criticism of Benedict Anderson’s Imagined Communities, as the strategy adopted by anticolonial nationalism in South Asia, namely imagining a sovereign community in the cultural/spiritual sphere because what Anderson termed the “institutions of power,” e.g. the economy and statecraft, are already colonized and exploited. He notes in his landmark The Nation and Its Fragments that, the imagining of this sovereign community is achieved through:

dividing the world of social institutions and practices into two domains—the material and the spiritual. The material is the domain of the “outside,” of the economy and of statecraft, of science and technology, a domain where the West
had proved its superiority and the East had succumbed. . . . The spiritual, on the other hand, is an “inner” domain bearing the “essential” marks of cultural identity. The greater one’s success in imitating Western skills in the material domain, therefore, the greater the need to preserve the distinctness of one’s spiritual culture.454

One important implication of this formula is that the inner/spiritual realm is declared sovereign and that foreign power is not allowed to intervene in this domain.455 Although Saudi Arabia was never colonized, it seems that foreign oil industry was seen as a colonizing threat to the autochthonous culture of Arabia that al-Thubaytī’s modernist project sought to preserve but now with a modernist framework. This is how the people of Arabia are seen as distinct from foreign power.

Moreover, there is another level of distinction taking place here. Employing the saga of the Banū Hilāl to convey the modern predicament of the people of Arabia is al-Thubaytī’s way of distinguishing his own project from the larger project of Arabic modernism as being anchored in tradition. If embracing modernity meant for the Arabic modernist project moving westward (i.e., journey to the West, westernization, alienation), his “west” and modernity can be found by taking a journey westward (taghrība) but within the demarcated cultural boundaries of Arabia, i.e. the East. For al-Thubaytī, marching to modernity means marching eastward;456 it is his poetic


455 Ibid.

456 In his article “Tension in the House,” Saad al-Bazei briefly mentions al-Thubaytī’s taghrība at the end to arrive to a similar conclusion regarding the modern poetry of Arabia, but he reads this movement “eastward” in a modernist project that was originally initiated to catch up with Western literary developments as a source of tension. He also does not reflect on the relationship between this metaphorical movement within the poem and the larger, external context of a specific place like Saudi Arabia, for he sees this “tension” as characteristic of the modernist movement of the Arabian Peninsula and the Gulf states in general. See: Saad Al-Bazei, “Tension in the House: The Contemporary Poetry of Arabia,” World Literature Today, 75, no. 2 (2001): 267–274. Al-Bazei’s views in “Tension
journey in tradition, traversing different meters and multiple religious and secular boarders to find a place for a new cultural self-image of Arabia, one in which tradition and modernity lives in harmony. This journey was intensified in his largest and final poetic project: *Mawqif al-jinās*.

in the House” are largely based on his earlier book *Thaqāfat al-ṣahrāʾ* (The Desert Culture), where he argues that the desert as a repertoire of cultural signs and references, the productions and re-productions of which go back to the pre-Islamic era, was central to the modernist movement of Arabia. The desert world is restored in texts that belong to a modern world, almost totally devoid of the actual presence of the desert and its effects. See: Sa’d al-Bāzī (Saad al-Bazi), *Thaqāfat al-ṣahrāʾ*: *dirāsāt fī adab al-Jazīra al-ʿArabiyya al-muʾāṣir* (Riyadh: al-Nādī al-Adabī, 1991). Al-Bāzī would later revisit his argument and apply it to narrative texts (novels) in: Sa’d al-Bāzī (Saad al-Bazi), “Ḥadāthat al-ṣahrāʾ: aṣāṭīr wa-mufāraqāt” (Desert Modernity: Myths and Paradoxes), *Alif: Journal of Comparative Poetics*, no. 33 (2013): 32-9.
Chapter 4:
The Poet as Palm-Tree: Arabia Incarnate in Arabic

Muḥammad al-Thubayīṭī’s primary poetic event of devising a new imagining of the place was condensed and intensified in the last of his long poems, *Mawqif al-jinās*. For such a poem, I would like to propose an understanding of the literary work whereby it functions in a twofold manner. The first is devising a new imagining of the external, outside community that it purports to perceive, precipitate, or represent in the poem. The second, and more intricate, pertains to the world of the literary work itself, whereby it operates as an imagined micro-community consisting of symbols, devices, tropes, characters, voices, and so forth.

According to this understanding, the poetic event creates an imagined community imbedded inside the literary work. This community has its own language, perceptions of time and geography, and its own authority that governs the inner workings of the poem, or, one might say, its politics. The event of this interior community, i.e. the poem, even though it has a certain degree of autonomy, has as its ultimate goal to change the outer community, the community of the Saudi Arabian people.

I argue that this poem is essentially a grand metapoetic metaphor, or, say, a metapoetic event that identifies the poet wherein he is identified with the palm tree, the latter symbolizing a synecdoche for the autochthonous nature/culture of Saudi Arabia. In this poem, the palm tree appears to be the nexus of the poem and the center of a certain nostalgic pull, a yearning for a cultural world that redefines the self with pre-oil vocabulary, hence offering the poet’s imagined community an alternative identity based on elements that are neither artificial, like oil, nor
religious as the prevailing narrative insists, but human and cultural, autochthonous connecting the place to the creative impulses of its deep-rooted tradition.

The poem forms a poetic, that is, metaphoric site of commemoration, with the poet as a secular prophet in it “unfolding what has been folded,” as the poem reads, and reminding those “who look ahead” of their cultural identity and creative, human past. And although al-Thubayṭī’s previous works contributed to the creation of this site of commemoration, it was most emphatically elucidated in *Mawqif al-jinās*.

After translating the poem in the next few pages, I will present an interpretive reading of *Mawqif al-jinās* arguing that it stands as the poet’s ultimate poetic event that encapsulates not only his poetic career, but that of an entire generation of Saudi modernists.
1. He embraced me,
   Then made me stand on the sands

   He called me:
   By mīm (m), ḥāʾ (ḥ), mīm (m), and dāl (d)

5. And he stood up radiantly in my certainty,
   And said:

   You and the palm trees are two branches

   You deflowered the daughters of distance
   And raised the bells

10. They acknowledged the secret of the date-stones
    And knew the divine laws

    The fruit of the poor
    And the fruit of the poets

   You poured each other the two blended drinks:

15. Innocent wine and lawful magic

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457 See the full Arabic text in Appendix [2]. The page breaks in the translation follow the Arabic oriented version.

You and the palm trees are twins⁴⁵⁹

This is what the medals claim
That is what the groves desire

This is
20. The one whose orbits Virgo entered

That is
The one to whose garments the Virgin clinged

This is a possibility in autumn
And that is a completion in spring

⁴⁵⁹ The Arabic word in the poem is ṣinwān, a reference to the Qur’ān, 13:4: “nakhīlun ṣinwān wa-ghayru ṣinwān” (Palm trees growing from the same root and not).
You and the palm trees are two children
One going back and forth between classrooms
The other repeating with the seasons:

I make friends with the streets
The sand and the fields

I make friends with the palm trees

I make friends with the city
The sea and the ship
And the beautiful beach

I make friends with the nightingales

The house facing mine
And music and song

I make friends with the stones
The lighted square
And the long season

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460 Lines 28-39 are written in bold in the page of the printed book.
40. You and the palm trees are two children

A child who spent his life as a witness among men
And a child who unsheathed [the sword] of beauty

* * *

41. You and the palm trees are one and the same

You have become their custom

45. They, your two hands

And you have become the stars (Simāk)\(^{461}\) above their ceiling

They, your sky

They witnessed the setting of the Pleiades
And you saw the rising of the crescent moon

* * *

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\(^{461}\) The Arabic word here is Simāk, which is Arcturus in English, one of the brightest stars in the night sky. On the names of the stars and their significance in pre-Islamic Arabia for guidance in the night, see: P. Kunitzsch and J. Knappert, “al-Nudjūm”, in: *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*, Edited by: P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, W.P. Heinrichs. Consulted online on 01 April 2019 <http://dx.doi.org.proxy.library.georgetown.edu/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_COM_0871>
Blood flows from the clusters of dates
To the veins
Then the language of lightening becomes intoxicated:

- Which meter do you do best?
  Which ink do you desire?

- My master is no longer my master

My hand is no longer my hand
He said:

You are as far away as if you were the water of the sky (Māʾ al-Samāʾ).

I said:

I am as near as if I were a dew drop (Qaṭr al-nadā).

The open space and cities (al-Madāʾ in) are wasteland and poverty.

The fruits and the Hanging Gardens (al-Janāʾ in) are bitter aloe and patience.

And the bride of the ships.
Is night and sea

The ink of the treasuries of literature

Is a verse and a line [of poetry and of prose]

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He Said:

70. O palm tree

The weak trees slander you
And the lowly tent-peg (al-watad al-dhalīl) looks down on you

While you keep ascending in God’s space
With legendary pollen

75. And gracious patience

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467 The lowly tent-peg (al-watad al-dhalīl) is an unmistakable reference to the following two famous verses by the 6th century poet al-Mutalammis’s (d. 580):

No one will accept humiliation intended for them
Except for the two lowly [things]: the neighborhood donkey and the tent-peg
That [one] is fastened by its worn-out rope
This [one] has his head smashed and nobody cries for him

The two verses are of great historical significance. Traditional sources say that the prominent Qurayshī figure Abū Sufyān (d. 653) recited these two verses in the Day of the Saqīfa (Yawm Saqīfah Banī Sā‘īda) when the then nascent Muslim community gathered to select the first Caliph after the Prophet’s death. Abū Sufyān meant by the (two lowly) ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib (d. 660), the Prophet’s cousin and son-in-law and the fourth Caliph, and al-‘Abbās b. ‘Abd al-Muṭṭalib (d. 653) the Prophet’s uncle, for they accepted to pay allegiance to Abū Bakr al-Ṣiddīq (d. 634) as the first of the Rightly Guided Caliphs. See a full account of the Day of the Saqīfa in: al-Ṭabarī, Tārīkh al-rusul wa-al-mulūk, ed. Muḥammad Abū al-Faḍl Ibrāhīm (Cairo: Dār al-Maʿārif, 1960-1977), 3/203-211.


He said:
O palm tree

Do you mourn your time
Or your place

80. Or a heart that, after the water of the two spells, disobeyed you

When passion overwhelmed you
So that between the Two Villages (al-Qaryatayn)\(^{468}\) you broke your staff in two

And in Makkah’s hollow, you wrote down the fugitive letters
While the new moons were first appearing around your face

85. And the poems were traps in your hands
And the night a sea for anxieties, and the day
A poem that belonged to no one but its creator
And the creator of the flute

\(^{468}\) In the Qurʾān (43:31), the word *al-qaryatayn* (the two villages) denotes the two cities of Makkah and al-Ṭāʾif, a city southeast of Makkah. The Qurʾānic verse describes the Meccan non-believers’ objection to Muḥammad’s Prophethood given that they perceived other leaders from the cities of Makkah and al-Ṭāʾif to be nobler and worthier of Prophethood than him. The verse reads, “*wa-qālū lawlā nuzzila hādha al-Qurʾānu alā rajulin min al-qaryatayni azīm*” (And they said: if only this Qurʾān was revealed to a great man from the two cities). As I noted in the introduction, Muḥammad al-Thubaytī lived his early life in al-Ṭāʾif, and then moved to Makkah to spend the rest of his life there.
O you who have gone deep into the distance

90. Be safe,
If your footsteps stumble

And be safe,
If the writers’ eyes stumble upon your error

And what is your error?!
95. That I gaze at the city [/at Medina] so that I can see you

And I don’t see you
But only the scent of an Arāk tree.\footnote{The Arāk is the tree from which the \textit{siwāk} (or \textit{miswāk}), a tooth-cleaning twig, is taken.}

\footnotetext[469]{The Arāk is the tree from which the \textit{siwāk} (or \textit{miswāk}), a tooth-cleaning twig, is taken.}
I go straight to the meaning
And I suck the wine from the fire
Then I quench my thirst
And then I drink once more
From
The water
Of blame

And I pass between the known roads and treacherous wastelands
Where there is no sea to collect the tatters of my sails
No horizon to gather together the scattered [feathers] of my wings
And no tree
To offer
Refuge
To my doves

470 “The water of blame” is a direct allusion to a verse by Abū Tammām, the ’Abbasid poet who became the epitome of modernity in Arabic poetry, either in his role in the the Muḥdath (Modern) movement, or in the Ḥdāthī (Modernist, Free-Verse) movement of the 20th century. Abū Tammām said:
Do not make me drink the water of blame, for I am
A fervent lover who found sweet the water of weeping

The verse was central in the classical critical controversy over Abū Tammām’s novel/innovative use of istiʿāra (metaphor). In his al-Mathal al-sāʾir, Ḍiyāʾ al-Dīn ibn al-Athīr records an anecdote about this particular verse whereby someone critical of Abū Tammām innovative istiʿāra sent him a cup and asked him to pour in it “the water of blame.” Abū Tammām responded, sarcastically, by sending him back a request for “a wing of humility,” alluding to the Qurʿānic verse {And lower to them [the parents] the wing of humility.} [Qurʿān 17:24]. Abū Tammām used the Qurʿānic istiʿāra to justify his own. See: Ḍiyāʾ al-Dīn ibn al-Athīr, Al-Mathal al-sāʾir fī adab al-kātib wa-al-shāʾir, ed. Aḥmad al-Ḥūfī and Badawī Ṭabānā (Cairo: Dār Nahdat Miṣr).
I go straight to the meaning
And between my fingers, the roads and the times intertwine
The mirage is broken from the drink

And my shadow
Is cast
Before me
I deflower the virgin stars
And ask for more cares

And I become intoxicated with fear when it passes
From
The numbness
Of the vein
To
The bones
And I traverse the desert of night
Until the mornings of the mind come to me early
While I am sleepless
And thirsty.

- I saw...did you not see!?
- Sleep betrayed my eyes

132. And Canopus (Suhayl) threw to the right of the sun
His soul and passed away, and in the orbits of the Pleiades
There alighted

135. A full Syrian (Shaʾāmī)
Moon
O her full moon
And the guidance of insight
O her pride
And the hidden passion of the heart
O her seal
And the sanctuary of the tribe
O her hair
And the length of her braid

* * *

471 The verses in this page are written in bold and centered on the page of the printed book.
In the field of missteps
Between the Kharijites and the battleships
My patience
Clamored inside me
And my stance

So I went straight to the meaning
Staring at my beloved’s features so that I could name her
But names
Fell short

I found that she was my homeland:
The joy of her voice, my sorrow
The glory of her beautiful presence, my desire

And her pure
Saliva,
My wine

Then I looked into the eye of the sky
The sparks of thirst were extinguished,

And my clouds
Burst
Into
Rain
To those who spend the night hungry 472
And those who reveal what lay hidden 473
And those who look
Ahead,

To the palm-trees, to the sand-dunes, to the Northern shīḥ
And to the breezes of the Ṣabā East wind 474

To the birds in the verdant hills
To the Sun
To the mountain
Of Ḥijāz
And to the sea

Of Tihāma

472 The phrase “al-bāʾ ātin ’alā al-tawā” is a direct reference to a verse by the pre-Islamic poet ’Antara b. Shaddād:
I would spend the night hungry, and remain so
Until I obtain through it a generous meal

وَلَنْحَذَّ أَبْيَتُ عَلَى الْطَوْرِ وَأَطْلِعُ
حَسْتُ أَنَا بِكُمْ كَمْرُ النَّمَاثِل

See the verse in: ’Antara b. Shaddād, Dīwān, 249.

473 The phrase “al-nāshirīn li-mā inṭawā” might very well be a reference to the rhetorical Bāḍī device of al-ṭayy wa-al-nashr (sometimes referred to as al-laff wa-al-nashr), the case where ideas are first introduced in general terms and then explained, sometimes in the same order and other times not. The idea behind this device is to let the reader/listener attach each explanation to its corresponding point. An example could be to say: I like books and coffee, to get informed and get awake. It is clear that the first explanation (to get informed) is linked to (I like books), while the second explanation (to get awake) to the second point (I like coffee). See Arberry explanation in Arthur John Arberry, Arabic Poetry: A Primer for Students (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965), 25. Also see: al-Khaṭīb al-Qazwīnī, al-ʿĪḍāfī fi ’ulūm al-bayān wa-al-nashr (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al- ʿIlmiyya, 2003), 268-269.

474 This is likely an allusion to the lyrical Ṣabā. The word al-ṣabā was such a powerful word that it evokes all nostalgia-related modes in classical Arabic poetry. In his reading of the role of nasīb in the classical tripartite ode, Jaroslav Stetkevych holds that it is “the mellow, the erotic, the rain-bringing and fertilizing al-ṣabā that not only enjoys a broad sway over significant motif-areas of pre-Islamic lyricism but that subsequently, as a mood signal, is destined to become one of Arabic lyricism’s most enduring and potentially most intensely charged words.” See: Jaroslav Stetkevych, The Zephyrs Of Najd: The Poetics Of Nostalgia In The Classical Arabic Nasīb (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 126-127.
Nature and culture are *sinwān*: All grow from the same root

*Mawqif al-jinās* has been considered a central text in contemporary Saudi and Arabic poetry. The renowned Yemeni poet and critic ‘Abd al-‘Azīz al-Maqāliḥ said that this poem was so significant an event in modern Arabic poetry that it could be deemed a declaration of “the birth of a new cycle in Arabic poetry, beginning this time from the [Arabian] Peninsula, and not from Baghdad or Cairo.”

In *Mawqif al-jinās*, the text highlights a poetic event that has an independent existence, one that completely obscures oil from the definitions of identity in favor of the natural and cultural elements of Arabia. In my reading I argue that the return of literature to these pre-oil autochthonous elements represents a resistance to the authority of the prevailing oil-based narrative in order to propose human definitions of the self through the image of the poet, who represents an intensification of the collective cultural self and a reinvention of its identity. I argue that taking the cultural context of the oil-based narrative about Saudi Arabia into account reveals the poem’s critical stance, or *Mawqif* as the title states, especially since the natural elements of the place are so intrinsic to the cultural tradition.

As mentioned in chapter 3, the natural world, especially the sand and palm tree, formed for al-Thubaytī, on numerous occasions, a cultural refuge from the coercions of an imagined, industrialized city and its narratives. Here I hasten to assert that al-Thubaytī’s evocation of the natural differs drastically from the pastoral protest against the violence of the modern world typical of the Romantics. Al-Thubaytī seems to be interested in criticizing the oil-based narrative about the

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city and *not* the city itself, hence the voice of the poem develops friendship with the city and its landmarks as well as with the desert and its emblems:

I make friends with the streets  
The sand and the fields  

30. I make friends with the palm trees  

I make friends with the city  
The sea and the ship  
And the beautiful beach  

I make friends with the nightingales  

35. The house facing mine  
And music and song  

I make friends with the stones  
The lighted square  
And the long season\(^{476}\)

\(^{476}\) The verses are printed in bold in the collection.
The verses speak of the need for a new Arabian cultural self-image to replace the old, reductionist, authoritarian narrative that I explained in chapter 3. In the new narrative, the elements that may, at a first sight, seem to be mutually exclusive can live in harmony, or, to use an Arabic term closely linked to these verses, can live in a state of *tajānus*. In this innovative self-image, the poet develops a friendship of some sort with the street—a newly-made, well-defined, immobile product of modernity, and with the sand—an ancient, shapeless and mobile part of the terrains of Arabia. Moreover, the poet makes friends with the city, with all its administrative limits and boundaries, and he simultaneously makes friends with the sea, endlessly reaching for the unknown, ungoverned and wide open to the horizon. These seemingly contradictory elements of the place accommodate each other and liberate the nation, symbolized by the poet’s voice, from the coercions of the current narrative.

My close reading of the poem will demonstrate how *Mawqif al-jinās* intensifies al-Thubaytī’s project of proposing a vision of modernism contrary to the prevailing one, which is understood as essentially a break with tradition, the two being mutually exclusive. The analysis will explicate how, through its very performance, *Mawqif al-jinās* proposes a more complex understanding of the modern and the traditional on the basis of which a modernist poem can have its roots deep in a tradition which it uses as its point of departure for an aesthetic journey towards creating its unique, modernist voice. In its relationship with the literary tradition in particular, the poem is replete with references to the traditions of the Qur’ān and the prophetic Ḥadīth, the

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classical *qaṣīda* (ode), particularly its structure and metrical system, the Ṣūfī experience, and most importantly the rhetorical device of *jinās* (paronomasia) as exemplifying the *Badiʿ* movement in classical Arabic poetry, or, in other words, the modern (*muḥdath*) movement in tradition.⁴⁷⁸

My reading of *Mawqif al-jinās* argues that the main statement of the poem is to suggest a root-based diversity of the identity of Arabia, one in which all seemingly contradictory elements go back to the same root, or, to use the poem’s quotation of the Qurʾānic diction, all are *ṣinwān*. To achieve this claimed root-based diversity, the poem, in the thematic level, juxtaposes the prophetic, mystic, and poetic (whether modern, classical, or post-classical or pre-modern) experiences in one textual field. In the stylistic level, the poem plays with multiple metrical schemes and makes extensive use of the rhetorical device of *jinās* (paronomasia), for, as I will explain later, both the traditional Arabic metrical system and the *jinās* device are based on making changes to words of the same letters of the root. This poetic root-based diversity within the text is the poet’s act to remind the imagined community of Arabia of its pre-oil cultural heritage, of its roots.

To this end, and since an exhaustive reading of *Mawqif al-jinās* is something I do not claim to produce in the present study, I focus my study on the following questions: how does the poem employ the bipartite structure of the classical poem to establish its artistic/aesthetic identity? What is the relationship between the transcendental experience of prophethood and Sufism, on the one hand, and the temporal, secular, and poetic experience in *Mawqif al-jinās*, on the other? How is

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⁴⁷⁸ In her pioneering article on the cultural context of the *Badiʿ* movement, “Toward a Redefinition of ‘Badiʿ’ Poetry,” S. Stetkevych proposes a re-conceptualization of *Badiʿ* and argues that the quantitative understanding of *Badiʿ* poetry, as found in classical rhetoric, reduces an unprecedent poetic movement to a mechanical reproduction of ancient embellishments. She argues that the “mode of thought, abstract, dialectical, metaphorical [is what] distinguishes Ḥāfiz as a poet from his predecessors” and that the new *badiʿ* style is characterized by “new ways of seeing and speaking, of constructing and perceiving meaning, of engaging with the world of men and things.” See: Suzanne Stetkevych, “Toward a Redefinition of ‘Badiʿ’ Poetry,” *Journal of Arabic Literature* 12 (1981): 1–29. See on the *Badiʿ* movement: Suzanne Stetkevych, “Abbasid Panegyric.” On the *Badiʿ* movement as a modern enterprise, see: Fakhreddine, *Metapoesis in the Arabic Tradition.*
the *jinās* device used in a poem called *Mawqif al-jinās* to signal the poem’s movement and directionality? And what is the relationship between this *jinās*-based movement and the movement triggered by the different metrical schemes of the poem?

From separation to identification in a modernist bipartite ode

In *Mawqif al-jinās*, the poem looks at itself in the mirror. To put it more clearly, al-Thubaytī employs metapoetic techniques to design a poem in which the poet appears as a temporal/secular prophet who receives his poetic revelations from a natural/earthly source and who identifies with the palm-tree as a synecdoche for the pre-oil condition. The metapoetic character of the poem has two dimensions: one thematic, where the poet and poetry become the subject of the poem; the other is what Huda Fakhreddine called “referential,” where the poem refers to literary texts, particularly from the classical period (religious, mystical, linguistic, critical, and poetic), and engages in a critical intertextual dialogue with them. It is in this latter form of metapoetry that al-Thubaytī’s poem firmly establishes its aesthetic and cultural links with its traditional roots.

The metapoetic event of *Mawqif al-jinās* is comprised of two sequential moments. The poem consists of two main sections represented in the printed collection by numbers (1) and (2). This indicates the poet’s intention to make a distinction between the two sections, hence the division can be considered an integral part of the overall meaning of the poem. In addition to the visual distinction, the theme of the first section constitutes a moment different from, and logically prior to, the moment of the second section. The first section (pp. 11-20, lines 1-97 in the printed collection) focuses on the relationship between the poet and the palm-tree as two distinct entities.

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and provides a long series of comparisons between them based in multiple voices, but mainly the
voice of a third party who gives some definitions to the poet:

7. You and the palm trees are two branches
                       ........................................................

You poured each other the two blended drinks:

15. Innocent wine and lawful magic

You and the palm tree are two twins
                       ........................................................

25. You and the palm trees are two children
                       ........................................................

40. You and the palm trees are two children
                       ........................................................

43. You and the palm trees are one and the same

آنتَ والنبّاحُ فنرزْعان
                       ........................................................

تَساقينتما بالخلطَيْنِ:
خَمْرَناً بريتاً وسَخْرَناً حلالًَٰ
 آنتَ والنبّاحُ صئْوان
                       ........................................................

480 Al-Thubayitî, al-A‘mâl al-kâmila, 11, 12.
The second part (pp. 21-30, lines 98-180), however, allows the poet’s voice to occupy all its print and vocal spaces and represents the condition where the poet is fully identified with the palm-tree and there is no longer a need to distinguish between them as two separate identities, especially given that Part I ended declaring the poet and the palm-tree identical (siyyān). With ten pages per section, the printed space provides a perfect balance between the moment of the Other and the moment of the self. Verses from Part II, all of which begin with the first-person pronoun (I), constitute a sign of the poet taking hold of his identity:

I go straight to the meaning
And I suck the wine from the fire

Then I quench my thirst
And then I drink once more
From
The water
Of blame

And I pass between the known roads and treacherous wastelands
Where there is no sea to collect the tatters of my sails
No horizon to gather together the scattered [feathers] of my wings

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481 Ibid., 13.
482 Ibid., 15.
And no tree
To offer
110. Refuge
To my doves

I go straight to the meaning
And between my fingers, the roads and the times intertwine
The mirage is broken from the drink
115. And my shadow
Is cast
Before me

I deflower the virgin stars
And ask for more cares
120. And I become intoxicated with fear when it passes
From
The numbness
Of the vein
To
125. The bones

And I traverse the desert of night
Until the mornings of the mind come to me early
While I am sleepless
And thirsty.

145. In the field of missteps
Between the Kharijites and the battleships
My patience
Clamored inside of me
And my stance
Made me worry
So I went straight to the meaning
Staring at my beloved’s features so that I could name her
But names
Fell short
of
Her qualities
أفتضْحُ أبنُكَ النجوم
وأستَرِزَّيْنَ السُّهمَوم
وأتِنتِي بِالْخُوفِ حِينَ يَمْرُ مِنْ
خُطَر
العَرِيذ
إِلَيَّ
الْعَمْلِ
وَأَجْنَبُ بِبَيْنَاءِ الْدِّجَّالِ
حَتَّى تَنَبَّأْنِي صَنْبَاتُ النِّجِّيَا
أَرْقَتَا
وفقَمِيّ
.............
في سَاحَةَ الْمَعَشَّرِ
مَا بَيْنِ النِّخْوَارِ وَالْبَيْتِ
ضَخَّ بِيّ صَنْبَرِي
وَأَقَلَّقْنِي
مُنَقَّامِي
فَمَضْنِثْ لِلْمَغْنِيْ
أُحْتَقَّ فِي أَسَارِيرِ الْحَيْبَيْةِ كَيْ أَسْمِيْهَا
فَضَّفَقُتْ
عَنْ
سَجَابِها
الأَسْلَامِيّ

483 Ibid., 21, 25.
484 Ibid., 27.
The bipartite division of *Mawqif al-jinās* can also be read in light of the bipartite structure of the classical poem as embodied in some pre-Islamic poems, but more generally in the Abbasid ode. With a poet so immersed in the poetic tradition as al-Thubaytī, as generally recognized, one is justified in comparing the structure of this poem to that of the classical *qaṣīda*. However, while the typical Abbasid ode consists of the two sections of *nasīb* and *madīḥ*, the bipartite structure of *Mawqif al-jinās* consists of the *nasīb* and the *raḥīl* sections; the final *gharaḍ* (goal) of the poem seems to be already imbedded in the performance or production of the poem itself.

The poem employs similar elements from the diction, imagery, and motifs of the classical ode. The classical poetic motif of *wuqūf* in the *nasīb* section of the ode, in which the poet “halts and weeps” over the departed beloved (and asks his companions to do the same) is transformed in *Mawqif al-jinās* into a poetic *mawqif* (halting/stopping) on the sand, while the journey section is altered to accommodate the modernist poet’s aesthetic journey in a poetic terrain “looking for the meaning,” as the poem reads.

Therefore, the first moment in the poetic event of the poem (pp. 11-20, lines 1-97 the printed collection) can be read against the *nasīb* section of the classical poem, but the difference here is that the one who “halts” and makes the poet stand in al-Thubaytī’s poem is the external voice (the Other), who negotiates with the self its definitions and reminds it of its long-lost identity. Therefore, verses such as “You are as faraway as if you were the water of the sky” and “O you who have gone deep into the distance” conjure up the invocations that the classical poet performs.

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485 In chapter 1, I discussed Stefan Sperl’s reading of the ’Abbasid biparite ode. See: Sperl, “Islamic Kingship.”

486 See, in chapter 3, al-Surayḥī’s note on al-Thubaytī’s formidable knowledge of the poetic tradition.

487 Line 58.

488 Line 89.
in the *nasīb* section, asking for his loved ones to come back, and weeping over the ruins of their once inhabited abodes.

As for the second moment in *Mawqif al-jinās* (pp. 21-30, lines 98-180), in which the self speaks for itself, it can be read as analogous to the journey of the classical ode. In addition to the central idea in this section, which is the constant search (read: journey) for the poem as a homeland, the poetic lexicon, almost entirely based on the idea of traveling, buttresses this claim. The section begins with “I go straight to the meaning,” then “I pass between the known roads and treacherous wastelands,” all echoing the dangers that the poetic persona of the classical ode most often encounters in the *rahīl* section, and after that “I go straight to the meaning” repeated twice, one time in the present tense and another in the past tense, and finally “I traverse the desert of night.” These images and their diction form a state of anxiety quite identical to the one usually encountered in the journey section of the classical poem. Yet the journey here, as opposed to the classical ode, has no physical end, thus “the roads and the times entwine,” and the journey continues. The poem reads:

105. And I pass between the known roads and treacherous wastelands Where there is no sea to collect the tatters of my sails No horizon to gather together the scattered [feathers] of my wings And no tree To offer

489 Line 98.
490 Line 105.
491 Lines 112, 150.
492 Line 126.
493 Lines 112, 113.
The final physical destination in the sand of the desert is impossible to reach because the star Suhayl (Canopus), which the ancient Arabs regarded as a good omen, turned away “wallā”, and the poet’s shadow lies before him, an image that can be read as a metonymy for an endless journey:

I go straight to the meaning
And between my fingers, the roads and the times intertwine
The mirage is broken from the drink

And my shadow
Is cast
Before me

Al-Thubaytī integrates the journey section of his poem into the final purpose or goal section of the classical poem, thus the departure to/through the poem becomes both its purpose and its
journey. The production and performance of the poem is its ultimate goal. This goal is reached in the last scene of the poem, the scene of the cloud-burst (of poetry)—of life-giving rain—, a scene that reminds one, again, of the final storm scene of Imru’ al-Qays’s *Muʿallaqa*. Al-Thubaytī says in a very illuminating verse:

Then I looked into the eye of the sky
The sparks of thirst were extinguished,

And my clouds
Burst
Into
Rain

The bipartite division of *Mawqif al-jinās* takes on a symbolic meaning that contributes to the anchoring of the identity in the deep-rooted tradition of the place, which further sharpens the nostalgic pull created by the pre-oil lexicon of the poem. This referential metapoetry to the literary tradition, represented here in the bipartite structure of the classical ode, continues to reveal more of its classical sources. Now that we have established the poetic *mawqif*, let us turn to the prophetic *mawqif.*

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Language and revelation: Prophethood from heavenly to earthly

In the opening lines of *Mawqif al-jinās*, al-Thubaytī says:

1. He embraced me,
   Then made me stand on the sands

   He called me:
   By *mīm* (m), *ḥāʾ* (ḥ), *mīm* (m), and *dāl* (d)

5. And he stood up radiantly in my certainty,
   And said:

   You and the palm trees are two branches…

 Readers with knowledge of Islamic history and classical Arabic literature will not fail to
notice the poet’s allusion to the story of the revelation of the first verses of the Qur’ān in Makkah.

Islamic tradition holds that Angel Gabriel was sent to Prophet Muḥammad one day when he was
worshipping God in the Cave of Ḥirāʾ on *Jabal al-Nūr* (Mountain of Light). The Angel embraced
the Prophet, and then commanded him, “Recite.” This incident is recorded in al-Bukhārī (d. 870)’s

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498 Ibid., 11.
al-Jāmiʿ al-Ṣahīḥ (The Authentic Collection), in the Book of the Beginning of Revelation, which contains Prophet Muḥammad’s sayings on the ways through which he first received revelation as follows:

‘Āʾisha bint Abī Bakr (d. 678)⁴⁹⁹ [Prophet Muḥammad’s wife] said:

He [Prophet Muḥammad] used to go in seclusion in the cave of Ḥirā’ where he would worship God . . . Until Truth descended upon him while he was [there].

The Angel [Gabriel] came to him and said, “Read!” He [the Prophet] said, “I can’t read.” He [the Prophet] added, “Then he caught me and pressed me until I could not bear it any more. He [the Angel] then released me and said, “Read!” I said, “I can’t read.” Thereupon he caught me and pressed me a second time until I could not bear it anymore, and then released me and said, “Read!” I said, “I can’t read.” Thereupon he caught me and pressed me for the third time, and then released me and said, “{Read in the name of your Lord, who created [all existence]. He created man from a blood-clot. Read and your lord is Most Generous} [Qurʾān 69:1-3]”

Al-Thubaytī builds on this story but from a metapoetic perspective, transforming it into a foundation myth of his own secular, poetic experience whereby language, broken down into its smallest parts, i.e. the letters, is the basic elements in the formation of identity, just as the Qurʾānic letters were the first steps towards forming the then-new Islamic community. In the poem, as if deciphering a code—m-h-m-d (=Muḥammad)—the voice literally “spells out” for the poet who he

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is, he “names” him, i.e., identifies him. In the process, the poet establishes what Paul Connerton terms a “mythic concordance” between the poet of Arabia (Muḥammad al-Thubayṭī) and the Prophet of Arabia (Prophet Muḥammad), whereby the former’s poetic mawqif is “reenacting” the latter’s prophetic mawqif. It is worth recalling that the poet’s name is Muḥammad, just like that of the Arabian Prophet, and that he lived in the city of Makkah not far from the place in which the first Qurʾānic revelation is said to have taken place, namely the Cave of Ḥirā’ on Jabal al-Nūr (Mountain of Light), thus the shared name (Muḥammad) implies a shared identity between the poet and the Prophet.

There is an important difference between the Prophet’s and the poet’s moments, however. While the Prophet first received the sacred revelation when he was on the top of a mountain, the poet is being stopped on the sand. From a symbolic point of view, the mountain evokes the meanings of sacredness and transcendence above the level of earthly life, whereas the sands evoke a different set of meanings. As the poem is centered upon the idea of the poet as a secular prophet, it makes sense to bring the prophetic experience from its lofty position down to earth, to a position purely horizontal where there is no hierarchy and no superiority, a position grounded in the sand of

501 While Connerton’s term “mythic concordance” concerns the relationship between two separate events, one “originary” and another one reenacting it in commemorative ceremonies, S. Stetkeyvych extends the use of the term to include the identification of two events or figures, one of mythic proportion and one contemporary to the poet. She understands the Arabic ode as a verbal equivalent of a commemorative ceremony. In my use of the term, I extend it even further to cover the metaphorical identification between two events or figures, whereby there is no comparison between two entities, but rather the old event is used as a metaphor to describe the new one. In Mawqif al-jīnās, there is no comparison between the moment of the first Qurʾānic revelation to the Prophet and the poet’s mawqif; instead, the event of the Prophetic moment of revelation on Jabal al-Nūr is used only as a metaphor to describe the poetic moment of “creation.” Still, the poem as a textual performance establishes a “mythic concordance” between the two moments and achieves the identification between the two figures: the Arabian Prophet and the Arabian poet. For more on “mythic concordance,” see: Connerton, How Societies Remember, 43. On S. Stetkeyvych’s application of this concept, see: S. Stetkeyvych, The Poetics of Islamic Legitimacy, 35.

502 Hinting at this shared identity, ʿAbdullah al-Ṣaykhān (b. 1956), a Saudi Ḥadāthī poet of al-Thubayṭī’s generation who used to be a close friend of his, said that al-Thubayṭī so often used to look at Jabal al-Nūr from a window in his house and then recite his poetry, imagining the distance that Prophet Muḥammad used to cross from his house to Jabal al-Nūr. See: “Baʿd arbaʿat aʿwām’ alā rahīlih: Muḥammad al-Thubayṭī bi-ʿuyūn ʿaṣdiqāʾ ih,” Al-Arabīya (15 January 2015): https://www.alarabiya.net/ar/saudi-today/2015/01/15/
Arab autochthony. For a poem that paints a picture of the poet as identical to the palm tree, and one who makes friends with all components of the human society, it is significant for the poet to function from within the society and not from a superior position like the mountain.

The story of the beginning of the Qur’ānic revelation is aptly referenced in *Mawqif al-jinās* at the beginning of the poem, which functions as the secular revelation for the new society. Language was a very crucial factor in creating new imaginings for modern communities, as noted above in the concluding points from Anderson’s book, and in al-Thubaytī’s case, he relies on the Islamic idiom in order to make the grammar of his “poetic” community more visible and to help its “members” find their voices. Hence, in cultural terms, since the Islamic imagined-community was created by the word “Read”, which functioned as an event that precipitated the creation of that community in reality, al-Thubaytī used this very event to devise a new imagining of the community, and thus his poem begins with the same “prophetic” event that traditional sources say occurred to Prophet Muḥammad at the beginning of his prophethood.

However, the opening lines go even further back in history, to the story of the creation of Man in the Abrahamic tradition, according to which the first human, Adam, was given his identity by learning the names, “all names” as the Qur’ānic verse states:503

\[
\text{وَعَلَّمَ آدمَ الْإسْمَاءَ كُلَّهَا}
\]

{And He taught Adam the names—all of them.} [Qurʾān 2:31]

Quite similarly, the poet is discovering himself and the world around him by first learning how to pronounce his own name, which is, as I said before, the same as the Arabian Prophet’s

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name, Muḥammad, through pronouncing the disconnected letters in “He called me by mīm (m), ḥāʾ (h), mīm (m), and dāl (d).” Here, the sacred is humanized/secularized to fit a narrative centered upon autochthonous elements. Furthermore, the boundary between the sacred and the human dissolves, and poetry is given the function of creating a new imagining of the community.

Furthermore, beginning the poem with these disconnected letters seems to have four main functions:

1. Constituting a subtle reference to the disconnected letters (al-hurūf al-muqatṭa‘a) of some Qur’ānic Sūrās, overwhelmingly Meccan. There are twenty-nine Sūrās, twenty-seven of which belong to the Meccan period of the Qur’ānic revelation, that begin with disconnected letters, a phenomenon that some classical scholars regarded as one proof of the inimitability of the Qur’ān (iʿjāz al-Qurʾān). The Qur’ānic argument seemed to them that, although the Qur’ān as a text goes back to mere letters, nobody, neither human nor jinn, has the capacity to use these letters in a style that could create a text equal to the Qur’ān in rhetorical power and beauty.

504 The group of letters called al-hurūf al-muqatṭa‘a (disconnected letters); fawātih al-suwar (the openers of the sūras); or awā’il al-suwar (the beginnings of the sūras), occur in 29 sūras in the Qurʾān, and their meaning has been a matter of dispute for centuries and has not settled yet. The range of possibilities for their meaning goes from considering them abbreviations of Divine names and prophetic epithets; sounds to captivate audience; symbolic mystical signs; or, as I noted above, an attestation of the familiarity of the Qurʾānic language and that it is based on the letters of the Arabic language. In Western scholarship, these letters are called: the mysterious letters, a name that attests to how these letters intrigued and baffled scholars for centuries. See: A. T. Welch, R. Paret and J. D. Pearson, “al-Kurʾān”, in: Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition, Edited by: P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, W.P. Heinrichs. Consulted online on 04 April 2019 <http://dx.doi.org.proxy.library.georgetown.edu/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_COM_0543> Of significance, I think, for the interpretation of the possible roles of these letters in the poem is the fact that 27 out of 29 of the sūras with al-hurūf al-muqatṭa‘a are Meccan, for two reasons. One is that the Meccan period is the period when the then new Islamic community has not been formed yet, hence the use of these letters at the beginning of the poem evokes the meanings of a society in the making, a process of imagining a community that is not formed yet. The letters speak of a new beginning, which is the ultimate meaning of the poem: a new beginning of a new imagined community. The other reason concerns the actual context of the poem, which is written by a poet who lived in Makkah.
2. Providing the poem with a justification from within to build its internal world on the rhetorical device of *jinās*, which works, as will become clear later in this chapter, based on a play with letters of the same root. In other words, the poem begins by emphasizing the role of individual letters in making the meaning, only to use that emphasis as a base for its extensive use of the *jinās* device as a producer of meaning.

3. Hinting at the readers’ role in discovering the meaning by implicitly inviting them to participate in deciphering the secret codes of the poem, and thus giving readers an active role in the creation of the new imagining of the society.

4. Uniting the two sections of the poem together by emphasizing the name as both a moment of birth and a desired point of arrival, or final *gharad/goal* of the journey. In the first section, it is through these letters that the poet, which might be taken as a symbol of the community, came to know his name and identity. Likewise, in the second section, it is to “the name of the beloved” that the poet hopes to arrive so that he can find a “homeland” when his current state or place was a source of anxiety. Language is a moment of creation and also a homeland. The poem reads:

145. In the field of missteps
   Between the Kharijites and the battleships
   My patience
   Clamored inside of me
   And my stance

150. Made me worry

   So I went straight to the meaning
   Staring at my beloved’s features so that I could name her
   But names
Fell short
of
Her qualities

I found that she was my homeland:
The joy of her voice, my sorrow
The glory of her beautiful presence, my desire
And her pure
Saliva,
My wine

في ساحة التعبئات
ما بينن النخوة والنبوارج
ضَع بِي
صبوري
وأفنقاني
مُقابي

فمضيثًا للمغلي
أحَد في أسارير التحبيبة كي أسميها
فضااقت
عن
سجاها
الأصلي

ألغنيتها وطنني
وبيئتها صوتيها شجعني
ومجتمع حضورها الشافي مُنائي
وزرعتها
النابي
مُندامي

505 Al-Thubaytī, al-ʿA’ māl al-kāmila, 27, 28.
To conclude, then, I argue that using the disconnected letters in the poem, in addition to paving the way for the poetic event of *jinās*, serves multiple functions; it re-emphasizes the role of language in creating a new imagining by connecting the modern poem with its Arabo-Islamic heritage, particularly in the early Meccan phase when the then-new community was being born; it secularizes the prophetic text, invites the reader to participate in that event and its implications, and links the two sections of the poem together by insisting on the name as a beginning and an end.

The poem’s humanization and secularization of the spiritual experience of prophethood, as represented by the allusion to the Qur’ānic revelation in Makkah, is further reinforced by the poem’s treatment of another spiritual experience: the Sufi *mawqif*.

**Sufi experience: From the abstract to the particular / from authority to friendship**

Another central spiritual/literary reference in the poem is the Sūfī concept of *Mawqif*, so central to the poem that it appears twice in the title: (*Mawqif al- rimāl, mawqif al-jinās*) and in the first line: *ḍammanī thumma awqafanī fir-rimāl* (He embraced me, then made me stand on the sands).

The word *waqafa* means: to stop (halt) or stay stand, and among its many derivations what concerns the present discussion are two: the first is the poetic motif of *wuqūf* and *istīqāf*, when the poet stops and asks his companions to stop and weep with him over the beloved’s ruined abodes (which I explained in more than one occasion above); the second is the Sūfī concept of *Mawqif*, which is derived from the literal meaning of *mawqif* as a place of standing, and perhaps also from
the Islamic use of the term to denote the most important part of the pilgrimage rituals (shaʿā ir al-ḥajj), namely the place where the wuqūf (stopping) is held in the area of ʿArafāt.⁵⁰⁶

As a Sāfī concept, Mawqif denotes “the intermediate moment between two “spiritual stations” (makām), represented as a halting (wakfa) and described as a state of stupor and of the loss of reference points acquired since the preceding stage. The mawkiṭ is a dynamic psychological state, in which the connection between the mystic and God becomes overturned, and sometimes suspended (annihilation in God, the so-called fanā). The best example of the course of such an experience is given in the work of al-Niffarī.⁵⁰⁷ That the term mawqif denotes a state of “stupor” and “loss of reference points” is crucial in interpreting the mawqif in al-Thubayṭī’s poem.

For a poem that alludes to the poetic motif of wuqūf and istiqāf where the poet is lost after the beloved is gone, and that evokes Prophet Muḥammad’s loss once the first Qur’ānic verses were revealed to him through the Angel, it is perfectly suitable to allude to a mystical moment of loss. Moreover, each of the three moments of loss will be a catalyst for a new beginning: the poet through the journey “looking for the meaning;” the Prophet through the establishment of the new community; and the mystic by rising into a higher station (maqām).


In literature, the concept of \textit{mawqif} was famously propagated by the mystic al-Niffārī (d. 965 or 966)\textsuperscript{508} in his only remaining work \textit{al-Mawāqif wa-al-mukhāṭabāt}.\textsuperscript{509} It seems indisputable that al-Thubaytī was familiar with the modernist interpretation of al-Niffārī’s work, and that of other Sūfī figures, that took place at the hands of Adūnīs and other modernist writers, as a result of which the mystic’s work was understood as to form a literary text close to a modern prose poem of surrealist character.\textsuperscript{510} In his book \textit{al-Ṣūfiyya wa-al-suryāliyya} (Sufism and Surrealism), Adūnīs writes:

In the context of the Arabic language, the Sūfī experience is not merely an experience in [“philosophical”] speculation, but also, and perhaps even before that, it is an experience in writing. It is a vision that was articulated in poetry, in metric verse and prose, or [say] in a poetic language, in addition to scientific language and commentary. In that, in terms of writing, it is an innovative movement that expanded the boundaries of poetry, adding to its metrical forms other prose forms where we can find what was termed, in [the parlance of] modern literary criticism, a “prose poem” (\textit{gašīdat al-nathr}).\textsuperscript{511}


\textsuperscript{511} Adūnīs, \textit{al-Ṣūfiyya wa-al-suryāliyya}, 22.
While al-Niffarī gives his *Mawāqif* abstract names, such as al-ʿizz (glory), al-kibriyāʾ (honor), al-karam (generosity) etc., al-Thubaytī is interested in *Mawqif al-rimāl*, referring to a particular geography. Al-Thubaytī’s poem transforms the abstract, mystical experience into a song full of references to the tangible, physical components of the landscape of Arabia and its culture. Therefore, we have in this poem the sands and palm trees; the streets and the farms; the sea and the ships; the beautiful beach and the house; the stones and the lighted square; the Two Villages (Makkah and al-Ṭāʾif); Makkah and Medina; Suhayl and al-Thurayyā (Pleiades); the sand-dunes; the Northern shīḥ (wormwood); the Ṣabā wind (east wind); the verdant hills; and finally the Ḥijāzī mountain and the Tihāman Sea. Additionally, the poem contains extensive references to Arabic culture: examples are the Qurʾān, classical poetry and poets, and traditional names of personalities, book, and political movements (e.g. Māʿ al-Samāʾ, *Qaṭr al-nadā*, and the Kharijites) and allusions and puns.

All these references to the autochthony of the place help bring the transcendental, abstract experience of al-Niffarī’s *Mawāqif* down to earth and inject a sense of particularity in it. It also attests to al-Thubaytī’s acute awareness of the literary past and his engagement in the critical debate of the present. By transforming the heavenly experience of al-Niffarī’s *Mawāqif* into an earthly adventure in the specific realms of the Arabian Peninsula, al-Thubaytī’s poem can, in some ways, be considered a response from an earthly position in the sacred city of Makkah to Wallace Stevens’s note in his critical work *The Necessary Angel*, in which he declares that, “the great poems of heaven and hell have been written and the great poem of the earth remains to be written.”

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512 al-Niffarī, *Kitāb al-mawāqif*.

To this idea, I noted regarding the concluding points of Anderson’s *Imagined Communities* that emphasizing a constellation of particularities that belong to a specific community, such as the (Saudi) Arabian community, is necessary in order for the new imagined community to be realized, to come into being. The universality of abstract discourse makes it incapable of advancing a new imagining. In al-Thubaytī’s *Mawqif al-jinās*, this constellation of particularities transforms the abstract *Mawāqif* of al-Niffarī into an earthly, tangible *mawqif* that belongs specifically to the Arabian Peninsula.

Additionally, al-Niffarī’s *Mawāqif* presents a one-sided, unidirectional “conversation” between a mysterious voice who is addressed in the third person “he said to me” and who gives orders, while al-Thubaytī’s *Mawqif* consists of many voices interacting: giving suggestions, asking questions, and having a conversation, without one party exercising authority over the other. The poem begins with its main voice (lines 1-7), who introduces another voice that will extend for 21 lines (8-27), and then this new voice will introduce another voice that extends for 12 lines (28-39). Line 40 then goes back to the second voice which continues for 13 lines (40-52), and after that the identities of the voices collapse until the end of Section I (line 98) although it could very well be the second voice that speaks after that line. In other words, every voice is hosting another, and the text hosts them all. Consider the three different voices in the following passage (Voice I in Roman/normal font; II *italicized*; and Voice III *in bold*):

1. He embraced me,
   Then made me stand on the sands

   He called me
   By mīm (m), ūḥ (ḥ), mīm (m), and dāl (d)
5. And he stood up radiantly in my certainty,
And said:

*You and the palm trees are two branches*

25. *You and the palm trees are two children*

*One going back and forth between classrooms*
*The other repeating with the seasons:*

*I make friends with the streets*
*The sand and the fields*

30. *I make friends with the palm trees*

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Consider also the dialogue between the second voice and the first voice (the poet) in the following passage:

He said:
You are as far away as if you were the water of the sky (Māʾ al-Samāʾ)

I said:
I am as near as if I were a dew drop (Qaṭr al-nadā)

Moreover, as I mentioned in the discussion of the bipartite structure of the poem, while the first section/movement (lines 1-97) is mostly dedicated to the voice of the other (Voice II), which makes pronouncements about the identity of the speaker/poet and engages in a conversation with him, the second section/movement (lines 98-180) is entirely dedicated to the speaker/poet.

To sum up the argument above, the dual thematic division of the poem, its bipartite structure, its references to the disconnected letters of the Qurʾānic revelation and the Prophetic and mystical experiences, all function as to anchor the poetic experience in its particular place and culture (the roots of Arabic culture and the Arabian Peninsula), grant language the critical role in

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515 Ibid., 13, 14.
516 Ibid., 17.
imagining the community, bring the transcendental/heavenly experience down to earth, and define poetry and the poet as a human revelation to an earthly/secular prophet.

With this textual hosting of multiple voices from a myriad of contexts, al-Thubaytī transforms his poem into a heteroglossia, to use Bakhtin’s concept, a site where multiple voices interact with each other. Much like a composer, al-Thubaytī uses these voices to signal the movement of his poetic event from one state to another. In fact, he uses the actual metrical/musical schemes of his poems to signal that movement.

“Which meter do you do best?” Movement through metrical schemes

The visual and thematic divisions between Parts I and II of al-Thubaytī’s *Mawqif al-jinās* are further reinforced by differentiations in metrical schemes. As I introduced in chapter 2 the Arabic metrical systems, in the classical poem and Free-Verse poetry, the latter gives poets more freedom to play with the metrical parts/feet (*tafʿīlāt*). In *Mawqif al-jinās*, the word “free” in the term “Free-Verse” is given its utmost efficacy by using the *tafʿīla* as “a marker of differentiation and a sign of distinction” between the two sections of the poem, a vehicle to take the poem from one section to another, and a reference to the cultural heritage of the place.

The first section of *Mawqif al-jinās* contains multiple transitions from one metrical foot to another, even within the same verse or line, whereas the second section contains only the metrical foot *mutafāʿ ilun*, and all verses end with the same rhyming letter (*qāfiya*) of a *mīm* followed by a

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517 In his seminal essay “Discourse in the Novel,” Bakhtin valorizes the modern novel as the literary genre capable of representing the modern world with its heteroglossia, or its multiple dialects, accents, and linguistic variants interacting, and competing, within the same language of the society. See: M. M. Bakhtin, “Discourse in the novel,” in *The dialogic imagination: four essays* by M. M. Bakhtin, ed. M. Holquist, trans. C. Emerson and M. Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), 269-422.
long vowel yāʿ (mī). This further supports the idea of viewing the poem as a “poetic event” performed in two distinct movements or distinct sections. Consider these opening lines from Part I:

1. He embraced me,
   Then made me stand on the sands
   He called me
   By mīm (m), ḥāʾ (ḥ), mīm (m), and dāl (d)

5. And he stood up radiantly in my certainty,
   And said:
   You and the palm trees are two branches

The metrical foot in these first lines is fāʿ ilun, which continues in lines 1-19, but then in line 20, the metrical foot begins to change from the single fāʿ ilun foot to a variety of metrical feet in verses such as:

16. You and the palm trees are twins

518 Al-Thubayitī, al-A`māl al-kāmila, 11.
This is what the medals claim
That is what the groves desire
This is
20.
The one whose orbits Virgo entered

That is
The one to whose garments the Virgin clung

This is a possibility in autumn

And that is a completion in spring

Anنت والمُخْلُصُ صَبُّوَانً:

هَذَا الْذِّي تَدْعَى عِيْنَةُ النَّبِيَّينّ
ذَلِكَ الْذِّي تَشْتَهَى الْبَسِائِذَانِ

هَذَا الْذِّي
دُخِلْتُ إِلَى أَفْنَالِهِ النَّمْرُودَاءُ

ذَلِكَ الْذِّي:
دُخِلْتُ إِلَى أَكْفَالِهِ النَّمْرُودَاءُ

هَذَا الْذِّي في التَّخْرِيف احْتِمَالُ
وَذَلِكَ الْذِّي في الرَّبِيع اكْتِبَامُٰ

While lines 16-18 maintain the basic metrical foot fāʿ ilun of al-Mutadārak meter, lines 19-22 change into mutafāʿ ilun and mustafʿ ilun of al-Kāmil meter (they are two variants of the same metrical foot in classical prosody), and then lines 23-24 go back to fāʿ ilun and fāʿ īlun. Moreover, after line 24, three lines are cast in the metrical foot fāʿ ilun, and then beginning from line 28, al-

519 Ibid., 13.
Thubaytī inserts a whole new mono-metered section (lines 28-39) cast in the foot of mustaf’ilun and faʿūlu of the Rajaz meter but in the Muthallath (tercet) form, a type of rhyme scheme in which the first two verses of the stanza share the same rhyme while the third differs, yet the third verse in each stanza ends with the same rhyme. The poem reads:

25. You and the palm trees are two children

One going back and forth between classrooms
The other repeating with the seasons:

I make friends with the streets
The sand and the fields

30. I make friends with the palm tree

I make friends with the city
The sea and the ship
And the beautiful beach

I make friends with the nightingales

35. The house facing mine
And music and song

I make friends with the stones
The lighted square
And the long season
As the poem proceeds, the metrical variety only intensifies. Consider these lines:

He said:

70. O palm tree
The weak trees slander you
And the lowly tent-peg looks down on you
While you keep ascending in God’s space
With legendary pollen

75. And gracious patience He said:

520 Ibid., 13, 14.
Only the first two lines (69 and 70) are cast in ُّآٰلْ، but then, beginning from line 71, the poem changes into ُّآٰلْ and ُّآٰلْ. This colorful variety of meter and rhyme schemes in the first section can be interpreted as to signify the rich poetic, musical, and cultural heritage of the place. The movement of the line from one meter to another transforms it into something like a living organism in a condition that is ever-moving and never-static, a movement that transforms the poem itself into something like an ecosystem, or a poetic event in which the movement can be heard, felt, and seen. But more important than any other stylistic device or strategy, al-Thubaytī’s poetic event in ُّآٰلْ is incarnated in the rhetorical device of ُّآٰلْ.

Meta-ُّآٰلْ: Incarnation and a root-based diversity

ُّآٰلْ can be understood as a lively ecosystem, whereby different sounds mark different movements. These sound differentiations are exhibited in the poem mainly through the ُّآٰلْ device and the variety of meters (which I discussed above). Here, a brief overview of the rhetorical device of ُّآٰلْ is warranted before proceeding to the discussion of its representation in ُّآٰلْ. After that I will analyze a few examples of ُّآٰلْ and metrical differences to argue that al-Thubaytī’s ُّآٰلْ is a meta-ُّآٰلْ and meta-meter poem that performs the twofold function of using ُّآٰلْ and various metrical schemes to advance its new vision of Arabia, on the one hand, and on the other advancing a new understanding of the traditional device of ُّآٰلْ and the traditional metrical system. In this new understanding, modernism is understood as harmonious and “embracing” of tradition, just as the mysterious voice who evokes the “classical” story of the first

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521 Ibid., 18.
revelations of the Qurʾān “embraces” the modern poet. The poem thinks by using the jīnās device, while thinking about jīnās too.

*Jīnās: Definition and history*

As a basic definition, *jīnās* (paronomasia; root-play)*522* is “a pair of utterances (mostly, but not necessarily single words), within a line or colon, which are semantically different but phonetically, either completely or partially, identical. The alternative “completeness or lack of such” is the basis for distinguishing the various sub-types that the rhetoricians have discovered.*523* All these various subtypes of jīnās are subsumed under two main headings: *jīnās tāmm*, which exhibits “complete, phonetic identity,” and *jīnās ghayr tāmm*, which does not have a general term that covers all its subcategories but, in general, it is a case “in which the two terms of the *tadжnīs* show any kind of lesser degrees of assonance, down to root-repetition (*ishtīkāḥ*, *figura etymologica*).*524* Thanks to its root-and-pattern system, Arabic language allows poets ample opportunities to create jīnās instances by playing on the root of the word.*525*

Hence it should not come as a surprise that the jīnās device, in Arabic literary history, became “a bone of contention”*526* and a central phenomenon in the poetry of the ‘Abbāsid Bādī’ movement, which belongs to a period characterized by meta-linguistic concerns where “the code of

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523 Although jīnās is the most common term in classical rhetoric to describe paronomasia, other terms were used such as *tajnīs*, mujānas, *tajānus*, mujānas. See: W. P. Heinrichs, “*Tadжnīs*,” in: *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*, Edited by: P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, W.P. Heinrichs. Consulted online on 23 February 2019 <http://dx.doi.org.proxy.library.georgetown.edu/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_COM_1144>

524 Ibid.

525 Ibid.

526 Ibid.
language was cracked,\textsuperscript{527} and hence it became possible to conduct a systematic and "philosophical" thinking about language.\textsuperscript{528} Poets of the Bāḍī\textsuperscript{'} (\textit{muhdath}) movement, salient among them is Abū Tammām, to whom Muḥammad al-Thubaytī alludes directly in \textit{Mawqif al-jinās},\textsuperscript{529} "shifted the character of [\textit{jinās} and other rhetorical] . . . figures from being a means of poetic style to becoming an essential part of the poetic endeavour."\textsuperscript{530} By intensifying the use of rhetorical devises such as \textit{jinās}, Abū Tammām and the modern (\textit{muhdath}) poets with him "rejected all moderation in innovation and unremittingly pursued a new way of doing things with verse,"\textsuperscript{531} and thus produced "the earthquake-like impact"\textsuperscript{532} in the history of Arabic poetry.

In later Arabo-Islamic periods, \textit{jinās} continued to be prominent, especially in post-classical poetry, where "the \textit{tadājnīs} . . . becomes ever more central."\textsuperscript{533} However, with the historical narrative advanced by the poetry of the 19th and 20th centuries Arab Awakening movement (\textit{`Aṣr al-Nahḍa}), which interpreted the `Abbāsid period as a Golden Age in the history of Arabo-Islamic civilization (as I noted in chapter 3) and relegated the post-classical period to an Age of Decadence (\textit{`Aṣr al-inḥīṭāt}), the \textit{jinās} device, which by then has become an emblem of the period of \textit{al-inḥīṭāt},


\textsuperscript{528} See Suzanne Stetkevych’s analysis of the relationship between the abstract and dialectical mode of thinking about language in the `Abbāsid culture and the poetry of the Bāḍī\textsuperscript{'} (\textit{muhdath}) movement: S. Stetkevych, “Toward a Redefinition of ‘Bāḍī’ Poetry.”

\textsuperscript{529} See my footnote on the translation of \textit{Mawqif al-jinās}, lines 98-104.

\textsuperscript{530} Heinrichs, “\textit{Tadājnīs}.”


\textsuperscript{532} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{533} Heinrichs, “\textit{Tadājnīs}.”
was “taken as a symbol of the late artificial, ossified state of pre-Modern Arabic poetry.” Poets and critics of ‘Aṣr al-Nahda “used this period as a foil—an Age of Decline from the High ‘Abbāsid Age whose master badī’ poets the Neo-Classicists took as their models and whose political and cultural hegemony they hoped to revive.”

Even after ‘Aṣr al-Nahda, poets continued to relegate jīnās to a mere artificial device belonging to the excessive Badī’ turn now characteristic of ‘Aṣr al-inḥiṭāt. Suzanne Stetkevych holds that “the Romantics and Moderns . . . threw out the entire Classical and Post-Classical qaṣīdah tradition as sclerotic, artificial, and obsolete. All schools, however, shared the disdain for the Post-Classical period as one of particular artificiality and lack of originality.” This disdain of jīnās continued with the first generation of the Free-Verse movement, the pioneering modernists, because of “the intimate connection of jīnās and other rhetorical devices with the Arabic poetic tradition that prevailed from the tenth to the nineteenth centuries. In their opinion, the excessively lengthy tenure of this set of poetic norms had stifled the normal development of poetry and even threatened to strangle their own creative endeavors.”

However, late Modernists and the new generations of Arab poets have, in the past few decades, developed a more nuanced understanding of their tradition, which allowed them to

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534 Ibid. While until quite recently, Arabic literary and critical studies of poetry, both in the Arab world and the West, have been rather rigidly compartmentalized into Classical and Modern, with the intervening 500-year period dismissed as an “Age of Decline” and largely neglected, recent studies have attempted to recoup and reintegrate the Post-Classical (approx. 13th-18/19th c.) “Age of Decline”. See for example: Thomas Bauer, “Mamluk Literature: Misunderstandings and New Approaches,” Mamluk Studies Review 9 (2005): 105-132. Also see: Thomas Bauer, “‘Ayna hādhā min al-Mutanabbī!’ Toward an Aesthetics of Mamluk Literature,” Mamluk Studies Review 17 (2013): 5-22.

535 S. Stetkevych, “From Jāhiliyyah to Badī’iyyah.”

536 Ibid.

537 DeYoung, “Language in Looking-Glass Land.”
explore and reconsider the aesthetic potential of classical rhetorical devices such as *jinās*. These poets are “much more assured and free in the way they utilize the language and idioms (including rhetorical figures) taken from their literary heritage, in a way which their immediate predecessors were not. . . . The younger generation seems to have developed a much more dynamic relationship with the tradition than did the first generation of the Free Verse movement.” In Muḥammad al-Thubaytī’s poetry, the acute awareness of the dynamic relationship between the modern poet (the individual talent) and his tradition is taken to a higher level, by emphasizing the Classical and post-Classical rhetorical device of *jinās* to be the center of the poem, as will be clear soon.

**Al-Thubaytī’s meta-*jinās*: Identification incarnated in the word**

The *jinās* in al-Thubaytī’s poem performs many functions, one of which has a symbolic and metapoetic dimensions, for by referring to a stylistic device that belongs primarily to the classical poetic tradition, the text confirms the historical (necessarily pre-oil) dimension of the local identity. In its reference to the rhetorical devices of classical poetry, the poem intensifies its “referential metapoetry” to an extent seldom if ever realized in modern Arabic poetry, at least to the best of this writer’s knowledge. Not only does the poem present a case of meta-*jinās* by revolving around the classical literary device of *jinās* and exploring its aesthetic and cultural potential, it provides new interpretations of some of the main aspects of the classical ode and the defining moments in the history of its modernization.

The poem, for instance, alludes to Abū Tammām’s famous “water of blame” verse, the poet who is credited with giving the *muhdathūn* (the Modern) movement its distinctive character, and

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538 Ibid.

539 I explained the controversy around this specific verse in a footnote on my translation of the poem above. See my footnote on the translation of *Mawqīf al-jinās*, lines 98-104. In this verse, Abū Tammām said:

Do not make me drink the water of blame, for I am
as I explained above. The poem uses this allusion as a window to comment on the
traditional/modern debate over form and content, a debate whose main persona in the classical
period was no other than Abū Tammām himself. The allusion to this Abū Tammāmian verse, to the
poet who was “accused” of creating farfetched bāḍī‘ forms and favoring form over
content/meaning, comes right in the beginning of Part II of Mawqif al-jinās, where the poet asserts
that he goes “straight to the meaning.” It is as if al-Thubaytī is engaging in the critical debate over
the bāḍī‘ movement, and the emphasis on the form in the modernist movement in general, by
reading the form and meaning to be conjoined inseparably. This is essential for a poem that bases
its argument on the minute differences between words and on the Prophetic and Sūfī mysterious
letters that purport to create a new world and a new community through the power of linguistic
forms. Al-Thubaytī says:

I go straight to the meaning
And I suck the wine from the fire
Then I quench my thirst
And then I drink once more
From
The water
Of blame

أَمْضَى إِلَى الْمَنْعِنِي
وَأَمْتَسْنَ الْرُّحْيَ مِنْ الْتَحْرِيق
فَازْتَوْيِ
وَأَعْلَنَّ
مِنْ
مَاء

A fervent lover who found sweet the water of weeping
This centrality of *jinās* in al-Thubayṭī’s *Mawqif al-jinās* is evidenced quantitatively by the extensive use of *jinās* throughout the poem. Here follows a list of all *jinās* instances in *Mawqif al-jinās*, divided into the two general sub-types of *jinās tāmm* (complete) and *jinās ghayr tāmm* (incomplete), in addition to the smaller sub-types of the latter. As in chapter 2, the abbreviation Ln.1 means line number 1.

**A) Jinās tāmm (complete):**

1- (al-nawā) = distance, Ln.8 & date-stones, Ln.10.

2- (al-ʿadhrāʾ) = Virgo, Ln.20 & the Virgin, Ln.22.

3- (al-fuṣūl) = classrooms, Ln.26 & seasons, Ln.27.

4- (ʿaṣāk) = disobeyed you, Ln.80 & your staff, Ln.82.

5- (arāk) = see you, Lns.95,96 & Arāk tree, Ln.97.

**B) Jinās ghayr tāmm (incomplete):**

**B-1) Jinās nāqīṣ mudhayyal (two appended letters at the end of the second term):**

1- (al-madā) = The open space, Ln.61 & (al-madāʾ in) = the cities, Ln.61.

2- (al-janā) = The fruits, Ln.63 & (al-janāʾ in) = the Hanging Gardens, Ln.63.

**B-2) Jinās muḥarraf (difference in vocalization):**

1- (simāk) = the stars (Simāk), Ln.64 & (samāk) = your sky, Ln.47.

2- (ṣibr) = bitter aloe, Ln.64 & (ṣabr) = patience, Ln.64.

3- (khuṭāk) = your footsteps, Ln.91 & (khaṭāk) = your error, Lns.93,94.

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B-3) Jināṣ al-galb (different arrangement of the same letters):

1- (dakhalat) = entered, Ln.20 & (khaladat) = clung, Ln.22. 
2- (aflakihi) = orbits, Ln.20 & (akflaihi) = garments, Ln.22. 
3- (qafir) = wasteland, Ln.62 & (faqr) = poverty, Ln.62. 
4- (al-ruqyatayn) = the two spells, Ln.80 & (al-qaryatayn) = the two villages, Ln.82. 
5- (al-rahīq) = the wine, Ln.99 & (al-ḥārīq) = the fire, Ln.99.

B-4) One different consonant:541

1- (al-nawāqīs) = the bells, Ln.9 & (al-nawāmīs) = the divine laws, Ln.11. 
2- (iḥtimāl) = a possibility, Ln.23 & (iktimāl) = a completion, Ln.24. 
3- (qadā) = spent his life, Ln.41 & (madā) = went on, Ln.42. 
4- (shāhidan) = a witness, Ln.41 & (shāhiran) = unsheathing, Ln.42. 
5- (al-’udhūq) = the clusters of dates, Ln.50 & (al-’urūq) = the veins, Ln.51. 
6- (tujīd) = you do best, Ln.53 & (turīd) = you desire, Ln.54. 
7- (al-nadā) = a dew drop, Ln.60 & (al-madā) = The open space, Ln.61. 
8- (saṭr) = a verse, Ln.68 & (ṣaṭr) = a line, Ln.68. 
9- (al-nāy) = the flute, Ln.88 & (al-na’y) = the distance, Ln.89. 
10- (al-masālik) = the known roads, Ln.105 & (al-mahālik) = treacherous wastelands, Ln.105.

541 According to al-Khaṭṭab al-Qazwīnī’s al-ʿIdāh, if the two divergent letters are of the “same articulation area,” rhetoricians called this jināṣ mudāriʿ (homorganic); if not, then it is called jināṣ lāhīq (non-homorganic). See: al-Qazwīnī, al-ʿIdāh, 291-292. The translation of the two terms comes from Heinrichs, “Tadbīḥīn.”
The Mirage, Ln. 114 & The Drink, Ln. 114.

The Kharijites, Ln. 145 & The Battleships, Ln. 145.

The Beautiful, Ln. 159 & The Pure, Ln. 160.

Hunger, Ln. 169 & Lay Hidden, Ln. 170.


B-5) Jinās al-ishtiqāq (words come from the same, or a similar, root):

1-The root: r-d-d:

Benefited (yatarraddadu) = going back and forth, Ln. 26, Repeated (yuraddidu) = repeating, Ln. 27.

2-The roots: f-r-', r-f-, and 'r-f:

Two branches (far‘ān) = Ln. 7, You deflowered (iftara‘ta) = Ln. 8,

You raised (rafa‘ta) = Ln. 9, They [Feminine] acknowledged, Ln. 10, They [Feminine] knew, Ln. 11

(i’tarafna) =

From this list we see that jinās is employed 34 times in the poem, overwhelmingly in Part I (27 times, pp. 11-20, lines 1-97 in the printed collection), as opposed to only 7 jinās instances in Part II (pp. 21-30, lines 98-180). Here, just as what I did with Darwīsh’s emphasis on the rhyming words in his Qāfiya, I choose to borrow from cognitive poetics the term “figure and ground.”

Considering al-Thubaytī’s Mawqif al-jinās a textual field, the emphasis on jinās, from the title to the last lines of the poem, transforms it into the most prominent verbal element in the poem, a figure whose prominence distinguishes it from the rest of the textual field, or the ground. As Peter Stockwell explains what makes a stylistic element a figure, “it will be more detailed, better
focused, brighter, or more attractive than the rest of the field [and] it will be on top of, or in front of, or above, or larger than the rest of the field that is then the ground.”

This figuring of the jinās device in the textual field of the poem is based on the metaphor: THE POET IS A PALM-TREE.

As stated above, the poem can be read as a poetic event whose meta-poetic grand metaphor is the identification of the poet with the palm tree. This identification reaches its aesthetic climax in the jinās device, which is employed extensively in Mawqif al-jinās, from the title through to the closing lines. Based on the term “conceptual metaphor” from cognitive poetics, which understands metaphors as tools to understand one “conceptual domain” in terms of another, it can be said that the jinās in al-Thubaytī’s poem is, in fact, a “conceptual jinās” that, on the one hand, reflects the similarity in the traits between the poet and the palm-tree, and, on the other hand, but its emphasis on the minute differences between the letters to make different meanings, functions as a reference to the role of linguistic forms in inventing traditions and creating sites of commemoration where the histories and aspirations of the social group meet.

After the opening lines set the stage for the meeting between the poet (the Self) and the mysterious voice (the Other) who calls the Self by the “mysterious letters,” the poem proceeds to delineate the multiple ways in which the poet and the palm trees are identified with each other. In the following examples from the beginning of the poem, jinās (underlined) incarnates the identification between the poet and the palm trees. Almost all the words that delineate the similarities between the poet and the palm trees are closely linked in sound and meaning, as though these similar sounds were the poetic incarnation of how identical people, nature, and culture are:

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Ibid., 105-119. Also see the first theorization and application of the term “conceptual metaphor” in: George Lakoff and Mark Johnsen, *Metaphors We Live By* (London: The university of Chicago press, 2003).
7. You and the palm trees are two branches:
   You deflowered the daughters of distance
   And raised the bells
10. They acknowledged the secret of the date-stones
   And knew the divine laws

16. You and the palm trees are two twins

This is
20. The one whose orbits Virgo entered
    That is
    The one to whose garments the Virgin clung
    This is a possibility in autumn
    And that is a completion in spring

25. You and the palm trees are two children

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545 Ibid., 13.
One going back and forth between classrooms
The other repeating with the seasons:

أنت وَالنَّخل طَفَنَان
وَاحِدَة يَبْتَرَزُّ بَينَ النَّفَخِصُول

40. You and the palm trees are two children
A child who spent his life as a witness among men
And a child who unsheathed [the sword] of beauty

أنتِ وَالنَّخل طَفَنَان
طَفَنَان قَضْنِي شَاهِدًا فِي الرَّجَال
وَطَفَنَان مَضْنِي شَاهِرًا لِلْجَمال

43. You and the palm trees are one and the same
You have become their custom

45. They, your two hands

And you have become the stars (Simāk) above their ceiling
They, your sky

أنتِ وَالنَّخل سَبَان
فَذَ صَرَرْت بَيْنَهُنَّ
وَهُنَّ يَدَاك
وَصَرَرْت سَمَاكًا عَلَى سَمَكِهِنَّ
وَهُنَّ سَمَاك

In five consecutive lines (7-11), for example, five words stem from the same three letters of
f-r-‘ in different arrangements: f-r-, r-f-, and ‘-r-f: (farʿān) = two branches, Ln.7, (iftaraʿta) = you

546 Ibid., 13.
547 Ibid., 15.
548 Ibid., 15.
deflowered, Ln.8, (rafaʿta) = you raised, Ln.9, (iʿtarafna) = They [Feminine] acknowledged, Ln.10, (ʿarafna) = They [Feminine] knew, Ln.11. In the same lines, in addition to these five words, we have nawāqīs with nawāmis, and al-nawā twice, with two different meanings. Also, the word nawā, which literally means date-stones, forms the first two syllables in the words nawāqīs and nawāmis. This transfers the word from only having the literal meaning of date-stones into actually being a date-stone in another word, or, say, being a farʿ in another word. And quite interestingly, the first word in the first jinās chain in a poem that is called Mawqif al-jinās advises the self that, together with the palm-trees, they make farʿān, two parts or branches of a larger entity.

In other words, the poem begins by reminding the self that it has roots, very long-standing roots just like the palm-trees have. These roots allow the palm trees to know the divine laws (ʿarafna al-nawāmis) and to acknowledge the secret of the date-stones (iʿtarafna bi-sirri al-nawā). These secrets and divine laws (or traditions) should make the poet well-equipped to create the new beginning by taking the journey into the poem, or to use the poem’s words, by “deflowering the daughters of distance” and then “raising the bells.”

“Raising the bells” indicates the announcement or declaration of something newly born. The very use of the sound of ringing bells as a symbol to announce the new beginning, or the movement to a new identity and narrative, is quite intriguing, precisely because, as explained above, this poem emphasizes the role of sounds differentiation, both in the word-to-world level through jinās and in the line-to-line level through the use of different meter schemes, in creating meaning and movement. Through its extensive use of the sounds of jinās and metrical schemes, the poem was “raising the bells” to announce the birth of the new cultural self-image.
After the first *jinās* chains in the beginning lines, the poem continues to make comparisons between the poet and the palm-trees, employing *jinās* to incarnate the similarities between the two, the poet and the palm-trees, as representing culture and nature respectively. Here the text develops what can be called a meta-*jinās*, a reflection on the rhetorical device and how it can be utilized to delve deep into the roots of language to search for similarities with nature—as if language is nature and culture together. Here is another set of examples (*jinās* underlined):

16. You and the palm trees are two twins

..................................................

This is

20. The one whose *orbits* *Virgo* *entered*

That is

The one to whose *garments* *the Virgin clung*

This is *a possibility* in *autumn*

And that is *a completion* in *spring*

أنتِ والَّلَّذِينَ صَبْنُوانَ

..................................................

هذَا الَّذِي

دَخَلْتُُ إِلَى أَفْلَاكِهِ العَذْرَاءَ

هذَا الَّذِي

حَمَّلْتُ إِلَى أَكْتَفَلِهِ العَذْرَاءَ

هذَا الَّذِي فِي الْخَتِيفِ احْتَمَالٌ

وَذَالِكَ الَّذِي فِي الْرَّبِيعِ احْتَمَالٌ

Words such as desire, virgin, enter, and completion evoke the sexual experience, which is in line with the connotations of the diction in the previous verses, such as in the word “deflower.”

The sexual act, which, interestingly enough, is called *jins* in Arabic, comes to represent the

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549 Ibid., 13.
necessary stage before the new birth of the land. The role of *jinās* in the poem for the birth of the new cultural self-image, for the re-imagining of the Saudi (Arabian) identity, is just as crucial as the role of *jins* is for the birth of the new child. The poem’s fertility myth is based on *jinās*.

After this stage, a child is born. The third time the poem compares the poet (the self) to the palm-trees takes place by saying: “You and the palm-trees are two children.” And then once the child has been born, he is now able to talk about himself in the first person and to make friends (*jinās* underlined):

25. You and the palm trees are two children
One going back and forth between classrooms
The other repeating with the seasons:

I make friends with the streets
The sand and the fields

30. I make friends with the palm trees

The *jinās* between *yatarraddadu* (going back and forth) and *yuraddidu* (repeating) is intriguing. The movement of the first child between seasons is made equivalent to repeating a song, which is another example of how the poem sees movement and sounds as one and the same. I

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explained above that the *jinās* and the different metrical schemes are the essential parts that make the poem move from one meaning to another, from one theme to another, and from one part/section to another. I also interpreted the “raising of the bells” (line 9) as the announcement of the new birth, that is, new life. And in the latest example above, the movement between seasons is equal to repeating a song, a movement that gives the child his first identity by which he was able to use the first-person pronoun (I) for the first time in the poem. In all these cases, the identity of the poem is pronounced through the sounds, just as the poet becomes aware of his identity by pronouncing the sounds of his name.

The two dimensions of sound/meaning, one formed by *jinās* and one by the various metrical patterns, reinforce one another to prepare the poem as a whole for its own movement from the first section, where the other is introducing the self to “the ruined-abodes” of its forgotten self-definitions and identities, into the second section where the self is already identified with the palm tree and is capable of talking about itself in the first-person, the pronoun that the poet/poem uses to “travel to the meaning.” Now that the self and the palm-trees are *siyyān* (one and the same), this unification and identification find its formal expression in one unified metrical scheme/field throughout Section II of the poem (the second section contains only the metrical foot *mutafāʿ īlun*) and also in a textual field with only a slight presence of the *jinās* device (only seven *jinās* instances in Section II).

The different letter-sounds within two similar words indicate a movement from one meaning to another, which is the essence of what *jinās* actually is. This level of letter-sounds can be called the internal musical movement, which is reinforced by the external musical movement represented in casting the lines of Section I in a variety of metrical patterns. Both musical movements coalesce to reaffirm and intensify the role of the sound, language, culture, and the voice of the people of the place to create a new-imagining of their identity.
Furthermore, both movements are based on a change that goes back to the root. Jinās is a root-play device, and the metrical feet of the sixteen meters of the Arabic metrical system, as explained above, all are traditionally represented by using the generic root of the letters fāʾ, ʿayn, and lām (f-ʿ-l). The significance of this root-based diversity is closely linked to the main function of the poem, which is to revive the forgotten identity and re-imagine a new one by, first and foremost, reminding the imagined community of its pre-oil cultural heritage, or, say, its cultural roots. The poem’s argument would then be that the cultural roots need to be revisited and re-understood as a rich source of change and movement and as capable of creating a multiplicity of meanings and possibilities.

**The Poem of jīm, nūn, sīn**

I choose to call the poetic event created by Mawqif al- jinās “the Poem of jīm, nūn, sīn,” using the three letters that form the root of the five basic elements of the poem in their disconnected (mysterious) form. These five basic elements can be summed up in the following:

1. **Jinās**, which denotes not only the rhetorical device, but also the physical incarnation on the paper, before the reader’s eyes, of the identification between the poet and the palm-tree.

2. The grand metaphor of the poem, which speaks of an identification (mujānasa) between the poet and the palm-trees. Here man is identified with and incarnated in the word, and culture and nature are one and the same. This is essential for the text to usher in a new imagining of the identity in which the modern poet is identified with the classical poetry, Prophethood, and the Šūfī experience. By beginning the poem with the incarnation of the poet in the letters mīm (m), ḥāʾ (ḥ), mīm (m), and dāl (d), al-Thubaytī takes the modern Arabic poem into a mythic/cosmic level, where the incarnation of man in the word is quite similar to the
incarnation of Christ in the word of God, the Islamic creation of the Ummah in the word 
Igraʾ of the first Qurʾānic revelation, and the Sūfī (and Hellenistic) concept of ḥulūl\textsuperscript{551} whereby the triangle of God, word, and the cosmos are incarnated in language.

3. The overarching message of the poem, which argues for an identity of Arabia based on a harmonization (tajānus) between its different aspects, or to use the title of al-Thubaytī’s landmark third dīwān: its different terrains (taḍārīs).

4. The ultimate effect cultivated in the poem at large by the performance of all previous functions. This effect is essentially creating a species (jins) of the new imagined community and establishing a nationality (jinsiyya), a certain Saudi Arab-ness, of the place.

5. The method through which the re-imagining of the Saudi (Arabian) identity can be achieved. It can be said that the birth of the new imagining, the new species and nationality, is perceived to be a possibility, “iḥtimāl” as the poem reads, only after forming an intimate relationship with language and its tradition. This intimate relationship is metaphorically represented in the poem by the sexual experience (jins), where the poet is “deflowering the daughters of distance” and also “deflowering the virgin starts.” Just as the intimate relationship and sexual experience (jins) is necessary for the birth of a human being, having an intimate relationship with tradition is essential for the birth of the new imagining of the community.

al-Thubaytī’s mawqīf al-jinās is a grand metapoetic metaphor par excellence; a heteroglossic yet organically cohesive, multi-voiced, multi-metered, and multi-layered poem that

identifies the poet with the Arab autochthony to culminate a lifelong poetic project of re-imagining the Saudi Arabian identity and rewriting the narrative of the place.
Conclusion

The genesis of this study lies in the mysterious disconnected letters in the opening scene of Muḥammad al-Thubayṭī’s *Mawqif al-rimāl... Mawqif al-jinās*, his final tour-de-force performance of the identification between modern Arabia and Arab cultural autochthony. Understanding these disconnected letters metaphorically, the trajectory this dissertation took was an attempt to connect the dots, to “go straight to the meaning” and explore the continuity of the poet’s self-image versus authority from the classical ode of Arabia until its modernist representation in a heteroglossic poem that challenges claims of disconnection between modernity and tradition.

In chapter 1, I explored the reception and counter-reception of al-Mutanabbī, the poet who came to epitomize the poet-versus-authority question. Al-Mutanabbī’s poetic self has been seen, by admirers and detractors alike, as a self-image of Arabic culture, the analysis of whose project could provide insights on this culture’s past, present, and future. He appeared as a displacement of the Divine text as the point of competition, and also a linguistic and psychological “displacement” of modern poets’ fears of losing poetic identity.

To better understand this poetic self-image, achieved through a verbal contest between the poet and authority, I explored in chapter 2 the moment of the actual encounter between the poet and the Prophet, the latter being the greatest challenge to the poet’s *raison d’être*. As the Prophet’s Divine prosaic text moved the game to a newly discovered turf, the chapter examined two of the earliest and most significant responses to the prophetic authority in the tradition of the Arabic *qaṣīda*. While Kaʿb b. Zuhayr’s “Poem of Incorporation” exhibits an incorporation of the Prophet’s prosaic text into the tradition of the classical ode and vice versa, Tamīm b. Muqbil’s “Poem of
Rejection” establishes a rejection of a reconciliation between the Prophet’s and the poet’s linguistic miracles.

In modern Arabic poetry, Darwīsh’s Qāfiya min ajl al-Muʿallaqāt came to modernize and universalize Ibn Muqbil’s poem by placing it within an archetypal conflict between two different forms of literary production: poetry and prose. Perceiving poetry as a “horse of song” that the Arabs have left behind, Darwīsh’s Qāfiya exhibits the poem of double rejection. It frames poetry as an anti-text to the Prophet’s new prosaic system of writing, and in claiming to resuscitate the Muʿallaqāt, Darwīsh is also rejecting the modernist rejection of the classical tradition and re-claiming it as his heritage. In rejecting both Prophets, the Prophet of tradition and the Prophet of modernism, he was searching for a new prophet whose prophethood is not based on dichotomies like poetry and prose, or tradition and modernity. This new form of prophethood was achieved in al-Thubaytī’s Mawqif al-jinās.

Operating in the cultural/spiritual sphere, Mawqif al-jinās encapsulates and culminates a poetic project of re-imagining the cultural self-image of Arabia by achieving the twofold objective of preserving its autochthonous culture and adding a modernist meaning to it. It constitutes a metapoetic affirmation of the self that aims to salvage the autochthonous culture of the place in the face of a reductionist narrative that threatens to strip the self of its tradition and relegate it to the material, superficial world that was imposed on it. This affirmation takes shape, most importantly, in the aesthetic incarnation of the identification (mujānasa) between the poet and the palm-trees through the rhetorical device of jinās, which also speaks of a harmonious hosting of multiple voices from tradition and modernity.
In its dealing with the anxiety posed by the influence of its main two (inter)textual worlds, namely the Arab poet’s poetic ode vis-à-vis the Arab prophet’s prosaic Qur’ān, *Mawqif al-jinās* creates a poetic persona of a mythologized and secularized prophet, thus offering a cultural space that diffuses the assumed dichotomy between them. This treatment of the challenge posed at the modern poet by the secular and divine traditions was read against two moments: the moment of al-Mutanabbī, whose poetic persona displaces both the divine and secular texts, and the moment of the first confrontation between the poetic text and the divine prosaic text of the Prophet as represented in Maḥmūd Darwīsh’s *Qāfiya*.

In all three moments: al-Mutanabbī’s displacement, Darwīsh’s rejection, and al-Thubaytī’s harmonization, poets assume a self-image that safeguards their poetic capital. Through negotiating the demands and challenges of the time-honored poetic tradition on the one hand, and the contemporary political and cultural authorities on the other, poets forged their distinct identities as a significant part of the Arab cultural self-image.
This appendix includes only two complete poems: Maḥmūd Darwīsh’s Qāfiya min afī al-Mu’allaqāt and Muḥammad al-Thubayṭī’s Mawqif al-rimāl... Mawqif al-jinās. The versions included here are copies from the poetry collections where the two poems were published: Maḥmūd Darwīsh. al-A’māl al-jadīda al-kāmila. pp. 381-384; Muḥammad al-Thubayṭī. al-A’māl al-kāmila. pp. 11-30. While I added the line numbers, the format and page numbers of the original texts are retained. All other Arabic verses can be found right after their respective English translations.
سؤال الآخرين ولا جواب له. أنا لغتي آنا، وآنًا معلقةٌ معلقنتان... عشرًا، هذه لغتي آنا لغتي. أنا ما قالت الكلمات:

كنِ جسدًا، فكنِ لبهرها جسدًا. أنا ما قلتكُ الكلمات: كوني ملتقي جسدي مع الأبدية الصحراً. كوني كي أكون كما أقول! لا أرض فوق الأرض تحملني، فيحملني كلامي طائرًا متفرغًا مني، وبيني عش رحلته氨امي في خطامي، في حطام العالم السحري من حولي، على ريح وقفت. وطال بليالي الطويلُ... هذه لغتي قلائد من يوم حُوم حول أعناقيم الأحيان: هاجروا أخذوا المكان وهاجروا أخذوا الزمان وهاجروا أخذوا روايحهم على الفخار والكلام الشحيح، وهاجروا أخذوا الكلام وهاجروا القلب القتيلُ
لمَ إذا تركت الخصان وحيدًا

معهم. أيُّ عَجَب الصدى، هذا الصدى،
هذا السراب الأبيض الصوتي لا اسم تملاً
المجهول بِعَظَمته، ومِيلاهُ الرحيل أَلوهَة؟
تَضَغَّع السماء عَلَى نافذة فَأنظر: لا
أَرى أحدٌ سواي...
وجدت نفسى عند خارجها
كما كانت معي، ورؤاى
لا تنأى عن الصحراء،
من ريح ومن رملٍ عُطْلَى
وعالمي جَنَتِي وما مَلَكتُ بهالي
أَنا المسافر والسبيل
يَطلِ عَلَى آلهةٍ عَلَى وَذَهْبٍ، ولا نُطِيل
حديثنا عنما سأبُثى. لا غَدٌ في
هذا الصحراء إلَّا ما رأينَا أَمس،
فلأرفج مَعْلُقتي ليَنكسُر الزمان الدائريٌ
وِلْوَلَّ الوقت الجميلٌ!
ما أَكَثَر الماضي يجيء غداً
تركت لنفسها نفسى التي امتلأت بِحاضرها
وأفرغني الرحيلٌ
من المعابد. للسماء شعوبها وحوّبها
أما أنا، فليُغزل زوجتي، وليّ النخيل معلقات في كتاب الرمل. ما أرى
للمرء ملكة العبار وتاجه. فلتنتصر لعنت على الدُّهر العُدُو، على شلالاتي;
علي، على أبي، وعلى زوال لا يزول
هذى لغتي ومغجّزتي. عصا سخري.
حدائقُ بابلي ومستلقي، وهوتي الأولى،
ومعديني الصقلي
ومقدّس العربي في الصحراء،
يعبد ما يسبر
من القوافي كالنجوم على غباءً،
وعبد ما يقول
لا بُدّ من نفر إذا،
لا بُدّ من نفر إلهي لينصر الركُّسُ...
موقع الرمال موقف الجناس

(1)

ضَعْتُكَ،
ثَمَّ أُوقَتْتِي فِي الرَّمَالَ
وَدَخَانِي:
بِجِيبِ وَخَاءٍ وَبِمِيمٍ وَدَانَ
وَاسْتَوَى سَاطِعاً فِي يَقِينِي،
وَقَالَ:
أَنْتُ وَالْنَّخْلُ قَرْعَانٌ
أَنْتُ افْتَرَغْتَ بَنَاتَ النَّوْى
وَرَفَغْتَ النُّواقيسَ
ديوان موقف الزمان

هُن اعترفْن بِبيِّن الدَّوِي
وعرَفْن النَّواميس
فَاكِهَة الفُقراء
وفَاكِهَة السَّعراء

تَسافَقَتْما بِالخليطين:
خَمْرا بْرِينَا وسبخرا خلال

١٠ ١٥
أنت والنخل صنانِ
هذا الذي تدعيه التباشِين
ذلك الذي تستهله البُساتين
هذا الذي
دخلت إلى أفلاكي العذراَاء
ذلك الذي
دخلت إلى أفلاكي العذراَاء
هذا الذي في الخريف احتمال
وذلك الذي في الربيع اكتمال

أنت والنخل طلالانِ
واحد يتردد بين الفصول
وكان يتردد بين الفصول:
دیوان موفق الرمال

أضایق الشوارع
والرمل والمرارع
أضایق الحبیل
أضایق المرينة
والبحر والسفينة
والشاطئ الجميل
أضایق البلابل
والمنزل المقابل
والعرف والهدي
أضایق الحجارة
والساحة المشتركة
والموسم الطويل
أنت والنتخل طفلاً
طفل قصى شاهداً في الرجال
وطفلاً مصى شاهراً للجمال

أنت والنتخل سبّان
قد صبرت ديدنهن
وعين يدّاك
ورصت سماكًا علّى سمكهن
وعين سماءك
وعين شهدان أثول الثرى
وأت رأيت بزوع الهلال
ديوان موقف الزنال

تَسْرِي الدَّمَاء مِن العَذُوَقِ
إِلَى العُرُوقِ
فَقَنْتَكْيَمُ لَغْيَةُ الْعُرُوقِ:

• أيُّ بَحْرٍ تُجِيزُ
• أيُّ جَنَّٰرٍ تُرِيدُ

سَيْدِي لَنْ يُعْدُ سَيْدِي
وَيْدِي لَنْ يُعْدُ يَدِي

16
قال:
أنت بعيد كأنك ماء السماء
فلت:
إني قريب كأنني قطر الندى
ألمدى والمدائن
قفر وقفر
والجني والجنيائين
صبر وصبر
وعروس السفائين
ليل وبحر
ويداد الحزائين
شطر وسطر
قَالَ:
يا أَيُّهَا النَّخْلُ
يُغَتَّبِكَ الشَّجْرُ الْهَزِيلُ
وَيَذْمُكَ الْوَرْنِدُ الدَّلِيلُ
وَتَظْلُّ تَسْمَوُ في فَضَاءِ اللّهِ
ذَا طَلْعٍ خَرَافِيٍّ
وَذَا صَبْرٍ جَميِلٌ
قُلْ:
يا أَيُّهَا النَّخلُ
هَلْ تَزْيِي رَمَاثَكَ
أَمْ مَكَانَكَ
أَمْ قَوَادًا بَعْدَ مَاءِ الرَّقَابِينَ عَصَاكَ
جَيْنَ اسْتَبْدِلَ بِكَ الْهَوَىٌ
فَشَقَّتْ بَيْنَ الْقَربَيْنِ عَصَاكَِ
وَكَتَبَتْ نَافِرَةً الْحُروُفِ بِبَطْنَ مِكَّةٌَ
وَالْأَهْلَةُ حَولَ وَجَهَكَ مُسْتَهَلَةٌٌ
وَالْقَصَائِدُ فِي يَدِكَ مِصَائِدُ
وَالْلَّيْلُ بَخْرٌ لِلْهُواجِسِ وَالْتَهَارُ
فَصَيْدَةٌ لَا نَتَجِي إِلَّا لِبَارِيَهَاٌ
وَبَارِي النَّاَي
ديوان محمد الزمان

يا طاعتنا في النَّاي
إِسْلَمٌ ،
إِذَا عَرَّتْ خَطاكَ
وَإِسْلَمٌ ،
إِذَا عَرَّتْ عَيونُ الكاتِبينَ عَلَى خَطاكَ
وَمَا خَطاكَ ؟
أُنِّي أَحَدَّقُ فِي العَمَّاليَةِ كَي آَرَاكَ
فَلا آَرَاكَ
إِلَّا شَهيْماً مِنَ آَرَاكَ.
 موقف الرمال موقف الجناس

(2)

أمضى إلى المعرق
وأقتص الرقيق في الحريك
فأزرعي
وأعل
ماء
الماء

أمر ما بين المسالك والمقالك
حيث لا يَنَم يَتَّهِم شَتَات أشرعتي
ولا أفق يَضْمَ تَمُّ نُهْر أُجِيحتي

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بيوان موقف الزمان

ولا شجر

يُلوذ

به

خَمَامِي
أشفي إلى المعنى
وبين أصابعي تتعانق الطرقات
والآواقات، ينفض السراب عن السراب
ويرتدي
ظللي
أتاني
أقطرَ أَبْكَارَ النُّجُومِ
وَأَسْتَرَدَّ مِنْ الْهُمْوِ
وَأَتْنَى بِالْخَوْفِ جَيْنَ يُمْرُ مِنْ
خَدَّر
الْوَرِيد
إِلَى
الْعَظَامِ
وأجوب بِيدَاء اللَّجَّى
حتى تَباكرني صِباَحاتُ النَّجَا
أرقاً
وظامي

إنني رأيت.. ألم ترأ؟

عيوناي خانَهَما الكَرى
وشهيل ألقى في مِيْين السُّمِس
مُهَجَّته وولى، والثَّريّا خل في
 أفلاَكِهَا

بدر
شَأَمي
لياء بذرها
وهدى البصرة
ليا فخرها
وهوى السريرة
ليا مُهرها
وجمي الغسيرة
ليا شعرها
ومذي الضيفرة
في ساحة العُدْرَاتِ
ما بين الخوارج والبُوارِجِ
ضُعْ يِبِي
ضُرْبِي
وأَقْلَقِي
مُقَامِي

فَمَضَبَتْ لِلَّمَغْنِي
أخذُ في أسَاري الخَيْبَةِ كَي أَسْمِيَهَا
فَضَافَتْ
عَنْ
سَجَائِيَّةِ
الآسَامِيِّ

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ديوان موقف الزمان

ألقيتُها وطني
وبهجة صوتيها شجني
ومجد حضورها الصافي مداي
ورفعها
الصافي
مداي
وضعزك في عين السما
قحبث شرارات الطمأ
وانتشٌ
عن
مظهٌ
عمامي

للبائيين على الطوى
والناشرين لما انتروى
والناظرين
إلى
الأمام
للمحل للكتبان لليشخ الشمالي

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170
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ليقف في خضرة الرُبَّي
للشمس
للجبيل
الحجْاجِي
وللبهْخر
النهائي

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