

Pleasant Symmetry

Fiction in Classical Arabic Literature

ARKADY NEDEL

All things tend toward their ultimate perfection.

– Dionysius

Any literature begins with a set of limitations. They can be genre, thematic, poetic or others and they usually play a double role: *a*) as restrictions laid upon the author, especially if the latter must follow an established canon, as was always the case in classical ages (both Western or Eastern), and *b*) as a generative mechanism compelling the author to invest maximum energy and gather all the forces of his or her imagination in order to show emotional diversity, the complexity of human feelings and the strength of passions, as passed through Ockham's razor of the literary rules. Since Arabic classical poetry is rich in various genres (*hijā'*, *rithā'*, *mardīyāt*, *wacf*, *zuhdiyyat*,¹ etc.), each of them demands special skills and a readiness to obey its particular restrictions. This obedience, however, is not blind. For example, the author working in *hijā'*, which distantly reminds one of the European epigram, though sometimes with a more discourteous lexicon, feels free in sending curses to his poetic object, whereas he still takes great care to show his excellent grasp of the genre.

Rithā' is a geometrical construction with the inner symmetry combining the abstract and the concrete in one completed figure. It has two parts: general meditation on fate, death, the illusion of earthly existence, etc. and the panegyric addressed immediately to the dead. Since the idealized description of the latter is as a kind of poetic funeral or farewell to a good man – the man of *murūwwa*² – whose deeds will never fall into oblivion, the contemplative part of *rithā'* was never of lesser value. It could well be the subject of a separate study: whether philosophical reflections in *rithā'* gave birth to a later speculative complexity which took on many shapes in subsequent Islamic thought.

Symmetry is felt on all scales, in the literary genres as well as in living consciousness. If there are 'sad genres,' there are also 'joyful ones,' like *mardīyāt* (images of the hunt)³ performed by such authors as al-Buḥturī (821-897) and al-Mutanabbī (cf. below). *lardīyāt* was a court genre *par excellence*, it didn't actually differ from its European counterpart. In the traditional *ghazal* (Rumi, Hafiz, Fuzulī, to mention just a few), devoted to feelings of love, an idealized figure of the beloved has

much in common with the *rithā'* idealization of the dead. Darling is not a real woman, but an icon; she can be prim or easy-going, distant or close, reserved or responsive but she always resides in the poet's imagination. Paradoxically or not, the Arabic poet loves not what he sees but what he doesn't, and forgetting the women around him, he creates his own whom he will never chance to meet in real life. This though is what he actually needs. Poetic love doesn't need to be realized just as the adoration for the dead man doesn't need to be based on his real qualities. In both cases we deal only with the ritual acts which exteriorize the human feelings to the extent they are no longer personal but belong to persona.

To construct this symmetrical world and keep it secure was a primary task, not only poetic but religious. Symmetry, among other things, is completeness; whatever the natural and social conditions, changing in time for better or for worse, a poetically flawless figure seems to be the only way to survive in the constant flow of things. It can't be forgotten since a poet as a human being with limited memory finds it the most effective way to save and transfer what he ought to. A poetic figure, squeezed in symmetry, functions as a phenomenal event, the niche of memory. Consciousness of death and the comprehension of one's finitude made classical Arabic poets seek a solution; with minimal instruments in their possession they opted to rely on the phenomenal and aesthetic, i.e. the timeless, not on the physical and illusory. In this sense, ritual in Arabic literature differs, for instance, from the Vedic ritualism by the way that they have constructed their universe. If the Vedic ritual excludes time as life factor and the *ṛṣi* is trained to recite the same "text" with the mathematically gauged rhythm, the *shā'ir*, on the contrary, includes time in his worldview. What he needs to do is to create the eternal within the perishable, unlike the *ṛṣi* who creates the perishable out of the eternal.

A genuine classical poet, a literary genius, as we call him or her when such a work is completed, is often a product of this dichotomy which pushes the poet to invent something new within the untouchable old. Doing so, the author himself doesn't really make "literary history," as one might interpret this; he neither breaks it down nor revolutionizes it when his oeuvre stays individually with neither acknowledgement nor even understanding expressed either by the public or by the court where the necessity of the latter was particularly needed in medieval times when the social and financial position of the author was the direct consequence of the court's attention to his work. One can think, for example, of the Heian period (平安時代, 794 - 1185 A.D.) in Japan, of the late Pallavas in Tamilnad or of the period of the early caliphs when the poet played the role of a spiritual servant, etc. (for example, as when the emir of Aleppo Sayf al-Dawla welcomed the philosopher peripatetic Abū Naṣr Fārābī (872-950/51) and the poet Abū aṭ-Ṭayyib al-Mutanabbī (915-965) who also praised his military campaigns.

In Arabia the classical author had another role: to use his talent within the settled limitations and yet function as the keeper of ritual as expressed in words.⁴ This ritual doesn't mean a return to the archaic past, a repetition of "the same" in order to keep

the world in *status quo* (as Vedic *ṛṣis* or Altaic shamans do), but the poetic visualization of a common sensibility. Like in the European Middle Ages, the Arabic author had no copyright because he expressed not his own thoughts and sensations but the common ones; he saw his goal as not to say something new by positioning himself as an original and creative mind but to say as clearly and elegantly as possible what everyone might think and feel. Maximum innovation can be done in form (*lafẓ*) but not in sense (*ma'nā*)⁵; the latter remains untouched as the object of mental ritual.⁶ From this point of view, early Arabic literature doesn't know authorship but *inter-authorship* which, however, doesn't mean the total absence of individuality but rather a hierarchy of individual voices each expressing poetic ideality. Every author was (and, supposedly, felt himself) a contributor to the common treasure of ideas, he belonged to a sort of spiritual tribe charged with the task of keeping and transferring the fragile feeling of the perfect. The well-known phrase of the pre-Islamic poet 'Antar ('Antarah ibn Shaddād, 525-628) about what one poet bequeaths to another betrays the spirit of poetic heritage: one who comes later is supposed to improve that with which he has been left.

Three elements compose this perfectness: *lafẓ*, *ma'nā*, and *beit*. Since medieval Arabic poetry has a strong preference for clear-cut, semantically complete rhythmic segments, every *beit* (بيت) stands as a micro-universe conveying an image, i.e. a message. Structurally speaking, any hemistich of *beit* conveys one *ma'nā* which can be developed in the second hemistich.⁷ *Beit* is to the Arab consciousness what *haiku* (俳句) is to the Japanese one,⁸ it makes both the mind see and time go. This attitude to *beit* comes from the pre-Islamic epoch when the completed rhythmic segments had magic meaning. Many poets were the masters of this universe hence, perhaps, the sense of their own exclusivity and self-righteousness. Poets use *beit* in order to create the most beautiful images that they can, like al-Mutanabbī, who likes to play with the contrasts and symmetry when one hemistich of the *beit*, containing 2, 3 or 4 feet (between 16 to 32 syllables), is visually opposed to the second:

izā anta akramta-l-karīma malaktahu
*wa in anta akramta-l-la'ima tamarradā*⁹

Such antinomies are countless but each of them conveys a particular idea then imprinted on the common mind. Not only for the sake of aesthetic reason, but also for a social one, contrast as a poetic tool worked its way out to the summit of Arabic poetry. It had, as we said, a magical dimension: if the world is always balancing between the good and the evil, the victory of one or the other depends on a man's thoughts and deeds. On his words as well; this is why locutions should be as clear and illustrative as possible, word as sharp as a sword.

Besides, comparison (*tashbih*) and metaphor (*isti'āra*) play a most important role in classical Arabic literature since they present a shortcut to the sense to be conveyed. The poetic space of *beit* is so limited that any means helping to economize it, including ones such as *tajnīs*,¹⁰ are of imperishable value. Thus it seems natural when an Arabic poet uses unheard comparisons: the beloved's hair as a bunch of

grapes, and striking metaphors – the times of joyfulness go away like the lover with the stolen kiss – since his ultimate goal is to keep the world in its ritualistic state, to make distant things meet in a poetically built symmetry.

Let me now propose a hypothesis: the symmetrical (or dual) structure of the *beit*, especially in Bedouin poetry, is indeed a verbal form of the proto-Semitic 'symmetrical' consciousness manifested, in particular, in the worship of ancestral spirits, as in the Upper and Lower Egyptian kingdoms. As an example one can take the Dual Shrines (*iterty*) in Ancient Egypt where the royal ancestors were kept; these objects were built, as H. Frankfort says, of "light and ubiquitous materials, they could be easily taken down and rebuilt wherever they were required."¹¹ If the *beit* is such a verbal shrine, which is rebuilding by the poet at any necessary moment, then it transmits to us the most profound mental construction of the Semitic world. Moreover, if the *beit* is a far but direct heir of the ancestral practice of worshiping, one can have no doubts concerning its ritualistic nature, even unseen under the wrap of poetic images.

It would be certainly naive to think that even such basic feelings as love, hate, jealousy, fear of death or quest for happiness have not changed through different times and, being all-human, are similar (similarly displayed) in world literature. Romantic love in Novalis' *Heinrich von Ofterdingen* (1800) differs significantly from, say, love in Murasaki Shikibu's (紫式部) *The Tale of Genji* (XI century) or from Sei Shōnagon's (清少納言) *Pillow Book* not by the standards of the lovers' behavior or by verisimilitude in description or by the fact that Novalis writes as a man and Lady Murasaki as a woman, but first and foremost by the content of the concept itself. For Novalis, as for the German romantics as a whole, love is an enviable disease which often ends in death. To love means to die in the abyss of this feeling never reaching its bottom. Endless love is a secular version of the scholastic concept of infinity based both on the Aristotelian metaphysics and on the Hebrew idea of God. In medieval Japan, however, described at best in Lady Murasaki's novel, love is a message sent by a lover to his or her object. Romantic sufferings are unknown to the medieval Japanese lovers not due to the superficiality of their feelings nor to the lack of true passions, but due to their having no idea of such emotional gravity as crushes everyone who gets grasped by its force. Love as disease is a European ritual supporting the whole body of such literature at least from the Romantic period onwards. In the Heian period love conveys the idea of illusion; it can be of course true and passionate but remains as much a will-o'-the-wisp as one's worldly existence. Japan thus presents another kind of ritual in which any ontology is whittled away and the goal to attain supremacy over the world and death loving someone is just irrelevant. German, Japanese or Arabic, as we shall see further, this ritual governs the author's consciousness of the classical age formatting the latter within the dichotomy between canonical restrictions and imaginary freedom.

In classical Arabic poetry, which received its start in the works of al-Mutanabbī, then pushed to its summit by Abū al-Ma'arrī (973-1058), Ibn Hajjaj (941-1001), and Abu Firās al-Ḥamdānī (932-968) among other names, love and affections had much in common

with Troubadour poetry which created a series of poetic icons (or clichés) used by Troubadours as play cards in their poems. When al-Ma‘arrī depicts a beautiful Bedouin lady whose gaze makes every man tremble, he creates a narrative icon situated exclusively in the narrator’s imagination:

Oh, if thou, the cloud, love Zainab, cry then and we will do <...> In my most hidden dreams I give you countless kisses without being afraid of the consequences of what has never been.¹²

Like *la Dame* in the Troubadour’s poetry or love in Bernart de Ventadour’s poems, Zainab is not actually a living being, a “corporeal woman” but an ideal manifesting an iconic love of the poet for his own creature. Indeed, it was more than just the idealization of a life character whose presence could daunt a sensitive soul. When al-Ma‘arrī, or anyone else of his caliber, creates such an icon, he performs a ritual helping him to protect the object of adoration, and his own feelings, from ineluctable death. To love the icon is safer than loving a living woman whose beauty will one day vanish. She avidly protects her cheeks from kisses, but the earth will have them in its possession anyway.¹³

Often love poems in Arabic classics neighbor funeral elegy (*rithā’*) in tone and in poetic feature. However, funeral elegies, like the one that al-Ma‘arrī composed in memoriam of his mother, turn out to be more individualistic since they portray the particular event and must display the sorrow caused by it.

My mother went ahead of me to the grave. It is horrendous that she had gone away before me. What is left to me is to mourn her disappearance with the words gashing from my mouth <...> She had gone when I reached the mature age, but it still seems to me that I am a newborn took away from the breast.¹⁴

Individualism in *rithā’* is almost always embedded in the folkloric frame, and the form of narration presents, in fact, a network of traditional images from Ancient Arabia and Bedouin life that can be traced back to pre-Islamic times (*al-jāhilīya*). This network is so dense that almost every poetic figure in funeral elegy refers to and thus actualizes its ancient proto-type.¹⁵ So, inscribing the death of his mother into a larger narrative and telling us the story about the dove mourning her brother, al-Ma‘arrī alludes to the pre-Islamic poetess al-Ḥansa’ (d. around 644); when the poet speaks of the lion with eyes like two flames sheltering in two rocks, in two cups of wine, al-Ma‘arrī once again returns to *al-jāhilīya*. His spiritual teacher al-Mutanabbī, after falling in disgrace in Sayf al-Dawla, often in his dreams returns to the lost paradise of Bedouin culture when everything was righteous.

If poetry is a remedy from time, the poet (*shā‘ir*) is a φαρμακός, a medium and a carrier of the sacred knowledge; he is a keeper of ritualistic time. The poetic network of images is mediated through his very position, and even the most wealthy and powerful caliphs need his service in order to enter eternity. Such was the conviction of al-Mutanabbī who shared many Bedouin beliefs concerning the poetic gift. “Al-Mutanabbī” is a pen-name, it is the active participle of the verb *tanabbā* (or *tanabba’* a

- “to tell the future, to act as a prophet”), the fifth form derived from the noun *nabīy* (from Aramaic *nbīyā*, Hebrew *nābī’*) meaning “prophet;” the name may also signify “tall man” (from the verb *nabā* - “to be tall, rise up”).

Al-Mutanabbī was a complex figure. His early years passed in the Bedouin milieu of Yemen the influence of which in the form of poetic nostalgia is felt almost everywhere in his poems. His favorite poets were Abū Tammām and al-Buḥturī,¹⁶ both belonging to the South Arabian tribe of *ṭayy* (طيء);¹⁷ when al-Mutanabbī was killed he had in his bag the *dīwāns* of these two poets with his marginal notes. He was ambitious and arrogant, he had political views that once cost him years in prison and nearly his life;¹⁸ a traveler and a beggar, a wealthy man and an escapist.

Al-Mutanabbī’s early poetry is far from being in any variety of styles. The most illustrative example is, perhaps, a *rithā’* written on the death of al-Ḥusayn ibn Ishāq al-Tanūkhī that presents a coherent structure and sets up the canon for this genre developed in the Arabic funeral elegy during the Xth century. It starts with a general meditation on the illusory values of human existence:

In truth, I know as any wise man that life I protect so cautiously is nothing but false seduction. I see how every man cherish the hope wandering indeed toward nothingness¹⁹.

It may be interesting to note that similarly gloomy motives fill up a woman’s diary in medieval Japan known under her pen-name Michitsuna no Haha (右大将道綱母). Al-Mutanabbī’s contemporary, whose lonely reflections on the illusion of all human matters echo the Arabic poet. She, however, belonged to the high class of Japanese society and had no need to seek powerful protectors but the feeling of loneliness and the vanity of everything hovers over every line of the diary. Her writing is also a kind of funeral elegy on the world around her since it has no recourse to become true and real, truth and reality are to be imagined. The one she loves is away and waiting is the *modus vivendi* of her life. So years pass, and only her own imagination, helping to realize the veritable nature of existence, its ineffable but omnipresent nothingness, brings her some emotional release.

Something ended with the death of al-Tanūkhī and the author of *rithā’* makes us feel it:

Until you were buried in the grave I didn’t realize that stars can vanish from the sky falling upon earth.²⁰

The deceased was a brave man and his earthly existence gives an example of such proud behavior as every man should seek. Whatever the enemies’ effrontery, whatever the wealthy men’s thoughts, the brave warrior enters eternal peace. The *beīt* says:

what they feel in their palaces will be never better than what he does in the grave; he is protected by the angels Munkar and Nakir.²¹

Knowing the character of the poet, it seems that he takes advantage of the tragic event to disparage the rulers showing them to be as dwarfs before the giant. This

rithā' is also a political message sent to those whom al-Mutanabbī considers inept at administration. The dissociated Arabic empire is governed by yesterday's slaves, people of low origin, by the non-Arabs who have neither the capacity nor the right to occupy their positions. The poet dreams of an ideal governor, a caliph, capable to reunite the Arabs into a powerful State based on the spirituality of Islam.

The greatness of the peoples lies in their governors. The Arabs will not prosper until they are ruled by the strangers who have neither education, nor nobility or conscience.²²

Not just politically, but existentially as well the poet despises his contemporaries for their cowardliness, persnickety conduct, and lack of righteousness. Save for few exceptions, the contemporaries provoke in al-Mutanabbī nothing but pity:

Having huge bodies, the people of our time are skin-deep; although I live among them, I am not of their type. Well, the gold is obtained from the cinders.²³

Let's stress this point: the ideal Islamic state for the poet doesn't mean the caliphate, at least as he saw it in those days. According to his Qarmaṭian views, the caliphs violated the innate Arabic sense of social justice by their thirst for power, by their wish for wealth, etc. He dreams of a ruler as ascetic, as prophet and as *shā'ir* demanding no personal profit, governing the present looking at the perpetual. A ruler who supports the balance between the natural and the social, a ruler of the ritual.

The poet once found such a ruler in the emir of Aleppo Sayf al-Dawla with whom Al-Mutanabbī spent nine fruitful years (948-956) of his life resulting in the *Sayfiyat*. Although the relationships between the emir and the poet were not always cloudless, due to the court constant intrigues, his respect, if not adoration for the ruler, seemed to be sincere. He himself vehemently denied any flatter or hypocrisy in his panegyrics pointing to the fact that such an outstanding emir deserves only his verses.

Even the blind man sees my talents as a poet
And even the deaf will hear my poems.²⁴

His life-long nostalgia for the lost paradise, for *'umrān badawī*,²⁵ as ibn Khaldūn will put it later, may explain some of al-Mutanabbī's poetic choices in composing *urjūza*, poems in the *rajaz* meter, the most archaic and basic of Arabic poetry which stemmed from rhymed prose (*saḡ'*).²⁶ In his panegyric to Abū 'Alī al-Aurājī, written in *kāmil* meter, the poet widely uses these 'obsolete' forms²⁷ in order to amend the contemporary reality and its state of consciousness. He was also a master of *ṭardīyāt* known in Arabic literature since the pre-Islamic epoch where poets, working with the *madḥa* theme (the hero meets the lion), described (*wacf*)²⁸ the animal without ever seeing him.

Poetic consciousness is often, if not always, turned to the past. The Baghdadi author Muḥammad ash-Sharīf ar-Raḡī (970-1016) who, after the death of his father, became *naqīb al-ashrāf* (chief of the *'Aliyads*) was a devoted shī'ite with a perfect grasp of *rithā'* in which he expresses his deepest despair in the contemporary world:

We are like splinters bouncing here and there in the torrential flow
Bringing its waters between the hills and sandy desert.²⁹

The past is seen through an idealizing gaze owing to which it becomes more real than the present. The Islamic author feels the necessity and duty to rebuild the past at any suitable moment and with any *beit* so to keep it alive and, in so doing, opposing themselves to the reality around them. The past is fiction and the ultimate reality at once. When al-Raḡī's mother passed away, he expressed his disdain for his weakness as a human, selfish being. Death, which took his mother, will never compel her son to live without her in the present, his mother will never leave him because she is kept in poetic form. The only thing capable of giving a sense (*ma'nā*) to the loss of what one loves the most is that this loss is nothing but an actual sensation, an experience of *hic et nunc* whatever painful it may be. However, this actual is fallacious namely because it is of time: it comes to be and then goes away, and, without being immortalized by poetic means, it goes away forever. Thus imagination is more powerful than death if it is put to use in the right way, i.e. to create a perfect balance between sense and form.

To be sure, such was the feeling of the classical age. Al-Ma'arrī, perhaps the most complex and eclectic literary figure of the time, shows the same attitude to these existential themes. When the Ḥanafī theologian Abū Ḥamza died, al-Ma'arrī used this sad occasion to launch his metaphysical contemplations: "Death is sleep, a rest for body, life is insomnia."³⁰ This *rithā'*, among others, will be the grounds for his later metaphysical lyrics called *Luzūmīyāt* (Worthless Necessity) in which his special literary method, that of displaying inner subjectivity, was fully developed. Symmetry reaches its apogee when almost every *beit* in *Luzūmīyāt* becomes like the pile with two opposite poles: if death is sleep, then life is insomnia; one who mourns his ancestors is the same as the one who mourns his descendants; one who dies at a mature age doesn't differ from someone who dies in the cradle, and so it goes.

Al-Ma'arrī's symmetrical poetics turns out to be both perfect and fearful since it leaves one with the optimistic idea that the world, protected by God, can't change essentially and evil is nothing but a temporary and removable phenomenon. Whatever happens to a man after his death, the individual existence of the human being is ontologically tragic: it little matters where he is and what he does in his life. In many aspects al-Ma'arrī shares the Buddhist treatment of one's life as permanent suffering with no way out, even faith is not a solution since it can do nothing to turn human existence for the better. Every man is squeezed between the moment of birth and the moment of death, and he must cover this distance at any cost. Birth means death, existence means vanishing, individuality is just a haphazard form of suffering. Apparently, in the XIth century, when the world beyond mattered more than the actual one, this all-too human and personalized sensation was revolutionary, if not heretic.

We can speculate why such a perfect poet as al-Ma'arrī came to this 'Buddhist' vision of the world? Why did it happen at the time when Arabic poetics had reached its most splendid shape? Whether it was an outcome of the completed symmetry, of the Islamic atomism or of any other cause is a starting point for further studies. Important

is that al-Ma'arrī converts his tragic worldview into prose thus making another revolutionary move in medieval literature. In his two works *Epistle of Angels* (*Risālat al-malā'ika*) and *Epistle of Forgiveness* (*Risālat al-ghufrān*) the author presents a social satire on the existing order of things. The formal topic of the first *Epistle* concerns grammatical questions, in particular the declination of some angels' names. Al-Ma'arrī begins with compliments acknowledging his correspondent's scholastic erudition but takes it too seriously to evoke a comic effect in the reader. Knowledge of the classical Arabic should give access to paradise, as certain grammarians wish to hope, however what they know is only lifeless grammatical categories, not the richness of vivid language. These grammarians live on rules and never on language; being afraid of making a mistake (*ita'*), these wonks are incapable of grasping the essence of a word behind its purely grammatical form.

If *Epistle of Angels* is a critique of the rigid mind and of the void soul closed in its own often ridiculous self-assuredness, *Epistle of Forgiveness* is an ironic explication of al-Ma'arrī's skeptical ideas concerning the heavenly (after-death) life. Written as a reply to Ibn al-Qāriḥ, a then renowned panegyrist (*sheih*, ironically), in which al-Ma'arrī criticizes in a more or less implicit way the unabashed style and conduct of his colleague. The author's main thesis consists in denying the possibility of entering heaven just by using his panegyric talents even if it brings him glory and comfort on earth. For al-Ma'arrī the court panegyrist is a corrupted figure who has sold his talent for social dividends. His example is a vivid illustration of how 'Abbāsīd society makes use of the literary mind in pursuit of its self-glorification. Like many other caliphates, appeared at the al-Ma'arrī epoch, the 'Abbāsīds used religion as a ground for their political regime based, as it seemed, in a spiritual sovereignty. The political context, however, was complex. The Fātimid, another powerful dynasty, denied the 'Abbāsīd government in Baghdad as having the right to rule over Aleppo and Egypt, justifying it by their direct descendency from Muḥammad's daughter. In Baghdad the political power had been focused in the Shī'ī Buwayhid clan,³¹ i.e. Persian (*Daylam*)³² militaries.

Ibn al-Qāriḥ's greatest desire is to enter the paradise whose description he knows from the Qur'ān. It so happens that when al-Ma'arrī places the panegyrist in his dream, he embellishes it with unprecedented comfort, like the grove with fabulous trees, as if he were 'Allāh's special guest. The comic portrayal of the Qur'anic paradise was an unheard literary move at that time, it stands unique in classical Arabic prose marking simultaneously a significant shift in the Arab narrative consciousness that will never be the same again. Al-Ma'arrī creates a new concept of fiction that puts into doubt the canonical reality if not the sacred one. Such a bold innovation, one may think even of sacrilege, was possible owing to the symmetry elaborated in poetry: the author's imagination turns out to be equal to reality lying both in and out of the perceived world. In *Epistle of Forgiveness* the serious and the comic compose one "narrative pile" charged with fine observations of Arabic language, history, religious tenets, etc. The plot of the epistle is auxiliary and the reader's attention is directed towards all these subtleties so that the very text serves as a guide to Islamic culture as

a whole. Another important aspect of al-Ma'arrī's work is that it paved the way for literary individuality. Still residing within medieval inter-authorship, unlike its Japanese counterpart Michitsuna no Haha, this individuality reveals itself by creating unexpected contexts. When al-Ma'arrī leads his reader through the gallery of overwhelming philological peculiarities, he construes such fictional loci as allow him to mask or allegorize his heretical ideas. If Michitsuna's mother expresses in the diary her deepest thoughts and doubts, the Arabic author lets the reader guess what the true message might have been.

Such allegories will later be rampant in European literature and art, especially in the Renaissance period when the Italian artists will hide their pagan protagonists in Christian forms, but al-Ma'arrī uses allegories in order to propose an alternative vision, to compel his reader to see with his own eyes. So, paradise is nothing but a reflection of the social order where one receives what he has never got on earth. In the pastures of Heaven al-Qāriḥ behaves himself in exactly the same way as he did in the 'Abbāsīds: his character, habits, self-righteousness, love for luxury remain unchanged; he enjoys the same pleasures and strives for the same goals. Al-Qāriḥ's adventure in paradise reminds one of many European medieval journeys to heaven during which the traveller meets different individuals whom he knew or didn't know on earth. The aim of such a trip is usually educational because on his return the traveller changes his previous point of view and tells the truth to those who still have doubts about the afterworld. Al-Qāriḥ encounters notorious personalities with whom he conducts long discussions on poetic art, Arabic meter (*'arūd*), language, and literary genres. Everything looks realistic except some idealized modifications common to the paradisiacal life; for instance, when Al-Qāriḥ meets five horsemen with beautiful eyes he discovers that all of them in their earthly existence were one-eyed poets forced to compose poems for living.

Al-Ma'arrī constructs his paradise in the way the poet constructs the *beit*, i.e. according to the principle of symmetry. Two worlds are two hemistiches, and what occurs in the first one will be continued in the second in a somewhat "upgraded" manner; these worlds are linked one with another not in space and time but in the author's imagination for which the completeness of the universe is of primary importance. At his meeting with the houris, al-Qāriḥ asks an angel to explain to him one passage in the Qur'ān: "Verily, we have made them perfect. And made them virgins, darlings of equal age (with their spouses) for the fellows of the right" (56: 34-36). The angel says that 'Allāh made the houris of two kinds <sic!>: ones for oblectation to the right, the others he made beautiful maidens because of their pietist conduct during their earthly life. When our hero sees one of the them and finds her too skinny for his taste, the houri immediately becomes plump and rounded. Heaven gives the man what he lacked in his physical existence introducing him into the noumenal dimension where he can see known things from a different perspective. This is, indeed, the role of fiction to supply the human mind with allegorical visions, to extend one's horizon until it should have a whole image of a thing. It is worthless trying to understand the Qur'anic

sententiae at the literal level, they need a finer, more figurative reading (*mutashābihāt*)³³ helping to form a coherent picture of the two connecting worlds.

If the paradise is a fiction, a product of the author's fantasy having no literal meaning, as al-Ma'arrī shows us, then fiction is the only paradise where one can come to terms with social injustice and one's own sufferings.

Poetic influence had been felt in classical Arabic prose since the earliest essays. Abū Bakr al-Khwarizmī (934-993), issued from a modest Iranian family, was a writer who composed his fiction in rather poetic form. His rhythmic prose (*saj'*) is construed from short segments geometrically modeled after the *beit* structure. He uses oppositions and, like al-Ma'arrī, often plays with unexpected lexical combinations in order to deliver a comic effect. Al-Khwarizmī describes his misadventures during one of his journeys when he was obliged to ride a donkey in the company of a stupid donkeyman.³⁴ Hilāl as-Ṣābi' (925-994), born into a famous Sabian family, was a high ranking official under the Būyid whose history he was asked to write. Unlike many freelance writers, al-Ṣābi' chiefly wrote official documentation (letters and orders) in which he gives a vivid picture of the 'Abbāsīd state in the period of its decline. He doesn't criticize it in the way of al-Ma'arrī, but rather testifies to his times as objectively as possible. The sensitive personality of al-Ṣābi', equipped with his literary talent, allowed him to depict with lucid style not only significant events but also the mood of his epoch. His narrative is often embellished with lyrics showing from within the tastes of high 'Abbāsīd society, much like Murasaki Shikibu, the author of *Genji Monogatari* and a lady-in-waiting at the Imperial court, who gave us an exhaustive picture of Heian mores.

Although al-Ṣābi' is not a novelist and, like Lady Murasaki, he didn't create dramatis personae, nevertheless the Būyid official is definitely a representative voice of his society filtered through his administrative fiction. He uses *saja'* as a poet does, so his prose sounds poetic. The 'Abbāsīd literary mind nicely combines or, to put it better, doesn't differentiate the poetic and the prosaic usage of stylistic tools when the aim is to convey the meaning of the seen. Abū Hayyān al-Tawhīdī (922-1023), an essayist and one of the most brilliant minds of the time, wrote about al-Ṣābi' that "his prose has all the qualities of poetry and his poetry has all the qualities of prose."³⁵

We can certainly trust this laconic description since al-Tawhīdī himself, whose works show his knowledge and strong interest in gnostic philosophy,³⁶ was a man of the *adab* literature, Arabic belles-lettres. In his work *Enjoyment and Conviviality* (*Al-imta' wa-al-mu'anasa*), composed in the form of Platonic dialogues with the Būyid vizir and high official Ibn Sa'dān, al-Tawhīdī encroaches upon a great number of themes such as Arab language, grammar, Greek logic, philosophy, morals, etc. His friendship with Ibn Sa'ādān, he was one of his *nudamā'* (cup companions), permitted al-Tawhīdī to give to the vizir the role of Socrates. It doesn't seem to be a flattering hypocrisy but a thoughtful technique to place the wise statesman in the center of the narrative.

It is common in the *adab* literature to combine deep contemplations with easy lyrics and personal stories often serving as the illustrations to these contemplations.

The author himself claims no expertise in any field conveying only the sense of what was said and what he has heard from the notorious personalities. The author is fictional, his characters – Ibn Sa'dān, al-Sijistānī, Ibn Miskawayh, and some others – are real. Al-Tawhīdī tells the stories: for example, about the riots in Baghdad when in 972 the Byzantine army approached the city. The vizir asks the story-teller:

What do you know about the riots (*fitna*) that were so disastrous and played such a big role?

These events, I am going to tell you, I know from one spectator and participant who found himself in the thick of action, like the drowned, but later managed to survive.³⁷

The *adab* narrative is not deprived of medieval *exempla* well known from European literature. As John Bromyard, a late-medieval Dominican friar, once said: it doesn't matter whether one or another *exemplum* is true, what matters is its meaning.³⁸ The *exemplum* shows at a most basic level the link between abstract metaphysical concepts, such as good and evil, sin and redemption, penance, etc., unclear to illiterate hearers wishing nevertheless to understand the principles they are asked to obey. In the *exemplum* as well as in the *adab* two worlds – the divine and the human – are glued in a Möbius strip. All living beings move in one direction; when a man dies on earth, he begins to live in heaven.

Good and evil are clearly distinguished and articulated in the *adab* text where the author has no qualms about showing his attitude to one or another. In this attitude to these oppositions the author often demonstrates a psychological judgment revealing his fictional persona. Al-Tawhīdī sneers at superbia and weakness, also at ignorance and excessive egoism peculiar to many of his literary fellows. In his book, unlike the majority of the literati of the epoch, he points to the equality between poetry and prose by putting much stress on the fact that ideas, expressed in poetic or prosaic writing, are much more important than their form. Fiction is art and magic (*sihr*), as said in the Qur'ān, and the writer's goal is to reach a purity of speech, *balagha* (بلغ) that will help him to enter the reader's heart.

In the 'Abbāsīd period one, if not the most popular, form of the short narrative becomes *khavar*,³⁹ having the same symmetrical structure, *khavar* is *beit* in prose. It is a minimalist narrative composed of *sanad*,⁴⁰ a chain (*silsila*) of the narrators transmitting the story, and *matn*,⁴¹ the transmitted story. Apparently, the origin of the *khavar* genre goes back to the *ḥadīths* (Arabic plural: *ḥadīth*), the Prophet's deeds and sayings to be memorized by his followers until they have taken on the written form. The *ḥadīths* have been transmitted by the chain of people presenting the authoritative lineage in a way that nobody could doubt the authenticity of the transmitted words. *Silsila* will later be the dominating principle in many esoteric traditions such as Sufism where hidden knowledge will be transmitted through successive lineal masters to their disciples or the Terma tradition of Tibetan Buddhism (especially Nyingma school) where the inner teachings, known as the tantras of the long transmission of the canon, are transferred in the same way. Abū Muḥammad ibn

Qutaybah (828-889), an 'Abbāsīd philologist and a master of *ḥadīths*, composed a rich collection of short prose in his book *Kitāb ṭuyūn al-akhbār* (*The Book of Choice Narratives*) that became a standard handbook of Arabic belles-lettres.

The beginning of the *khavar* mentions the name of the transmitter: "Abū Muḥammad al-Qurashī told us; he said...", "in his *History* Muḥammad Ibn 'Abd al-Malik al-Hamdānī said...", "the old master told me; he said..." and so on.

Once upon a time two men accused of theft were fetched to Ibn al-Nasawī who identified the thief by his arrogant behavior and aplomb, the qualities that have helped him to steal. Another story was told by al-Qurashī: one man gave money to his pal and after some time asked him to give it back. The pal refused. Both men went to Iyās Ibn Mu'āwiya who asked the complainant whether he had any witness. He said: "no." Then Iyās Ibn Mu'āwiya asked about the place where it occurred. The complainant replied it was a tree; Ibn Mu'āwiya told him then to go to this tree and check if God left any sign there, meanwhile the accused had to wait for his return. As soon as he went, Ibn Mu'āwiya asked the accused in passing if he remembered that tree. After the latter described the tree to him, Ibn Mu'āwiya exclaimed: "Enemy of God! You are the traitor." Another *khavar*, transmitted by al-Muhasin al-Tanūkhī, tells us a classic story about the man who badly treated his servants and was finally punished by the caliph.

The symmetry of the *khavar* is clearly seen in its plot as always containing a "challenge and response" development; there is either a riddle to solve or a bad deed to punish. By and large, justice is always restored in this narrative since, as the Ḥanbalī theologian Ibn Taymiyyah points out in his seminal work *Al 'aqīdah al-wāsiṭiyyah*, it is the balance that 'Allāh had imposed for his creatures and established for fulfilling rights. When matters pertaining to this life are grounded on justice, then it will remain on the right course, even if the person who established this justice doesn't have any share in the hereafter (cf. also Qur'ān: 4: 135; 5: 8). Besides, the *khavar* literature demonstrates another aspect of the phenomenon of *inter-authorship*: the actual narrator dissolves into his reference, however without him the text (*matn*) might have never been transmitted.

At about the same time the *maqām*⁴² literature begins to spread out over Arabia. In the ancient (*jāhilīya*) epoch the term had the semantics of "dramatic state or situation" in which the poet finds himself most often. Later it seems to have signified "battle or struggle;" for example, in Abū Tammām's poems the word means "war scene," "theater of war" where the warriors show their braveness. This heroic meaning has been kept in Bedouin poetry and at one point migrated to Islamic culture with a modified semantics as attested by Abū Ibn Qutayba (828-889) in his work *Maqāmāt al-zuhhād 'ind al-khulafā' wal-mulūk* where the *maqām* appears as a rhetorical form, more exactly as a righteous speech. It is certain that at the dawn of Islam the meaning and the function of the *maqām* were close to the European *exemplum*: it signified the protreptic usually given by an ascetic (*zāhid*) in the caliph's or a high official's presence. Similarly, the story teller (*qāṣṣ*) has appeared in the mosque with the same protreptic or with his improvisations on the lives of prophets or saints in which he has revealed the vices of

society and the illusory values of earthly existence. More precisely, the word *qāṣṣ* (قاص) in Arabic means "fictionist," the person who narrates, especially a character who recounts the events of a novel or a poem.

Beginning from the Xth century the *maqām* means a story with such a fictionist, and in a larger sense the concept stands for any picaresque novel. Like in its European counterpart, in the *maqām* narrative a trickster or a vagabond (*'ayyār*) is the eloquent speaker who pronounces his rhythmic prose (*saq'*) and declaims poems in the classical language. The appearance of these characters on the literary scene was not a haphazard event. Urban culture, especially in Iraq and Iran, turns at the time to such novellino-like characters presenting another dimension of Islamic official culture. In other words, being articulated by a trickster, the popular and high registers were glued together in, so to say, one cultural totality corresponding to the very spirit of Islam. Interestingly, in Europe such a collection of short narratives by an anonymous author titled *Il novellino* appears in Italy in the epoch of *Duecento* (precisely, the last decade of the XIIIth century).⁴³ One of the novellas narrates the story of Francesco d'Accorso, a notorious lawyer who worked in Oxford and then returned to Italy. In England he was an adviser to Eduard I and apparently gained much respect from the king. We know also that he undertook some diplomatic missions on the king's behalf: in 1278 the lawyer delivers a harangue, actually an allegorical sermon, before Pope Nicolas III (1 Kings, Israel) asking Samuel— who is a metaphor for the Pope — to give him a king, a new archbishop of Canterbury to occupy the vacancy. Dante, in his *Divine Comedy*, which was certainly written not without the indirect influence of al-Ma'arrī, places Francesco d'Accorso in Hell among sodomites (*Inferno* XV, 110).

As the *'ayyārs* began to throng the Iraqi and Iranian cities, they more and more began to enter literature. Although the geographer Muḥammad al-Muqaddasī (945-991) in his book *Aḥsan al-taqāsīm fī ma'arif al-aqālīm* (*The Best Divisions in the Knowledge of the Regions*) describes them as beggars and the people deprived of a sense of law and morality,⁴⁴ it was not always the case. For some authors, like the Ismaili poet Nācir Khusraw, they are rather strong and smart men often clad in dervish cloths; according to the Sufi Šamdūn al-Qaccār, their relations are based on ethics; the writer Abū al-Jāhṣ informs us that the *'ayyārs* are gathered in confederations and choose their own *qāḍī* whose role is to solve inside problems. In the era of the Safavid dynasty, which developed out of the Sāfawīyyah Sufi order, the *'ayyārs* become a legend; balancing between the heroic and the comic, like the notorious Mehtar Nesīm and 'Amr ibn Umayya, they are the "gluing figures" of two cultural registers.

Whatever the truth, stories about the *'ayyārs* laid the ground for *maqām* literature and for Arabic fiction conceptualized in these ambivalent characters. In classical Greek literature such ambivalence, if in fact it ever existed, only in mythology; Europe will come to know it (except some Latin authors) only in the Renaissance, especially in Italy and Spain, when *novela picaresca* portrays the *pícaro* having the same typological traits as the Arabic *'ayyār* and like the latter the *pícaro* is a phenomenon of urban culture mirroring the vices of the official power. In Spain the first picaresque

novel *Lazarillo de Tormes* (1554)⁴⁵ was published by an anonymous author and was later included in the *Index Librorum Prohibitorum*. It tells the story of a boy, Lazarillo (an allusion to Lazarus of Bethany⁴⁶), born in Salamanca, who in his struggle with poverty becomes a *pícaro*. An Arabic influence is felt already at the outset of the novel since the mother of Lazarillo, after the death of her husband, lives with the Moor-groom Saïd who takes care of his new family. Later on, when Saïd was caught and severely punished for pilfering, Lazarillo's misadventures begin.

In *Maqāmāt al-Ḥarīrī*,⁴⁷ composed by the poet, scholar and the fine stylist Muḥammad al-Ḥarīrī (1054-1122), we read about a certain Abū Zayd who, before he died, gives a lesson to his son on the best occupation in the world: it is of course to be a beggar, a vagabond as the legendary royal son Sāsān (Sāsān the Kurd) whose father, the Persian ruler Bahman b. Esfandīār (according to the *adab* literature), left the kingdom to Sāsān's sister Homaï. Deprived of his inheritance, Sāsān takes to a wandering life gathering around him other beggars and vagabonds named the "sons of Sāsān." Similarly, Abū al-Muṭahhar al-Azdī (d. in the first half of the XIth century) is known for his work *Ḥikāyat Abī al-Qāsim al-Baghdādī* where he creates a vagabond persona Abū al-Qāsim who absorbed all the main features of this popular image. Abū al-Qāsim lives in Baghdad and the stories give a vivid picture of the town sometimes with precise details concerning the relationship between official and popular culture. Once upon a time, attending a meeting of the wealthy righteous citizens, the hero begins to read from the Qur'ān in an ostentatiously serious manner provoking smiles in some of them. Watching their reaction, Abū al-Qāsim goes berserk wondering what is so funny and, after being asked to go on, he instantly changes his attitude (as if he was acting in a Nō play) and starts telling dirty jokes and anecdotes scolding his listeners.

This in fact is the most important, metaphysical feature of the vagabond figure: to be able to change his point of view on purpose and to let see the same things from the opposite perspective. Before *maqām* literature such ambiguity was unknown. To be sure, its appearance in the Arab fiction of the epoch modified significantly not only literary perception in general but also the basic concepts of the medieval mind which was used to perceiving culture in unequivocal categories as symmetry that makes prose look like tracery.

Notes and References

1. *Zuhdiyyat*, sermon-like poems, were also popular in medieval Jewish poetry. Its main focus was laid upon death and asceticism. The poet of the 'Abbāsīd era Abū l-'Atāhiyya (748-825) was the chief representative of this genre, he renounced this world to the point that his contemporaries accused him of heresy.
2. One of the key concepts of traditional Arab culture is embodied in the phrase: "to have Man's high qualities" (braveness, hospitality, amiability and the like). It also fulfilled an important function in poetics since poetry in the pre-Islamic era was considered by the poets of *al-jāhiliyya* as a verbal *muruwwa*. The most intriguing thing is that the *muruwwa* has been gradually adopted by Islam as

religion, by politics (under the *Umayyad*) and by caliphate diplomacy. Later authors consider the *muruwwa* as benevolence. Note that the cultural significance of the concept can be compared to the Chinese (Confucian) lǐ (禮) and yì (義). For details cf. J. Goldziher, "Alte und neue Poesie im Urtheile der arabischen Kritiker," in *Abhandlungen zur arabischen Philologie*, 1, Leiden, 1896, 149 and passim; B. Farès, *L'Honneur chez les Arabes avant l'Islam*, Paris, 1932, 190-193; also G. Lecomte, *Ibn Qutayba: l'homme, son oeuvre, ses idées*, Damas, 1965. Cf. M. Rihan, *The Politics and Culture of an Umayyad Tribe: Conflict and Factionalism in the Early Islamic Period*, New York, Tauris, 2014, 18 and passim; S. Sperl, *Mannerism in Arabic Poetry*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989 (esp. chap. 5).

3. Cf. for more details H.A. Shehada, *Mamluks and Animals: Veterinary Medicine in Medieval Islam*, Leiden, Brill, 2013, 116.
4. This conception of ritual poetics discusses Monroe's theory of poetic formulae which is grounded, in turn, on the folklorist research of Lord and Parry. For Monroe, as well for Parry, the formula is a group of words regularly used in the same metrical conditions to express a necessary concept. It is treated as a mnemotechnic instrument of the epic language. Using such a formula, the poet is able to "metrize" or convert his speech to a metric system. Cf. J.T. Monroe, "Oral Composition in Pre-Islamic Poetry," *Journal of Arabic Literature*, vol. 3, Leiden, 1972; M. Parry, *Studies in the Epic Technique of Oral Verse I: Homer and the Homeric Style*, Harvard Studies in Classical Philology, vol. 41, 1930; also A.B. Lord, *The Singer of Tales*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1960.
5. For a detailed analysis of the concept *lafẓ* cf.: K. Athamina, "*Lafẓ* in Classical Poetry," in *Studies in Medieval Arabic and Hebrew Poetics*, S. Somekh (ed.), Israel Oriental Studies XI, Brill, Leiden, 1991, 47-55; also D.E. Kouloughli & D. Kouloughli, "A propos de *lafẓ* et *ma'nā*," *Bulletin d'études orientales*, t. 35, Institut Français du Proche-Orient, 1983, 43-63. Arabic medieval literary criticism knew a number of "books" (*kitab*) devoted to *ma'nā* with more or less specific considerations of the concept. For a complete list of these books cf. F. Sezgin, *Geschichte des arabischen Schrifttums*, Bd. II. Poesie bis CA. 430H., Leiden, 1975, 58-60.
6. The Arabic *lafẓ* and *ma'nā* may be compared with the Indian *śabda* and *sphoṭa* respectively where the first one is the temporal, physical manifestation of an unchanged ideal sense.
7. According to Grunebaum, who partly developed some of Massignon's ideas, *beit* unambiguously reveals the atomistic viewpoint of Islamic culture. Cf. L. Massignon, *Les méthodes de réalisation artistique des peuples de l'Islam, Opera minora*, t. 3, Beirut, 1963; G.E. Grunebaum, "The Spirit of Islam as Shown in its Literature," in *Studia Islamica*, vol. 1, 1953; cf. also A. Dayf, *Essai sur le lyrisme et la critique littéraire chez les Arabes*, Paris, Jouve et C^{ie}, 1917; P. Zumthor, *Essai de poétique médiévale*, Paris, Seuil, 1972.

8. *Haiku*, the term coined by the Japanese modern poet Masaoka Shiki, is structured by the *kiru* (cutting) and *kireji* (cutting word) principles when two images are juxtaposed and “cut” by a word.
9. “When you respect a noble man, you possess him, when you respect a bastard you prepare a revolutionary”; المتنبي. ديوان. بيروت، 1973، 372.
10. In Arabic poetics *tajnīs* corresponds to the Greek *παρονομασία* (derived from the verb *παρονομάζω* - “to transform a word,” “to play upon words which sound alike”) based on the use of phonetically close words derived from the same *ʿishtiqaq*. For further details cf. O. Zwartjes, *Love Songs from al-Andalus. History, Structure & Meaning of the Kharja*, Leiden, Brill, 1997, 266 et passim.
11. H. Frankfort, *Kingship and the Gods. A Study of Ancient Near Eastern Religion as the Integration of Society and Nature*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago & London, 1948, 96. He also points to the great antiquity of these ritual artifacts, mentioning their names: *per-nezer* (Lower shrine) and *per-ur* (Upper shrine).
12. 226، 1973، بيروت، سقط الزند، المغري أبو العلاء، المتنبي. One can notice that the name “Zainab” alludes to one of the Prophet’s daughters.
13. *Ibid.*, 26.
14. *Ibid.*, 39.
15. It can be compared with Italian Renaissance painting, in particular in Sandro Botticelli’s works, where the Christian motifs unambiguously refer to the pagan mysteries. Cf. for example E. Wind, *Pagan Mysteries in the Renaissance*, London, Faber & Faber, 1958.
16. البعدائي عبد القادر. خزانه الادب 1-3، القاهرة، 1، 383.
17. This tribe belongs to the southern or Qahtanite branch of Arab tribes originally from the Aja and Salma mountains situated in North Central Arabia. The tribe shared the area with Bani Assad and Bani Tamim, and its members included both nomads and settled town-dwellers. Cf. K. Al-Saleh, *Fabled Cities, Princes and Jinn from Arab Mythology*, Wallingford/Oxon, Eurobook, 1985.
18. Al-Mutanabbī’s activity in Latakia and among the Bedouins remains in many aspects uncertain, but his poems of this period show the dissident spirit against the ruling dynasty. He seemed to share the Qarmaṭian heresy, denied many of the Qur’anic precepts, including that of the *hajj*, and considered the imam not as the dynastic prerogative of the ‘Aliyad but as an investiture accessible to any muslim. Cf. for details R. Blachère, *Un poète arabe du IV^e siècle de l’Hégire* (Xe siècle de J.-C.): *Abou t-Tayyib al-Motanabbī*, Paris, Adrien-Maisonneuve, 1935.
19. المتنبي. ديوان. بيروت، 1973، 71.
20. *Ibid.*
21. *Ibid.* In Islamic eschatology these two angels, *The Denier* (منكر) and *The Denied* (نكير), control the faith of the dead.
22. المتنبي. ديوان. بيروت، 1973، 93.
23. *Ibid.*, 100.

24. *Ibid.*, 332.
 25. The word *badawī* (بدوِي) is derived from the “*badw* (بدو) - “nomad, wanderer,” opposed to the verb *ḥaḍara/ ḥḍr* - “to stay, be present somewhere;” thus the main semantics of *badawī* is a nomadic way of life signifying no anchors nor attachments to a certain place. Unlike *ḥaḍara* as a sort of urbanism, *badawī* implies a holistic psychology, a vision of the whole. Al-Mutanabbī’s personality was exactly so.
 26. The Muslim philologist Abū Mancūr al-Tha‘ālībī (961-1039) is known for collecting samples of the rhymed or rhythmic prose (*saj‘ al-manthūr*) designed mainly for secretaries (*kuttāb*) who were expected to memorize and use them in their official correspondence. There are four unpublished manuscripts of his work: *saj‘ al-manthūr*. Topkapı Ahmet III Kitāpları 2337/2; Yeni Cami 1188; Üniversite Arapça Yazmalar 741/1; Bayezid Umūmī 3207/1. Cf. for details B. Orfali, “The Works of Abū Mancūr al-Tha‘ālībī (350-429/961-1039),” *Journal of Arabic Literature* 40 (2009).
 27. المتنبي. ديوان. بيروت، 1973، 130-132.
 28. This *wacf* technique will be artistically developed by al-Ṣanawbarī (897-945), another poet from Sayf al-Dawla’s circle known for his fine landscape lyrics. His poems differ from those of Mutanabbī and of Abū Firās (both are his close neighbors in poetry) by a special sensitivity toward nature. If in Mutanabbī nature is a representation of the *badawī* essence and in Abū Firās it is the silent watcher of the poet’s torments on earth, al-Ṣanawbarī, on the contrary, lets nature display all its diversity which brings him the delight of existence. One of his most illustrative poems reads: “The cup of grass feels no lack of wet out of clouds and, fed by her, the grass gets drunk and swings. The roses line up for us, gathered and dispersed everywhere. The narcissi strike the vision but not in a way that witchcraft does <...> the clouds permanently disseminate their gems, the earth gives them a smile in return, the birds get excited”; cf. الصنوبري. ديوان. بيروت، 1960، 42-43.
- Al-Ṣanawbarī was, perhaps, the most meditative poet in Sayf al-Dawla’s court. One can define his method by referring to the concept of the XVIIIth German aesthetics *Einfühlung* (Greek: *πάθεια*, Eng.: “in-feeling”) or empathy. It is seductive to compare al-Ṣanawbarī with Matsuo Bashō (松尾芭蕉, 1644-1694), a Japanese poet of the Edo period and a great master of *renku* (連句) and *haiku* (then *hokku* 発句 with a 5-7-5 mora structure). Like the Arabic poet, Bashō belonged to the elite literary circles of *Nihonbashi* where he exerted a significant influence because of his fine natural style. In spite of his literary success Bashō, being unsatisfied with the world around him, started practicing Zen meditation but even this didn’t bring him peace. Like al-Ṣanawbarī, Bashō liked to wander throughout the countryside: he traveled on the Edo Five Routes as if seeking an accidental death. During his journey to mount Fuji, then to Ueno and Kyōto, Bashō meets other poets who, admiring the master’s talent,

- ask for his teachings. Al-Ṣanawbarī and Matsuo Bashō were emphatic poets, the poets of *sabi* (寂), who interiorized observable, imperfect things and so created a field that “in-feels” the world as it never was before.
29. الشريف الرض ابلو الحسن. ديوان، بيروت، 1961، 162.
 30. المعري ابو العلاء. سقط الزيد. بيروت، 1973، 8.
 31. Cf. for example C. Hunt, *The History of Iraq*, Greenwood Press, 2005.
 32. In *Luzūmīyāt al-Ma‘arrī* uses this word to denote the Persian power; cf. المعري. لزوم مالا يلزم، بيروت، 2، 1961، 472.
 33. The term also signifies “the sciences of the Qur’ān” (*‘Ulūm al-Qur’ān*); cf. the Qur’ān (*al-Imran*: 7).
 34. الخوارزمي ابو بكر. رسائل. استامبول، 1968، 103. cf. also Z. Mubārak, *La prose arabe au IV^e siècle de l’Hégire (Xe siècle)*, Paris, Librairie orientale, 1931.
 35. أبو حيان التوحيدي. كتاب الإمتاع والمؤانسة، 1-3، القاهرة، vol. 1، القاهرة، 1953، 68.
 36. Undoubtedly, along with Abū Sulaymān al-Sijistānī (932-1000) and the Persian neoplatonist Ibn Miskawayh (932-1030), one of his main intellectual sources were the *Rasā’il al-Ikhwān al-Safā’* (*Epistles of the Brothers of Purity*) whose ideas became the vogue. Paradoxically, al-Tawhīdī was long neglected by the succeeding generations of writers until the Islamic geographer and encyclopedist Yāqūt al-Hamawī (1179-1229) mentioned him in his work *Mu’jam al-‘Udabā’* (*Dictionary of Writers*, about 1226) as “the philosopher of literati and the literatus of philosophers.” It is interesting to note that al-Hamawī describes al-Tawhīdī by the same “symmetrical formula” as al-Tawhīdī describes al-Ṣābi’.
 37. أبو حيان التوحيدي. كتاب الإمتاع والمؤانسة، 1-3، القاهرة، 1953، 150.
 38. Cf. G.R. Owst, *Literature and Pulpit in Medieval England*, Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1961, 155.
 39. In Arabic the term *khavar* (الْخَبَرُ) has also a syntactic meaning: “predicate,” “new information.” In the nominal phrase (الْجُمْلَةُ الاسْمِيَّةُ) it follows the subject, (الْمُبْتَدَأُ) *mubtada’*.
 40. The *sanad* (السند) means “support,” “credibility” of the transmitted texts created by the *silsila*. In Arabic classical linguistics the *sanad* means also the part of the sentence upon which another part (*musnad*) leans. It conveys pretty much the same idea as *mubtada’* and *khavar*.
 41. The *matn* (المتن) signifies the visible part of a thing. In the *ḥadīths* it is the text (content) of the oral tradition.
 42. The word is derived from the verb *qwm* (ق.و.م) the initial semantics of which was to rise, to dress for accomplishing an action;” later the meaning changed until the verb began to signify an action by the passive agent: to stay, to reside in one place.” The term *maqām* appears in the Qur’ān several times as a place, a dwelling site” and also as a station in the afterworld (cf. Qur’ān, 19: 73,74).

43. G. Favati, *Il Novellino*, Bozzi, Gżnes, 1970.
44. أحسن التقاسيم في معرفة الأقاليم. مطبعة، بريل ليدن، 1909
45. Full title reads: The Life of Lazarillo de Tormes and of His Fortunes and Adversities (*La vida de Lazarillo de Tormes y de sus fortunas y adversidades*).
46. The name “Lazarillo” is a diminutive from Lazarus; in Hebrew *El’ āzār* (אֵלְעָזָר) means “God is my help.” The Gospel of Luke (16:19-31) narrates the story of the Beggar Lazarus and his relationship with the Rich man.
47. لحريري. مقامات، بيروت، 1958

University of Sarbonne
Paris: discover@free.fr