THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

THRESHOLDS OF DOUBT: NEGOTIATING AUTHORSHIP IN THE PARATEXTS OF AL-MAʿARRĪ

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO

THE FACULTY OF THE DIVISION OF THE HUMANITIES

IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

DEPARTMENT OF NEAR EASTERN LANGUAGES AND CIVILIZATIONS

BY

KEVIN MARK BLANKINSHIP

CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

JUNE 2018

For Bronwyn, Henry, and Sammy

أُنْفُضْ ثيـــابَك مِنْ وُدِّي وَمـــعْرِفَتي فإنَّ شَخْصِي هَباءٌ في الضُّحى هَـــابِ
وقـــدْ نَبَذتُ على جَمرٍ خَبَا يَـــبَساً فإنْ يَكُن فـــيه سِقْطٌ يَذْكُ إلهـــابي
وقـــدْ نَصَحتُك فاحذرْ أنْ تُرى أُذُنا تَـــرمْي إلى السَّهْب إكْثاري وإســـهابي

Shake from your robes any love or notice of me!
For I am but motes dancing
In the beams of morn.
Some dry stuff I've thrown onto dying embers,
And if there be a spark,
I will rouse them to flame.
How often I've urged you, a measureless tale :
Don't let your ear cast my counsel,
Though it be windy and wordy,
To the sands.

~ Abū l-ʿAlāʾ al-Maʿarrī

Table of Contents

List of Figures

Acknowledgements

Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist James B. Stewart nailed it on the head when he wrote that "the generation of an idea is almost always a collaborative process." From start to finish dissertation writing has been an exercise in growing more comfortable with other people's help. Even the subject matter was borne of teamwork. I first read al-Maʿarrī's poetry in a fourth-year Arabic class with miriam cooke at Duke University, and a few years later his name was suggested to me by Cameron Cross, a then-University of Chicago student, as maybe a fruitful dissertation topic. Since then, working with others has only gotten more important.

Thanks are due first and foremost to my advisor Tahera Qutbuddin, whose deep learning is matched only by her refinement and poise. For conveying the splendor of Arabic, giving detailed notes on many a seminar paper, and guiding me through doctoral parturition, I am deeply in her debt. My thanks go also to the other dissertation readers: Michael Sells, for the intimacy, approaching a second sense, that he brings to Arabic literature; Michael Cooperson at UCLA, for his preternatural ability with language and boundless teacher's enthusiasm; and Boris Maslov, for gracefully drawing literary data together under a conceptual aegis. I could not be more grateful for such a thoughtful and hardworking committee.

A number of institutions gave their support. I researched and wrote parts of the dissertation on a yearlong Fulbright-Hays Doctoral Dissertation Research Award (DDRA) to Rabat, Morocco, where I was able to work in the Bibliothèque National and the Royal Hasaniyyah Archives. This trip abroad led to collaborations with Bilal Orfali, Kirill Dmitriev, Julia Hauser and others through the Arab-German Young Academy (AGYA). I have also worked with Aglae Pizzone and Lars Mortensen at the Center for Medieval Literature at the University of Southern Denmark (SDU). Aglae and I received short-term seed funding from SDU for a project on medieval authorship beyond Western Europe, and I took the opportunity to also spend time with manuscripts in the Royal Danish Library. Speaking of manuscripts, Saud al-Sarhan at the King Faisal Center for Research and Islamic Studies (KFCRIS) has helped greatly with access to digitized Arabic documents. In the final year of writing, I enjoyed walking the stacks of J. Willard Marriott Library at the University of Utah, where Leonard Chiarelli has built up a world class collection in premodern Arabic. It is one of the school's many hidden gems.

Dozens of individuals have given feedback over written drafts, conference presentations, email exchanges, and informal chats. The following is an incomplete list and in no particular order: Geert Jan van Gelder, Maribel Fierro, Samer Ali, Devin Stewart, Bilal Orfali, Daniel de Smet, Adam Talib, Sabine Schmidtke, Eric Dursteler, Camilla Adang, Majd al-Mallah, Luke Yarbrough, Brian Catlos, Kirill Dmitriev, Jeannie Miller, Asad Ahmed, Sharon Kinoshita,

Kelly Tuttle, Arie Shippers, Nizar Hermes, Christian Sahner, Matthew Keegan, Emily Selove, Allen James Fromherz, Ben Fortna, Whitney Cox, Marla Segol, Yoni Brack, Aun Hasan Ali, Michelle Hamilton, David Wacks, Ghenwa Hayek, Christian Mauder, Terri DeYoung, Jaroslov and Suzanne Stetkevych, James Evans, Theo Beers, Mariam Sheibani, Greg Baum, Mohamad Ballan, Jessica Mutter, Austin O'Malley, Sabahat Adil, Matt Barber, Mick Bechtel, Justin Benavidez, Andrew DeRouin, Rich Heffron, Sam Hodgkin, Monica Phillips, Amir Toft, Sami Sweis, Jeremy Vecchi, Maryam al-Zoubi, Cadence Coffin, Andrea Crow, Jacob Johansen, Holly Baker, Francesca Chubb-Confer. I owe you and many others a debt of gratitude.

A number of University of Chicago faculty had their hand in shaping me as a scholar: Frank Lewis, Fred Donner, John Woods, Ahmed El Shamsy, Orit Bashkin, Kay Heikkinen, Noha Forster, Na'ama Rokem, Jim Robinson, and visiting lecturers like Angelika Neuwirth and Gamal al-Ghitany. Those in leadership positions such as Theo van den Hout, Martha Roth, and Martina Munsters gave crucial academic and financial support. During the summers I honed my Arabic at the Middlebury Language Schools on the whetstone of teachers like Hussein Elkhafaifi, Alaa al-Gibali, Dwight Reynolds, John Eisele, Mahmoud Abdallah, Basma al-Dajani, Faten Arfaoui, and Nagwa Saber. UChicago's Little Red Schoolhouse taught me to put my audience first, while Dan Raeburn, my creative nonfiction professor, showed me that "it takes

a lifetime to develop an ethical relationship with one's memory." To say all these mentors had a formative effect on my intellectual upbringing would be an understatement.

Finally I want to thank my first teacher of Arabic, Bronwyn, whom I had the great fortune of going on to marry, albeit a dozen years after the fact. She and others like her inspired me to know more about the Middle East in my undergraduate days, setting me on the course to where I am now. During graduate school she has lent unflagging support; without her warmth, patience, good humor, and devotion to family, this dissertation never would have seen the light of day. I therefore dedicate it to her and our two boys.

لا يشكر الله من لا يشكر الناس

Salt Lake City
June 2018

Title: Thresholds of Doubt: Negotiating Authorship in the Paratexts of al-Maʿarrī
Candidate: Kevin Blankinship
Committee: Tahera Qutbuddin (chair), Michael Sells, Michael Cooperson, Boris Maslov
Defense: 29 March 2018

Abstract

This dissertation treats the controversial Syrian poet Abū l-ʿAlāʾ al-Maʿarrī (d. AD 1058) as a case study of medieval Arabic authorship. On one hand, readers have traditionally attributed to authors like al-Maʿarrī a stable position whereby their writings transparently reflect their life and thought. On the other hand, recent scholarship on manuscript culture considers medieval authorship as unstable and diffuse, in contrast to the writerly unity of print culture. Left unreconciled, these competing views perpetuate misconceptions, such as that al-Maʿarrī must either be a sincere believer or a devious doubter. In my assessment, neither end of this spectrum is satisfactory. Therefore I draw those ends closer together by examining the paratexts — titles, prefaces, glosses, and other writings attached by an author to his own works — of al-Maʿarrī, which are part of a lifelong effort to curate his own legacy.

I focus on three paratexts from *Luzūm mā lā yalzam* (Self-Imposed Necessity), al-Maʿarrī's poetry collection notorious for its critiques of religion: an introduction, a self-commentary, an exchange of letters. This choice of texts is deliberate, since it in response to reader doubts that al-Maʿarrī must consolidate his authorship. I use insights from functional

linguistics, such as that language is a social practice; its use represents agency exercised within constraints; and that language users negotiate personal and social conceptions of identity.

Through this analysis, I gain purchase over al-Maʿarrī's rhetorical stance encoded by his paratexts. That stance is best described by Robert R. Edwards' term "counter-authorship," namely a position of authority against authority. Through explicit formulation and implicit performance, al-Maʿarrī resists literary and religious orthodoxy wedded to political power by setting out an ethics of writing, commanding the physical margins of texts, and forcing dialectical engagement by readers. To show historical continuity, I also include a chapter on modern receptions of al-Maʿarrī's authorship. This demonstrates the persistence of his image as a counter-authority, albeit in another time and with different stakes.

These findings mediate between the two opposing views of medieval authorship described above. On the one hand, they reveal how authorship and textuality can be stabilized through mechanisms like paratexts, while on the other, they complicate authorship as biographism by heeding questions of rhetoric, audience, and convention. The results of my study also show the importance polemical discourse, namely the anticipation of and response to reader doubt; and of textuality, namely the physical, documentary form of the text itself. That these both join in the process of negotiating authorship as much as the text's very language becomes clear in a case like that of al-Maʿarrī.

Introduction: Forging an Author

This study explores the authorship of blind Arab poet, critic, philologist, ascetic, and alleged heretic, Abū al-ʿAlāʾ al-Maʿarrī (d. AD 1058). Known for his caustic wit, innovative style, and vast knowledge of Arabic, al-Maʿarrī is one of the most distinctive literary personas of the pre-modern Islamic world. Partly this is due to his prodigious output. Over a dozen works survive, and medieval sources list as many as 200 undertaken in his lifetime.[1] Today the most famous of these are *Luzūm mā lā yalzam* (Self-Imposed Necessity), a collection of poetry written in double end-rhyme on themes of *zuhd* (renunciationism) and *waʿẓ* (*memento mori*), and the rhyming-prose journey through heaven and hell, *Risālat al-ghufrān* (*The Epistle of Forgiveness*).

But this is only a fraction of the whole. Al-Maʿarrī's extant corpus includes a second poetry collection from al-Maʿarrī's youth, a long meditation on Aleppo society spoken by animal characters, a treatise on *ṣarf* (morphology), dozens of letters to rulers and intellectuals, and a rhyming-prose work alleged to be a parody of the Qurʾān. This varied and copious output spawned an equally varied and copious response. Al-Maʿarrī's work was fodder for dozens of medieval commentators, while his prose works appeared in anthologies on good Arabic style,

[1] More detail about al-Maʿarrī's works will be given in chapter 1. The number 200 is probably an exaggeration, although that does not diminish the fact that al-Maʿarrī was an extraordinarily productive author.

including the *Ṣubḥ al-ʿashā* of Egyptian Mamluk scribe al-Qalqashandī (d. AD 1418) and the *Iḥkām ṣanāʿat al-kalām* by Andalusian vizier al-Kalāʿī (d. AD 1237). His life and legacy was recounted in biographical encyclopedia entries[2] and defenses of the poet's dubious reputation.[3] Moreover, his literary works were a starting point for creative imitation. Al-Kalāʿī and also the Baghdadi poet Ibn al-Habbāriyah (d. AD 1115) responded to al-Maʿarrī's work narrated by animals, *Risālat al-ṣāhil wa-al-shāḥij* (The Epistle of the Horse and the Mule), with animal-themed works of their own. Al-Maʿarrī's penchant for formal experimentation may have inspired the *muʿashsharāt* (*décimas*, ten-line strophic poems) of North African Zīrid poet ʿAlī al-Ḥusrī al-Qayrawānī (d. AD 1095) and the *al-Maqāmāt al-luzūmiyyah* of Andalusian lexicographer al-Saraqusṭī ibn al-Ashtarkūwī (d. AD 1143).

If scope and influence are any indicator, then al-Maʿarrī can rightly be said to occupy a canonical status in classical Arabic literature, alongside such luminaries as Imruʾ al-Qays, Jarīr and al-Farazdaq, Abū Nuwās, Abū Tammām, and al-Mutanabbī. Yet most of al-Maʿarrī's output and its fecund reception has gone unexplored. Analytical studies are largely restricted to *Luzūm mā lā yalzam* and, to a lesser extent, *Risālat al-ghufrān*. This means that less heed has been

[2] Many of these entries were collated in 1944 by a team of scholars led by Ṭaha Ḥusayn, a monumental effort whose fruits attest to his impact on later medieval authors. See: Ṭaha Ḥusayn et al., *Taʿrīf al-qudamāʾ bi-Abī al-ʿAlāʾ* (Cairo: Wizārat al-Maʿārif al-ʿUmūmiyyah, 1944, repr. 1965).

[3] The most famous of these was composed by fellow Syrian Ibn al-ʿAdīm. See Ḥusayn, *Taʿrīf al-qudamāʾ*, 350-440.

paid to the rich variety of discourses responding to al-Maʿarrī, especially creative ones like imitation and adaptation, and to the dynamic, dialogic process by which the original texts unfolded in the first place. We likewise lack studies of the sociohistorical setting of al-Maʿarrī's readers. And of course much ink has been spilled over the important yet limited question of al-Maʿarrī's heterodoxy, with the discussion often being had in narrowly polarized terms.[4]

All of these tendencies paint at best an incomplete portrait of an author whose breadth, complexity, and impact is hard to overstate. Al-Maʿarrī's image as a heretic, for instance, persists from inattention to factors such as the wide range of the poet's writings, the supple and socially-situated nature of orthodoxy, the rhetorical stakes of writing about religion, and the universality of *takfīr* discourse (charging someone with unbelief) in the medieval Islamic world. His reputation for cynicism rests mainly on *Luzūm mā lā yalzam*, from which readers have in the past tried to tease out biographical and intellectual points and assemble them into a picture of his life and thought.[5]

The feeling that al-Maʿarrī's texts faithfully reflect reality brackets the impact of rhetoric, audience, and discursive convention. Also, the traditional focus on just one or two works ignores other ones in which al-Maʿarrī's voice resonates differently, such as the

[4] For a fuller study of this question, see Tahir Khalifa al-Garradi, "The Image of al-Maʿarrī as an Infidel Among Medieval and Modern Critics" (Doctoral dissertation, University of Utah, 1987).
[5] Appropriate examples will appear in the context of individual chapters.

authoritative distance of his lexical commentaries or the supplicating humility of *al-Fuṣūl wa l-ghāyāt*. But in response to concerns such as these about many authors, not just al-Maʿarrī, medieval studies has swung too far in the opposite direction, by minimizing both the individuality of authorship and its connection to actual reality. From this angle, manuscripts and their authors are unstable and diffuse when compared to the freezing effect had on texts by printing and, as an extension, on the social, economic, and legal boundaries of authorship.[6]

My study intervenes here by examining al-Maʿarrī's authorship as neither established biographical truth nor a mere function of texts or communities, but as a discursively- and sociohistorically-emergent process of negotiation. The primary data for the study are paratexts, that is, auxiliary writings attached by an author to her own works, such as titles, prefaces, glosses, epilogues, and so forth. In the case of *Luzūm mā lā yalzam*, I focus on three such texts in particular: an introduction, a marginal self-commentary, and an exchange of letters. The word "paratext" was coined by Gérard Genette, who emphasized not only the

[6] For a representative argument in this vein, see for example Albert Russell Ascoli, *Dante and the Making of a Modern Author* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 6-7. For counterarguments that acknowledge individuality in medieval authorship, see for example Daniel Hobbins, *Authorship and Publicity Before Print: Jean Gerson and the Transformation of Late Medieval Learning* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009), 1-2. On the diffuseness of medieval Arabic authorship, see for example Abdessamad Belhaj, "The Council of Dictation (*imlāʾ*) as Collective Authorship: An Inquiry into *adab al-imlāʾ wa l-istimlāʾ* of al-Samʿānī," *Conceptions of Authorship in Pre-Modern Arabic Texts*, ed. Lale Behzadi and Jaakko Hämeen-Anttila (Bamberg: University of Bamberg Press, 2015), 93-106.

capacity of such texts to surround and modify a primary work but also to present that work to readers. "The paratext is what enables a text to become a book and to be offered as such to its readers and, more generally, to the public."[7] In this sense they serve not as closed boundaries but rather thresholds, *seuils* in Genette's original French, that invite the reader to step inside or turn back. Therefore the question of language as a social medium, and of speech events as social transactions, lies at the heart of paratextual discourse.

To analyze how al-Maʿarrī's paratexts function socially and historically to establish his authorship, I turn to insights from the field of modern linguistics. In case readers might object that this field has little to contribute to literary study, here I should clarify two points. First, linguistics can take either a generative-structural approach to its raw data, or a functional-pragmatic one. The former, elaborated by thinkers like Ferdinand de Saussure, Claude Lévi-Strauss, and Noam Chomsky, tries to elaborate the inherent, systematic, and universal properties of language as a closed system.[8] This brand of linguistics is the one most familiar to literary scholars, and also the most objectionable; they have for decades critiqued it through poststructuralist suspicion of universal claims and Marxist attention to social history.

---

[7] Gérard Genette, *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation*, trans. Jane E. Lewin (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 1.

[8] For an overview, see John R. Searle, "Chomsky's Revolution in Linguistics," *New York Review of Books*, June 29, 1972. For a recent defense of structural linguistics, see Gilbert Lazard, "The Case For Pure Linguistics," *Studies in Language* 36, no. 2 (2012), 241-59.

Meanwhile, the latter approach has its origins in the writings of the Russian Formalists and the Prague Linguistic Circle. It was further elaborated by British linguist Michael Halliday as a "social semiotic," and it has since given rise to whole fields in turn, such as sociolinguistics, speech act theory, and linguistic anthropology.[9] While the functional perspective too attends to formal features of language, it asks how and why those features play a role in human life. Its methods and concepts have been applied fruitfully to literature by Roger Fowler, Roger D. Sell, Geoffrey Leech, and many others, under such names as discourse analysis, literary pragmatics, and stylistics.[10] These various models wed traditional literary criticism to functional—as opposed to structural—linguistics, in order to look at the "writing and reading of literary texts as interactive communicative processes . . . inextricably linked with the particular sociocultural contexts within which they take place."[11]

It is the functional rather than structural linguistic approach that I follow in studying al-Maʿarrī. Attention paid by that approach to context leads to the second point about

[9] For a sampling of the early Russian sources, see Ladislav Matejka and Krystyna Pomorska, eds., *Readings in Russian Poetics: Formalist and Structuralist Views* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1971). For a good survey of Michael Halliday's social semiotic and related ideas, see M.A.K. Halliday, *The Essential Halliday*, ed. Jonathan J. Webster (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2009).

[10] See for example Roger Fowler, *Linguistic Criticism*, 2nd ed (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1996); Roger D. Sell, ed., *Literary Pragmatics* (London, UK: Routledge, 1991); Geoffrey Leech and Mick Short, *Style in Fiction: A Linguistic Introduction to English Fictional Prose*, 2nd ed (London, UK: Routledge, 1997).

[11] Sell, *Literary Pragmatics*, xiv.

linguistics and literature. From the outlook of literary pragmatics, and in contrast to what some perceive to be the view of New Criticism, literature is not an autonomous, quasi-mystical realm of language, but a kind of discourse relatable to other kinds.[12] Mitchell Green suggests that fictionality, for instance, is synonymous with counterfactuality, and looks similar to hypotheticals posed in argument[13]; or on the non-committal expressiveness and sometimes dubious sincerity of authors, Jørgen Johansen points out that "a joke [too] is insincere."[14]

The assumption that literature exists on a continuum with other discursive fields permits the balance between text and context that literary pragmatics hopes for. That balance includes recognition of actual, historical and psychological users of language, or, in the case of literary discourse, an actual author-subject. Literature's link to other discourses also helps keep a steady eye on the diachronic scope of language use, on the grounds that writing and reading are ultimately historical processes. Perhaps most important to my understanding of al-Maʿarrī's authorship is the idea that language use enacts a certain identity under certain

[12] As Roger Fowler points out, the accusation often leveled that New Criticism pays no attention to literary context is somewhat exaggerated. See Fowler, *Linguistic Criticism*, 45.
[13] Mitchell Green, "Narrative Fiction as a Source of Knowledge," *Narration as Argument*, ed. Paula Olmos (Basel, Switzerland: Springer International Publishing, 2017), 56-60.
[14] Jørgen Johansen, *Literary Discourse: A Semiotic-Pragmatic Approach to Literature* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002), 99.

circumstances. Nikolas Coupland calls this "the relational self," meaning "the fusion of personal and relational meanings that [linguistic] style negotiates."[15]

Based on these and other insights from literary pragmatics, I argue that al-Maʿarrī uses paratextual discourse to consolidate his own authorship. This happens within the fluid economic and sociopolitical environment of the eleventh-century Middle East, in which both texts and authors were subject to the existential pressures of "market"competition. To protect himself in this dynamic milieu, al-Maʿarrī assumes a stance of "counter-authorship," a term coined by medieval Latinist Robert R. Edwards to describe a position of authority against authority.[16] In al-Maʿarrī's case, he resists literary and religious conventions upheld by political power, by propounding an ethics of writing, commanding the physical margins of texts, and compelling readers to dialectical engagement. This overall process might be thought of as a negotiation, that is, a transaction of meaning had between multiple participants struggling for pride of place. So conceived, al-Maʿarrī's authorship neither ossifies into simple biographism as in some traditional scholarship, nor dissolves into functions of texts or communities as in recent work on medieval manuscript culture. There is a Self at the heart of literary texts, I

[15] Nikolas Coupland, "The Sociolinguistics of Style," *The Cambridge Handbook of Sociolinguistics*, ed. Rajend Mesthrie (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 151.
[16] Robert R. Edwards, "Walter Map: Authorship and the Space of Writing," *New Literary History* (Spring 2007): 275-9.

wish to argue, even if it is a discursively and socially relational one. Furthermore, al-Maʿarrī's attempts to consolidate his writerly position teach us that medieval Arabic authorship was an individual as well as collective enterprise.

Additionally, my choice of paratexts surrounding *Luzūm mā lā yalzam* reorients the picture of a work which has immortalized al-Maʿarrī through its renown but restricted him in the lack of attention to almost anything other than its verse content; hence yet another study of the *Luzūm* rather than one of his many lesser known works, further scrutiny of which represents a real need in al-Maʿarrī scholarship. But reframing the familiar seems a necessary start to grasping the unfamiliar. As documented by its paratexts, the *Luzūm* came about not as a transparent, *sui generis* expression of the poet's inner life, but instead a negotiation, a lifelong discursive unfolding which encompasses prevalent self-commentary, subversive linguistic style, and dialectical involvement of readers. In pointing out how paratexts record the *Luzūm*'s process of becoming, my overall goal is mainly to enrich the mental schema we conjure when thinking of al-Maʿarrī.

As to its structure, the dissertation is divided into five chapters. Chapter 1 surveys the life and works of al-Maʿarrī, with particular focus on the way in which both those life and works have been limited by cultural memory. In particular, not enough attention has been paid to the care with which al-Maʿarrī curates his own legacy. Therefore the chapter portrays

the importance of his commenting upon his own life and works, concluding that both are better served when thought of as composite and conflicted. Chapter 2 treats the preface to *Luzūm mā lā yalzam*, in which al-Maʿarrī explains that he has renounced the traditional Arabic *qaṣīdah* as a commodity for sale to patrons or a vehicle for lewd topics like wine and women. Scholars typically focus on this claim and ignore the 30-page preceding discussion of rhyme in general and double end-rhyme in particular (in Arabic, *luzūm mā lā yalzam*). I reorient thinking away from double rhyme as an icon—that is, a signifier that bears physical resemblance to its signified—of al-Maʿarrī's restrictive lifestyle, and toward its role in defamiliarizing poetic convention. By expounding principles of rhyme in the abstract, but most especially by applying the added constraints of double rhyme to an entire *dīwān*, al-Maʿarrī consolidates his own authority as a successful theorist and practitioner of poetry.

Chapter 3 examines *Zajr al-nābiḥ*, a secondary gloss by al-Maʿarrī on his own poetry in *Luzūm mā lā yalzam*. Written to defend against charges of deviant belief, the *Zajr* offers a unique chance to explore how al-Maʿarrī portrays himself as an author. By using various techniques that exploit semantic slippage, filling the margins normally reserved for other readers, and equivocating on his own authorial position, al-Maʿarrī uses polysemy of text and persona to counter allegations of heterodoxy. Chapter 4 studies correspondence between al-Maʿarrī and the chief missionary of the Fāṭimid *daʿwah*, al-Muʾayyad fī l-Dīn al-Shīrāzī. Somewhat in

contrast to *Zajr al-nābiḥ*, in these letters al-Maʿarrī takes a firm stand for his complete abstention from animal products. Indeed he assumes the authorial position of missionary, exhorting readers to veganism, while al-Muʾayyad seeks to debunk such a position. In this way, arguments for or against veganism become a cultural signifier against the backdrop of an intellectually fluid era.

To show historical continuity, chapter 5 discusses a key example of al-Maʿarrī's reception in the modern period. This example is a debate between Egyptian intellectual Ṭaha Ḥusayn and Iraqi poet Maʿrūf al-Ruṣāfī, over the source of al-Maʿarrī's fundamental skepticism and its implications for his authorship. Both understand him as a counter-authority, but they reach differing conclusions about his motivations for writing. While Ḥusayn believes that al-Maʿarrī wrote in order to instruct through subversion, al-Ruṣāfī sees him as providing sincere encouragement to positive social change. Finally, aside from reiterating the results of the study—al-Maʿarrī's counter-authorship as built by his paratexts and perpetuated up to the modern era—the conclusion emphasizes authorship as an ongoing process, a negotiation between authors and readers. Here I also commend to scholars the use of pragmatics, discourse analysis, and other approaches from functional linguistics in tandem with traditional literary criticism and poetics.

Chapter 1. Curating a Legacy:

The Life and Works of al-Maʿarrī

In his work of cultural criticism *Maʿa Abī l-ʿAlāʾ fī sijnih* (Together With al-Maʿarrī in His Prison), Egyptian intellectual Ṭaha Ḥusayn cites the following line of poetry by al-Maʿarrī:

لا تَظْلَموا الموتَى وَإنْ طالَ المدَى إنّي أَخَافُ علَيكُم أنْ تَلْتَقُوا

[Do not disparage the dead, no matter how long the delay,

For indeed I fear for you when you meet them!][1]

When placed alongside other poems from al-Maʿarrī's corpus, this line fits the pervasive theme of *waʿẓ* (*memento mori*) running throughout. Do not be overly critical of those who have passed on, the poet seems to say, since you are soon to join them in death. However, Ḥusayn bypasses this more obvious reading and moves in a different direction: أَتَرَى أَبا العَلاء فكّر في نفسه وفيما سيقول الناس فيه بعد موته؟ [Do you not see al-Maʿarrī thinking on himself and what people will say of him after his death?] Rather than a warning, according to this interpretation, the line becomes a plea for mercy after the poet is gone.

[1] Ṭaha Ḥusayn, *Maʿa Abī l-ʿAlāʾ fī sijnihi* (Cairo: Dār al-Maʿārif, 1981), 25.

One can disagree with Ḥusayn's biographical understanding of this line and still appreciate the well-founded insight about al-Maʿarrī's preoccupation with his own legacy. The sheer volume of his literary output suggests both a desire for recognition and a concern for reception. Also, if medieval reports are to be believed, the poet had a sense of his own potential from a young age, hence for example his desire to journey to Baghdad for greater exposure. Then, after returning to his hometown of Maʿarrat al-Nuʿmān in the north of modern-day Syria, al-Maʿarrī opened his house as a place of learning wherein he received students from all over the region. The decision to be a teacher, which in might have come in part from altruistic motives, represents that same yearning for a legacy that motivated him to write in the first place.

Al-Maʿarrī's attention to his own legacy is a major theme running throughout his life. In fact, it is difficult to read any of his works without considering the way in which he curated his own reception. Therefore that curatorship acts as the guiding thread that ties together my presentation of al-Maʿarrī's life and works in this chapter, which is divided into four sections. The first two deal with al-Maʿarrī's life, and the last two, his works. After surveying key events of his life in the first section, "Uncovering the Past," the second section, "Writing Life, Writing Literature," portrays how al-Maʿarrī tried to shape his own image by commenting on his life or incorporating biography into his literary works. This happens especially around the fact of his

blindness, his ill-fated trip to Baghdad, and even his own death. That he successfully mythologized these biographical elements as part of his own literary persona is borne out by later reception, as I show with salient examples.

The last two sections take a similar course. The third section of the chapter, "An Escaped Menagerie," comprises an overview of al-Maʿarrī's extant writings, with a focus on their variety and volume. This focus is meant to serve partly as a corrective to literary historical inertia, which has tended to privilege just two works: *Luzūm mā lā yalzam*, a collection of double end-rhyme poetry on themes of *zuhd* (asceticism), *waʿẓ*, and critique of religious authority; and *Risālat al-ghufrān* (The Epistle of Forgiveness), a long prose journey through heaven and hell. But emphasizing the range and size of al-Maʿarrī's body of work also signals the unifying theme of concern for his own image and subsequent efforts to cultivate it.

Those efforts are again conveyed by the fourth section, "Curating a Literary Legacy Through Paratexts." As the title indicates, this portion introduces the importance of "paratexts" to al-Maʿarrī's writings, a term coined by Gerard Genette to describe supplementary texts that surround and present a written work for public reception, including titles, prefaces, glosses, and letters. In al-Maʿarrī's case, many of his texts have one paratext attached; even in those that do not, he often refers to his own works and to his status as their creator. While there are many reasons for al-Maʿarrī to do this, two in particular come to

mind: controversy about his religious beliefs, and a desire on his part to teach about language and literature. These possible motivations for paratextual writing lead to a final consideration of the section and the chapter as a whole, namely, the performance of authorship and whether al-Maʿarrī would have assented to the ways in which that authorship has survived in reader memory.

Uncovering the Past: Al-Maʿarrī's Life and Times

Before sketching the outlines of al-Maʿarrī's life, let us tarry a moment on the question of sources. Al-Maʿarrī is the subject of biographical entries in some two dozen medieval encyclopedias, with short mentions in another three dozen.[2] His collected letters attest to the poet's contemporary renown, as do the hundreds of commentaries on his works. Many of these have been edited, but many more remain in manuscript and come to light all the time, making the process of writing his life one of ongoing discovery. Also, many details come down to us through secondary *akhbār* written by people with strong feelings pro or contra. Often this takes the form of religious controversy, such as the anecdote in which al-Maʿarrī admits to his

[2] For a thorough list of pre-modern biographies of al-Maʿarrī, see: *Taʿrīf al-qudamāʾ bī-Abī l-ʿAlāʾ*, ed. Ṭaha Ḥusayn et al. (Cairo: Wizārat al-Maʿārif al-ʿUmūmiyyah, 1944, repr. 1965), 603-5. Many biographical entries are copied verbatim from previous ones, and therefore I will limit myself to either the earliest accounts or those that provide the most detail, in the case that these two elements do not coincide in the same text.

student, the grammarian Abū Zakariyyā Yaḥyā ibn ʿAlī al-Tibrīzī (d. AD 1109), that he harbors doubts concerning the veracity of Islam.[3] Also, biographical accounts lean heavily on al-Maʿarrī's poetry and arts prose, especially *Luzūm mā lā yalzam*, to extrapolate historical fact from texts with a noncommittal connection to reality. Here, the potential of literary discourse for "fictionality"[4] aggravates already-polarized discussions, a point to be borne in mind when examining the poet's life.

Turning now to that life, Abū l-ʿAlāʾ Aḥmad ibn ʿAbd Allāh ibn Sulaymān al-Maʿarrī al-Tanūkhī was born in 363 AH, namely 973 or 974 AD in the Gregorian calendar. Al-Qifṭī gives as

[3] This story is preserved by Abū l-Faraj ʿAbd al-Raḥmān ibn al-Jawzī (d. AD 1201), one of al-Maʿarrī's most vehement medieval critics and the subject of chapter 4. See: Abū l-Faraj ibn al-Jawzī, *Al-Muntaẓam fī taʾrīkh al-mulūk wa l-umam*, 19 vols, ed. Muḥammad ʿAbd al-Qādir ʿAṭā and Muṣṭafā ʿAbd al-Qādir ʿAṭā (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyyah, 1995), 16:23. It is cited from Ibn al-Jawzī by Khalīl ibn Aybak al-Ṣafadī in consideration of the many opinions held about al-Maʿarrī's beliefs. See Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn Khalīl ibn Aybak al-Ṣafadī, *Kitāb al-wāfī bi l-wafayāt*, 29 vols., ed. Aḥmad al-Arnaʾūṭ and Turkī Muṣṭāfā (Beirut: Dār Iḥyāʾ al-Turāth al-ʿArabī, 2000), 7:65.

[4] Scholars traditionally apply this term to narrative and, to a lesser extent, theatrical works, rather than verse. See, for example: Catherine Gallagher, "The Rise of Fictionality," in *The Novel, Volume 1: History, Geography, and Culture* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006), 336-63; Richard Walsh, *The Rhetoric of Fictionality: Narrative Theory and the Idea of Fiction* (Columbus, OH: The Ohio State University Press, 2007); Jerzy Limon, "Theater's Fifth Dimension: Time and Fictionality," *Poetica* 41, no. 1-2 (2009), 33-54. Here I think it *apropos*, however anachronistic, to acknowledge in a general way the knotty relationship of statements made in poetry to the reality of which they speak. Debates about that relationship extend at least as far back as Aristotle's discussion of *mimesis*, as will no doubt be familiar to many readers. Thus "fictionality" is but one of many possible classificatory possibilities.

the exact date Friday 27 Rabīᶜ al-Awwal, 363 AH,[5] which would make al-Maᶜarrī's birthday 26 December 973 AD. His *nisbah* indicates a provenance of Maᶜarrat al-Nuᶜmān, which to this day lies between Aleppo and Ḥimṣ in northern Syria. The boy's family was made up of "fuḍalāʾ wa-quḍāt wa-shuᶜarāʾ" (notables and judges and poets), including his grandfather Sulaymān ibn Aḥmad, who served as the chief judge of Maᶜarrat al-Nuᶜmān, and his brother Abū l-Majd Muḥammad ibn ᶜAbd Allāh, a judge and accomplished poet in his own right.[6]

Thus al-Maᶜarrī grew up among intellectual elites and had early access to their advanced learning and sociopolitical circles, both of which played a significant role throughout his life. Another important factor was his contraction of smallpox, which left him blind at age four. This fact is confirmed by several biographers, who also preserve anecdotes about how humiliating it was for al-Maᶜarrī to live his daily life as an adult. For instance, al-Qifṭī relates that one day, al-Maᶜarrī went down into his cellar (*sirdāb*) and ate fruit syrup (*rubb aw dibs*), some of which dripped onto his chest. One of his students pointed this out to the poet,

[5] "Li-thālathin baqīna" (three remaining days of the month). See: Jamāl al-Dīn Abū l-Ḥasan ᶜAlī ibn Yūsuf al-Qifṭī, *Inbāh al-ruwāt ᶜalā anbāh al-nuḥāt*, 4 vols., ed. Muḥammad Abū l-Faḍl Ibrāhīm (Cairo: Dār al-Fikr al-ᶜArabī and Beirut: Muʾassasat al-Kutub al-Thaqāfiyyah, 1986), 1:83. This information also appears in Ibn al-ᶜAdīm's account. See Kamāl al-Dīn ᶜUmar ibn Aḥmad ibn al-ᶜAdīm, "Al-Inṣāf wa l-taḥarrī fī dafᶜ al-ẓulm wa l-tajarrī ᶜan Abī l-ᶜAlāʾ al-Maᶜarrī," in Ḥusayn et al., *Taᶜrīf al-qudamāʾ*, 514.

[6] Yāqūt al-Ḥamawī recounts the names of many noteworthy members of al-Maᶜarrī's family and reproduces excerpts from their poetry. See: Yāqūt al-Ḥamawī, *Muᶜjam al-udabāʾ, irshād al-arīb ilā maᶜrifat al-adīb*, 7 vols., ed. Iḥsān ᶜAbbās (Beirut: Dār al-Gharb al-Islāmī, 1993), 1:296-302.

who wiped away the stain and shouted in embarrassment, لعن الله النَهَم (God curse my gluttony!).[7] Yet despite his disability and its devastating psychological toll, al-Maʿarrī showed a talent for language at an early age, for which he garnered something of a local reputation.

Wishing to put that reputation to the test, as a young man he undertook a sort of intellectual pilgrimage to Baghdad, which stood as a cultural center at the time and to which aspiring poets often went seeking their fortune. Al-Maʿarrī left for the city most likely in the year 399 AH/1008 AD, making him about 30 years old.[8] All entries in medieval biographical encyclopedias agree on the fact of the trip itself. It is also the only journey that al-Maʿarrī himself reports,[9] through various lines in *Luzūm mā lā yalzam* as well as a letter to the people of Maʿarrat al-Nuʿmān.[10]

---

[7] Al-Qifṭī, *Inbāh al-ruwāt*, 1:90.

[8] See, for example: Abū l-ʿAbbās Shams al-Dīn ibn Khallikān, *Wafayāt al-aʿyān wa-anbāʾ abnāʾ al-zamān*, 8 vols., ed. Iḥsān ʿAbbās (Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, 1963), 1:114.

[9] Medieval secondary sources report that al-Maʿarrī probably undertook several longer journeys in his early years. Some biographers tell of a few months spent at a monastery within the confines of Byzantium, most likely Latakia. See: Al-Qifṭī, *Inbah al-ruwāt*, 1:90; Ibn Kathīr, *Al-Bidāyah wa l-nihāyah*, 21 vols., ed. Ṣalāḥ Muḥammad al-Khiyamī et al. (Doha: Wizārat al-Awqāf wa l-Shuʾūn al-Islāmiyyah, Dawlat Qaṭar, 2015), 13:133. Among others, Ibn Kathīr attributes al-Maʿarrī's deviant beliefs to this trip, which supposedly introduced doubt into the poet's mind about several points of Islamic doctrine, especially the lawfulness of consuming meat.

[10] This letter is preserved by Yāqūt al-Ḥamawī in his entry on al-Maʿarrī. See: Al-Ḥamawī, *Muʿjam al-udabāʾ*, 1:319-20. It was also edited and translated as part of David Margoliouth's

As to what motivated the trip, some biographers emphasize that al-Maʿarrī went to further his learning at the Dār al-ʿIlm, Baghdad's world-renowned library. Ibn al-ʿAdīm writes that the poet travelled للاستكثار من العلم (to increase in knowledge), then records the names of his teachers, including Abū Aḥmad ʿAbd al-Salām ibn al-Ḥusayn al-Baṣrī, a grammarian and then-director of the Dār al-ʿIlm.[11] A second possibility is intellectual ambition. As noted, Baghdad was to premodern Arabic poets what Hollywood is to aspiring actors today; anyone with a hope of success makes a trip to the hub of the industry.

As to why he left Baghdad eighteen months later, a few possibilities exist.[12] In a letter to his uncle and a poem sent to his pupil Abū l-Qāsim ʿAlī ibn al-Muḥassin, al-Maʿarrī cites both his mother's failing health and his own diminished financial means as the main reason for leaving.[13] However, most biographers claim that al-Maʿarrī suffered rejection by those he most

---

study of al-Maʿarrī's collected letters. See: D.S. Margoliouth, *The Letters of Abu l-'Alā of Ma'arrat al-Nu'mān* (Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press, 1898), 42-4.

[11] Jalāl al-Dīn ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Suyūṭī, *Bughyat al-wuʿāt fī ṭabaqāt al-lughawiyyīn wa l-nuḥāt*, 2 vols., ed. Muḥammad Abū al-Faḍl Ibrāhīm (Cairo: Maṭbaʿat ʿĪsā al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī wa-Shurakāhu, 1964), 1:315-16. For more on al-Wājikā, see: Al-Ṣafadī, *Al-Wāfī*, 18:255; Muḥammad Salīm al-Jundī, *Al-Jāmiʿ fī akhbār Abī l-ʿAlāʾ al-Maʿarrī wa-athārihi*, 3 vols. (Damascus: Al-Majmaʿ al-ʿIlmī al-ʿArabī, 1962-64), 1:259.

[12] Most historians report that al-Maʿarrī remained in Baghdad for a year and seven months, before returning to Maʿarrat al-Nuʿmān.

[13] Al-Ḥamawī, *Muʿjam al-udabāʾ*, 1:310-19. Abū l-Qāsim is one of al-Maʿarrī's students mentioned by name in medieval sources. See, for example: Ibn Kathīr, *Al-Bidāyah*, 13:137.

hoped to impress. Ibn al-ʿAdīm reports that upon arrival and looking for people with whom to study, al-Maʿarrī sought out ʿAlī ibn ʿĪsā al-Rabaʿī, a grammarian of some notoriety for animal cruelty.[14] True to such a harsh reputation, al-Rabaʿī supposedly greeted the poet with an insult: "Let the blind-harper [*iṣṭīl*] come in!"[15] From another angle, Ibn Kathīr attributes al-Maʿarrī's rejection from intellectual society to his dubious beliefs, especially as they appear in *Luzūm mā lā yalzam*.[16]

But the most widely-recounted story tells of an incident at the weekly *majlis* of Abū l-Qāsim ʿAlī al-Sharīf al-Murtaḍā, the Shīʿite polymath and elder brother of the poet al-Sharīf al-Raḍī.[17] At one point, al-Sharīf al-Murtaḍā mocks the poetry of al-Mutanabbī, whom al-Maʿarrī

[14] Ibn al-ʿAdīm, "Al-Inṣāf," *Taʿrīf al-qudamāʾ*, 541. Abū l-Barakāt al-Anbārī reports, for example, that al-Rabaʿī was known locally as مُديرٌ في النحو، مديرٌ في قتْل الكلاب [A leader in grammar, a leader in dog slaughter]. See: Abū l-Barakāt al-Anbārī, *Nuzhat al-alibbāʾ fī ṭabaqāt al-udabāʾ*, ed. Ibrāhīm al-Sāmarrāʾī (Zarqa, Jordan: Maktabat al-Manār, 1985), 249. For more on al-Rabaʿī's life and works, see al-Anbārī's full entry, and also: Al-Ḥamawī, *Muʿjam al-udabāʾ*, 4:1829; Khayr al-Dīn al-Zirkilī, *Al-Aʿlām*, 7 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-ʿIlm li l-Malāyīn, 2002), 4:318.

[15] Ibn al-ʿAdīm, "Al-Inṣāf," *Taʿrīf al-qudamāʾ*, 516. For the definition of *iṣṭīl* as a swindler pretending to have lost his sight, see, for example: Abū ʿUthmān ʿAmr ibn Baḥr al-Jāḥiẓ, *Kitāb al-bukhalāʾ*, ed. Muḥammad Ṭāhir al-Ḥājirī (Cairo: Dār al-Kātib al-Miṣrī, 1948), 45.

[16] Ibn Kathīr, *Al-Bidāyah*, 13:133.

[17] For a brief overview of the life and works of both figures, see: J. Cooper, "Al-Sharīf al-Murtaḍā" and "Al-Sharīf al-Raḍī," *Encyclopedia of Arabic Literature*, ed. Julie Scott Meisami and Paul Starkey (London and New York: Routledge, 1998), 705-6. For a book-length study on al-Sharīf al-Murtaḍā, see: ʿAbd al-Razzāq Muḥyī l-Dīn, *Adab al-Murtaḍā min sīratihi wa-āthārihi* (Baghdad: Maṭbaʿat al-Maʿārif, 1957).

greatly admired.[18] In response, the latter quips that, لو لم يكن للمتنبي من الشعر إلا قوله:

لك يا منازل في القلوب منازل، لكفاه فضلا [If al-Mutanabbī had written no verse other than the line, "You, ruined stations, have stations in our hearts," he should still be considered the best poet]. Here, al-Maʿarrī's wit rests on the inferred reference to al-Sharīf al-Murtaḍā of a line appearing later in the cited poem: وإذا أَتَتْكَ مذمّتي من ناقصٍ / فهي الشهادةُ لي بأنّي كاملُ [And if disparagement of me reaches you from some deficient fool, then it is proof to me that I myself am faultless]. The insinuation—that al-Sharīf al-Murtaḍā is a fool—was not lost on al-Maʿarrī's host, who according to reports demanded the poet be dragged from the session by his feet.

Whether such violence and disparagement was al-Maʿarrī's impetus for leaving Iraq, by 400 AH/1009 AD we find him back in Maʿarrat al-Nuʿmān. His mother died that same year, and it was also at this point that the poet began living in seclusion at his own house.[19] Such self-imposed exile apparently had been on al-Maʿarrī's mind for some time:

[18] Al-Ḥamawī, *Muʿjam al-udabāʾ*, 1:302-3; al-Jundī, *Al-Jāmiʿ*, 1:244.

[19] Al-Qifṭī, *Inbāh* 1:86.

فوجدت أوْفق ما أصنعه في أيام الحياة، عزلة تجعلني من الناس كبارح الأروى من سانح النعام . . . ليس بنتيج الساعة، ولا ربيب الشهر والسنة، ولكنه غذي الحقب المتقادمة، وسليل الفكر الطويل.

> [I found the best thing to do with my remaining days is seclusion from human society, like one who departs the she-goats and approaches the ostriches[20] . . . And this is not the result of an hour's reflection nor the child of a month or a year, but rather the youngling of long periods one after the other, the scion of much thought.][21]

This passage complicates the agreement had among medieval biographers that al-Maʿarrī's ill treatment at Baghdad constitutes the main reason for his flight from that city. At least, it shows that any such treatment was the latest in a long process of deciding to withdraw from human society.

Moreover, it reveals the weightiness of that particular moment to the rest of his life; a confluence of unhappy events seemed to decide his fate for the next half century. From here,

[20] Namely descending the mountain into the valley, an image meant perhaps to symbolize movement from visibility into obscurity.

[21] Al-Ḥamawī, *Muʿjam al-udabāʾ*, 1:319.

al-Maʿarrī confined himself to his own house, relying on servants and scribes and, according to sources, living an ascetic lifestyle. Al-Qifṭī's summary is a representative description: وَكان يتزهّد ولا يأكل اللحم ويلبس خَشِن الثياب [He lived as an ascetic, did not eat meat, and wore coarse clothing].[22] In confirming his own veganism, al-Maʿarrī uses the word *zuhd* (abstention)[23] as well as the phrase *ṣawm al-dahr* (lifelong fasting)[24] to describe his sparing routine to al-Muʾayyad fī l-Dīn al-Shirāzī.

During this period, al-Maʿarrī was supposedly offered several positions of wealth and power but which he declined to accept. Al-Ṣafadī recounts that al-Mustanṣir bi-llāh (r. AD 1036-1094), the eighth Fāṭimid caliph, بذل لأبي العلاء ما ببيت المال بالمعرّة من الحلال [he granted to al-Maʿarrī those funds in the treasury of al-Maʿarrah that were licit to give].[25] In explanation of his refusal, al-Maʿarrī strikes a lowly pose, claiming in a poem that such reward is above his station:

لَا أَطْلُبُ الأَرْزاقَ والـ ـمَولى يُفيضُ عليّ رِزقي

[22] Al-Qifṭī, *Inbāh*, 1:83.

[23] Al-Maʿarrī, *Rasāʾil*, 104.

[24] Ibid., 111.

[25] Al-Ṣafadī, *Al-Wāfī*, 7:66.

إنْ أُعْـطَ بعضُ القُـــــوتِ أَعْـ لَمُ أَنَّ ذلكَ فَـــــــــــوق حـقّي

[I do not ask for money, even as my Lord [God] gives me sustenance

If but a morsel of food were given, I know that it is more than I deserve][26]

Here al-Maʿarrī may be playing both sides, since al-Mustanṣir's offer was almost certainly motivated by a desire to exert influence over the independent Mirdāsids who ruled Aleppo at this time. But from another angle, al-Maʿarrī's response affirms his ethical conviction that refraining from earthly reward is the morally correct path.

It was during this time that al-Maʿarrī composed most of his works, about which I will say more in the next section. He also opened his house to dozens of scholars who came to study under his tutelage.[27] These include Abū Zakariyyā al-Tibrīzī, a "celebrated Arab philologist" who remained with al-Maʿarrī for two years and who is best known as the author of numerous literary commentaries and an abridgement of Ibn al-Sikkīt's *Iṣlāḥ al-manṭiq*.[28] Another was Abū Tammām [al-Humām] Ghālib ibn ʿĪsā al-Anṣārī, an Andalusian jurist and

[26] Ibid.

[27] Ibn al-ʿAdīm devotes a section to the names and profiles of those known to have studied with al-Maʿarrī. See: Ibn al-ʿAdīm, "Al-Inṣāf," *Taʿrīf al-qudamāʾ*, 517-21.

[28] For more on his life and works, see: R. Sellheim, "Al-Tibrīzī," *Encyclopedia of Islam, Second Edition*, eds. P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, W.P. Heinrichs (Leiden: Brill Online, 2012). 19 June 2017.

ḥadīth scholar.[29] Additionally, al-Maʿarrī did leave home during his years of self-exile, if only once. According to several sources, in the year 417 AH/1026 AD, the (Christian) proprietor of a tavern (*mākhūr*)[30] tried to rape a Muslim woman, who fled for refuge to the main mosque of al-Maʿarrah.[31] There, the Friday prayer-goers formed a mob, killed the culprit, and looted his tavern. In response, the governor of Aleppo and founder of the Mirdāsid dynasty, Ṣāliḥ ibn Mirdās "Asad al-Dawlah" (r. AD 1025-29), was persuaded by his Christian *wazīr* Tādhurus (Theodorus) ibn al-Ḥasan to arrest seventy notables of al-Maʿarrah and fine them one thousand dinars.[32] The people of al-Maʿarrah pled with al-Maʿarrī to arbitrate the case before Asad al-Dawlah, which he did, apparently with success.

---

[29] On his life and works, see, for example: Muḥammad ibn ʿAbdallah ibn al-Abbār, *Al-Takmilah li-Kitāb al-ṣilah*, 4 vols, ed. ʿAbd al-Salām al-Harrās (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1995), 4:50-1.

[30] This term carries the negative connotation of a debauched establishment, hence the meaning of "brothel" in modern usage. See: Edward William Lane, *Arabic-English Lexicon* (London, UK: Willams & Norgate, 1863), 2693.

[31] Al-Ḥamawī, *Muʿjam al-udabāʾ*, 1:354-5; Ibn al-ʿAdīm, "Inṣāf," in *Taʿrīf al-qudamāʾ*, 566-9; al-Ṣafadī, *Al-Wāfī*, 7:68; Margoliouth, *Letters*, xxxiii; Pieter Smoor, *Kings and Bedouins in the Palace of Aleppo as Reflected in Maʿarrī's Works* (Manchester, UK: University of Manchester, 1985), 133-69. Al-Maʿarrī himself refers to this incident in several poems from *Luzūm mā lā yalzam*. See, for example: Abū l-ʿAlāʾ al-Maʿarrī, *Luzūm mā lā yalzam*, 2 vols., ed. ʿAzīz Zand (Cairo: Maṭbaʿat al-Maḥrūsah, 1891-95), 1:355.

[32] Smoor notes a prior animosity for the people of al-Maʿarrah on the part of Tādhurus after his father-in-law's murder. Tādhurus had the perpetrators crucified, which inflamed the people against him and thereby also stoked his own anger. See: Smoor, *Kings and Bedouins*, 141. Concerning the attempted rape, all medieval accounts use language to the effect that Tādhurus arrested and fined the seventy notables in order to cause fear in the population (*li-iqamat al-*

Aside from portraying the tensions between Muslims and Christians at the borders of eleventh-century Byzantium, this episode signals the public role played by al-Maʿarrī. Even in exile, the poet was known and revered, as both the attack on the woman and al-Mustanṣir's offer of monetary reward demonstrate. Thus there may also be a basis in reality to reports that, upon al-Maʿarrī's death in 449AH/1058 AD at age 85, his public funeral was well-attended; al-Ḥamawī reports that no fewer than 84 poets recited eulogies over his grave.[33] Such was the mixed legacy of al-Maʿarrī immediately following his death and which continued for centuries to come.

Writing Life, Writing Literature

At the risk of waxing speculative, al-Maʿarrī himself may have been delighted to know that readers would toil continuously over his persona. Boris Tomashevsky says that for some authors of the European tradition, such as Voltaire and Rousseau, "the juxtaposition of the texts and the author's biography plays a structural role"[34]; compare this situation to earlier

haybah). For more on the life of Ṣāliḥ ibn Mirdās, see, for example: Ibid., 133-69; Th. Bianquis and Samir Shamma, "Mirdās, Banū or Mirdāsids," *Enyclopedia of Islam, Second Edition*.

[33] Al-Ḥamawī, *Muʿjam al-udabāʾ*, 1:303-4.

[34] Boris Tomashevsky, "Literature and Biography," *Readings in Russian Poetics: Formalist and Structuralist Views*, ed. Ladislav Matejka and Krystyna Pomorska (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1962), 49.

authors for whom biography is not as integral, such as Francis Bacon and most especially Shakespeare, "the 'iron mask' of literature."[35] In the medieval Arabic context, al-Maʿarrī falls squarely in the former category. What his writings show is a concern not just for the fate of his words and ideas but indeed the overall picture of his life. For this reason, one finds frequent efforts to shape his own biography in the eyes of readers, similar to how he comments on his own works to shape how they are interpreted. More on this last idea in another section.

A few data points from al-Maʿarrī's life will serve to illustrate how he curates the writing of that life. One is his blindness, a verifiable fact of history that has also become a major element of his persona. In corresponding with al-Muʾayyad fī l-Dīn al-Shirāzī about the practice of veganism, al-Maʿarrī relates that from age four, his eyes were damaged enough that he could not distinguish between an adult camel and its calf. He then laments this as the first of many cascading troubles (*thummah tawālat miḥanī*), including difficulty walking and a curved spine.[36] This biographical aside is meant to illustrate the overall privation (*izhād*) imposed on him by God and by which al-Maʿarrī came to practice veganism; it also represents an appeal to reader pathos, coming as it does at the letter's opening. Elsewhere, blindness is a key literary trope, e.g. the main character of *Risālat al-ṣāhil wa l-shāḥij* (The Epistle of the Horse and the

[35] Ibid., 48.

[36] Abū l-ʿAlāʾ al-Maʿarrī, *Rasāʾil Abī al-ʿAlāʾ al-Maʿarrī, al-juzʾ al-awwal*, ed. Iḥsān ʿAbbās (Beirut: Dār al-Shurūq, 1982), 103.

Mule) is a blind mule chained to a water wheel and who laments being unable to send a message to the governor.

In these and other texts, al-Maʿarrī himself places his lack of sight at the center of his literary persona, especially in comparison to other authors known for blindness like Bashshār ibn Burd (d. 783 AD) and al-Aʿmā al-Tūṭīlī (d. AD 1126), who do not make their disability such an important touchstone. Further evidence of this contrast lies in the fact that blindness has clung to al-Maʿarrī's persona through time. Medieval biographers mention it often, such as al-Ṣafadī's attribution to al-Maʿarrī: لا أعرف من الألوان إلّا الأحمر لأنّي أُلْبست في الجدري ثوباً مصبوغاً بالعصفر لا أعقل غير ذلك [I know no colors but red, since the smallpox compelled me to wear a robe dyed with safflower, and therefore I cannot perceive other than this].[37] In the modern era, Ṭaha Ḥusayn and Bint al-Shāṭiʾ confirm that al-Maʿarrī's loss of sight

[37] Al-Ṣafadī, *Al-wāfī*, 7:64. A briefer notice on al-Maʿarrī's familiar prominence appears in another of al-Ṣafadī's works, namely his encyclopedia of noteworthy blind people. See: Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn Khalīl ibn Aybak al-Ṣafadī, *Nakt al-hiymān fī nukat al-ʿumyān*, ed. Aḥmad Zakī Bey (Cairo: Dār al-Madīnah, 1911), 109.

represented his life's greatest tragedy;[38] for Ḥusayn in particular, blindness is also the true source of the poet's skepticism.[39]

Lack of vision represents just one example of how al-Maʿarrī creates hermeneutic momentum by writing about himself. Another is his trip to and flight from Baghdad, about which he expounds in some detail in a letter to the people of his hometown. He offers explanations for going, such as being drawn to one of Baghdad's prime intellectual resources: آثرتُ الإقامةَ بدار العِلم [I preferred to tarry in the Dār al-ʿIlm].[40] He also insists that fame and fortune were not his goal: وأَحْلِفُ ما سافرتُ أستَكثِرُ من النشب ولا أتكثَّرُ بِلِقاء الرجال [I swear I did not travel to seek greater means, nor to earn a fortune in the company of famous men].[41] This attitude—desire for learning over prestige or fame—could be taken in support of the poet's overall reputation for misanthropy.

[38] Ḥusayn, *Maʿa Abī l-ʿAlāʾ*, 59-65; ʿĀʾishah ʿAbd al-Raḥmān "Bint al-Shāṭiʾ," *Maʿa Abī l-ʿAlāʾ fī riḥlat ḥayātihi* (Cairo: Dār al-Maʿārif, 1965; repr. Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-ʿArabī, 1972), 34-5.
[39] Ḥusayn, *Maʿa Abī l-ʿAlāʾ*, 55.
[40] Al-Ḥamawī, *Muʿjam al-udabāʾ*, 1:320.
[41] Ibid., 1:319.

Yet it is clear in his letter that al-Maʿarrī sought a place among Baghdad's learned circles, as in this sentence clarifying why his wishes did not come to pass: شاهدت مكانا لم يُسعف الزمن بإقامتي فيه، والجاهل مغالب القدر، فلهيت عمّا اسْتأثر به الزمان [I came to see a place (for myself), but in which fate did not permit me to stay. And only a fool will quarrel with destiny, so I abandoned that which fate held back for itself].[42] Accompanying this sentiment are many anecdotes preserved by medieval biographers describing his ill treatment in Iraq, such as being called "dog" (*kalb*) on more than one occasion.[43]

The overall implication that al-Maʿarrī failed to achieve desire for recognition prompts the cynicism of David Margoliouth: "Like many of those who have failed to secure material prosperity, he found comfort in a system which flatters the vanity of those who have not succeeded by teaching them that success is not worth attaining."[44] Such a claim is overblown, especially given the poet's apparent affection for Baghdad and its people, upon whom he invokes God's blessings.[45] Yet Margoliouth's assessment does speak to a larger point: whatever al-Maʿarrī's actual, potentially conflicted feelings about his time abroad, ignominious rejection

[42] Al-Ḥamawī, *Muʿjam al-udabāʾ*, 1:320.

[43] Ibid., 1:323

[44] Margoliouth, *Letters*, 30.

[45] Margoliouth, *Letters*, 44.

at Baghdad and ensuing misanthropy is major part of the poet's legacy, due in no small part to his own reflections in writing.

To take an intriguing example from modern literature, the memory of al-Maʿarrī as a hater of mankind made its way from Arabic into twentieth-century Armenian poetry. It did so through the work of Avetīk Ishākiyān (d. 1957), a nationalist intellectual who rejected both Russian imperial control of Armenia as well as the reforms promised by pan-Turkism. During his years in political exile, brought on by his affiliation with the Soviet revolution, Ishākiyān penned a long poem called "Abu-Lala Mahari" sometime between 1903 and 1908.[46] It was then translated into Arabic as "ʿUrūj Abī l-ʿAlāʾ" (Al-Maʿarrī's Flight) and published at Aleppo in 1940.[47] Divided into seven "sūrahs" (a word referring to chapters of the Qurʾān), the so-named

[46] Avetik Ishākiyān, *Malḥamat al-Maʿarrī*, trans. Niẓār B. Niẓāriyān (Aleppo: Dār al-Ḥiwār, 1975, repr. 1994), 24.

[47] Ibid., 19. Niẓāriyān explains that the original translation, completed by Syrian intellectual Khayr al-Dīn al-Asadī, was an important but flawed first step in bringing Ishākiyān into Arabic. In addition to the fact that Ishākiyān went back and edited his poem after al-Asadī's translation first appeared, Niẓāriyān thought it necessary to produce his own rendering. Also noteworthy is the fact that parts of al-Asadī's translation were published in 1946 as an appendix to *ʿAlā bāb sijn Abī l-ʿAlāʾ*, the reply of Iraqi poet Maʿrūf al-Ruṣāfī to Ṭaha Ḥusayn's assessment of al-Maʿarrī. See: Maʿrūf al-Ruṣāfī, *ʿAlā bāb sijn Abī l-ʿAlāʾ*, ed. Muḥammad ʿAlī al-Zarqā (Damascus: Dār al-Madā, 1946, repr. 2002), 83-6. Al-Ruṣāfī's essay was published posthumously, meaning that it was the choice of the editor and leading socialist intellectual Muḥammad ʿAlī al-Zarqā to include Ishākiyān's verse. That choice speaks to both the widespread impact of al-Asadī's Arabic translation throughout the Arab-speaking world, and of the strong association between al-Maʿarrī and the political concerns of post-World War II socialist intellectuals.

malḥamah (epic poem) channels Ishākiyān's own frustration with the state of his homeland, using al-Maʿarrī's flight from Baghdad and subsequent self-exile as a trope.[48] In this way, the medieval poet's legacy of reclusiveness allows his modern Armenian counterpart a way to exorcise his own political demons, at least in part.

A third and final example of al-Maʿarrī's concern for writing his own life happens, ironically, around his demise. Previously I mentioned an indicator of al-Maʿarrī's public renown, namely the fact that many people came to mourn him upon dying. This occasion was also, following the account of premodern religious scholar Ibn Kathīr, a final chance for al-Maʿarrī to craft his own persona. In the universal history *al-Bidāyah wa l-nihāyah*, after noting that a large group of people came to the funeral, Ibn Kathīr reproduces the now-legendary line that al-Maʿarrī requested to be written on his own gravestone: هذا جناهُ أبي عليَّ / وما جَنَيْتُ على أحد [This is my father's crime against me, which I myself committed against

[48] Ishākiyān, *Malḥamat al-Maʿarrī*, 76. In the introduction, Niẓāriyān describes how Ishākiyān saw in al-Maʿarrī's biography a certain *naẓrah tashāʾumiyyah* (outlook of pessimism) that was not unfamiliar to Ishākiyān himself, and hence his choice of the Syrian poet's life to meditate on exile and the lamentable state of Russian-controlled Armenia. See: Ibid, 37.

none].[49] Often taken as a pithy expression of anti-natalism, this epitaph also evinces al-Maʿarrī's ongoing supervision of his legacy, even at the end of his life.

That this self-written phrase has been remembered through the centuries; and that al-Maʿarrī's tomb is still adorned by the phrase *shāʿir al-falāsifah wa-faylasūf al-shuʿarāʾ*, "A Poet Among Philosophers, and a Philosopher Among Poets,"[50] attests to the effectiveness of his self-cultivation of persona, even as it raises more questions about the nature of that persona. The same strategy employed to curate his biography can also be seen in the many secondary writings attached by al-Maʿarrī to his own works.

An Escaped Menagerie: Al-Maʿarrī's Works

The title of this section comes from Anthony Verity, who describes how al-Maʿarrī's poetry unleashes on his readers a volley of images like a pack of animals.[51] I find it an apt description his corpus as a whole. His writings are as prolific as they are difficult, a fact that intimates the man's desire for recognition and concern for reception. Up to now, the breadth

[49] Ibn Kathīr, *Al-Bidāyah*, 13:137.

[50] Muṣṭafā Abū Shams, "Raʾs al-Maʿarrī wa-masqaṭuhu," *Al*-Jumhuriyyah, November 7, 2017. <https://www.aljumhuriya.net/ar/content/%D8%B1%D8%A3%D8%B3-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%B9%D8%B1%D9%91%D9%8A-%D9%88%D9%85%D8%B3%D9%82%D8%B7%D9%87>

[51] A.C.F. Verity, "Two Poems of Abū'l-ʿAlā Al-Maʿarrī," *Journal of Arabic Literature* 2 (1971), 41.

and variety of al-Maʿarrī's work has not been widely recognized by scholars or general readers, which in my view prevents us from gaining a more nuanced sense of his persona. Therefore it will be worth the effort to survey al-Maʿarrī's literary output before delving into the particular prominence of self-commentary.

The work most often associated with al-Maʿarrī is *Luzūm mā lā yalzam* (Self-Imposed Necessity), sometimes called the *Luzūmiyyāt*. The title is a technical term in Arabic rhetoric denoting double consonant end-rhyme, which characterizes every poem in al-Maʿarrī's collection. Many have made the association between this formal feature — which imposes extra restrictions on the poet in terms of rhyme words, syntax, and diction — and al-Maʿarrī's self-imposed seclusion from humankind.[52] The content of *Luzūm mā lā yalzam* seems to bear this out, treating as it does such themes as *zuhd* (asceticism), *waʿẓ* (*memento mori*), and rationalist critique of religion. In the following section I shall have more to say on the *Luzūm* as a special case of authorial self-commentary, since there survive more secondary glosses on this work than any other by al-Maʿarrī.

[52] See, for example: Sinan Antoon, "Abūʾl-ʿAlāʾ al-Maʿarrī," *Essays in Arabic Literary Biography, 925-1350*, ed. Terry DeYoung and Mary St. Germain (Wiesbaden: Harrasowitz Verlag, 2011), 230; Suzanne Pinckney Stetkevych, "Abūʾl-ʿAlāʾ al-Maʿarrī wa-shiʿriyyat al-iltizām: naḥw qirāʾah taḥlīliyyah li-*Saqṭ al-zand* ("Abūʾl-ʿAlāʾ al-Maʿarrī and the Poetics of Engagement: Toward an Analytical Reading of *Saqṭ al-zand*"), *Proceedings of the Third International Conference for Literary Criticism, Cairo, Egypt, 10-14 Dec. 2003*, ed. ʿIzz al-Dīn Ismāʿīl (2006), 2:308-16.

The other text that is best known today is *Risālat al-ghufrān* (The Epistle of Forgiveness),[53] a winding work of prose in two parts. The *Ghufrān* amounts to a protracted (over 600 edited pages) response to a complaint from grammarian ʿAlī ibn Manṣūr al-Ḥalabī Dawkhalah (d. AD 1035), better known as Ibn al-Qāriḥ, about the alleged heresy of certain poets. Writing in approximately 1033 AD, al-Maʿarrī answers the aging Ibn al-Qāriḥ by imagining the latter to have died in the meantime and undertaken a journey through heaven and hell. Along the way, this notional Ibn al-Qāriḥ meets those poets whom he himself charged as heterodox, only to discover that they have been forgiven (hence the work's title) and granted a place in paradise.[54]

Even though al-Maʿarrī's eschatological tourism[55] was not as popular among pre-modern Arab readers as *Luzūm mā lā yalzam*, for a time it was thought by modern scholars to

[53] Abū l-ʿAlāʾ al-Maʿarrī, *Risālat al-ghufrān*, ed. ʿĀʾishah ʿAbd al-Raḥmān "Bint al-Shāṭiʾ" (Cairo: Dār al-Maʿārif, 1963).

[54] A key to understanding al-Maʿarrī's devious rhetorical stance vis-à-vis his interlocutor is the fact that Ibn al-Qāriḥ had quarreled with al-Maʿarrī's close friend and patron, al-Ḥusayn ibn ʿAlī al-Maghribī (d. AD 1027). For general information on the latter's life, see: C.E. Bosworth, "al-Maghribī, al-Ḥusayn ibn ʿAlī," *Encyclopedia of Arabic Literature*, ed. Julie Scott Meisami and Paul Starkey (London and New York: Routledge, 1998), 488; Pieter Smoor, *Kings and Bedouins in the Palace of Aleppo as Reflected in Ma`arri's Works* (Manchester: 1985), 17, 46. Two of al-Maʿarrī's most famous letters, "Risālat al-manīḥ" (The Epistle of the Profitless Arrow) and "Risālat al-ighrīḍ" (The Epistle of the Tender Palm Branch), were addressed to al-Maghribī. At least one of the latter's responses survives today. See: Al-Maʿarrī, *Rasāʾil*, 145-255.

[55] Among others, Gregor Schoeler has described the work this way. See: "'Eschatological Tourism and 'Collaborative Authorship': An Interview with Gregor Schoeler on Translating al-

have been a possible source of Dante's *Divine Comedy*, a fact that thrust *Risālat al-ghufrān* onto the stage of world literature. Thus it has endured in the European imagination, even if the idea that it directly influenced the Italian Renaissance has been abandoned by scholarship.[56] Among modern Arab readers, the *Ghufrān* has had a major impact, including on Iraqi poet Jamīl Ṣidqī al-Zahāwī's epic poem *Thawrah fī Jaḥīm* (Revolt in Hell). Detailed visions of the hereafter appear in another text by al-Maʿarrī, *Risālat al-malāʾikah* (The Epistle of the Angels), a treatise on *ṣarf* (Arabic morphology).[57] To impress the importance of this topic onto readers, al-Maʿarrī imagines himself to have died and pled for entry to paradise by convincing Riḍwān, the gatekeeping angel, of the need to teach heaven's inhabitants about etymologically-opaque words in the Qurʾān.

Some works by al-Maʿarrī have trod a path opposite that of *Risālat al-ghufrān*, enjoying broad repute in the medieval era yet fading from popular memory in the modern. One of these

---

Maʿarrī," *Library of Arabic Literature Blog*, New York University, 13 March 2014. <www.libraryofarabicliterature.org/2014/eschatological-tourism-and-collaborative-authorship-an-interview-with-gregor-schoeler-on-translating-al-ma'arri/>

[56] For more on the *Ghufrān* as a possible source of the *Divine Comedy*, see Dionisius A. Agius and Richard Hitchcock, eds., *The Arab Influence in Medieval Europe: Folia Scholastica Mediterranea* (Reading: Ithaca Press, 1994), 70-1. For debates about the overall influence of Islamic sources on Dante, see: Vincente Cantarino, "Dante and Islam: History and Analysis of a Controversy (1965)," *Dante Studies* 125: Dante and Islam (2007), 37-55.

[57] Abū l-ʿAlāʾ al-Maʿarrī, *Risālat al-malāʾikah*, ed. Muḥammad Salīm al-Jundī (Beirut: Al-Maktab al-Tijārī li l-Ṭibāʿah wa l-Tawzīʿ wa l-Nashr, 1966).

is *Saqṭ al-zand* (The First Tinder-Spark),[58] a collection of al-Maʿarrī's early poetry (written before AD 1020), including *madḥ* (panegyric), *rithāʾ* (elegy) for his own father, and a group of 30 *dirʿiyyāt* (armor poems) personifying suits of armor.[59] The *Saqṭ* survives in dozens of manuscripts and it served as major teaching text.[60] Yet ironically, this medieval heyday had its basis in the same conformity of *Saqṭ al-zand* to then-fashionable poetic norms that has been a likely factor in the collection's unpopularity among moderns. In addition, the *Saqṭ* is noteworthy for its enthusiastic reception in the Islamic West, if the numerous extant secondary commentaries (*shurūḥ*) are any indication.[61]

Also popular in the Maghreb is the long work in prose, *Risālat al-ṣāhil wa l-shāḥij* (The Epistle of the Neigher [Horse] and the Brayer [Mule]).[62] Setting out to entreat then-governor of

[58] Abū l-ʿAlāʾ al-Maʿarrī, *Shurūḥ Saqṭ al-zand*, 5 vols., ed. Ṭaha Ḥusayn et al. (Cairo: Al-Hayʾah al-Miṣriyyah al-ʿĀmmah li l-Kitāb, 1945-9; repr. 1987).

[59] For a secondary study of the *dirʿiyyāt*, see Pierre Cachia, "The Dramatic Dialogues of al-Maʿarrī," *Journal of Arabic Literature* 1 (1970), 129-36. These poems are one of the most intriguing parts of al-Maʿarrī's *oeuvre*, yet they have received virtually no study other than Cachia's article.

[60] S.M. Stern, "Some Noteworthy Manuscripts of the Poems of Abu'l-'Alā' al-Ma'arrī," *Oriens* 7, no. 2 (1954), 322-47. Stern notes the crucial impact of al-Maʿarrī on "the Baghdad school of philologists in the 6th/12th century," through his student Abū Zakariyyā al-Tibrīzī.

[61] See especially Mohammed Bencharifa, ed., *Shurūḥ Andalusiyyah ghayr maʿrūfah li-Saqṭ al-zand*, (Casablanca: Maṭbaʿat al-Najāḥ al-Jadīdah, 2011).

[62] Abū l-ʿAlāʾ al-Maʿarrī, *Risālat al-ṣāhil wa l-shāḥij*, ed. ʿĀʾishah ʿAbd al-Raḥmān "Bint al-Shāṭiʾ" (Cairo: Dār al-Maʿārif, 1984). The two surviving manuscripts are written in clear Maghribī hand

Aleppo Abū Shujāʿ Fātik ʿAzīz al-Dawlah (d. AD 1022) to pardon a land tax owed by al-Maʿarrī's relatives, the Syrian poet conjures a menagerie of talking animals who commiserate on grammar, prosody, war, and politics.[63] Several medieval authors wrote creative imitations of this *risālah*, including the *Risālat al-sājiʿah wa l-ghirbīb* (The Epistle of the Dove and the Raven) by Andalusian vizier ʿAbd al-Ghafūr al-Kalāʿī (d. AD 1237)[64] and the *Kitāb al-ṣādiḥ wa l-bāghim al-munāṣiḥ* (The Book of Wise Council of the Crower [Cock] and the Wailer [Gazelle]) by Iraqi poet Ibn al-Habbāriyyah (d. AD 1116).[65] Another widely-imitated work is the short prosimetrical text "Mulqā l-sabīl" (The Crossroads), which meditates on life's transience and other leitmotifs like those found in *Luzūm mā lā yalzam*.[66]

---

and held at the Ḥasaniyyah Archives (*al-khizānah al-ḥasaniyyah*) in Rabat, Morocco, a fact that speaks to al-Maʿarrī's popularity in the Islamic West.

[63] For a description of the work's contents and analysis of its polysemic literary rhetoric, see: Pieter Smoor, "Enigmatic Allusion and Double Meaning in Maʿarrī's Newly-Discovered 'Letter of a Horse and a Mule': Part I," *Journal of Arabic Literature* 12 (1981), 49-73; "Enigmatic Allusion and Double Meaning in Maʿarrī's Newly-Discovered 'Letter of a Horse and a Mule': Part II," *Journal of Arabic Literature* 13 (1982), 23-52.

[64] Al-Maʿarrī, *Ṣāhil*, 61.

[65] Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad ibn al-Habbāriyyah, *Al-Ṣādiḥ wa l-bāghim*, 2 vols., ed. Wuraydah Jumʿah ʿAwd (Benghazi: Jāmiʿat Qāryūnus, 1999). This is the best edition. For general information about the author's life and works, see C. Hillenbrand, "Ibn al-Habbāriyya," *Encyclopedia of Arabic Literature*, ed. Julie Scott Meisami and Paul Starkey (London and New York: Routledge, 1998), 327.

[66] Abū l-ʿAlāʾ al-Maʿarrī, "Mulqā l-sabīl," *Rasāʾil al-bulaghāʾ*, ed. Muḥammad Kurd ʿAlī (Cairo: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿArabiyyah al-Kubrā, 1913), 214-31.

Both the *Luzūm* and "Mulqā l-sabīl" harmonize with another composition: *Al-Fuṣūl wa l-ghāyāt* (Paragraphs and Periods).[67] Despite the fact that only a quarter of the work survives in a unique Egyptian National Archives manuscript; and although modern scholarship has all but ignored it,[68] the *Fuṣūl* was and is notorious for being an alleged parody of the Qurʾān. Al-Maʿarrī wrote the text in rhyming prose *fuṣūl* (sections or paragraphs) arranged in larger groupings that share a *ghāyah* (monorhymed ending), on general themes of *tamjīd* (godly praise), *waʿẓ* (*memento mori*), and *ḥikmah* (gnomic counsel). For some, these features signal an imitation of holy writ, along with the use of divine names (*al-tawwāb*, "the Forgiving," *al-aʿlā*, "the Highest") and oaths, in the context of al-Maʿarrī's "extant works, information in his bibliography and other texts about works that have not been preserved, and biographical anecdotes about his

[67] Abū l-ʿAlāʾ al-Maʿarrī, *Al-Fuṣūl wa l-ghāyāt fī tamjīd Allāh wa l-mawāʿiẓ*, ed. Maḥmūd Ḥasan Zanātī (Beirut: Al-Maktab al-Tijārī li l-Ṭibāʿah wa l-Tawzīʿ wa l-Nashr, 1938).

[68] Recent studies by Christian Peltz and Devin Stewart are two of just a handful of modern studies on the *Fuṣūl*. See: Christian Peltz, *Der Koran des Abū l-ʿAlāʾ*, 2 vols. (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz-Verlag, 2013); Devin Stewart, "Rhythmical Anxiety: Notes on Abūʾl-ʿAlāʾ al-Maʿarrī's (d. 449/1058) *al-Fuṣūl waʾl-Ghāyāt* and Its Reception," *The Qurʾan and* Adab: *The Shaping of Literary Traditions in Classical Islam*, ed. Nuha Alshaar (Oxford, forthcoming), 239-72. For a sense of other modern studies on the *Fuṣūl*, see Stewart, "Rhythmical Anxiety"; Kevin Blankinship, "Review: Christian Peltz, *Der Koran des Abū l-ʿAlāʾ*," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 76, no. 1 (April 2017), 203-6.

thought and dealings with other scholars of his day."[69] Others deny a direct connection, or at least doubt that al-Maʿarrī wrote in a spirit of mockery.[70] The issue remains open to debate.

In addition, two of the most important yet overlooked parts of al-Maʿarrī's *oeuvre* are his collected correspondence, and his commentaries. The former total more than three dozen letters preserved in at least five known manuscripts,[71] and they shed light on al-Maʿarrī's eleventh-century *milieu* under the Syrian Ḥamdānids and Mirdāsids, as well as its tenuous placement between three major power centers, namely the Byzantines, the Fāṭimids, and the ʿAbbāsids.[72] Other noteworthy letters include a long (thirty translated pages) meditation on the

---

[69] Stewart, "Rhythmical Anxiety," 266. For other scholars taking a similar position, see, for example: Wadad Kadi and Mustansir Mir, "Literature and the Qurʾān," *Enyclopaedia of the Qurʾān*, 6 vols., ed. Jane Dammen McAuliffe (Leiden, Boston, and Köln: Brill, 2001-06), 3:221.

[70] See for example August Fischer, *Der "Koran" de Abu l-ʿAlāʾ al-Maʿarrī* (Leipzig: 1942); Rudy Paret, "The Qurʾān — I," *The Cambridge History of Arabic Literature, Volume 1: Arabic Literature to the End of the Umayyad Period* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 213; Abdelfattah Kilito, *Abū l-ʿAlāʾ al-Maʿarrī aw matāhāt al-qawl* (Casablanca: Dār Toubqāl, 2000), 34-6. In contrast to Stewart's reading of secondary anecdotes about al-Maʿarrī as supporting the case for parody, Kilito argues that they portray al-Maʿarrī as a believer, since context is added that defangs his purportedly heterodox views.

[71] See David S. Margoliouth, *The Letters of Abu l-`Ala of Ma`arrat al-Nu`man; edited from the Leyden manuscript, with the life of the author* (Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press, 1898). Currently the best edition, which conveys much more content of the letters than Margoliouth's, was prepared by Iḥsān ʿAbbās from five complete or partial manuscripts. See: Al-Maʿarrī, *Rasāʾil*. Supposedly al-Maʿarrī himself collected, edited, and glossed the letters, as evinced by the poet's own lost commentary but which has been incorporated by later authors.

[72] Additionally, *Risālat al-ṣāhil wa l-shāḥij* too describes the constant fear of Byzantine invasion that haunted Aleppo society in al-Maʿarrī's day.

caprice of time and mortality,[73] and another that expounds at length on muteness, blindness, and physical disability, called "Risālat al-akhrasayn" (The Epistle of the Two Mutes).[74] As for commentaries, al-Maʿarrī wrote several on his own works and those of other poets, notably al-Mutanabbī (d. AD 965), whose verse stood as a model of eloquence,[75] as well as al-Buḥturī (d. AD 897), Abū Tammām (d. AD 845), and Ibn Abī Ḥusaynah (d. AD 1065), a praise poet of the Mirdāsids and al-Maʿarrī's younger contemporary.[76]

In the next section I will discuss al-Maʿarrī's commentaries in more detail, as part of his overall propensity to explain his own writings. But to cap off the preceding overview, the veritable menagerie of poetry and prose that survives from al-Maʿarrī's pen reveals a fecund mind at work in various rhetorical modes. This fact should broaden one's view of his literary legacy beyond the perennial texts of *Luzūm mā lā yalzam* and *Risālat al-ghufrān*. Furthermore, the sheer volume of writing signals both a lifelong engagement with language and literature

[73] Margoliouth, *Letters*, 50-80.

[74] ʿAbbās, *Rasāʾil*, 47-69.

[75] For a book-length study of al-Mutanabbī's medieval reception, see Majd Yaser al-Mallah, *In the Shadows of the Master: Al-Mutanabbī's Legacy and the Quest For the Center in Fāṭimid and Andalusian Poetry* (London, UK: Berkshire Academic Press, 2012).

[76] This commentary, also lost, has been incorporated into Ibn Abī Ḥusaynah's *dīwān*. See: *Dīwān Ibn Abī Ḥuṣaynah, samiʿahu wa-sharaḥahu Abu l-ʿAlāʾ al-Maʿarrī*, 2 vols., ed. Muḥammad Asʿad Ṭalas (Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, 1956, repr. 1999). For more on the life and works of Ibn Abī Ḥusaynah, see J. Rikabi, "Ibn Abī Ḥaṣīna," *Encyclopedia of Islam, Second Edition*.

and, more fundamentally, a demand for recognition. Both of these are contributing factors in al-Maʿarrī's regular use of paratexts, the subject of the remaining section of this chapter.

Curating a Literary Legacy Through Paratexts

In the same way that al-Maʿarrī shepherds his own biography into the hands of readers, so too does he prepare his own written works for public reception. The main vehicle for doing so are secondary texts such as titles, prefaces, commentaries, and letters, which texts surround the primary ones. Gerard Genette calls these ancillary writings paratexts, or, in the French title of his study, *Seuils*, "thresholds," indicating their mediating role as "a 'vestibule' that offers the world at large the possibility of either stepping inside or turning back."[77] They serve a principally pragmatic rhetorical function, that is, they enable "a text to become a book and to be offered as such to its readers and, more generally, to the public."[78] While Genette's *Seuils* deals with the printed book rather than medieval manuscripts, his concept of texts that frame and present other texts could not be more appropriate to what one finds throughout the works of al-Maʿarrī.

[77] Gérard Genette, *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation*, trans. Jane E. Lewin (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 1

[78] Ibid.

To start with a simple example, titles are a ubiquitous element that clue readers in to al-Maʿarrī's playful if not mischievous authorship. One of his two glosses on al-Mutanabbī's poetry is called *Muʿjiz Aḥmad* (Aḥmad's Miracle), a daring title which contains a pun on his subject's first name, Aḥmad, and that of the prophet Muḥammad (also known as Aḥmad), for whom the revelation of the Qurʾān was considered to be his greatest miracle and therefore the clearest indicator of his divine mantle.[79] The second commentary, which treats only select portions of al-Mutanabbī's *dīwān*, is called *al-Lāmiʿ al-ʿazīzī* (The Radiance of ʿAzīz) and was supposedly commissioned by the Mirdāsid governor of Aleppo, ʿAzīz al-Dawlah Thābit ibn Thimāl, hence the title.[80]

Al-Mutanabbī's works aside, al-Maʿarrī annotated select verses by al-Buḥturī under the name *ʿAbath al-Walīd* (Child's Play, a pun on al-Buḥturī's first name, al-Walīd).[81] He also wrote a *sharḥ* on the poetry of Ḥabīb ibn Aws al-Ṭāʾī (d. AD 845) better known as Abū Tammām, with the title *Dhikrā Ḥabīb*, a reference to the first line of Imruʾ al-Qays's pre-Islamic *muʿallaqḥ* poem

[79] Abū l-ʿAlāʾ al-Maʿarrī, *Sharḥ dīwān al-Mutanabbī li-Abī l-ʿAlāʾ al-Maʿarrī, "Muʿjaz Aḥmad"*, 4 vols., ed. ʿAbd al-Majīd Diyāb (Cairo: Dār al-Maʿārif, 1986-88, repr. 1996).

[80] Abū l-ʿAlāʾ al-Maʿarrī, *Al-Lāmiʿ al-ʿazīzī* (Hamidiye 1148), Süleymaniye Library, Istanbul; Abū l-ʿAlāʾ al-Maʿarrī, *Al-Lāmiʿ al-ʿazīzī* , ed. M. Saʿīd al-Mawlāwī (Riyadh, Saudi Arabia: Maktabat al-Malik Fayṣal li l-Buḥūth wa l-Dirāsāt al-Islamiyyah, 2008). ʿAzīz al-Dawlah al-Mirdāsī should not be confused with the Mirdāsid ʿAzīz to whom *Risālat al-ṣāhil wa l-shāḥij* was addressed.

[81] Abū l-ʿAlāʾ al-Maʿarrī, *ʿAbath al-Walīd*, ed. Nādiya ʿAlī al-Dawlah (Beirut: Al-Sharikah al-Muttaḥidah li l-Tawzīʿ, 1987).

and a pun on Abū Tammām's first name (this work does not survive independently, but rather as part of a commentary on Abū Tammām by al-Maʿarrī's student, Abū Zakariyyā al-Tibrīzī[82]). Regarding titles of his self-commentaries, there is the *Zajr al-nābiḥ* (Driving Off the Barker),[83] a marginal gloss on the poetry of *Luzūm mā la yalzam* and the subject of chapter 3. It was written to defend both the *Luzūm* and al-Maʿarrī's own reputation against accusations of heterodox belief (*zandaqah*) or atheism (*ilḥād*), hence the titular image of the author beating back a yapping dog.

In this way, through a paratext as simple as titling, al-Maʿarrī places his unique, playful signature on each work and projects authority and control to his readers. Even the mere presence of titles for his texts serves this purpose. Harry Levin points out that, in contrast to the practice in ancient Greek, Latin, Hebrew, and Assyrian of calling a text by its first line, "the existence of titles [in later texts] generally presupposed the recognition of authorship."[84]

---

[82] *Dīwān Abī Tammām bi-sharḥ al-Khaṭīb al-Tibrīzī*, ed. Muhammad ʿAbduh ʿAzzām (Cairo: Dār al-Maʿārif, 1964); Al-Khaṭīb al-Tibrīzī, *Sharḥ dīwān Abī Tammām*, 2 vols., ed. Rājī al-Asmar (Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-ʿArabī, 1994). There does survive a commentary attributed to al-Maʿarrī and which glosses Abū Tammām's anthology of pre-Islamic poetry, *Al-Ḥamāsah*. See Abū l-ʿAlāʾ al-Maʿarrī, *Sharḥ dīwān Ḥamāsat Abī Tammām, al-mansūb li-Abī l-ʿAlāʾ al-Maʿarrī*, 2 vols., ed. Ḥusayn Muḥammad Naqshah (Beirut: Dār al-Gharb al-Islāmī, 1991).

[83] Abū al-ʿAlāʾ al-Maʿarrī, *Zajr al-nābiḥ: "Muqtaṭafāt,"* ed. Amjad al-Ṭarābulsī (Damascus: Al-Maktabah al-Hāshimiyyah bi-Dimashq, 1965).

[84] Harry Levin, "The Title as a Literary Genre," *The Modern Language Review* 4 (Oct. 1977): xxiv-xxv.

Further strengthening this recognition in al-Maʿarrī's case is the fact that he often includes not just the title but also an explanation for why he chose it, a conventional though nonetheless individual way to justify one's writing.

Looking at his entire corpus, titles are the tip of al-Maʿarrī's paratextual iceberg. Self-commentaries are another salient feature of many—though not all—extant works. I have already mentioned one, *Zajr al-nābiḥ*, which survives as a marginal gloss on a unique manuscript of *Luzūm mā lā yalzam* held at the British Library.[85] In terms of its physical form it differs from the running commentary incorporated as part of *Al-Fuṣūl wa l-ghāyāt*. For every stylized paragraph of that work, written in *sajʿ* (rhyming prose) and praising God and offering pious counsel, there is an equally long clarification of lexical, grammatical, and metrical matter. This more traditional mode of commentary differs from the *Zajr* in a second way, namely its didactic rhetorical stance, in contrast to the defensive mode assumed by the voice of the *Zajr*. I shall return to this point below.

Speaking of the *Zajr* as a self-commentary on *Luzūm mā lā yalzam*, that work of poetry represents a special case of authorial self-writing, since more paratexts survive for the *Luzūm* than have been discovered for any other of al-Maʿarrī's works. In addition to *Zajr al-nābiḥ*,

[85] Abū al-ʿAlāʾ al-Maʿarrī, *Luzūm mā lā yalzam, al-juzʾ al-awwal* (OR 5319), digital scan, British Library, London.

there is a 30-plus page preface (*khuṭbah*) laying out an ethics of writing poetry, which al-Maʿarrī claims to reject in its traditional role as a commodity for patrons or a vehicle for lewd topics; and surveying elements of rhyme in Arabic poetry, along with a description of al-Maʿarrī's own contribution thereunto. Also, not appended to the *Luzūm* itself but still taking that text as its subject matter is the exchange of letters between al-Maʿarrī and Fāṭimid missionary al-Muʾayyad fī l-Dīn al-Shīrāzī, on the subject of the former's practice of veganism.

The accrual of surviving paratexts around *Luzūm mā lā yalzam*, which accrual is an important reason for my choice of this particular text, could be due to accidents of history or literary fashion.[86] Then again, it is a strange coincidence that what may in al-Maʿarrī's lifetime have been the most controversial of his writings would also be the one to which so much self-explanation is appended. This conspicuous record of polemic returns us to the difference in tone noted earlier between self-commentary in the *Zajr* and the *Fuṣūl*, and raises another point in turn: often al-Maʿarrī's paratexts were born of controversy, the constant presence of which we can see vividly in secondary medieval accounts of al-Maʿarrī's life.

[86] As one example of how the accidents of fashion and fate can shape literary reception, the difference between a bestseller and a masterpiece was the subject of a recent University of California, Santa Barbara symposium on medieval European and Middle Eastern literatures. See: Heather Blurton et al., participants, Medieval Bestsellers vs. Masterpieces Conference, 5 May 2016, Loma Pelona Center, University of California, Santa Barbara, CA.

For example, the Persian Ismāʿīlī Shīʿite poet and scholar-traveler Nāṣir-i Khusraw (d. 1088 AD) describes contemporary reactions to *Al-Fuṣūl wa l-ghāyāt*, namely that "people accused him [of heterodoxy], saying, 'You tried to imitate the Qurʾān with this book!'"[87] In a later, Mamluk-era work of history, Egyptian scholar al-ʿUmrī attributes reader doubts about al-Maʿarrī to jealousy. "Many people who lacked al-Maʿarrī's intellect came to envy him. So they pored over his books with a critical spirit, but found them free of blame or corruption. When they saw he was devoid of reproach, they took to falsehood and calumny, charging him with spiritual deviance [*al-ilḥād*] and denying God's attributes [*taʿṭīl*]."[88] And there are the accusations of Ibn al-Jawzī, a conservative Ḥanbalī theologian and orator and one of al-Maʿarrī's vehement opponents, that the poet "rails against the prophets, heaps scorn on revealed law, and denies the resurrection!"[89] In later chapters I will go into more detail about

[87] "Ū-rā tuhmat kardand ka, 'Tu īn kitāb[-rā] bi muʿāraẓa-yi Qurʾān karda-ī.'" Nāṣir-i Khusraw also mentions that *Al-Fuṣūl wa l-ghāyāt* was written in such difficult language that "only a few people were able to grasp its meaning" (*ka mardum bar ān vāqif namī shavand magar bar baʿẓī andak*). Nāṣir-I Khusraw, *Nasir-I Khusraw's Book of Travels: Safarnamah*, ed. and trans. Wheeler M. Thackston (Costa Mesa, CA: Mazda Publishers, 2001), 15.

[88] Ibn Faḍl Allāh al-ʿUmrī, *Masālik al-abṣār fī mamālik al-amṣār*, 27 vols, ed. Kāmil Salām al-Jabūrī (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyyah, 2010), 15:293.

[89] Abu l-Faraj ibn al-Jawzī, *Al-Muntaẓam fī taʾrīkh al-mulūk wa l-umam*, 17 vols., ed. Muḥammad ʿAbd al-Qādir ʿIṭā and Muṣṭafā ʿAbd al-Qādir ʿIṭā (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyyah, 1995), 16:24. For more on Ibn al-Jawzī's life and works, see Tilman Seidensticker, "Ibn al-Jawzī," *The Routledge Encyclopedia of Arabic Literature*, ed. Julie Scott Meisami and Paul Starkey (New York, NY: Routledge, 2010), 338.

the cause and nature of these controversies, but for now it is enough to note that their presence was no doubt ample motivation for al-Maʿarrī to gloss his own writings.

But a second factor seems to have inspired many paratexts, that is, a desire to teach. Several surviving commentaries are traditional *shurūḥ*, that is, lexical and grammatical glosses on al-Maʿarrī's own writing. They include, for example, "Ḍawʾ al-saqṭ" (The Spark's Light), a commentary on *Saqṭ al-zand*, now lost but incorporated by al-Tibrīzī into his own *sharḥ* on that work.[90] Biographers list other self-commentaries like this that no longer exist, such as "Lisān al-ṣāhil wa l-shāḥij" (The Tongue of the Neigher and the Brayer), an annotation for *Risālat al-ṣāhil wa l-shāḥij*, and the "Manār al-Qāʾif" (The Tracker's Beacon), a commentary on the work of animal fables *Kitāb al-qāʾif* (Book of the Tracker), which survives only in fragments.[91] That some of al-Maʿarrī's works circulated as teaching texts, together with the fact that he opened his house to students from around the Arab world, speaks to a didactic imperative.

Even leaving aside proper commentary, al-Maʿarrī expounds his own works in numerous other self-directed writings. For example, readers find many introductions and prefaces, such as the eschatological scene-setting of *Risālat al-malāʾikah* or the devious

[90] Yāqūt al-Ḥamawī, *Muʿjam al-udabāʾ*, 1:333.

[91] Ṭaha Ḥusayn's compilation reproduces a brief excerpt of this text. See: *Taʿrīf al-qudamāʾ*, 451-2.

preamble to *Risālat al-ghufrān*.[92] To take another genre, personal correspondence, in many of his letters al-Maʿarrī mentions, cites, or explicates his own verse from the *Luzūm* and *Saqṭ al-zand*. At times he includes a framing monologue or anecdote to justify his writing, a kind of "statement of purpose" to ease readers into the text. A good example is *Risālat al-ṣāhil wa l-shāḥij*, which begins with an explanation of how al-Maʿarrī's cousins owed a tax on their land, which al-Maʿarrī pleads with the governor to forgive. Still another way in which al-Maʿarrī exerts control over his own literary output involves self-editing projects. Iḥsān ʿAbbās points out, for example, that al-Maʿarrī collected, edited, and glossed his own letters, to be circulated as a teaching aide.[93] Pieter Smoor, reflecting on al-Maʿarrī's early verse collection *Saqṭ al-zand*, notes that he edited his own poems to reflect the shifting political landscape, as well as al-Maʿarrī's own ethical turn away from praise poetry in later years.[94]

When viewed as a whole, al-Maʿarrī's myriad paratexts — self-directed commentaries, glosses, introductions, letters, frame narratives, and redactions — reveal a need to disseminate his own writings, but in a way that is acceptable to the author himself. Such curatorship speaks

[92] For a study of this preamble's lexical, rhetorical, and mythical ramifications, plus a full English translation, see: Suzanne Pinckney Stetkevych, "The Snake in the Tree in Abu al-ʿAlaʾ al-Maʿarri's *Epistle of Forgiveness*: Critical Essay and Translation," *Journal of Arabic Literature* 45 (2014), 1-80.

[93] ʿAbbās, *Rasāʾil*, 13. Al-Ḥamawī gives as the title of this text "Khādim al-rasāʾil" (The Epistles' Custodian). See: Al-Ḥamawī, *Muʿjam al-udabāʾ*, 1:334.

[94] Smoor, *Kings and Bedouins*, 10.

in turn to a deeply felt concern for, if not an obsession with, one's own literary legacy. Although he does not make this obsession explicit, it is in al-Maʿarrī's performance of authorship that we can see him looking forward to posterity. In this sense, his corpus confirms the sense among modern scholars of high hopes for securing a legacy at Baghdad, and that having those hopes dashed might have played a role in his subsequent withdrawal from human society.

Al-Maʿarrī's anxiety over his own legacy also raises the question: Would he himself assent to the way that legacy has played out? How would he respond to detractors and supporters today? The provocative nature of many works suggests that al-Maʿarrī was comfortable with controversy, hence the proliferation of paratexts as thresholds of doubt and dispute. Perhaps he would be pleased to know that people still remember him as a gadfly; this reputation can be seen for example in the modern intellectual quarrel between Ṭaha Ḥusayn and Maʿrūf al-Ruṣāfī, which I examine at length in chapter 5. Indeed it is al-Maʿarrī's polemical authorship, or counter-authorship, that endures as much as the texts themselves, hence the need to understand these two elements of his legacy in tandem.

Chapter 2. Sound Authority: Rich Rhyme

and the Preface to *Luzūm mā lā yalzam*

"A while ago, I settled on the idea that I would make a written composition [*abniyat awrāq*] in which I would aim for truth in speech [*ṣidq al-kalimah*] and from which I would have stripped every falsehood [*kadhib*] and distortion [*mayṭ*]."[1] So begins the author's preface to *Luzūm mā lā yalzam*. Al-Maʿarrī's declared intention to rewrite poetry has through the years aroused much debate, particularly over the relation between ethical authorship, i.e. the rejection of poetry's profane social functions, and the constraints he imposes on literary form. In every poem of the *Luzūm*, al-Maʿarrī uses the device of *luzūm mā lā yalzam*, "making obligatory that which is not," the technical term for double end-rhyme. The fact the he mentions this in the preface together with his ethical claims to authorship suggests a connection between the two. What is the nature of that connection?

Modern scholars have typically understood al-Maʿarrī's use of *luzūm mā lā yalzam* as an iconic sign—that is, a sign that bears formal resemblance to its object[2]—of his strict ascetic

[1] Abū l-ʿAlāʾ al-Maʿarrī, *Luzūm mā lā* yalzam, 3 vols., ed. Ibrāhīm al-Anbārī (Cairo: Wizārat al-Tarbiyyah wa l-Taʿlīm, 1959), 1:3.

[2] The concept of an icon is part of the "second trichotomy" of sign types developed by mathematician and philosopher Charles Sanders Peirce. The other two corners of this trichotomy are "index," whose referential function happens by natural contiguity and with a

lifestyle. Abdelfattah Kilito, for example, calls al-Maʿarrī's poetry "labyrinths of speech" (*matāhāt al-qawl*).[3] Sinan Antoon writes that "al-Maʿarrī extended his self-imposed [physical] confinement into the poetic realm."[4] Iḥsān ʿAbbās portrays al-Maʿarrī being withdrawn behind "walls of daub and walls of style" (*al-judrān al-ṭīniyyah wa l-judrān al-uslūbiyyah*).[5] Here, modern academics follow a strong impression given by medieval accounts of the ethical underpinnings of rhyme. In his encyclopedia of poets, Yāqūt al-Ḥamawī reproduces an apparently self-given nickname, *rahīn al-maḥbasayn*, "the twice-bound captive," referring to the poet's "self-confinement at home" (*ḥabs nafsihī fī l-manzil*) and "hindrance from seeing the world due to

---

sense of particularity, e.g. an individual cloud of smoke signifying an individual fire; and "symbol," which operates by convention and signals a general type, as with traffic signs or, more vitally for literature, natural languages. Somewhat in contrast to these two types, the "icon" bears formal resemblance to its object, with classic examples including maps and photographs. These categories should be considered interactive rather than detached; the "complete" sign will exhibit three types depending on their putative object and in different circumstances.

For helpful elaborations of Peirce's theory, see for example T.L. Short, *Peirce's Theory of Signs* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 207-62; Jørgen Dines Johansen, *Literary Discourse: A Semiotic-Pragmatic Approach to Literature* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002), 29-40.

[3] Abdelfattah Kilito, *Abū l-ʿAlāʾ al-Maʿarrī, aw matāhāt al-qawl* (Casablanca: Dār Tubqāl li l-Nashr, 2000), 44.

[4] Sinan Antoon, "Abū l-ʿAlāʾ al-Maʿarrī," *Essays in Arabic Literary Biograph: 925*-1350, ed. Terri DeYoung and Mary St. Germain (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz-Verlag, 2009), 231.

[5] Abū l-ʿAlāʾ al-Maʿarrī, *Rasāʾil Abī l-ʿAlāʾ, al-juzʾ al-awwal*, ed. Iḥsān ʿAbbās (Beirut: Dār al-Shurūq, 1982), 84.

blindness" (*ḥabsahū ʿan al-naẓar ilā l-dunyā bi l-ʿamā*).[6] In another report, Jamāl al-Dīn al-Qifṭī cites al-Maʿarrī himself as saying "I confined myself to my house" (*lazimtu maskanī*),[7] with a conspicuous morphological congruence between the verb *lazimtu* and the technical term for double rhyme, *luzūm mā lā yalzam*. Such overlap seems to justify the iconic reading of rhyme in al-Maʿarrī's poetry.

But the modern argument that linguistic constraints bear a likeness to real-life asceticism do not recognize al-Maʿarrī's formal parameters in many other works, none of which advances ethical claims like those in the *Luzūm*. When in other writings he does make such claims, especially when relating writerly ethics to verbal form, it is often tongue-in-cheek. For instance, he justifies writing about morphology (*ṣarf*) in the treatise *Risālat al-malāʾikah* (The Epistle of the Angels), on the grounds that it will benefit the inhabitants of Paradise, by which he may intend to critique overly literal visions of the afterlife more than to actually advise those who are bound for that afterlife.[8] The view that al-Maʿarrī withdrew behind language just as he withdrew from society also overstates his seclusion, if one is to

[6] Yāqūt al-Ḥamawī, *Muʿjam al-udabāʾ, aw Irshād al-arīb ilā maʿrifat al-adīb*, 7 vols, ed. Iḥsān ʿAbbās (Beirut: Dār al-Gharb al-Islāmī, 1993), 1:303.

[7] Jamāl al-Dīn al-Qifṭī, *Inbāh al-ruwāt ʿalā anbāh al-*nuḥāt, 4 vols., ed. Muḥammad Abū l-Faḍl Ibrāhīm (Cairo: Dār al-Fikr al-ʿArabī, 1986), 1:91.

[8] Abū l-ʿAlāʾ al-Maʿarrī, *Risālat al-malāʾikah*, ed. Muḥammad Salīm al-Jundī (Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, 1992), 25-6.

believe his abundant correspondence with rulers and thinkers. Moreover, the ethical stakes of rhyme are not the focus we find in the preface to the *Luzūm*. The bulk of the discussion surveys rhyming norms in Arabic, after which al-Maʿarrī describes his own particular innovations in this area. He does not talk about those particulars in the ethical terms sometimes attributed to him.

Based on these points, I see little direct evidence for a link between ethical authorship and double rhyme in the *Luzūm mā lā yalzam*. Therefore I propose an alternative: By experimenting with double rhyme, al-Maʿarrī strengthens his authorship inasmuch as he tacitly claims to be an expert in poetry. In the following chapter, I will explore how al-Maʿarrī does this in theory, by displaying his abstract knowledge of rhyme, and in practice, by proving himself a successful practitioner of it. In the first section, I place the *Luzūm* in its eleventh-century context, a time of remarkable innovation in literature due to increased literacy, the persistence of orality, and greater sociopolitical dynamism; al-Maʿarrī was both a product of and a contributor to this time, due arguably to his own individual desire to create.

Then I consider al-Maʿarrī's preface to the *Luzūm*. In the second section, I show that he invites readers to consider him an authority in theoretical learning, by pithily displaying knowledge of rhyme and taking a confident stance vis-à-vis his reader. In the third section I study the *Luzūm* itself, in which al-Maʿarrī uses double rhyme alongside a number of rhetorical

devices, notably paronomasia (punning or wordplay), assonance (repetition of long vowels), and morphological parallelism (juxtaposition of semantic opposites with the same verbal form). These all serve to create the combination of phonetic identity semantic difference which is characteristic of all rhyme.

To gain purchase on how this virtuoso performance serves al-Maʿarrī's authorship, in the fourth section I zoom back out and examine statements by premodern Arabic poets and theorists about double rhyme, *luzūm mā lā yalzam*. Those statements emphasize the difficulty of this device, a fact that lends al-Maʿarrī credibility for having written a whole double rhyming *dīwān*. Also, premodern theorists consider *luzūm mā lā yalzam* to fall under the aegis of *badīʿ*, the rhetorical branch concerned with tropes and whose purpose is to present existing ideas in a new way, not to come up with entirely new ideas. To me, this means that al-Maʿarrī did not try to create a new genre when he wrote the *Luzūm*, although that text did afford him the chance to show mastery of the tradition before rejuvenating it. In the final section, I reflect on the ambivalence around reception of the *Luzūm*, which leads me back to literary innovation in the eleventh century: The same tension between tradition and innovation in society at large is reflected in a tension within the individual between indebtedness to tradition and the desire to flout it.

A Time for Rhyme

The tenth and eleventh centuries AD were a period of real literary innovation in the Islamic world. New forms appeared, including the rhyming prose *maqāmah* and the shadow play,[9] while already existing forms were reinvigorated, such as folktales and epic *sīrah* poems, secretarial correspondence, literary anthologies, creative imitations (*muʿāraḍāt*), and treatises on classical rhetoric (*balāghah*). In poetry, one of the most salient novelties was the appearance of the stanza—the Arabic word is *dawr*, "a round," cognate to the Greek *strophḗ* and English strophe, "turn" or "twist"—that is, grouped lines set off from each other within the same poem by different rhymes. Stanzaic verse represents a watershed moment in Arabic poetry, since as far as we know, monorhyme was the norm prior to this point.

Granted, experimenting with rhyme and meter was not new, as Gregor Schoeler has shown with the *Musammaṭ-Familie* of rhyme groupings that led eventually to the formation of fully strophic poems like the *muwashshaḥ* and *zajal*.[10] But the variety of such experiments increased dramatically after the tenth century, and not just in Arabic. It was also in this period that the first *tarjīʿ-band* and *tarkīb-band* poems appeared in the Persian *dīwān*s of Qaṭrān Tabrīzī

[9] James Monroe and Mark F. Pettigrew, "The Decline of Courtly Patronage and the Appearance of New Genres in Arabic Literature: The Case of the Zajal, the Maqāma, and the Shadow Play," *Journal of Arabic Literature* 34, no. 1/2, The Arabic Literature of al-Andalus (2003), 138-77

[10] Gregor Schoeler, "Musammaṭ," *Encyclopedia of Islam II*, ed. C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, W.P. Heinrichs and Ch. Pellat (Leiden: Brill, 1992a), 7:660.

(d. AD 1009) and Farrukhī-ya Sīstānī (d. AD 1031).[11] In Hebrew, there is evidence of *zajal* forms a full century before they appeared in Arabic.[12] During this time strophic poetry first entered Europe through vernacular Romance *formes fixes* like the *rondeau*, the *estornel*, the *virelai*, and the *cantiga*,[13] which as several scholars have noted bear striking resemblance to the Arabic *zajal*.[14] In addition, other Arabic forms appeared that take similar liberties with rhyme and poem length, such as the five-line *mukhammasāt* (also *takhāmīs*) and ten-line *muʿashsharāt* in Iberia and North Africa.[15]

---

[11] Gabrielle van den Berg, "Stanzaic Poetry," *Encyclopedia Iranica Online*, December 6, 2012. Van den Berg argues that these Persian forms have no equivalent in Arabic, even though the only major difference between the *tarjiʿ-band* and the *muwashshaḥ* is the absence of the *kharja* couplet in the former.

[12] Schoeler, "Musammaṭ," 660-1. Tova Rosen suggests an indigenous origin for the Hebrew forms. See Tova Rosen, "The Muwashshah," *The Literature of al-Andalus*, ed. María Rosa Menocal, Raymond P. Scheindlin, and Michael Sells (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 177.

[13] M.L. Gasparov, *A History of European Versification*, trans. G.S. Smith and Marina Tarlinskaja, ed. G.S. Smith and Leofranc Holford-Strevens (Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press, 1996), 149-62.

[14] Schoeler, "Muwaššaḥ," 448-50; Otto Zwartjes, *Love Songs From al-Andalus: History, Structure, and Meaning of the Kharja* (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 94-125.

[15] For an introduction to the latter form and its place in the works of Ibn ʿArabī, see Denis E. McAuley, "An A to Z of Sufi Metaphysics: Ibn ʿArabī's *Muʿashsharāt*," *The Meeting Place of British Middle East Studies: Emerging Scholars, Emergent Research & Approaches*, ed. Amanda Phillips and Refqa Abu-Remaileh (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2009), 60-77. Similar forms also appeared at this time in Persian. See Van den Berg, "Stanzaic Poetry."

Viewed as a whole, al-Maʿarrī's *oeuvre* fits neatly into this trend of experimenting with rhyme. The best known example is the work under study, namely *Luzūm mā lā yalzam*, in which he imposes double end-rhyme onto every poem, meaning that the last two phonemes of the rhyme word remain the same instead of just one (more details on this in a later section). In another text, *Al-Fuṣūl wa l-ghāyāt*, he groups sections (*fuṣūl*) of internally-rhyming prose under a single end rhyme (*ghāyah*), thereby creating a sort of prose analogue to the stanza.[16] He also wrote a short text of prosimetrum, that is, a text that mixes poetry and rhyming prose tightly together, which formal design is indicated by work's very title, "Mulqā l-sabīl" (The Crossroads).[17] All these formal experiments, unprecedented in Arabic literature as far as I know, bespeak an overall trend in his writings to push the bounds of language.

What led to the remarkable innovations of an author like al-Maʿarrī and Arabic literature as a whole? Or as Alexander Elinson wonders about stanzaic rhyme, "Was it merely a coincidence that vernacular literature and forms, and their use in religious expression gained in popularity in the thirteenth century, in Islamic lands and Europe alike?"[18] One important

[16] Abū l-ʿAlāʾ al-Maʿarrī, *Al-Fuṣūl wa l-ghāyāt fī tamjīd Allāh wa l-mawāʿiẓ*, ed. Maḥmūd Ḥasan Zanātī (Beirut: Al-Maktab al-Tijārī li l-Ṭibāʿah wa l-Tawzīʿ wa l-Nashr, 1938).

[17] Abū l-ʿAlāʾ al-Maʿarrī, "Mulqā l-sabīl," *Rasāʾil al-bulaghāʾ*, ed. Muḥammad Kurd ʿAlī (Cairo: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿArabiyyah al-Kubrā, 1913), 214-31.

[18] Alexander Elinson, "Lourdes María Alvarez, trans., *Abū al-Ḥasan al-Shustarī: Songs of Love and Devotion*" (review), *Journal of Arabic Literature* 42 (2011): 96.

factor in all the new developments, not just with rhyme, seems to have been the rise of "writerly culture,"[19] that is, the mounting importance of books, both in private consumption and public production. Consonant with other changes in technology, increased literacy rates led to financial and cultural valuation of reading to a degree unprecedented in other contemporary societies, including Western Europe.[20] Yet even with the expansion of literacy, a second contributing element is the persistence of orality. The impact of continued reliance on oral performance and transmission is unmistakable when one sees how quickly new genres spread around the region.

A third factor in literary developments of this time, one pointed out by many scholars, is greater political and social autonomy. James Monroe and Mark Pettigrew have made the argument that decentralization of power—and with it, more plentiful sources of poetic patronage—led to the rise of the *zajal*, the *maqāmah*, and the shadow play.[21] The fluid political situation also seems to have stoked demand for works pondering the nature of good leadership. Göran Larsson and Linda Darling note that "mirrors for princes," a genre known to

[19] This phrase was popularized by Shawkat Toorawa among medieval Arabists. See Shawkat M. Toorawa, *Ibn Abī Ṭāhir Ṭayfūr and Arabic Writerly Culture: A Ninth-Century Bookman in Baghdad* (London and New York: RoutledgeCurzon, 2005). See especially Chapter 2, "The Presence and Insistence of Books."

[20] Konrad Hirschler, *The Written Word in the Medieval Arabic Lands: A Social and Cultural History of Reading Practices* (Edinburgh, UK: Edinburgh University Press, 2012), 3-4.

[21] Monroe and Pettigrew, "Decline," 140.

Arabic authors for at least two centuries, assumed greater importance in shaping not just political discourse but actual rulership as well.[22] Perhaps decentralization also helps explain the upsurge of animal symbolism; examples of this trend include Ibn Ẓafar al-Ṣiqillī's *Sulwān al-muṭāʿ fī ʿudwān al-atbāʿ* (The Sovereign's Comfort in [the face of his] Subject's Ire) and Muḥammad ibn ʿAbd al-Salām al-Muqaddisī's *Kashf al-asrār ʿan ḥukm al-ṭuyūr wa al-azhār* (Revealing the Secrets of Rule by Birds and Flowers).

Of course, greater dispersal of power can only go so far to explain these developments. In his study of medieval Arabic reading practices, for example, Konrad Hirschler notes that it was not decentralization but rather its opposite that led to the rise of major libraries in Egypt and Syria.[23] Moreover, the effects of sociopolitical fluidity were not uniform and did not weather historical circumstances equally well. Ahmed El Shamsy's forthcoming book on print culture in nineteenth century Egypt begins by profiling a Mamluk library whose contents gradually evacuated out during five centuries, in a reversal of the trends under discussion.[24]

---

[22] Linda Darling, "*Mirrors for Princes* in Europe and the Middle East: A Case of Historiographical Incommensurability," *East Meets West in the Middle Ages and Early Modern Times: Transcultural Experiences in the Premodern World* (Berlin and Boston: De Gruyter, 2013), 228; Göran Larsson, Ibn García's shuʿūbiyya Letter: Ethnic and Theological Tensions in Medieval al-Andalus (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2003) 3-4.

[23] Hirschler, *The Written Word*, 4.

[24] Forthcoming, Princeton University Press. One of El Shamsy's graduate students, Kyle Wynter-Stoner, is currently at work on a dissertation about this Mamluk library and the overall trend in the transmission of knowledge that it embodies.

But considering these counterpoints is not to deny the importance of political dynamism, only to bear in mind that several ingredients may have contributed to innovation, not just one.

In addition, a fourth factor in eleventh-century literary growth is the need of individuals to create something new. Here the Arabic literature's tenth- and eleventh-century moment, which seems to have afforded more chances to express artistic individuality, becomes especially relevant to al-Maʿarrī. Stefan Sperl points out al-Maʿarrī's penchant for what he calls "semiological mimesis,"[25] that is, a poet's attempt to make language refer not to reality but instead to language itself. The reason for doing so, Sperl contends, is out of a desire to go against overly habituated literary norms. Here he refers to an observation by Wolfhart Heinrichs that "the motive force that brought about the rise of *badīʿ* poetry was the traditionalism of Arabic poetry with regard to its content—a fact that compelled the poets to give exclusive attention to the 'attire' of their products."[26]

By testing out new uses of rhyme and other formal features, al-Maʿarrī is from one perspective a product of his time, in which such experiments were happening around the

[25] Stefan Sperl, *Mannerism in Arabic Poetry: A Structural Analysis of Selected Texts (3rd century AH/9th century AD—5th century AH/11th century AD)* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 97-154.

[26] Ibid., 180; Wolfhart Heinrichs, "Literary Theory: The Problem of its Efficiency," *Arabic Poetry: Theory and Development, Third Giorgio Levi Della Vida Biennial Conference*, ed. G.E. von Grunebaum (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1973), 25.

Islamic world and beyond. But from another perspective, he exhibits the tension felt by authors between indebtedness to tradition and the desire to break free of it. Whether such a desire by al-Maʿarrī "corrupted" (*afasada*) classical forms of poetry, as was claimed by Ṭaha Ḥusayn,[27] he was arguably led by the yearning of all authors for originality and, by implication, authority. In the following sections I will explore how al-Maʿarrī does this in theory, by showing himself to be a knowledgeable expert on rhyme, and in practice, by proving himself a successful practitioner of it.

A Rhyme Expert: Authority in Theory

At the beginning I quoted al-Maʿarrī's claim to write something free of falsehood and distortion when he composed *Luzūm mā lā yalzam*. In the rest of this brief opening, al-Maʿarrī explains the work's hortatory content, in which readers will find "praising God" (*tamjīd li llāh*), "reminding the forgetful" (*tadhkīr li l-nāsīn*), and "cautioning against this world" (*taḥdhīr min al-dunyā*). Some thirty pages later, at the preface's end, he elaborates the point about truth in speech by rejecting poetry's traditional role in praising earthly rulers or extolling the pleasures of wine, women, and song. This role he calls *taḥsīn al-manṭiq bi l-kadhib*, "beautifying

[27] Ṭaha Ḥusayn, *Maʿa Abī l-ʿAlāʾ fī sijnih* (Cairo: Dār al-Maʿārif, 1981), 30.

speech through falsehood,"[28] perhaps implying the stereotype of medieval Arabic poetry that *aḥsan al-shʿir akdhabuhu*, the most eloquent verse is also the most deceitful.[29] His rejection of poetry on moral grounds may indicate al-Maʿarrī's actual feelings on the matter, just as it could be a generic convention meant to establish a credible ethos. In either case, it sets up a position of authority that continues throughout the preface.

Between the bookended claims to a composition free from deceit and a rejection of traditional poetry, there lie thirty pages amounting to a treatise on rhyme (*al-qawāfī*). Although there is no clear link between that experiment and the ethics of writing other than that they appear together in the author's preface, some traces of a connection do exist. To give one example, al-Maʿarrī describes his project with a genitive phrase, *abniyat awrāq*, which imparts the sense of something constructed or made (*abniyah*, sing. *bināʾ*, "building") and of paper or leaves (*awrāq*, sing. *waraq*). The apparent meaning is "written composition," that is, a "composition" (i.e. construction) that takes its form in "writing" (i.e. on paper). However, there are at least two other possibilities. The first would in English go something like "house of

[28] Ibid., 48.

[29] For studies of this stereotype and the broader attitude it indicates among premodern Arabic poets, see for example Johann Christoph Bürgel, "'Die beste Dichtung ist die lügenreichste': Wesen und Bedeutung eines literarischen Streites des arabischen Mittelalters im Lichte komparatischer Betrachtung," *Oriens* 23-24 (1974): 7-102; "Lüge und Warheit in der klassischen islamischen Dichtung: Ein Beitrag zur Wesenbestimmung der arabischen und persichen Poesie," *Folia Orientalia* 15 (1974): 259-62.

leaves," a rendering that invites poststructuralist interpretation to the effect that al-Maʿarrī wants to show language's incapacity to signify anything except itself.

But the second meaning is that it refers to meter. In medieval Arabic theory of prosody, the word *abniyah* means metrical "patterns" to be found in poetry[30], being one among several such terms like *baḥr* and *wazn*. In this sense, *abniyat awrāq* would mean something like "written patterns," referring presumably to formal innovations in the *Luzūm*. The presence and importance of these patterns are familiar to modern scholars. For example, both Dmitry Frolov and Yohannes Friedmann discovered independently of each other that the order of meters in the *Luzūm* follows their order in the "five circles" schema expounded by Khalīl ibn Aḥmad.[31] Thus al-Maʿarrī may be suggesting at the outset that his prosodic ventures have something to do with the overall project of cleansing the *qaṣīdah*.

In turn, this is one of several ways in which al-Maʿarrī seems to signal his knowledge of rhyme to readers, thus establishing himself as an expert on that topic. Another is his explanation of rhyme elements and conventions. After setting out the ethical impetus behind

[30] Dmitry Frolov, *Classical Arabic Verse: History and Theory of* ʿArūḍ (Leiden: Brill, 200), 192

[31] Dmitry Frolov, "The Circles of Ḫalīl and the Structure of *Luzūmiyyāt* of *Abū l-ʿAlāʾ al-Maʿarrī*," *Studies in Near Eastern Languages and Literatures: Memorial Volume of Karel Petrácek*, ed. P. Zemanek (Prague: Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic, Oriental Institute, 1996), 223-36; Yohannes Friedmann, "Literary and Cultural Aspects of the Luzūmiyyāt," *Studia Orientalia. Memoriae D.H. Baneth dedicata* (Jerusalem: The Magnes Press, The Hebrew University, 1979), 347-65.

Luzūm mā lā yalzam, al-Maʿarrī overviews the linguistic constituents of rhyme in Arabic and their proper use, before moving to his own contribution in the *Luzūm*. He explains that the cluster of rhyming sounds at the end of a line—called the "rhymeme" by Rina Drory, who has to date written the most comprehensive study in English[32]—consists of eleven building blocks, six "letters" (*ḥurūf*) and five "vowels" (*ḥarakāt*).

According to al-Maʿarrī, the six "letters," a notional category,[33] comprise two consonants and four long vowels. In addition to the rhyme consonant itself, *al-rawī*, there is the *waṣl*, either an *alif*, *wāw*, *yāʾ*, or *hāʾ*, following the *rawī* and indicating a long vowel; the *khurūj*, either *alif*, *waw*, or *yāʾ*, succeeding a movent *hāʾ* in a third person pronoun whether masculine or feminine (e.g. *mawki**buhā**, naʿ**ṣihī***); the *ridf*, again an *alif*, *waw*, or *yāʾ*, this time preceding the *rawī* and indicating that the vowel in the syllable before the *rawiyy* is long (e.g. *al-ḥuq**ūq**, qaṭ**āmī***); the *taʾsīs*, always an *alif* and which comes in the second syllable before the *rawī* (e.g. *t**ā**mi**r**, al-daw**ā**ʾi**r***); and the *dakhīl*, the other consonant, falling between the *taʾsīs* and *rawī*. Its vowel varies but is normally *kasrah*, and it is always short (e.g. *tām**ir**, al-dawāʾ**ir***).

The remaining components of the rhymeme are five "vowels" (*ḥarakāt*): the *majrā*, the vowel of the *rawī* in "freed rhyme" (*qāfiyah muṭlaqah*; in "fettered rhyme," *qāfiyah muqayyadah*,

[32] Rina Drory, *Models and Contacts: Arabic Literature and its Impact on Medieval Jewish Culture* (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 64.
[33] Ibid., 86.

there is no vowel atop the *rawī*); the *nafād*, the vowel of the *hāʾ* when followed by a *khurūj* (long vowel following a movent *hāʾ* that follows the *rawī*); the *ḥadhw*, the vowel of the letter preceding the *ridf* (long vowel immediately preceding the *rawī*); *tawjīh*, the vowel of the short syllable before the *rawī*; and the *rass*, the vowel (always *fatḥah*) of the letter before the *taʾsīs* (always *alif*). For all the constituent *hurūf* and *ḥarakāt* of the rhymeme, al-Maʿarrī furnishes the reader with ample proof texts (*shawāhid*) portraying them in context.

Looking at other medieval treatments of rhyme in Arabic, such as the *Kitāb ṣanʿat al-shiʿr* by Abū Saʿīd al-Sayrāfī[34], *Kitāb al-qawāfī* by Abū Yaʿlā ʿAbd al-Bāqī al-Tanūkhī,[35] or *Al-Wāfī fī l-ʿarūḍ wa l-qawāfī* by al-Maʿarrī's own pupil, al-Khaṭīb al-Tibrīzī[36], the information about rhyme in the *Luzūm*'s preface is remarkable mainly for the short space in which it is presented. Its clear style and tone contrasts with the *luzūmiyyāt* poems themselves and other works written by al-Maʿarrī in a more "literary" mode, a fact due probably to the treatise or commentary genre of which it takes part.

[34] Abu Saʿīd al-Sayrāfī, *Kitāb Ṣanʿat al-shiʿr*, ed. Jaʿfar Mājid (Beirut: Dār al-Gharb al-Islāmī, 1995), 270-332.

[35] Abū Yaʿlā ʿAbd al-Bāqī al-Tanūkhī, *Kitāb al-qawāfī*, ed. ʿUmar al-Asʿad and Muḥyi al-Dīn Ramaḍān (Beirut: Dār al-Irshād, 1970).

[36] Al-Khaṭīb al-Tibrīzī, *Al-Wāfī fī l-ʿarūḍ wa l-qawāfī*, ed. ʿUmar Yaḥyā and Fakhr al-Dīn Fajāʾuh (Aleppo: Al-Maktaba al-ʿArabiyyah bi-Ḥalab, 1970).

Also, the preface gives some attention to rhyming norms and other points of stylistic decorum. Al-Maʿarrī discusses impermissible rhyme errors, particularly *iqwaʾ* (switching the rhyme consonant, *al-rawī*), *ikfāʾ* (switching the vowel atop the *rawī*[37]), and *sinād* (any change in letters immediately preceding the *rawī*). He also describes a general avoidance by poets of certain consonants for the rhyme letter, such as unaspirated consonants (*ḥurūf al-hams*) such as *tāʾ marbūṭah* and the pronominal suffix *-k*. The former are considered weak and therefore unsuitable for the final *ḍarb* (drumbeat, a technical term for the final poetic foot), while the latter seems monotonous in rhyme since pronouns can be affixed to the end of any noun.[38]

Throughout his explanations, al-Maʿarrī adopts a stance of cool-headed authority vis-à-vis his reader. At the outset of the rhyme treatise, he justifies the long treatment of that topic in "concern that this book may fall into the hands of those with little knowledge of these terms" (*makhāfatan an yaqaʿ hādha l-kitāb ilā qalīl al-maʿrifah bi-tilka l-asmāʾ*).[39] In describing the conditions for proper use of the five *ḥarakāt* of rhyme, he first surveys prior opinion on the matter, then absolves himself of responsibility if someone chooses to adopt rules other than

[37] This is Rina Drory's definition based on other premodern commentators. See Drory, *Models and Contacts*, 100. In fact al-Maʿarrī defines *ikfāʾ* as a change in the long vowel directly preceding the *rawiyy*, called *al-waṣl*. See al-Maʿarrī, *Luzūm*, 15.

[38] Similar statements appear in other premodern treatises on rhyme. See Geert Jan Van Gelder, *Sound and Sense in Classical Arabic Poetry* (Wiesbaden: Harrasowitz Verlag, 2012), 202-5.

[39] Al-Maʿarrī, *Luzūm*, 1:4.

these "of his own accord" (*fa-huwa mutabarriʿun fī dhālika*).[40] He displays knowledge of the tradition by remarking that poets do not avail themselves of all possible phonemes in Arabic, such as the four vowelling options (*fatḥah, ḍammah*, *kasrah*, and *sukūn*). The modern poets (*muḥdathūn*) do use more letters as final rhyme consonants, since "they study the matter more thoroughly" (*li-anna fīhim qawman mustabḥirīn*).[41]

At times, al-Maʿarrī projects his authority by implicating people who break the rules of rhyme. For instance, while discussing the vowel atop the rhyme consonant *rawī*, which vowel is called the *majrā*, he avers that most of the time it will by default be nominative or indicative (*marfūʿ*), or jussive (*majrūr*). But because it was acceptable to remove through truncation or apocopation (*tarkhīm*) the final short vowel in *pausa* when reading aloud, "it is said that some poets are more daring with this rule."[42] This, according to al-Maʿarrī, is the only explanation for bending the rules of rhyme if one assumes the person is a native Arabic speaker possessed of linguistic facility (*faṣīḥ*) and knowledge of poetry.

Remarks such as these on pragmatic aspects of rhyme are infrequent compared to prescriptive observations; this is not uncommon for premodern Arabic texts on rhetoric and

[40] Ibid.

[41] Ibid.

[42] Al-Maʿarrī, *Luzūm*, 1:28.

prosody, as Geert Jan van Gelder confirms.[43] But the implied projection of expertise does serve an overall purpose in the preface, that is, to establish al-Maʿarrī as an authority on the principles of rhyme. The comments mentioned above, brief and offhand as they are, subtly erect a barrier of aloofness between al-Maʿarrī and his reader that invites its own interpretation: he must know more about rhyme than I do, if he can afford to be this confident about it. As discussed in the next two sections, this message encoded throughout the preface to *Luzūm mā lā yalzam* extends to the poetry of that work itself.

[43] Ibid., 272-3. "For all their efforts in discerning and distinguishing between many forms of word-play and sound patterning, the scholars of *badīʿ* did not introduce a section on onomatopoeia and sound symbolism in their growing lists of figures of speech and literary embellishments . . . It seems that literary critics were not sufficiently interested in the literary use of the iconicity of language. There have always been poets, however, who exploited the expressiveness of pure sounds." This is not to say that the meaning of sound played no role in *balāghah*. The seventeenth-century Sufi scholar ʿAbd al-Ghanī al-Nabulusī (d. AD 1731) lists 34 different kinds of paranomasia along with another dozen sound-based devices, e.g. *radd al-ʿajuz ʿalā al-ṣadr* or simply *taṣdīr*, "echo," defined as "placing two words which are identical in pronunciation or in meaning . . . from the same root, one near the beginning of the discourse and the other at the end." See ʿAbd al-Ghanī al-Nabulusī, *The Arch Rhetorician, or The Schemer's Skimmer: A Handbook of Late Arabic badīʿ Drawn From ʿAbd al-Ghanī an-Nābulsī's* Nafaḥāt al-azhār ʿalā Nasamāt al-Asḥār, ed. and trans. Pierre Cachia (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 1998), 19-42.

Making the Unnecessary, Necessary: Authority in Practice

Even more than the preface's theoretical survey of rhyme, the fact that al-Maʿarrī actually produced an entire *dīwān* of poems with double end-rhyme seems to demand that readers view him as an authority. In the last quarter of the preface, in al-Maʿarrī lays out his own intervention in the poetics of rhyme. It involves three self-imposed parameters. The first is to write every poem using *luzūm mā lā yalzam*, using not one but two repeated end-line consonants (*rawī*) throughout the poem. For example, here is a couplet on a theme typical of al-Maʿarrī, namely a contrast between the truth of his words and the falsehood of others:

إنْ عَذُبَ المِـــــينُ بِأفْـــــواهِكُم فـــــإنَّ صِـــــدْقِي بِـــفَمِي أعْذَبُ

طَلَـــــبَتُ لِلعَـــــالَمِ تَهْذيـــــبَهُمْ وَالنَّـــــاسُ ما صُـــــفُوا ولا هُـــــذِّبُوا [44]

*In ʿadhuba l-maynu bi-afwāhikum/fa-inna ṣidqī bi-famī aʿ**dhabū***

*Ṭalabtu li l-ʿālami tahdhībahum/wa l-nāsu ma ṣufū wa-lā hudh**dhibū***

[If falsehood is sweet in your mouths, then truth is sweeter in mine;

I asked the world to refine people, but they were not purified or refined]

In the transliteration, I have bolded the rhymemes to show the richness of sound added by double rhyme. A rough equivalent in English would be *believe/receive*, in which both syllables

[44] Al-Maʿarrī, *Luzūm*, 1:364.

rhyme, instead of *believe/conceive* (in Arabic the vowel between the two consonants need not be the same to count as double rhyme, as al-Maʿarrī's couplet makes clear).

The other two constraints imposed throughout the *Luzūm* increase the effect further: they are that he will use every consonant and every short vowel (plus *sukūn*)—that is, every possible phoneme in Arabic—to construct his rhymemes. This constricts choice of rhyme words and other line elements considerably, yet achieves an effect unique on the level of the line, as well as for the overall structure of the *Luzūm*. For these and other formal features discussed below, it is therefore more appropriate to call al-Maʿarrī's accomplishment "rich rhyme"[45] instead of simply double rhyme, since he modifies several parts of the rhyme word to enhance poetic sound.

Using two rhyme consonants is one of several ways that al-Maʿarrī exploits the sound of language to create the "combination of phonic identity or similarity and semantic difference" characteristic of all rhyme.[46] One common technique is *tikrār*, homonymy, which can take a number of forms depending on closeness of spelling, sound, or morphological derivation.

[45] This is van Gelder's translation of the term. See Van Gelder, *Sound and Sense*, 253.
[46] Max Nänny, "Iconic Uses of Rhyme,"*Outside-In-Inside-Out: Iconicity in Language and Literature*, ed. Constantino Maeder, Olga Fischer, and William Herlofsky (Amsterdam: Benjamins, 2005), 195.

يُهـــــنَّأُ بِالخَيرِ مَـــــنْ نَـــالهُ وَلَـــــيسَ الهَنَاءُ عَلَى مـــــا هَنَا

وَأقْرِب لِـــمَنْ كـــانَ في غِـــبْطَةٍ بِـــلُقيَاَ المنَى مِـــنْ لِـــقاءِ المنِا [47]

Yuhanna'u *bi l-khayri man nālahū/wa-laysa l-****hanā'u*** *ʿalā mā* ***hanā***

*Wa-aqribu li-man kāna fī ghibṭatin/bi-****luqyā*** *l-****manā*** *min* ***liqā'i*** *l-****munā***

[He who profits, gains comfort thereby,

yet life's comfort is not in what gives life;

To those living in ease, the release of death approaches,

bringing an encounter with their end]

In the transliteration, the bolded words show pairs or, in the first line, trios of words derived from the same etymological root and whose divergent meanings combine with phonetic affinity to create a supple tension between sound and sense. In the first line, the root *h-n-ʾ* appears first in a passive voice verb meaning "to be comforted," *yuhanna'u*, followed by a noun meaning "ease of living" or "affluence," *hanāʾ*, and final a past tense verb meaning "to nourish" or "give life," *hanā'* (here taken to mean something that gives only physical life). In the second line, there is a pair of words from the root *l-q-ī*, namely *luqyā*, "meeting" but which here has

[47] Al-Maʿarrī, *Luzūm*, 1:251.

the sense of "peace" or "safety,"[48] and *liqāʾ*, "rendezvous" (here, the sense of an inevitable rendezvous, namely with one's demise); and a pair from the root *m-n-ī*, being *manā*, "death," and *munā*, "aim" or "goal." Together these paronomastic groupings impart the identity of death with peace or rest, which identity is consonant with the semantics of the couplet: the only true comfort to mortals comes at life's end.

The phonic identity of homonymy is a common feature of al-Maʿarrī's poetry, but so is another means of exploiting linguistic sound: assonance, especially assonance among long vowels. Like paronomasia, it exploits the fact of phonetic equivalence or similarity to imply semantic relationships and contribute to the overall sense of a line. In the following example, al-Maʿarrī meditates upon the fickleness of human desire by comparing it to the movement of liquid:

القَلْبُ كالماءِ والأهْواءُ طافيةٌ عَلَيهِ مِثْلَ حَبَابِ الماءِ فِي الماءِ [49]

*Al-qalbu ka l-mā**ʾ**i wa l-ahwā**ʾ**u ṭā**f**iyatun/ʿalayhi mithla ḥabā**b**i l-mā**ʾ**i fī l-mā**ʾ**i*

[The heart is like water, and the passions drift

Upon it, like the froth of water upon water]

[48] Ibid. See the note on *luqyā* beneath this line. In classical Arabic, the root *l-q-ī* has the general meaning of "the good" (*al-khayr*), and so can connote health, safety, or peace. See Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān al-ʿarab*, 20 vols. (Cairo: Bulāq, 1883-91; repr. Beirut, 1955-56), 18:4065.

[49] Al-Maʿarrī, *Luzūm*, 1:184.

Here the repetition of the long *alif*, bolded in transliteration as before, connects through sound the three key concepts at work in this metaphor: water (*mā*ʾ), human passions or caprices (*ahwā*ʾ), and froth that drifts or dances (*ḥabāb*, "froth"/"bubbles"; *ṭafiyatun*, "drifting"/"floating"). Together with the rhetorical repetition (*tikrār*) of the word *mā*ʾ reiterated three times, these open vowels create a sense of forward motion, leading the listener down the line to the rhyme word, which of course has already appeared twice. One might also speculate that the repeated *alif* phonetically mimics the dancing froth, but such onomatopoeic significance is rare in Arabic poetry as in all rhyme and indeed all language, [50] since linguistic meaning normally derives from shared conventions rather than natural resemblance between signs and objects.

To consider a third and final way that al-Maʿarrī enriches the sound of his poetry, he often juxtaposes words having the same morphology in order to achieve the congruity of sound and difference of sense observed before. This device, which we might dub

[50] In a few cases from Arabic poetry there may be such a connection: for example, one hears the adamant repetition of the second person plural pronoun suffix *-nā* in the rhyme of Ibn Zaydūn's *nūniyyah*, emphasizing closeness with the beloved. See Van Gelder, *Sound and Sense*, 230). Or in the medieval Hebrew strophic poems of Moses ibn Ezra, one hears the echoing refrain *-āh* that mimics the cry of a doe trapped in the lion's teeth. See Joseph Dana, "Meaningful Rhyme in the Hebrew Poetry of Spain (Selected Examples from the Sacred Poetry of Rabbi Moses ibn Ezra)," *The Jewish Quarterly Review* 76, no. 3 (Jan. 1986): 172. But in speaking of rhyme in general, not just Arabic, these examples are the exception, not the rule.

"morphological parallelism," is called in Arabic *al-tawāzun wa l-taqṭīʿ*, "balancing and severing"; when used specifically to contrast semantic opposites having the same morphology, it is known as *jamʿ al-muʾallaf wa l-mukhtalif*, "combining the like and the unlike," or simply "balancing."[51] We can see the device at work in a couplet which casts death as the great equalizer:

تَـــــلْتَقي فِي الصَّعِيـــــدِ أُمٌّ وَبِنْتٌ وَتَسَـــــــاوى القَـــرْنَاءُ وَالجَـــــمَّاءُ

وأَنِيـــــــقُ الرَبِيـــــــعِ يُدْرِكُه القَـيْـ ـظُ وَفِيـــــــهِ البَيَـــــضاءُ والسَّحْمَاءُ [52]

*Taltaqī fī l-ṣaʿīdi ummun wa-bintun/wa-tasāwā l-**qarnāʾu** wa l-**jammāʾu***

*Wa-anīqu l-rabīʿi yudrikuhū l-qay/ẓu wa-fīhi l-**bayḍāʾu** wa l-**saḥmāʾu***

[In the grave, mother and daughter meet

And equal are the horned and unhorned ram,

Overcome is spring's grace by summer heat

In which the stunted white and the choked black.]

[51] Al-Nabulusī, *Skimmer*, 49. A classic example is found in Sūrah al-Infiṭār (Q 82), verses 13 and 14: *Inna l-abrāra la-fī naʿīm, wa-inna l-fujjāra la-fī jaḥīm* (Surely the righteous are in bliss and the wicked are in hell).

[52] Al-Maʿarrī, *Luzūm*, 1:147.

Here, the semantic *coincidentia oppositorum*—young and old, symbolized by mother (*umm*) and daughter (*bint*); the freshness of spring (*anīq al-rabīʿ*) and the heat of summer (*al-qayẓ*)—is reinforced by the identical morphology of each paired word at line's end. In the first line, the reader finds united in the grave a ram with horns (*qarnāʾu*) and one without (*jammāʾu*); in the second, the summer heat stunts plants before they turn to green from white (*bayḍāʾu*) and chokes them dry until black (*saḥmāʾu*) after they are fully grown. Thus all are alike in death, a message conveyed at the phonetic, grammatical, and semantic levels of the line.

All the formal features seen above—paronomasia, assonance, and morphological parallelism—work along with the basic unifying device of double consonant vowels, *luzūm mā lā yalzam*, to create phonetic and semantic richness in Arabic. In doing so throughout an entire poetry collection, the text of *Luzūm mā lā yalzam* is unique within the Arabic literary tradition. But it is more difficult to say how the usage itself of double rhyme signals authority for al-Maʿarrī, aside from standing as a feat of language. What is the larger impact of al-Maʿarrī's contribution to Arabic poetry? How does he "change the game" by putting double rhyme onto a whole *dīwān*? And what does this contribution mean for his authorship? To gain purchase over these topics, let us now consider what medieval rhetoricians thought about the device of *luzūm mā lā yalzam*, and how and why other poets put it to use.

Theory and Practice: Other Writers on Double Rhyme

In both theoretical and practical discourse, emphasis is placed on the difficulty of writing poetry with double rhyme. In fact the earliest technical term for *luzūm mā lā yalzam* captures this nicely; Ibn al-Muʿtazz calls it *iʿnāt al-shāʿir nafsahū fī l-qawāfī*, "the poet's troubling himself in the matter of rhyme."[53] By al-Maʿarrī's time it was of course known by the term he uses, and moving into the Mamluk era, one also finds it called *iltizām*, "undertaking," in the *kāfiyyah badīʿiyyah* poem by Ṣafī al-Dīn al-Ḥillī.[54] These and other works stress the non-obligatory use of a second rhyme consonant in every line, as an added measure the poet imposes upon himself.

As for poetic practice, few other authors wrote whole works in double rhyme and then discussed their reasons for it, but one exception, the *Al-Maqamāt al-luzūmiyyah* by al-Saraqusṭī ibn al-Ashtarkūwī (d. AD 1143), reinforces the difficulty of such a feat. In the laconic preface to this work, al-Saraqusṭī lays bare his motives: "The author exhausted his mind and kept his eye awake, for in both prose and poetry [of the *maqāmāt*] he took as an obligation what is normally not required; and this, so that they reached the utmost degree of quality [*fa-jāʾat ʿalā ghāyatin*

[53] Ibn al-Muʿtazz, *Kitāb al-badīʿ*, 74.

[54] Ṣafī al-Dīn al-Ḥillī, *Sharḥ al-kāfiyah al-badīʿiyyah, fī ʿulūm al-balāghah wa-maḥāsin al-badīʿ*, ed. Nasīb Nishāwī (Damascus: Majmaʿ al-Lughah al-ʿArabiyyah bi-Dimeshq, 1983), 203-4.

min al-jawdah], yet God knows best if this is true."[55] Another author, ʿAlī ibn al-Ḥuṣrī al-Qayrawānī (d. AD 1078), wrote poetry not in double rhyme but which still departs from traditional conventions. He declares in the preface to his collection of elegiac verse to his deceased son, in which each poem uses the rhyme word of each line to begin the line that follows, that the work is but "a pearl scooped from my sea" (*badrun min baḥrī malqūṭ*), seeming to imply his measureless poetic virtuosity.[56]

In conveying the effort demanded by their venture and its high-quality result, both al-Saraquṣṭī and Ibn al-Ḥuṣrī al-Qayrawānī seem to strike a similar pose to that of al-Maʿarrī, emphasizing that they have accomplished no mean feat and, by inference, established themselves as successful poets. Their assertions to greatness are a trope in premodern Arabic used to shore up one's own position as an author. As another brief example, Andalusian *zajal* poet Ibn Quzmān (d. AD 1160) says in his preface, "In this age of mine I have found none but braggarts, or those who stutter when they speak; their miserable little *zajals* contain no more than five to six strophes; when they attempt to compose at length, they chip helplessly away at

[55] Ḥasan al-Warāklī, *Al-Maqāmāt al-luzūmiyyah: Taʾlīf Abī l-Ṭāhir Muḥammad ibn Yūsuf al-Tamīmī al-Saraquṣṭī* (Rabat: Maṭābiʿ Manshūrāt ʿUkāẓ, 1995), 17. The English is mine. For another rendering, see James T. Monroe, ed. and trans., *Al-Maqāmāt al-Luẓumīyah by Abū l-Ṭāhir Muḥammad ibn Yūsuf al-Tamīmī al-Saraquṣṭī ibn al-Aštarkūwī (d. 538/1143)* (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 43.
[56] ʿAlī ibn al-Ḥuṣrī al-Qayrawānī, *Abū l-Ḥasan ʿAlī ibn al-Ḥuṣrī al-Qayrawānī*, ed. Muḥammad Marzūqī and Yaḥyā ibn al-Ḥajja al-Jilānī (Tunis: Maktabat al-Manār, 1963), 257.

stones; if they request largesse, they hew on wood to no avail."[57] Aside from conveying the brashness of persona, such proclamations assume a stance of authority based on outstanding literary accomplishment, including the use of *luzūm mā lā yalzam* throughout one's poetry.

A second point about Arabic double rhyme follows from the difficulty and non-obligatory nature of its use: medieval rhetoricians considered it a rhetorical embellishment—one of "the beauties of poetry," *maḥāsin al-shiʿr*—rather than an essential feature of rhyme. Indeed, most major rhyme treatises do not mention *luzūm mā lā yalzam*, or if they do, it is only in passing.[58] For lengthier discussion, one must look to works on *balāghah* (rhetoric and poetics). As noted, Ṣafī al-Dīn al-Ḥillī includes it under the name *iltizām* in his *qaṣīdah badīʿiyyah*, a praise poem to the prophet Muḥammad that doubles as a practical display of major rhetorical devices. Ibn al-Athīr places it on a list with seven other "combined expressions" (*alfāẓ murakabbah*), meaning those expressions that rely on two or more combined formal elements for their effect.[59] Al-Maʿarrī's pupil al-Tibrīzī classifies double rhyme among aspects of "the craft of poetry that are needed and knowledge of which is

[57] Ibn Quzmān, *The Mischievous Muse: Extant Poetry and Prose by Ibn Quzmān of Córdoba (d. AH 555/AD 1160)*, 2 vols, trans. James T. Monroe (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 1:19.
[58] ʿAbd al-Bāqī al-Tanūkhī, *Kitāb al-qawāfī*, 112-16; Al-Tibrīzī, *Al-Wāfī*, 295; Abu Saʿīd al-Sayrāfī, *Kitāb Ṣanʿat al-shiʿr*, ed. Jaʿfar Mājid (Beirut: Dār al-Gharb al-Islāmī, 1995), 270-332.
[59] Ḍiyāʾ al-Dīn ibn al-Athīr, *Al-Mathal al-sāʾir, fī adab al-kātib wa l-shāʿir*, 4 vols, ed. Aḥmad al-Ḥufī and Badawī Ṭabāna (Cairo: Dār Nahḍat Miṣr, 1973), 1:281-90.

obligatory" (*mimmā yuḥtāj ilayhi wa-tajib maʿrifatuhū min ṣanʿat al-shiʿr*).[60] All these rhetorical surveys place the device among "figures of expression"—*alfāẓ lafẓiyyah*, as opposed notionally to "figures of thought," *alfāẓ maʿnawiyyah*—under the general category of *badīʿ*, "tropology."[61]

That double rhyme represented verbal embellishment to premodern Arabic critics has conceptual implications for al-Maʿarrī's authorship. I have already discussed how the emphasis placed on the difficulty of *luzūm mā lā yalzam* by theorists and practitioners lends credibility to his project in the *Luzūm*. Its classification as *badīʿ* adds still more credibility by allowing al-Maʿarrī to display mastery of the tradition, then supersede it to striking effect. I come to this conclusion based on definitions of *badīʿ* found in the rhetorical works in question. Put briefly, those works define *badīʿ* as the use of multiple devices to convey an existing idea according to the needs of context, rather than the invention of a new idea. It is the difference, in other words, between invention and innovation.

The clearest statement to this effect appears in the *ʿUmdah* of Ibn Rashīq al-Qayrawānī, who distinguishes between *ibdāʿ* ("innovation," a synonym for *badīʿ*) and *ikhtirāʿ* ("creation" or

[60] Al-Tibrīzī, *Al-Wāfī*, 257.

[61] These translations are from Pierre Larcher, "Arabic Linguistic Tradition II," *The Oxford Handbook of Arabic Linguistics*, ed. Jonathan Owens (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2013), 198. They come from nineteenth-century French poetics, which is in turn based on classical Greek and Latin rhetoric, and so should be considered analogous rather than identical to similar terms in the medieval Arabic tradition.

"invention"). According to this schema, *ikhtirāᶜ* means inventing new *maᶜānī*, "mental images" or "conceptual meanings," while *ibdāᶜ* refers to a process of presenting an extant *maᶜnā* in an elegant new way (*ityān al-shāᶜir bi l-maᶜnā al-mustaẓraf*).[62] From this basic distinction flow other statements about *badīᶜ*. Ṣafī al-Dīn al-Ḥillī posits that any sentence, clause, or even an individual word that exhibits *ibdāᶜ* "be such that there appear in one line or *qarīnah* a number of devices (*ᶜiddat ḍurūb min al-badīᶜ*) in the total number of its words or clauses; or perhaps in one lexical word, there be henceforth two such devices. And when the style is not thus, it is not *ibdāᶜ*."[63] Ibn al-Athīr compares double rhyme, and other *alfāẓ murakabbah* like it, to taking low grade pearls and joining them together (*allafahā*) to create a more beautiful product.[64]

Regarding al-Maᶜarrī, the fact that double rhyme and other devices studied above are embellishment for existing ideas, and not the invention of fully new ideas, means that he was not trying to create a new genre when he wrote the *Luzūm*. Other points lend weight to this argument as well. From the perspective of literary pragmatics, the poems of *Luzūm mā lā yalzam* are still recognizable as a kind of *qiṭᶜah* or, less frequently, a *qaṣīdah*[65]; they often rely on

[62] Ibn al-Rashīq al-Qayrawānī, *Al-ᶜUmdah fī maḥāsin al-shiᶜr wa-ādābihi wa-naqdihi*, 2 vols, ed. Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn Hawwārī and Hudā ᶜAwdah (Beirut: Dār wa-Maktabat al-Hilāl, 1996), 1:419.

[63] Ṣafī al-Dīn al-Ḥillī, *Sharḥ al-kāfiyyah*, 292.

[64] Ibn al-Athīr, *Al-Mathal al-sāʾir*, 1:209.

[65] For more on the *qiṭᶜah* form, content, and function, see Gregor Schoeler, "Ḳiṭᶜa," EI2. The main difference between *qitᶜah* and *qaṣīdah* seems to have been primarily in length and secondarily in thematic singularity or plurality. The *qitᶜah* tended toward less than ten lines and restriction

traditional motifs like weeping over the beloved's campsite or *memento mori*. Second, from the perspective of reception, experiments in rhyme did not catch on as an independent form in "high" registers of poetry, whether in imitation or literary criticism. Third and finally, at the macro level, premodern critics were not so concerned with the entire *qaṣīdah* but rather "genre functions" (*aghrāḍ*) and "motifs" (*maʿānī*).[66] This fact militates against one man's capacity to turn the *qaṣīdah* into something wholly new with a single *dīwān*, however radically innovative it may have been.

Instead, it seems that with rich rhyme, al-Maʿarrī tried to show his mastery of the tradition, then "defamiliarize" it for readers. The notion of defamiliarization— literally "making strange" (*ostraninye*)—was introduced in by Viktor Shklovsky and became a key concept among Russian formalists and the Prague Linguistic Circle.[67] It refers to how literary language reorients, distorts, or upsets linguistic conventions in order to command heightened

---

to one theme or function, such as a proclamation, personal sentiment, remembrance, jest or epigram, or reflection on the moment, that is, an "occasional poem"; while the *qaṣīdah* tended to be longer than ten lines and featured several themes together.

[66] See for example Geert Jan van Gelder, *Beyond the Line: Classical Arabic Literary Critics on the Coherence and Unity of the Poem* (Leiden: Brill, 1982); Beatrice Gruendler, "Motif vs. Genre: Reflections on the Dīwān al-Maʿānī of Abū Hilāl al-ʿAskarī," *Ghazal as World Literature I: Transformations of a Literary Genre*, ed. Thomas Bauer and Angelika Neuwirth (Beirut: Ergon Verlag, 2005), 57-86.

[67] Viktor Shklovsky, "Art as Technique," *Russian Formalist Criticism: Four Essays*, ed. L.T. Lemon and M.J. Reis (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1965), 12.

attention. Nor need such distortions involve words or ideas outside the realm of normal experience, only that readers not perceive them in an automatic, unthinking way; in Shklovky's words, "art exists that one may recover the sensation of life; it exists to make one feel things, to make the stone *stony*" (original emphasis).[68] This notion of heightened attention to that which is familiar accords well with definitions of *badīʿ*, which takes ideas or images already known to us and presents them in a striking new way.

One indicator that al-Maʿarrī wanted to rejuvenate rather than recreate Arabic poetry is the fact that double rhyme, *luzūm mā lā yalzam*, appears in al-Maʿarrī's early poetry. As a brief example, the following panegyric lines from *Saqṭ al-zand* combine traditional virtues of generosity and courage in battle, in order to create an image of a ruler who provides for his friends and overwhelms his enemies simultaneously:

تُثْني عَلَيكَ البلادُ أَنَّكَ لَا تَأْخُذُ مِنْ رِفْدِها وتَرْفِدُها

مَنِ ارْتَعَتْ خَيلُهُ الرياضَ بِها وكانَ حَوْضَ الصَفَاءِ مورِدُها

فِفي نَبات الرُؤُوس تَسْرَحُها أَنْتَ وماء الجُسومِ تُورِدها

*Tuthnī ʿalayka l-bilādu anna**ka** l**ā**/taʾkhudhu min rifdihā wa-tarfiduhā*

[68] Shklovsky, "Art as Technique," 12.

Man irtaᶜat khayluhū l-riyāḍa ***bihā****/wa-kāna ḥawḍa l-ṣafāᵓi maw****riduhā***

*Fa-fī nabāti l-ruᵓūsi taṣraḥ****uhā****/anta wa-māᵓa l-jusūmi tū****riduhā***

[The lands praise you, saying that you do not take

But rather give their substance

To any whose horses graze its meadows, and

Whose waterhole is a tranquil basin;

For you pasture on plants that are heads, and

With the water of bodies (i.e. blood) give to drink.][69]

This macabre tableau echoes a similar line by al-Mutanabbī, of whom al-Maᶜarrī was a great admirer, comparing the abundance of falling rain to that of skulls left in battle by Aleppo's governor, Sayf al-Dawlah.[70] The bolded words in transliteration show *luzūm mā lā yalzam* in the last two lines, and even the presence in all lines of internal rhyme before the obligatory medial

[69] Abū l-ᶜAlāᵓ al-Maᶜarrī, *Shurūḥ Saqṭ al-zand*, ed. Ṭaha Ḥusayn et al (Cairo: Dār al-Kutub, 1945-49), 125.

[70] The line in question is the eighth in the poem: *Saqathā l-ghamāmu l-ghurru qabla nuzūlihī / fa-lammā danā minhā saqathā l-jamājimū* ("The magnanimous rainclouds watered it [al-Ḥadath al-Ḥamrāᵓ or Adata, a now-lost fortress in southeastern modern-day Turkey] before he [Sayf al-Dawlah] descended upon it / And then, when he drew near to it, the skulls did water it"). See Abū l-Ṭayyib Aḥmad al-Mutanabbī, *Sharḥ Diwān al-Mutanabbī*, 4 vols., ed. ᶜAbd al-Raḥmān al-Barqūqī (Cairo: Al-Maktabah al-Tijāriyyah al-Kubrā, 1938), 4:125. Heinrichs classifies such imagery as a kind of hyperbole (*ghulūw*) that he calls "macrocosmic," due to the image's logical implication that "the phenomena of the macrocosmos are explained as the effects of the *mamdūḥ*." See Heinrichs, "Literary Theory," 51.

caesura. While double end-rhyme does not typically go on past three or four lines in a given poem from *Saqṭ al-zand*, its frequency therein demonstrates both an early liking for the device,[71] which liking culminates in its use throughout an entire *dīwān*, and a desire for continuity with tradition. In turn, that continuity lets him display mastery of the very institutions of poetr which he then goes on to reinvigorate through rhyme.

But a question arises when we see how al-Maʿarrī uses rhyme in projecting writerly expertise: What did readers think of his formal innovations? Did they respond with an appraisal, or even their own innovations? These issues form the basis of the last chapter section, in which I explore how tensions between tradition and innovation shape debates about the *Luzūm*.

Tradition, Innovation, and the Fate of the *Luzūm*

Thinking on the issue of al-Maʿarrī's reception, I am reminded of brief cautionary remarks by Howard Mittelmark and Sandra Newman in their guide, *How Not to Write a Novel*, intended for aspiring modern-day writers of English: "Writing is not like figure skating, where

[71] Other examples can be found in al-Maʿarrī, *Shurūḥ Saqṭ al-zand*, e.g. pp. 887 (three consecutive lines), 1311-13 (four lines), 1321-3 (four lines), 1543-4 (three lines), 2019 (five lines). In some poems the device appears multiple times, such as poem #15 in ibid., pp. 473-5 (four lines), 484-5 (two lines), 489 (two lines), 506-7 (two lines).

flashier tricks are required to move up in competition. Ornate prose is an idiosyncrasy of certain writers rather than a pinnacle all writers are working toward."[72] In the context of premodern Arabic, this excerpt could just as easily summarize the attitude of many readers of al-Maʿarrī. That attitude holds the difficult style of *Luzūm mā lā yalzam* in low esteem vis-à-vis the perceived balance of form and content struck by ʿAbbāsid "Golden Age" poets like Abū Tammām, Abū Nuwās, and al-Mutanabbī.

Balancing form and content, so the criticism goes, these early poets were followed by a new but more extravagant epoch, one obsessed by the niceties of craft. An oft-cited reason for this shift in tastes is cultural decline, an immobilization of creativity into well-ploughed literary furrows. Readers will recognize here the "age of decadence" (*ʿaṣr al-inḥiṭāṭ*) argued by nineteenth-century European orientalists and their Middle Eastern counterparts. As a brief example, Egyptian intellectual Ṭaha Ḥusayn describes how, following his European professors like Carlo Nallino and Enno Littman, he avoided al-Maʿarrī's works for many years; even after coming around, he admits to holding his nose when reading *Luzūm mā lā yalzam*, which he claims destroyed [*afsada*, "corrupted"] the beauty of the traditional *qaṣīdah*.[73]

---

[72] Howard Mittelmark and Sandra Newman, *How Not to Write a Novel: 200 Classic Mistakes and How to Avoid Them—A Misstep-By-Misstep Guide* (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 2008), 30.

[73] Ṭaha Ḥusayn, *Maʿa Abiʾl-ʿAlāʾ fī sijnih* (Cairo: Dār al-Maʿārif, 1981), 149. Ḥusayn's distaste was not absolute, however. As Pierre Cachia points out, the Egyptian intellectual thought that some contemporaries had gone too far in rejecting the embellished style of Arabic poetry. See Pierre

One sees in Ḥusayn's mindset the influence of post-Romantic tastes that prefer simple language, lyricism of content, and Wordsworth's "spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings." Thomas Bauer blames this mindset in no uncertain terms for modern scholars' inability to deal with Mamluk-era literature, for instance.[74] Yet similar arguments prevailed even in the ninth century *querelle des anciens et des modernes* which pitted the "naturalness" (*ṭabᶜ*) of a poet like al-Buḥturī against the "artificiality" (*sanᶜah*) of one like Abū Tammām. The name itself given to this upcoming trend, *badīᶜ*, "the newfangled style," attests to conservative misgivings about the overuse of rhetorical figures in poetry.[75] Another word used by medieval thinkers captures

Cachia, "From Sound to Echo in Late *Badīᶜ* Literature," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 108, no. 2 (Apr.-June 1988): 219.

[74] Thomas Bauer, "Mamluk Literature: Misunderstandings and New Approaches," *Mamluk Studies Review* 9, no. 2 (2005): 105-7.

[75] In the introduction to *Kitāb al-badīᶜ*, Ibn al-Muᶜtazz alludes to these misgivings in his stated goal of "present[ing] in the sections of this book of mine . . . speech which is called by the Moderns *al-badīᶜ*, 'the new style': and this, to make it known that Bashshār [ibn Burd] and Muslim [ibn al-Walīd] and and Abū Nuwās and those who were like them and trod in their path were not the first to arrive at this art" (*qad qaddamnā fī abwāb kitābinā hādhā . . . min al-kalām alladhī sammāhu al-muḥdathūn al-badīᶜ, li-yuᶜlim anna Bashshāran wa-Musliman wa-Abā Nuwās wa-man taqayyalahum wa-salaka sabīlahum lam yasbiqū ilā hādhā l-fann*) (my translation). See ᶜAbd Allāh ibn al-Muᶜtazz, *Kitāb al-badīᶜ*, ed. Ignatius Krachkovsky (London: E.J.W. Gibb Memorial Publication, 1935; repr. Damascus: Dār al-Ḥikmah, 1960), 1. In this sense, Ibn al-Muᶜtazz tries to reclaim the term *badīᶜ* from its derogatory connotations.

the seeming obsession with craft: *taṣannuʿ*, "stylization," which is how al-Bāqillānī characterizes Abū Tammām's quest to "cram" (*ḥāshā*) his verse full of imagery and tropes.[76]

These misgivings among commentators in the ninth and tenth centuries likewise cast a shadow over formal innovations in the eleventh, chief among them al-Maʿarrī's use of rich rhyme. Those with somewhat conservative tastes rejected this, what for them was conspicuous formal embellishment or an undue obsession with language.[77] Poet and critic Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī compares the *Luzūm* unfavorably—"it's only so-so" (*mutawassiṭ*)—to al-Maʿarrī's early poetry in *Saqṭ al-zand*.[78] Al-Muʾayyad fī l-Dīn al-Shīrāzī, the Fāṭimid missionary at Cairo and al-Maʿarrī's interlocutor over veganism, about which more in chapter 4, makes the Syrian poet's mastery of language into a zero sum game; the more he focuses on verbal ornament, the less attention he gives to spiritual knowledge, and thus he "choo[ses] the labor that profiteth not, to be left, when the froth is gone, dry, with nothing else."[79] Ḥanbalī preacher Ibn al-Jawzī disparages his poetics in general. After citing a representative sample of *Al-Fuṣūl wa l-ghāyāt*, he says, "the entire work is weak and wooden to the utmost degree" (*wa-huwwa kalām fī nihāyat al-*

[76] Al-Bāqillānī, *Kitāb ʿijāz al-Qurʾān*, ed. al-Sayyid Aḥmad Ṣaqr (Cairo: Dār al-Kutub, 1963) 80.
[77] Ibn Kathīr, *Al-Bidāyah wa l-nihāyah*, 21 vols., ed. Ṣalāḥ Muḥammad al-Khiyamī (Doha: Wizārat al-Awqāf wa l-Shuʾūn al-Islāmiyyah, 2015), 13:134;
[78] Cited in Ṭaha Ḥusayn et al, eds., *Taʿrīf al-qudamāʾ bi-Abī l-ʿAlāʾ* (Cairo: Dār al-Qawmiyyah, 1944, repr. 1965), 318.
[79] D.S. Margoliouth, "Abu'l-'Alā al-Ma'arrī's Correspondence on Vegetarianism," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland* (Apr. 1902), 315.

rikkah wa l-burūdah) and praises God for "blinding [al-Maʿarrī's] sight and insight!"80 All these comments leave out what their authors also had to say about the *Luzūm*'s putatively heterodox content, which together with the disdain for verbal ornament adds up to a significant reaction against al-Maʿarrī's formal experiments.

There others who admired the linguistic daring of the *Luzūm*. In describing the device of *luzūm mā lā yalzam*, seventeenth century Sufi poet and thinker ʿAbd al-Ghanī al-Nabulusī claims that al-Maʿarrī outdid Ṣafī al-Dīn al-Ḥillī and other *badīʿiyyah* poets in rich rhyme.[81] A few went so far as to emulate its use of double rhyme, as I noted regarding the *Al-Maqāmāt al-luzūmiyyah* of al-Saraqusṭī. But those who were fond of *Luzūm mā lā yalzam* due to double rhyme and other devices seem to be in the minority; more often it is al-Maʿarrī's gnomic wisdom, gruesome imagery, and critiques of religion that excite. The preponderance of opinions against his difficult style invite speculation as to why, and also as to those attitudes among premodern readers which may have been a factor.

On the topic of attitudes, a view that crops up time and again in the works of *balāghah* is a desire for fit between linguistic form (*lafẓ*) and mental content (*maʿnā*). Al-Khaṭīb al-Qazwīnī expresses such a desire as he explains the power of *badīʿ*: "The source of beauty in all this lies

80 Abu l-Faraj ibn al-Jawzī, *Al-Muntaẓam fī taʾrīkh al-mulūk wa l-umam*, 17 vols., ed. Muḥammad ʿAbd al-Qādir ʿIṭā and Muṣṭafā ʿAbd al-Qādir ʿIṭā (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyyah, 1995), 16:24.
81 ʿAbd al-Ghanī al-Nabulusī, *Skimmer*, 19.

in the form following the meaning [*al-alfāẓ tābiʿah li l-maʿnā*], not the opposite. If meanings are given or held back according to their natural characteristics [*ursilat ʿalā sajīyatihā*] and what is required thereby, then they attract certain phrasings on their own and only keep to those things which befit them. And if it is other than this, then it is as al-Mutanabbī said: *If you see only the beauty of her moles [*shiyātihā*] and white flecks [*aghṣān*][82], then beauty has evaded you*."[83] On double rhyme in particular, Ṣafī al-Dīn al-Ḥillī qualifies its use "according to the poet's ability [*ʿalā qadri quwwatihī*], on the condition that there be no unnatural mannerism [*takalluf*]."[84] In fact, al-Ḥillī does not mention al-Maʿarrī at all in his entry on *iltizām*, unlike almost all other *balāghah* works written after the poet's death. This conspicuous oversight may indicate a lurking distaste on his part for the *Luzūm*.

Statements like these betray a preference for balance over radical innovation that can be seen at other moments in Arabic literature and indeed of any tradition. In the words of North African critic and contemporary of al-Maʿarrī, Ibn Rashīq al-Qayrawānī, "every Ancient poet [*qadīm*] is in fact a Modern [*muḥdath*] in his own age, and in comparison to those who

[82] Under this root, for the form *aghṣan*, Lane gives, "A bull having whiteness in his tail." See Edward William Lane, *An Arabic English Lexicon* (London: Williams & Norgate, 1863), 2664.
[83] Al-Bābartī, Akmal al-Dīn Muḥammad, *Sharḥ al-Talkhīṣ*, ed. Muḥammad Muṣṭafā Ramaḍān Ṣufiyyah (Tripoli, Libya: Al-Mansha'ah al-ʿĀmmah, 1983), 683.
[84] Ṣafī al-Dīn al-Ḥillī, *Sharḥ al-Kāfiyyah*, 204.

preceded him."[85] Analogous periods of innovation in Western Europe include the Baroque period's self-parody, exuberance, "far-fetchedness," and its "opulence . . . its elaborate ecclesiastical and celestial hierarchies, [all of which were] objectionable to Reformation sensibilities"[86]; and Dadaism in twentieth-century art, whose consciously absurd iconoclasm aimed at "total rebellion against the arts" and the bourgeois society that supports them.[87] Al-Maʿarrī partakes in a similar venture toward artistic change when he employs *luzūm mā lā yalzam* to an unprecedented degree.

This brings me back to the first chapter section, about the remarkable changes in Arabic literature during the tenth and eleventh centuries. Tensions between tradition and innovation among society as a whole reflect comparable tensions within the individual author. It is arguably such tensions at individual and social levels that created just the kind of

[85] Ibn Rashīq al-Qayrawānī, *Al-ʿUmdah fī maḥāsin al-shiʿr wa-ādābihi wa-naqdihi*, 2 vols. in 1, ed. Muḥammad Muḥyi l-Dīn ʿAbd al-Ḥamīd (Cairo: Maṭbaʿat al-Saʿādah bi-Miṣr, 1955), 1:90; Dustin Cowell, "On the Ancients and the Moderns, from al-ʿUmdah by Ibn Rashíq al-Qayrawàní," *Alif: Journal of Comparative Poetics* 2 (Spring 1982): 70. The English translation is Cowell's. For another treatment of "crisis" as characteristic of many periods, Huda Fakhreddine compares medieval *muḥdath* poetry with twentieth-century modernist poetry as two periods of literary crisis and metapoetic reflection. See Huda Fakhreddine, *Metapoesis in the Arabic Tradition* (Leiden: Brill, 2015).

[86] Lois Parkinson Zamora and Monika Kaup, "Baroque, New World Baroque, Neobaroque: Categories and Concepts," *Baroque New Worlds: Representation, Transculturation, Counterconquest* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), 2-3.

[87] Anna Balakian, "Dada," *The New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, ed. Alex Preminger et al. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993), 268.

environment for someone like al-Maʿarrī to throw his hat in the ring. Not only did he do this through abstract knowledge of rhyme recorded in the *Luzūm*'s preface, he did it through the existence of the *Luzūm* itself, which established his reputation as a virtuoso practitioner of rhyme. That this accomplishment contributed to his authorship is proven by ongoing discussion of these topics and the controversy they continues to stir.

Chapter 3. "Those Inclined to Dispute Every Point":

Self-Defense Through Polysemic Language and Persona

A key indicator of controversy surrounding *Luzūm mā lā yalzam* even in al-Maʿarrī's own lifetime is the existence of *Zajr al-nābiḥ* (Driving Off the Barking Dog), a marginal gloss on the poetry of the *Luzūm* preserved in a single manuscript at the British Library and published in a critical edition in 1965.[1] According to its content as well as secondary accounts, the *Zajr* was composed by al-Maʿarrī to guard himself and his poetry from accusations of *zandaqah* (heresy). As a self-defense against such charges, it may be unique in all of medieval Arabic literature.[2] It

[1] Abū al-ʿAlāʾ al-Maʿarrī, *Luzūm mā lā yalzam, al-juzʾ al-awwal* (OR 5319), digital scan, British Library, London. In 1965, an edition was published that reformats the text for readability. See: Abū al-ʿAlāʾ al-Maʿarrī, *Zajr al-nābiḥ: "Muqtaṭafāt,"* ed. Amjad al-Ṭarābulsī (Damascus: Al-Maktabah al-Hāshimiyyah bi-Dimashq, 1965). Aside from al-Ṭarābulsī's editorial introduction, the only other extended analysis of the *Zajr* is by Abdelfattah Kilito, who unfolds such conceptual implications of the *Zajr* as that the meaning of language, like authorial intent, is a puzzle that resists solution. See Abdelfattah Kilito, *Abū l-ʿAlāʾ al-Maʿarrī aw matāhāt al-qawl* (Casablanca: Dār Tūbqāl li l-Nashr, 2000), 50-4.

[2] To my knowledge, the only other defensive self-commentary in classical Arabic literature is the *Tarjumān al-ashwāq* (The Interpreter of Desires) of Muḥyī l-Dīn ibn ʿArabī (d. AD 1240), which was composed in response to those who accused him of impropriety for writing erotic poetry. See Reynold Alleyne Nicholson, *The Tarjumán al-Ashwáq* (London, UK: Royal Asiatic Society, 1911); Michael Sells, *Stations of Desire: Love Elegies from Ibn ʿArabī and New Poems* (Jerusalem: Ibis Editions, 2000), 32-4. Indeed, proper self-commentary, whether as a marginal gloss or a running commentary throughout the text, is comparatively rare in pre-modern Arabic. Other examples familiar to me are glosses on two didactic legal *rajaz* poems from a

also permits a singular chance to explore the impact of reader doubt—whether real or perceived—on literary creation and authorial self-presentation.[3]

This chapter is structured as follows. After an overview of the apparent circumstances of the *Zajr*'s composition, including lines of poetry that incensed his critics, I then submit that the *Zajr* of al-Maʿarrī presents a principled persona that is meant to oppose the corruption of would-be detractors. Throughout the self-commentary, al-Maʿarrī blames his unnamed

---

much later period: Ibrāhīm al-Laqqānī's (d. AD 1631) *Jawharat al-tawḥīd*, and Aḥmad al-Dardīr's (d. AD 1786) *Al-Kharīdah al-bahiyyah*. See Ibrāhīm al-Laqqānī, *Sharḥ al-nāẓim ʿalā al-jawharah*, 2 vols., ed. Marwān Ḥusayn ʿAbd al-Ṣāliḥīn al-Bijāwī (Cairo: Dār al-Baṣāʾir, 2009); Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad al-ʿAdawī al-Dardīr, *Sharḥ al-kharīdah al-bahiyyah fī ʿilm al-tawḥīd*, ed. ʿAbd al-Salām ibn ʿAbd al-Hāwī (n.d.). Also, as of this writing, Matthew Keegan at the American University of Sharjah has completed a dissertation about commentaries on the *Maqāmāt* of al-Ḥarīrī, and a few of these commentaries are by the author himself. Especially common in Arabic are introductions and other materials appended to anthologies, in order to explain the rationale for their compilation. For more on this and similar discursive modes, see Thomas Bauer, "Mamluk Literature: Misunderstandings and New Approaches," *Mamlūk Studies Review* 9, no. 2 (2005), 105-32.

[3] For example, Anthony Verity points out the "sheer force of moral indignation" that drives individual poems by al-Maʿarrī. See A.C.F. Verity, "Two Poems by al-Maʿarrī," *Journal of Arabic Literature* 2 (1971): 45. Suzanne Stetkevych discusses the exchange between al-Maʿarrī and Ibn al-Qāriḥ, and indeed personal correspondence more broadly, as premised on rhetorical antagonism. See: Suzanne Stetkevych, "The Snake in the Tree in Abu al-ʿAlaʾ al-Maʿarri's *Epistle of Forgiveness*: Critical Essay and Translation," *Journal of Arabic Literature* 45 (2014), 6-7. Studies on authorship more generally are a well-trod path across the disciplines. For examples from Arabic literature, see: Dwight Reynolds et al., *Interpreting the Self: Autobiography in the Arabic Literary Tradition* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2001); *Concepts of Authorship in Pre-Modern Arabic Texts*, ed. Lale Behzadi and Jaakko Hämeen-Anttila (Bamberg: University of Bamberg Press, 2015).

interlocutors for their willful ignorance, sometimes with surprising vitriol, calling them "dumb brutes" (*bahāʾim*) who lack basic understanding even of their own language. In contrast, al-Maʿarrī claims to possess wisdom stemming from a single-minded devotion to truth that qualifies him to propagate intellectual and moral facts, and in turn, to reprove the weak wits of his enemies. He accomplishes this by relying on the Qurʾān and *ḥadīth* and juxtaposition of his own moral authority to his opponents' lack thereof.

At the same time, his writerly persona comes across as elusive, ambiguous, and even polysemic. This subversive stance is echoed in both the form and content of the gloss. In terms of form, al-Maʿarrī commands the physical margins of the text, disallowing skeptical interpretations of his poetry. Regarding content, the *Zajr* singles out controversial lines and explains why readerly misgivings about them are unjustified. It achieves this above all by unfolding counterintuitive meanings hidden beneath more common ones. Here I will focus on two particular strategies. The first involves demarcating stricter semantic boundaries for words than they first appear to have. In Islamic legal hermeneutics, this interpretive move is called "indicating specific reference of a general expression" (*takhṣīṣ al-ʿāmm*), and while it is unclear whether al-Maʿarrī draws directly from the study of law, there are indeed clear resonances with the claims he propounds.

The second tactic consists in the opposite approach, namely *expanding* semantic boundaries so as to include meanings that are not obvious. Although several terms for this exist in medieval Arabic rhetorical theory, I have settled on *ilghāz* (riddling) since al-Maʿarrī exploits paranomasia to convey a secondary, less obvious meaning, rather than assigning equal value to both, as in *tawriyah* (double entendre). This reading is further strengthened by al-Maʿarrī's use of an etymologically related word, *lughz* (riddle), to describe his process. Relying on both *takhṣīṣ al-ʿāmm* and *ilghāz* throughout the *Zajr*, al-Maʿarrī thus repels notional reader displeasure with individual lines of his poetry and reveals a more general desire to ensure that his words are not misunderstood.

And yet by resorting to semantic slippage when faced with rhetorical suspicion, al-Maʿarrī undermines the very reader confidence he tries to inspire. Thus the *Zajr* frustrates reader expectations by rhetorically suspending them between the authority projected by al-Maʿarrī's pretensions to moral wisdom, and the semantic and textual incertitude on which those pretensions rest. Such an ambiguous authorship in *Zajr al-nābiḥ* echoes the polysemy exposed in the poetic language of *Luzūm mā lā yalzam*, but without granting the sense of closure that might have come from collapsing semantic potential into one meaning.

Al-Maʿarrī's polysemic language and identity in the *Zajr* reveals an effective method for protecting oneself and one's creative output from persecution. Studies on literary commentary

(*sharḥ*) have shown its traditional aim to be the clarification of textual meaning as part of the overall process of connecting readers to the source text.[4] In my view, the *Zajr* of al-Maʿarrī serves the opposite function. Its explicit goal is to destabilize meaning in order to show how it can be counterintuitive, rather than to stabilize meaning for the reader's benefit. Therefore it may be helpful to think of the *Zajr* as a kind of anti-*sharḥ*, both in its rhetorical assumption of a hostile audience and the destabilizing strategies it brings to bear on the text. As for self-reception, the fact that al-Maʿarrī contended over the meaning of his own texts within his lifetime underscores the blurry, unstable division between notions of "tradition" and "reception." Indeed it shows reception *within* antiquity, and with it the need to understand tradition and reception as part of the same process of intertextual rewriting.

[4] For studies that establish this point, see, for example: Margaret Larkin, "Abū l-ʿAlāʾ al-Maʿarrī's *Muʿjiz Aḥmad* and the Limits of Poetic Commentary," *Oriens* 41 (2013), 479-97; Kelly Tuttle, "Expansion and Digression: A Study in Mamlūk Literary Commentary," Ph.D. dissertation, The University of Pennsylvania, 2013, 77-8. Tuttle's study complicates the picture somewhat by showing how, as the source-text recedes in time, commentaries open up the text to new interpretations beyond the basic meaning. But the basic relationship remains one of trust between reader and commentator, in contrast to what we see in al-Maʿarrī's *Zajr*.

The Stakes of Authorship

The unique manuscript of the *Zajr* preserves nothing explicit about the context of its production.[5] For this we must seek out secondary medieval sources. Most biographers writing about al-Maʿarrī list the *Zajr* among his compositions, with several adding details about the unfriendly circumstances that prompted him to write it.[6] These details are typically couched in partisan tones. For example, Ibn al-ʿAdīm (d. AD 1262), author of a massive history of Aleppo and perhaps al-Maʿarrī's greatest champion,[7] writes that with the *Zajr*, أبطل فيه طعنَ المزري

[5] Al-Maʿarrī, *Luzūm mā lā yalzam* (OR 5319), fol. 1-2. The colophon does not include a date or other clues, but both Amjad al-Ṭarābulsī and the British Library note a twelfth- or thirteenth-century provenance based on the handwriting.

[6] Authors who mention the *Zajr* in greater or lesser detail include: Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn al-Ṣafadī, *Al-Wāfī bi l-wafāyāt*, 29 vols., ed. Aḥmad al-Arnaʾūṭ and Turkī Muṣṭafā (Beirut: Dār Iḥyāʾ al-Turāth al-ʿArabī, 2000) 7:68; Shihāb al-Dīn al-ʿUmrī, *Masālik al-abṣār fī mamālik al-amṣār*, 27 vols., ed. Kāmil Salmān al-Jubūrī (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyyah, 2010), 15:294; Jamāl al-Dīn al-Qifṭī, *Inbāh al-ruwāt ʿalā anbāh al-nuḥat*, 4 vols., ed. Muḥammad Abū l-Faḍl Ibrāhīm (Cairo: Dār al-Fikr al-ʿArabī, and Beirut: Muʾassasat al-Kutub al-Thaqāfiyyah, 1986), 95; Shams al-Dīn al-Dhahabī, *Taʾrīkh al-islām wa-wafāyāt al-mashāhīr wa l-aʿlām*, 53 vols., ed. ʿUmar ʿAbd al-Salām Tadmurī (Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-ʿArabī, 1994), 30:314; Sibṭ ibn al-Jawzī, "Mirʾāt al-zamān fī tawārīkh al-iʿyān," partly reproduced in *Taʿrīf al-qudamāʾ bī-Abī l-ʿAlāʾ*, ed. Ṭaha Ḥusayn et al. (Cairo: Wizārat al-Maʿārif al-ʿUmūmiyyah, 1944, repr. 1965), 154.

[7] Ibn al-ʿAdīm, *Bughyat al-ṭalab fī taʾrīkh Ḥalab*, 11 vols., ed. Suhayl Zakkār (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1988-9). For more on his life and works, see: David W. Morray, *An Ayyubid Notable and His World: Ibn al-`Adim and Aleppo as Portrayed in His Biographical Dictionary Associated With the City* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1994).

[Al-Maʿarrī عليه والقادح، وبيّن فيه عذره الصحيح، وإيمانه الصريح، ووجهَ كلامه الفصيح

foiled the piercing thrust of detractors and calumniators against him, and laid bare his firm exemption from blame and his patent faith in God, and made evident his eloquence and the reasoning behind that eloquence].[8] In another biographical encyclopedia, Greco-Syrian geographer and historian Yāqūt al-Ḥamawī (d. AD 1229) further explains that al-Maʿarrī himself was reluctant to respond, but that in the end he succumbed to pressure from supporters:

وكتاب زجر النابح يتعلق بلزوم ما لا يلزم، وذلك أنّ بعض الجهّال تكلّم على أبياتٍ من لزوم ما لا يلزم يريد بها التشرير والأذيَّة، فألزم أبا العلاء أصدقاؤه أنْ يُنشيء هذا، فأنْشأ هذا الكتاب وهو كاره.

[And also the book *Driving Off the Barking Dog*, which is appended to *Luzūm mā lā yalzam*, and this because some fool ranted dubiously[9] about verses in the *Luzūm*

[8] Ibn al-ʿAdīm, "Al-Inṣāf wa l-taḥarrī fī dafʿ al-ẓulm wa l-tajarrī ʿan Abī l-ʿAlāʾ al-Maʿarrī," reproduced in *Taʿrīf al-qudamāʾ*, 485. This is copied verbatim by Shihāb al-Dīn al-ʿUmrī in his biographical entry.

[9] Here the ordinarily neutral verb *takallama*, "to speak" or "to hold forth," is followed by the preposition *ʿalā*, thereby implying a negative attitude of the speaker toward his object and perhaps a public insinuation thereof. "To speak ill of" or "dissemble about" seems close to the

with the intent to cast aspersions and insult. Therefore al-Maʿarrī's friends compelled him to compose this work, which he did only reluctantly.][10]

The rhetoric in these passages serves to shore up authority for al-Maʿarrī, both in the sense that he vanquished his foes through superior learning, and also due to his author's discretion (i.e. he wrote the *Zajr* out of pressure from friends), a marker of modesty and therefore virtue. Additionally, Ibn al-ʿAdīm and Yāqūt al-Ḥamawī allude to still a third commentary to augment the *Zajr* itself, called *Najr al-zajr* (Smoothing Out the *Zajr*). Now lost to us, this other gloss was necessary because "his *Zajr* alone did not stop them" (*lam yamnaʿhum zajruhu*), as Ibn al-ʿAdīm says.

The amount and enthusiasm of defense mounted on the poet's behalf suggests that there were many who did not take a generous view of his work. Unfortunately, except for a few cases like al-Muʾayyad fī l-Dīn al-Shīrāzī with the letters on veganism (the subject of chapter 4) or Ibn al-Qārīḥ with *Risālat al-ghufrān*, there remains little contemporary information about who these critics were; the *Zajr* itself never indicates detractors by name.[11]

---

mark, but I also wanted to convey the same sense of blusterous raving portrayed by the title *Driving Off the Barking Dog*.

[10] Yāqūt al-Ḥamawī, *Muʿjam al-udabāʾ, irshād al-arīb ilā maʿrifat al-adīb*, 7 vols., ed. Iḥsān ʿAbbās (Beirut: Dār al-Gharb al-Islāmī, 1993), 1:330.

[11] Al-Maʿarrī also consistently refers his opponents in the singular, e.g. "hādha l-mutaqawwil." See al-Maʿarrī, *Zajr*, 12. For this reason, Amjad al-Ṭarābulsī, editor of the *Zajr*, posits that an actual single interlocutor was intended rather than a group. See Ibid., 18. Then again, perhaps

Here again, later references can shed some light. Ḥanbalī preacher Ibn al-Jawzī (d. AD 1201), one of al-Maʿarrī's most vehement critics, gives a sense in his universal history *Al-Muntaẓam fī taʾrīkh al-mulūk wa l-umam* (A Systematic Account of Kings and Polities) of the outrage over *Luzūm mā lā yalzam*. For instance, amid other sources cited to convey Ibn al-Jawzī's own views, we find the following:

ونقلتُ من خط أبي الوفاء ابن عقيل أنّه قال: من العجائب أنّ المعرّي أَظْهرَ ما أظهر من الكفر البارد الذي لا يبلغ منه مبلغ شبهات الملحدين، بل قصّر فيه كل التقصير، وسقط من عيون الكل، ثمّ اعتذر بأنّ لقوله باطناً، وأنّه مسلم في الباطن، فلا عقل له ولا دين، لأنّه تظاهر بالكفر وزعم أنّه مسلم في الباطن، وهذا عكس قضايا المنافقين والزنادقة، حيث تظاهروا بالإسلام وأبطنوا الكفر.[12]

al-Maʿarrī uses the singular addressee as a rhetorical device to convey arguments to be dismantled, or as a metonym referring to a group of real or notional readers.

[12] Abu l-Faraj ibn al-Jawzī, *Al-Muntaẓam fī taʾrīkh al-mulūk wa l-umam*, 17 vols., ed. Muḥammad ʿAbd al-Qādir ʿIṭā and Muṣṭafā ʿAbd al-Qādir ʿIṭā (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyyah, 1995), 16:23.

> [I cite from (a document) in the handwriting of Abū l-Wafāʾ ibn ʿUqayl[13]: 'The stone-cold heresy projected by al-Maʿarrī is truly astonishing — which the dubiousness of atheists cannot touch but lags behind — and thereafter he fell from favor in the sight of all. And then he apologized, saying that there is an inner [believing element] of his words, and that he is truly a Muslim at heart. This man has neither brains nor religion. He pretends to unbelief and then claims he is a Muslim at heart? That's the opposite of what hypocrites and heretics do; they pretend to Islam and hide their unbelief.']

Aside from its palpable contempt, the passage highlights a dilemma for readers: whether to trust the author. For Ibn al-Jawzī, citing Ibn ʿUqayl, if al-Maʿarrī seriously claims to be a faithful Muslim despite appearances, then he either ignores the eschatological consequences

[13] Abū l-Wafāʾ ibn ʿUqayl (d. AD 1120), a Ḥanbalī-trained theologian from Baghdad who faced controversy for his apparent avowal of Muʿtazalism, which he later publicly retracted. Ibn al-Jawzī was greatly influenced by his work, especially in the area of sermon writing. For general information on Ibn ʿUqayl's life and works, see: G. Makdisi, "Ibn ʿAḳīl," *Encyclopedia of Islam: Second Edition*, ed. P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, W.P. Heinrichs (Leiden: Brill, 1970-2006; first pub. online 2012). 25 March 2017. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_COM_0314> For a critical edition of his massive, partly-surviving legal compendium *Kitāb al-funūn*, see: Abū l-Wafāʾ ibn ʿAqīl, *The Notebooks of Ibn ʿAqīl:* Kitāb al-funūn, 2 vols., ed. George Makdisi (Beirut: Dār al-Mashriq, 1970-71). Ibn ʿUqayl's works are largely unedited, and therefore I have of this writing been unable to confirm the passage in question.

of such a position, or he has a death wish. This may at last be the meaning of, لا عقلَ له ولا دين (this man has neither brains nor religion).

What in the *Luzūm* could have prompted such vitriol? Again Ibn al-Jawzī's *Muntaẓam* offers perspective. That work cites many lines of al-Maʿarrī's poetry which appear to be dubious from the standpoint of believing Muslims, such as the following:

قُلْتُم لَـــــــــنَا خَـــــالِقٌ قديـــــمُ صَـــــــدَقْتُمُ هـــــكذا فَقُولـــــوا

زَعَـــــــمْتموه بِـــــلَا زَمـــــــانٍ وَلا مَـــــــــكانٍ أَلَا فَقُولـــــــــوا

هذا كَلامٌ لَـــــــهُ خَبـــــــــــيءٌ مَعْناهُ لَيـــــــسَتْ لَنَا عُقُـــــــــولُ [14]

[You said: We have an Eternal Creator. If you have spoken truly, then say so!

You people have claimed He is timeless and endless. Oh, go take a nap!

For your remark has a hidden meaning: that none of us has got any brains!]

Exasperated by the claim that people who assert God's eternality are irrational, Ibn al-Jawzī answers him in kind. "Look at the stupidity [*ḥamāqah*] of this fool [*hādha l-jāhil*]! He dismisses the fact that the Creator exists in time or place, when He is the One who caused both time and

[14] Ibn al-Jawzī, *Al-Muntaẓam*, 16:26-7.

place to be." While in many places al-Maʿarrī resists religious authority rather than basic faith tenets, here he appears, according to Ibn al-Jawzī's reading, to call into question the fundamental Muslim belief of God's eternal existence.

Similarly, at times he seems to question holy writ. In the *Taʾrīkh al-Islām* (History of Islam), damascene scholar Shams al-Dīn al-Dhahabī (d. AD 1348) excerpts the following couplet as proof of blasphemy[15]:

يَدٌ بِخُمسِ ميءٍ مِنْ عَسْجَدٍ فُدِيَـــتْ مـــــــا بَالُهَا قُطِعَتْ فِي رُبـــعِ دينارِ

تَنَـــاقُضٌ مَا لَنا إلّا السُّـــــكُوتُ لهُ وَأنْ نَعـــوذَ بِمَـــــولَانَا مِنَ النـــــارِ

[How can the hand,[16] which is redeemable by a fifth of a hundred,[17]

Be cut off for [stealing] a quarter of a dinar?

We can do nothing about this contradiction but keep silent and ask God

To be our refuge from fire][18]

[15] Al-Dhahabī, *Tārīkh al-Islām,* 30:205-6.

[16] Perhaps referring to the very hand writing these lines.

[17] That is, twenty gold pieces, the stipulated ransom payment.

[18] The English translation is from Tahir K. al-Garradi, "The Image of al-Maʿarrī as an Infidel Among Medieval and Modern Critics," Doctoral Dissertation, University of Utah (December 1987), 33.

Here the poet seems to characterize scripture, namely the word of God, as contradictory. On the one hand, the Qurʾān decrees that thieves be punished by having their hands severed, while on the other, it provides for ransom from punishment (*diyah*) to be paid in cases of damage to self or property.[19] Al-Dhahabī seems to confirm this interpretation in particular when he tells readers that the "contradiction" (*tanāquḍ*) in this line means "religious belief that reason cannot accept" (*ʿibādatun lā yuʿqalu maʿnāhā*).

The implication that holy writ is somehow defective because inconsistent would have been unconscionable to many and therefore grounds for punishment, even by death. Al-Dhahabī reproduces a statement to this effect by Shāfiʿī traditionist Abū Ṭāhir al-Silafī (d. AD 1180): "If the poet truly believes what is in these verses, then hellfire is his refuge [*fa l-nār maʾwāhu*] and he has no place in Islam." According to conservative theologian Ibn Kathīr, al-Maʿarrī's provocative lines caused such a reaction that he withdrew from society.[20] While this claim is most likely overstated, the fact of controversy—including accusations of *zandaqah* (heterodox belief) and *ilḥād* (atheism)—is not. Thus the question of whether al-Maʿarrī believed

[19] The reference for punishment of thieves is Qurʾān 5 (al-Māʾidah), v. 38, and for ransom payment, 4 (Al-Nisāʾ), v. 92. For English translation of these verses, see A.J. Arberry, trans., *The Koran Interpreted* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1964), 106.

[20] Ibn Kathīr, ʿImād al-Dīn, *Al-Bidāyah wa l-nihāyah fī al-taʾrīkh*, 14 vols. (Cairo: Maṭbaʿat al-Saʿādah, 1932), 12:73.

his own words, or if he meant something else by them entirely, hangs over one's reading of *Luzūm mā lā yalzam*.

At first glance, lines like those cited propound views that are controversial to say the least. Yet from another angle, they could be read as critiques of human authority rather than metaphysical reality itself. Al-Maʿarrī's medieval critics do not consider the possibility that it is not the Qurʾān but rather human interpretation thereof that al-Maʿarrī attacks; just as in the lines questioning the existence of God, which lines might instead be mocking an overly distant or literalist understanding of Deity. As the very existence of *Zajr al-nābiḥ* suggests, audience opinion represents a key battleground for al-Maʿarrī to secure his own legacy, even during his lifetime. This might be Ibn ʿUqayl's point in exclaiming that al-Maʿarrī had "neither brains nor religion," namely that it would be foolish of him to expect readers to trust his word about being a devout Muslim despite seeming otherwise. That the poet was interested in curating his own authorship, and that others were bound to contend with him over it, constitutes a crucial factor in understanding the *Zajr*.

A Wise and Prudent Sage: Al-Maʿarrī's Rhetorical Stance

In response to objections like those noted, and again bearing in mind that the *Zajr* does not address critics by name, al-Maʿarrī portrays those critics as *muʿtariḍ* (objector), *mutakallim*

(maligner), *mutaqawwil* (dissembler), *ṭāʿin* (attacker, lit. "piercer"), and *munkir* (indignant observer). On a line of poetry calling death an endless slumber — which for some could imply a denial of bodily resurrection, a core tenet of Islam — the *Zajr* declares, هذا لا يعترض فيه إلّا رجلٌ جاهلٌ، لأنّ كلَّ جيل والمنتسبين إلى كلّ نحلةٍ لا يدّعون أنّهم يعرفون وقت النشور ما هو. [No one but an ignorant man would object to this, since every generation and those belonging to every creed claim not to know the time of the resurrection].[21] In several places, al-Maʿarrī goes so far as to ask rhetorically about his critics, أَفَبَيْن البهائم هذا المتكلّم أم بين الإنس؟ [Is the person who speaks ill of these verses a dumb brute, or a human (as he claims)?][22] On a line claiming that Adam deceived his progeny by bringing them into a world replete with suffering,[23] he cites the Qurʾān, prophetic *ḥadīth*, and other poets in support of

[21] Al-Maʿarrī, *Zajr*, 25.

[22] Ibid., 69.

[23] The cruelty of bringing children into this world is a theme that runs throughout *Luzūm mā lā yalzam*. It can be seen in the first example of the following paragraph, as well as the epitaph that al-Maʿarrī wrote for his own tombstone: هذا جناه أبي عليّ / وما جنيت على أحدٍ [This is my father's crime against me, which I myself committed against none.]

this view, after which he says anyone who ignores such ample evidence does so out of غريزة ناقصة ولبٍّ ليس بثابتٍ وتعرّض لما لا يحسن [a faulty disposition, shaky intellect, and subjection to that which is unbecoming].[24]

For al-Maʿarrī, the ignorance of his detractors comes from a moral rather than intellectual fault. Near the end of the *Zajr*, al-Maʿarrī glosses two lines on the needless suffering of children who are forced to live in this world without their consent. He begins by psychologizing his opponent: إنكار هذا قد صدر عن قلبٍ مستولٍ عليه الشكّ متمكنٌ منه الإلحاد، فمهما سمع من قولٍ يصرفه إليه، لأنّ الإنسان إذا كثرتْ همّته بالشيء تصوّره في كلّ أوانٍ وتوهمه في اليقظة والرقاد [Denial of these lines' content comes from a heart possessed by doubt, with godlessness firmly rooted therein, such that any saying he hears turns him to that godlessness; for when human preoccupation with a thing becomes great, he imagines it at all times and envisions it whether he is awake or asleep].[25] While he does not spend much time on the nature of such lacking faith, he does pinpoint love of this world as a root cause. On two

[24] Al-Maʿarrī, *Zajr*, 102.

[25] Ibid., 116.

lines that compare Moses and Pharaoh as equals before death, a scandalous suggestion to some, al-Maʿarrī attributes readerly objections to a desire to commit harm: مالا ينفعه في الدنيا ولا في الآخرة مِن أذيّة مَن قد أمِنَ أذيتَه [doing harm to him who cannot be harmed, which benefits him neither in this life nor the next].[26] Elsewhere, al-Maʿarrī calls anyone who finds fault with his verse *mutasawwiq*, "sellout," suggesting that those faultfinders benefit financially from slandering the poet.[27] This, rather than seeking moral truths, represents their real motivation.

In contrast to the picture of his critics as ignorant and immoral, al-Maʿarrī positions himself as an intellectual and ethical authority. This happens mostly by implication, letting erudite content and references speak for themselves. The most oft-cited text in the *Zajr* is the Qurʾān, followed closely by prophetic *ḥadīth* (sayings) and *akhbār* (anecdotes, especially about the first Muslim leaders after Muḥammad). For example, al-Maʿarrī singles out the following line for comment:

لَعَمْـــري لَقَدْ فَضَـــحَ الأَوَّليـــ ـنَ مَـا كَتَبُـــوه وَمَـــا سَطَـــرُوا

[26] Ibid., 112.

[27] Ibid., 71.

[By my life, that which the ancients wrote and set down in lines has disgraced them!] From one angle, the poet appears to hurl unequivocal criticism at holy writ, that is, the prophetic writings of the ancients. Countering such a reading, or perhaps anticipating it, al-Maʿarrī cites the Qurʾān, Sūrat al-Baqarah (2), verse 79, as the foundation on which the verse is built (*mabniyyun ʿalayhi*): فَوَيْلٌ لِلذينَ يَكْتُبُونَ الكِتَابَ بِأَيْدِيهِم ثُمَّ يَقُولُونَ هذَا مِن عِنْدَ الله لِيَشْتَرَوا بِهِ ثَمَناً قليلاً، فَوَيْلٌ لَهُم مما كَتبَتْ أَيدِيهِم وَوَيْلٌ لَهُم مِمَا يَكْسِبُونَ [So woe to those who write the Book with their hands, then say, 'This is from God,' that they may sell it for a little price; so woe to them for what their hands have written, and woe to them for their earnings].[28] In light of this revelation, al-Maʿarrī argues, the line of poetry in question does not condemn all scripture, but only that which people claim to be scripture, when in fact it is their own creation.

Al-Maʿarrī relies on the Qurʾān and *ḥadīth* partly to answer in kind the theological attacks leveled by opponents, and partly to appeal to common sources of authority. But one gets the sense that he might be putting his religious knowledge on display as well. Indeed as the preceding example demonstrates, al-Maʿarrī is at pains to extract the pith of Qurʾānic

[28] Al-Maʿarrī, *Zajr*, 95. The English translation is Arberry's. See Arberry, *The Koran Interpreted*, 150. All Qurʾān translations are from Arberry unless otherwise noted.

meaning and thus force his audience to think harder about the implications of a single verse. Moreover, Qurʾān and *ḥadīth* citations accompany tacit juxtaposition between al-Maʿarrī and his critics, especially on moral grounds. In glossing one line of poetry, al-Maʿarrī implicit places himself among the righteous: المعنى أنّ أفعال العالَم تشتبه وهي مع ذلك على ضربَيْن: هُدى وضلال [Although the deeds of humankind (lit. "the world") appear similar, they are of two kinds: right guidance and error].[29] Elsewhere, in laying out several possible meanings for a verse claiming that, وَلَا كَائِنُ حتّى القِيامَةِ زَاهِدُ [No one is pious until the (Final) Resurrection], al-Maʿarrī , الإنسان في الحياة تدلّ على أنّ زهده غير كامل رغبة [Human instinct to cling to life proves that mortal piety remains incomplete]. Insofar as al-Maʿarrī is more aware of this need than other people, he assumes a position of moral authority.

Al-Maʿarrī inserts his biography in the *Zajr* to illustrate such authority. While explicating a line of poetry on the scarcity of proper spiritual guidance (*hudā*), which scarcity gets compared to a hidden secret, al-Maʿarrī takes the opportunity to say how his own secretive hiding from society caused others to think him wealthy: معناه أنّي من أول العُمر

[29] Al-Maʿarrī, *Zajr*, 29.

إلى آخره يُظَنُّ بي الثراء واليُسر لما أُعانيه من التقنُّع والإستغناء عن الناس [The meaning is that

throughout my life, people assumed that I was prosperous and lived a life of ease, based on how I took pains to keep to myself and dispense with the company of others].[30] Here, al-Maʿarrī's claims to legitimacy receive rhetorical support not only from a principled rejection of money — in contrast to his "sellout" (*mutasawwiq*) of a critic — but also from not broadcasting that rejection. This fact forced him to endure the misimpressions of others, along with any resulting damage to his reputation, thus lending him the credibility of one who has suffered for his beliefs.

But al-Maʿarrī's unwillingness to trumpet his own morality might ironically make it harder to trust him when reading the *Zajr*. As I hope to have shown by unpacking the foregoing examples, it is difficult to catch al-Maʿarrī explicitly declaring his own moral authority. That he wrote less clearly on this point than the failings of his opponents suggests

[30] Al-Maʿarrī, *Zajr*, 94. Rejection of earthly pleasure is an important trope of *zuhd* poetry in general and al-Maʿarrī's *oeuvre* in particular. He takes a firm and explicit stance in his later writings against panegyric poetry, for example, on the grounds that praising for worldly gain is unethical. This is a philosophical position, but one informed by biography. At the beginning of *Luzūm mā lā yalzam*, al-Maʿarrī attaches an introduction describing his own composition of praise poetry in his youth, from which later turned away: رَفَضْتُ الشَعْرَ رَفْضَ السَقْبِ غِرْسَهُ والرألِ تريكَتَهُ (I rejected poetry like a camel calf rejects its afterbirth, or a newborn ostrich rejects its eggshells). See: Abū l-ʿAlāʾ al-Maʿarrī, *Sharḥ al-Luzūmiyyāt*, 3 vols., ed. Ḥusayn Naṣṣār et al. (Cairo: Al-Hayʾah al-Miṣriyyah al-ʿĀmmah li l-Kitāb, 1994), 1:49

that such obscurity was intentional; even when al-Maʿarrī does unequivocally challenge his attackers, he never calls them by name. Furthermore, al-Maʿarrī's unstable position of power becomes exacerbated by the allegedly defensive motive for writing the *Zajr*, which brings back Ibn ʿUqayl's doubt about readers being able to trust al-Maʿarrī. Any assertion to belief is undermined by the possibility that al-Maʿarrī made such assertions merely to dodge reader attacks.

In addition, textual indicators in the *Zajr* complicate authorial stability. The unique manuscript dates from at least a century after al-Maʿarrī's death. It is not an autograph and indeed shows multiple handwriting styles on some folia[31]; glosses are also frequently followed by the statement هذا كلام الشيخ [These are the words of the master], a fact that further confirms collective authorship. Of course, this evidence is not conclusive. None of al-Maʿarrī's known manuscripts are autographs, since he was blind and therefore composed via dictation, and also the voice of the *Zajr* gloss is clearly al-Maʿarrī's, or — less likely — at least a spot-on imitation of it. But this does not detract too much from the overall impression of authorial

[31] The clearest example appears on folio 127, in which at least two other commentators recount anecdotes in support of a statement that Umayyad-era *imāms* used to preach behaviors prohibited by Islam. See Al-Maʿarrī, *Luzūm mā lā yalzam, al-juzʾ al-awwal* (OR 5319), fol. 127.

instability, an impression mirrored by the textual format of the *Zajr*, as well as the polysemic exegetical methods it brings to bear on al-Maʿarrī's own poetry.

Commanding the Margins

The very form of the *Zajr* as a marginal gloss can help us understand it. In terms of his overall body of work, not just *Luzūm mā lā yalzam*, there is little evidence that al-Maʿarrī was concerned about people tampering with the physical texts of his writings, relative to his concern over the fate of his words and ideas. One can make reasonable speculations as to why. For one thing, al-Maʿarrī rejected poetry as a commodity for sale to patrons, a position he takes explicitly as the impetus for writing the *Luzūm*.[32] He did not rely on income from literary pursuits to sustain his humble lifestyle, but rather private family funds, a fact that may have mitigated the threat of financial loss incurred through intellectual property theft. Furthermore, al-Maʿarrī himself did not write his own manuscripts, since his blindness necessitated the help of scribes to record by dictation. This would require a degree of trust in students and others charged with recording his words. In addition, throughout his life al-Maʿarrī licensed several pupils to teach his works, especially the poetry of *Saqṭ al-zand*.[33] Here

[32] Al-Maʿarrī, *Sharḥ al-Luzūmiyyāt*, 1:49.

[33] S.M. Stern, "Some Noteworthy Manuscripts of the Poems of Abu'l-'Alā' al-Ma'arrī," *Oriens* 7, no. 2 (1954), 322-47. Stern notes the crucial impact of al-Maʿarrī on "the Baghdad school of

the certification process ensured some level of quality in the transmission of his works, as it did with many forms of learning in the medieval Islamic world.[34]

Rather than material tampering, al-Maʿarrī was apparently more anxious about false interpretations of his words and ideas, and false attribution to him of heterodox belief. In the case of *Saqṭ al-zand*, he also wanted to avoid being pigeonholed in his political loyalties, due to the shifting alliances between the Byzantines and the Fatimids under local Mirdasid rule; this is the main reason al-Maʿarrī went back and edited that poetry collection himself.[35] As noted, the consequences of falling on the wrong side of religious or political authority included social isolation, exile, imprisonment, and death. Many anecdotes survive that relate such consequences for al-Maʿarrī. They include the above-

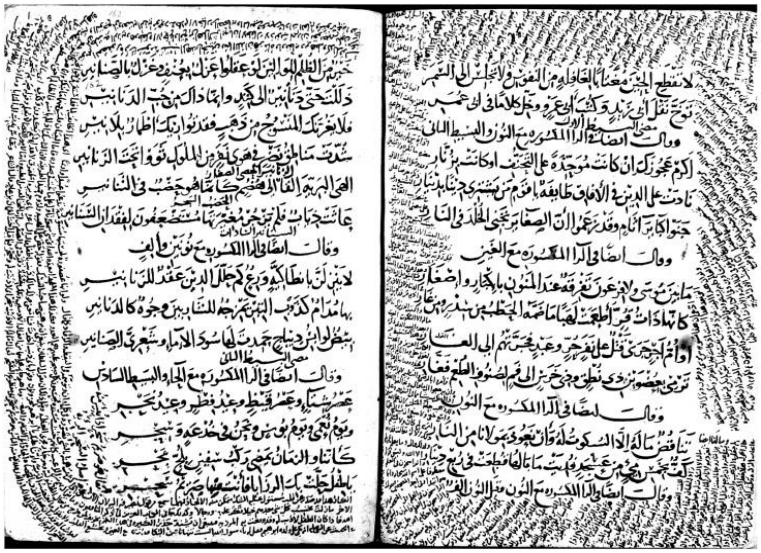

Figure 1: Zajr al-nābiḥ, *British Library OR 5319, Folio 162*

philologists in the 6th/12th century," through his student Abū Zakariyyā al-Tibrīzī, who helped pass *Saqṭ al-zand* down from one generation to the next.

[34] Ahmed El Shamsy, "The Social Construction of Orthodoxy," *The Cambridge Companion to Classical Islamic Theology*, ed. Tim Winter (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 97-117.

[35] Pieter Smoor, *Kings and Bedouins in the Palace of Aleppo as Reflected in Maarri's Works* (Manchester, UK: University of Manchester, 1985), 35.

mentioned comment by Ibn Kathīr about the poet's seclusion, stories of expulsion from literary salons in Baghdad, and even a rumor that he committed suicide to avoid physical torture by followers of the Fatimid missionary al-Muʾayyad fī l-Dīn.[36] The latter seems to be unfounded reportage, judging from the several extant accounts of al-Maʿarrī's death of old age in his hometown. But despite such exaggeration by secondary sources, they do agree that intellectual and religious controversy followed al-Maʿarrī throughout his life, and it was arguably to defend against this controversy that al-Maʿarrī took to self-commentaries like *Zajr al-nābiḥ*.

Moving to the details of that work, the unique British Library manuscript of the *Zajr* dates from at least a century after al-Maʿarrī's death. It is not an autograph, and in some places it shows multiple handwriting styles[37]; glosses are also frequently followed by the statement هذا كلام الشيخ [These are the words of the master]. All of these factors give the impression of collective manuscript production, yet with an authorial voice that is clearly al-Maʿarrī's, thus building a tension of individual versus plural authorship sustained in this work and others. The *Zajr* is not a self-standing text, but exists rather as a gloss in the margins of a previously-

[36] Margoliouth, "Vegetarianism," 314.

[37] The clearest example appears on folio 127, in which at least two other commentators recount anecdotes in support of a statement that Umayyad-era *imāms* used to preach behaviors prohibited by Islam. See al-Maʿarrī, *Luzūm mā lā yalzam, al-juzʾ al-awwal* (OR 5319), fol. 127.

copied manuscript of *Luzūm mā lā yalzam* (see Figure 1). For medieval Italianist Sherry Roush, this layout embeds a "pronounced hierarchical relationship between verse and prose."[38] This seems to be the case with al-Maʿarrī's *Zajr*. The poetic lines represent the *matn*, "source text," occupying a prestige location in the center of the page, in bold Naskhī script that commands attention with its size. Meanwhile, the gloss vies for recognition at the margins, its script compressed by lack of space, its content the afterthought of footnotes that "cannot speak first."[39]

This unilateral hierarchy appears further reinforced in comparison to the style of running commentary characteristic of Qurʾānic *tafsīr*,[40] in which lemmata from the source text are interspersed with explanatory material throughout. This kind of annotation is often written at the same time as the *matn*, with the ancillary exegesis taking part in the original moment of manuscript production. In al-Maʿarrī's *oeuvre*, such a method appears most

[38] *Hermes' Lyre: Italian Poetic Self-Commentary From Dante to Tommasco Campanella* (Toronto: Univerity of Toronto Press, 2002), 11.

[39] Jacques Derrida, "This is Not an Oral Footnote," *Annotation and Its Texts* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1991), 202.

[40] Norman Calder singles out this "*lemma* and comment" structure as an indispensable convention of Qurʾān commentary. See: Norman Calder, "*Tafsīr* From Ṭabarī to Ibn Kathīr: Problems in the Description of a Genre, Illustrated With Reference to the Story of Abraham," *Approaches to the Qurʾān*, ed. Gerald R. Hawting and Abdul-Kader A. Shareef (London and New York: Routledge, 1993), 101. It is also typical of commentaries on poetry, *shurūḥ*, in the pre-modern Arabic tradition.

distinctly in *al-Fuṣūl wa l-ghāyāt* (Paragraphs and Periods). Looking at the unique Egyptian National Archives manuscript of that work,[41] one sees a stylized *faṣl* (clause or passage) written in rhyming prose and which ends on the prominently-displayed word غاية, *ghāyah* (period), followed by a section of self-commentary tagged by the equally prominent marker تفسير, *tafsīr* (a term traditionally reserved for Qurʾānic exegesis) (see Figure 2). Then, the *tafsīr* again cedes the page to a new *faṣl*, whose beginning is signaled by the word رجع, *rajʿ* (return).[42] Thus the self-commentary format of *al-Fuṣūl wa l-ghāyāt* is more fully integrated as part of the text itself

[41] Abū l-ʿAlāʾ al-Maʿarrī, *Al-Fuṣūl wa l-ghāyāt* (838), digital scan, Egyptian National Archives, Cairo.

[42] Devin Stewart prefers the term "resumption," which together with "return" captures the nominal sense of *rajʿ*, as opposed to the traditional interpretation of this word as a past tense verb, *rajaʿa* (he [the author] returned]. See: Devin Stewart, "Rhythmical Anxiety: Notes on Abūʾl-ʿAlāʾ al-Maʿarrī's (d. 449/1058) *al-Fuṣūl waʾl-Ghāyāt* and Its Reception," *The Qurʾān and* Adab*: The Shaping of Literary Traditions in Classical Islam*, ed. Nuha Alshaar (Oxford, forthcoming), 248. I disagree with Stewart's conclusion that *rajʿ* must be a noun because other two section markers, *ghāyah* and *tafsīr*, are also nouns. While this argument provides the benefit of a nominalization for use as a conceptual category, a cursory glance at the manuscript reveals the vocalization رَجَعَ *rajaʿa*, which indeed denotes a verbal rather than nominal construction. Perhaps a compromise between this view and Stewart's can be found in the English gerund "returning," which captures both verbal and nominal senses of *rajaʿa*/*rajʿ*.

than *Zajr al-nābiḥ*, which seems to confirm the pronounced hierarchy embedded in the marginal gloss format of *Zajr al-nābiḥ*.

Figure 2: Al-Fuṣūl wa l-ghāyāt, Egyptian National Archives 838, Page 135

Yet that hierarchy is upset by the function of self-commentary the *Zajr*. Al-Maʿarrī employs a typical "secondary" text—a marginal gloss—to appropriate the space normally reserved for reader comment. His words occupy both the margins and the center, thereby disallowing skeptical interpretation by filling up the places where that interpretation would go. Thus the marginal notes, far from subordinate to the poetic source text of *Luzūm mā lā yalzam*, become an active means to consolidating al-Maʿarrī's position. This textual role reversal in *Zajr al-nābiḥ* echoes the overall unpredictability seen in al-Maʿarrī's self-presentation and exegetical strategies.

More broadly, the active, primary role of secondary marginalia in the *Zajr* speaks to recent scholarly discoveries of the creative nature of medieval Arabic commentary. Long considered "no more than stale expositions of the works of revered masters of a bygone age,"[43]

[43] Asad Q. Ahmed and Margaret Larkin, "The *Ḥāshiya* and Islamic Intellectual History," *Oriens* 41, no. 3 4 (2013), 213. The essays of this *Oriens* volume are a key contribution to medieval Islamic commentary scholarship. Another important study is Walid A. Saleh, "The Last of the

Islamic exegetical texts in fact reveal active intellectual production across many fields. In addition, while marginal glosses are ubiquitous in medieval Arabic manuscripts, self-commentaries are relatively rare. That al-Maʿarrī chose this way to defend himself speaks to its simultaneous power and fragility.

Specific Reference of a General Expression (*takhṣīṣ al-ʿāmm*)

Concerning the first strategy that exploits linguistic polysemy, al-Maʿarrī declares with striking frequency throughout the *Zajr* that words or phrases that seem to apply generally are in fact more restricted in meaning. He stresses this particularly about his own sweeping indictments of ignorance or religious hypocrisy, as in the following two lines:

وَقَدْ فَتَّشْتُ عَن أصْحَابِ دينٍ لَهُم نُسْكٌ ولَيْسَ بِهِم رِياءُ

فَأَلْفَيْتُ البَهَائمَ لَا عُقولٌ تُقِيمُ لَهَا الدَليلَ وَلَا ضِياءُ

[I've inspected devout people, who are outwardly pious

but lack true spiritual insight,

For I find (them to be) dumb brutes, no reasoning

Nishapuri School of Tafsīr: Al-Wāḥidī (d. 468/1076) and His Significance in the History of Qur'anic Exegesis," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 126, no. 2 (2006), 223-43.

to establish proofs, no light of truth][44]

This appears to be a general attack on "devout people" (*aṣḥāb dīn*), whom the poet compares unfavorably to animals in their lack of speech and, therefore, rationality (*al-bahāʾim*, literally "those who cannot speak").[45] Other poems level similarly expansive criticisms, like these lines cited elsewhere in the *Zajr*:

وَجِبِلَّةُ الناسِ الفســـادُ فَضَلَّ مَـنْ يَسْـــــعَى بِحِكْمَتِهِ إلــى تَهْذيبِهَا

يَـــا ثلَّةٌ فِي غَفْلَةٍ وأُوَيْسُـــــهَا الـ ـقَرَنـي مَثَلُ أُوَيْســـــهَا أي ذِيبِهَا

[The natural state of humans is vice, and thus whoever in his wisdom tries to cleanse that natural state will falter;

O what an unwitting flock! And their Uways al-Qaranī, who is rather like their *Canis lupus*, that is, like their wolf!][46]

---

[44] Al-Maʿarrī, *Zajr*, 11.

[45] This is a common analogy in al-Maʿarrī's writings, channeling the widespread association in pre-modern philosophical thought between the faculty of speech and that of reason. The very Arabic word for logic, *manṭiq*, means "speech" or "language," and is a direct loan-translation of the Greek root of "logic," namely *logos*, from the verb *legein*. For more on these and other Arabic appropriations from Greek, Aramaic, and Persian technical terms, see, for example: Gerhard Endress, "The Language of Demonstration: Translating Science and the Formation of Terminology in Arabic Philosophy and Science," *Early Science and Medicine* 7, no. 3, Certainty, Doubt, Error: Aspects of the Practice of Pre- and Early Modern Science (2002), 235.

[46] Al-Maʿarrī, *Zajr*, 35.

Al-Maʿarrī's wordplay with the name of a seventh-century ascetic — Uways al-Qaranī, whose first name also affectionately means "little wolf" — follows a second pun on the word *thallah*, "group of people," which, as al-Ṭarabulsī explains in a footnote, can also mean "flock of sheep" when vocalized as *thillah*. Thus al-Maʿarrī seems to prosecute as an unthinking herd all those who follow religious authorities, a charge that accompanies his wider condemnation of humans as universally corrupt.

Whether readers actually objected to such vitriol, or whether their objections are notional targets to be attacked, al-Maʿarrī anticipates them and answers by narrowing the referential scope of his own verse. About the lines comparing religious people to beasts, he writes: الكلام في هذَين البيتين إنّما خرجا على الخصوص لا على العموم [On the language of these two lines, they were set forth intending a specific reference, not a general one].[47] Similarly, for the verses likening religious followers to a flock of sheep, he claims وهذا الكلام خرج على الخصوص لأنّ العالم كلّه ليس كذلك [This language was set forth with specific reference, since the whole world is not like this].

[47] Ibid., 11.

To illustrate how a general expression can have a specific referent, al-Maʿarrī cites numerous examples from the Qurʾān and *ḥadīth* (sayings of the prophet Muḥammad), such as verse 74 of Sūrat al-Zukhruf (43): إِنَّ الْمُجْرِمِينَ فِي عَذَابِ جَهَنَّمَ خَالِدُونَ [But the evildoers dwell forever in the chastisement of the fire].[48] However, al-Maʿarrī points out, in other places the Qurʾān also decrees that if sinners repent, then they are freed from the punishment reserved for evildoers. This suggests that the language of Sūrat al-Zukhruf cited above is not universal in its semantic reference, even though the definite plural word for "evildoers," *al-mujrimīn*, takes the form of such universal reference. In turn, this argument shows how the language of al-Maʿarrī's poetry might seem to have general semantic meaning — like "devout people" (*aṣḥābi dīnin*), humans (*al-nās*), and so on — but which in reality has, according to him, a more restricted significance.

Al-Maʿarrī's claim that words can take at once the form of generality and the meaning of specificity looks quite similar to an argument from a field separate from literature, namely Islamic jurisprudence (*al-fiqh*), but which is related in its close attention to the nature of language.[49] That argument has to do with general versus specific language, *al-ʿumūm wa l-*

[48] Arberry, *The Koran Interpreted*, 511.

[49] It seems clear from al-Maʿarrī's use of terms and arguments that Islamic jurisprudence had a direct impact on his work. Indeed it is not unreasonable to assume the Syrian poet's familiarity

khuṣūṣ, which is the subject of a major debate in medieval Islamic legal philosophy (*uṣūl al-fiqh*) over how to determine the scope of the law.[50] In brief, scholars contended over whether Arabic words or phrases with "the form of general reference" (*ṣiyāgh al-ʿumūm*) would have actual "general semantic reference" (*al-ʿumūm*) for their exclusive literal meaning, as opposed to figurative or symbolic meaning (*al-majāz*).[51] To put the issue more broadly, is the form of a word innately linked to its literal sense? Framed in this way, pre-modern legal scholars were

with juristic analysis, since many of the men in his extended family served as judges and legal scholars in Aleppo.

[50] For general information on this argument and its importance to classical Islamic jurisprudence, see: B.G. Weiss, "*ʿUmūm wa-khuṣūṣ*," *Encyclopedia of Islam, Second Edition*, ed. P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, W.P. Heinrichs (Leiden: Brill, 1960-2007; online, 2012). 01 February 2017. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_COM_1293> For a fuller exposition, see: Bernard G. Weiss, "Chapter Eight: General and Unqualified Expressions," *The Search for God's Law: Islamic Jurisprudence in the Writings of Sayf al-Dīn al-Āmidī*, rev. ed. (Salt Lake City, UT: University of Utah Press, 2010), 382-439. For treatment of the *ʿumūm wa-khuṣūṣ* argument as part of the discussion of *ijtihād* (legal interpretation) versus *taqlīd* (cognate of precedent, or *stare decisis*), see: Sherman A. Jackson, "*Taqlīd*, Legal Scaffolding and the Scope of Legal Injunctions in Post-Formative Theory: *Muṭlaq* and *ʿĀmm* in the Jurisprudence of Shihāb al-Dīn al-Qarāfī," *Islamic Law and Society* 3, no. 2 (1996), 165-92. Weiss covers this topic of Islamic law more fully than other scholars writing in western languages, and therefore discussion of *al-ʿumūm wa l-khuṣūṣ* in this essay —including translation of technical terms — relies mainly on his work.

[51] Weiss, "General and Unqualified Expressions," 394-5. As Weiss points out, this debate assumes that literal and figurative meaning are separate, a premise which no pre-modern legal scholar seems to question.

really debating whether language is a "natural sign," meaning that form and content are linked by the inborn nature of words, rather than by their conventional usage.

To take a classic example, the Qurʾān decrees the following punishment for theft in Sūrat al-Māʾidah (5), verse 38: "And the thief, male and female [*wa l-sāriq wa l-sāriqah*]: cut off the hands of both, as a recompense for what they have earned."[52] In medieval Arabic theories of language, it is possible for the Arabic word for "thief," *al-sāriq*, to convey at once generality and specificity, through the separate but related functions of form and content. According to this view, the general idea or class of "thief" gets expressed through the linguistic form of general reference (*ṣiyāgh al-ʿumūm*), while the semantic content might refer to particular thieves through "specific reference" (*al-khuṣūṣ*). "The issue at hand," writes Weiss, "is thus whether there are . . . [general] forms that signify inclusive (or general) reference and nothing else as their literal sense."[53] According to him, the majority of pre-modern Muslim legal scholars believed that such forms of general reference intrinsically carried an all-inclusive, general meaning in their literal sense, while a minority held that their innate literal sense was specific.

[52] Arberry, *Koran*, 106.

[53] Weiss provides a list of Arabic forms that qualify as having the "form of general reference" (*ṣiyāgh al-ʿumūm*) and thus constituted the subject of debate. See Weiss, "General and Unqualified Expressions," 389-91.

But jurists of either stripe acknowledged that a word or phrase could have a more specific meaning than its outward form might indicate. To discover if this was the case, they would look for a linguistic or contextual "indication of specific reference" (*al-mukhaṣṣiṣ*), such as a mitigating or contradictory statement from an equally weighty authority. This might then justify an interpretive move called "indicating specific reference of a general expression" (*takhṣīṣ al-ʿāmm*) to delimit the general meaning as a more specific one.[54] In the case of Qurʾānic punishment for thieves, the directive to cut off their hands seems qualified by the very next verse's statement: "But whoso repents, after his evildoing, and makes amends, God will turn towards him." Therefore the main difference between juristic philosophies was not over the possibility of a word's more specific meaning. Instead, scholars contended over whether specific meaning was literal and intrinsic to outwardly general linguistic expressions, or whether it came from context.[55]

[54] Ibid., 432-9.

[55] Additionally, the particular question of literal versus figurative meaning relates to another interpretive technique, "diversion to non-apparent meaning" (*taʾwīl*), which stood at the center of medieval debates between those who preferred an expression's "apparent meaning" (*ẓāhir*), those who preferred its "non-apparent meaning" (*bāṭin*), and those who fell somewhere in between. See: Weiss, *The Search For God's Law*, 463-72. In contrast to Weiss, Ismail Poonawala renders *taʾwīl* in English according to the root etymology, namely "returning to its origin or source," which more generously captures the view of those who preferred such non-apparent textual meaning. See: I. Poonawala, "Taʾwīl," *Encyclopedia of Islam, Second Edition* <http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_SIM_7457>.

These legal debates over the nature of specific versus general meaning lend crucial insight to al-Maʿarrī's purported views on language and to his self-commentary as a whole. Although nowhere in *Zajr al-nābiḥ* does the Syrian poet say which meaning he thinks is literal or intrinsic, his assertion that language that looks general can in fact have a specific referent draws on an argument similar to *takhṣīṣ al-ʿāmm*, namely that form and content are not always congruous. His use of the exact terms deployed by jurists, *ʿumūm* and *khuṣūṣ*, further signals this connection. There are also linguistic and contextual clues in al-Maʿarrī's poetry to support his claim. In the first cited verses, the word "religion" (*dīn*) in the genitive phrase "men of religion" (*aṣḥābi dīnin*) is grammatically indefinite, thus not denoting the same semantic inclusivity in Arabic as if it were definite (*asḥāb **al-**dīn*). The same holds true for the second example, in which the word "flock" (*thallah*) is also indefinite. Granted, this could be for the sake of fitting the poetic meter, but that does not exclude the possibility that the words are restricted in meaning, as al-Maʿarrī asserts.

These points in support of al-Maʿarrī's argument yet again raise the question of authorial sincerity. Perhaps the Syrian poet was just as motivated by rhetorical necessity — in his case, fending off accusations of heresy or blasphemy — as by a desire to express authentic views on his poetry. Indeed, this is not the only place where al-Maʿarrī relies on *takhṣīṣ al-ʿāmm*-like arguments in the face of suspicion. Late in his life, al-Maʿarrī corresponded with al-

Muʾayyad fī l-Dīn at Cairo, the subject of chapter 4 and who initiates the discussion by asking[56] al-Maʿarrī to explain the following line of poetry, which appears to indict as intellectually and spiritually ignorant all who have not yet embraced veganism:

غدوتَ مريضَ العقل والدين فالقنِي لتسمـع أنباءَ الأمــورِ الصحائــحِ

[You are ailing in mind and faith, so come see me!

Hear of things as they truly are][57]

In response, al-Maʿarrī states [58]فإنّما خاطب به مَنْ غَمَرَهُ الجهل، لا مَنْ للرياسة عَلَمٌ وأهل

[Rather in this line, the poet addresses those who have been deluged by ignorance, not those who are a beacon of, and fit for, guidance]. This is the same argument about poetic language made in the *Zajr* (albeit without the technical terms *ʿumūm* and *khuṣūṣ*), namely that an expression that appears linguistically general can in fact have specific reference. Conspicuously, in both places al-Maʿarrī is under attack from a skeptical interlocutor, whether

[56] Abū l-ʿAlāʾ al-Maʿarrī, *Rasāʾil Abī al-ʿAlāʾ al-Maʿarrī, al-juzʾ al-awwal*, ed. Iḥsān ʿAbbās (Beirut: Dār al-Shurūq, 1982), 99-140.

[57] Abū l-ʿAlāʾ al-Maʿarrī, *Sharḥ al-luzūmiyyāt*, 3 vols., ed. Ḥusayn Naṣṣār et al. (Cairo: Al-Hayʾah al-Miṣriyyah al-ʿĀmmah li l-Kitāb, 1994), 1:362-4.

[58] David Margoliouth's edition gives the variant reading عَلَمٌ وأصل, which he translates as "beacon and source." See: D.S. Margoliouth, "Abu'l - `Alā al – Ma`arrī's Correspondence on Vegetarianism," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland* (Apr. 1902), 297.

notional or actual. Furthermore, of the times when he glosses his own poetry, it is only under these conditions that al-Maʿarrī's *takhṣīṣ al-ʿumūm*-esque arguments appear in his writings.[59] While this is not conclusive evidence, it does suggest more than one motivation for al-Maʿarrī to impute a restricted meaning to general linguistic forms.

Riddling (*ilghāz*)

Another way that al-Maʿarrī harnesses linguistic polysemy to disarm reader objections involves a literary device called *ilghāz*, translated variously as "allusion," "concealment," "riddling," or "double entendre." Briefly put, the device manifests in an extended metaphor that can be read either of two ways based on a single word's definition, only for the author to reveal one as correct. Al-Maʿarrī uses this tactic to gloss the following two lines:

فـي كُلِّ أَمْرِك تَقْلِيـــدٌ رَضِيتَ بِه حتّى مَقَـــــالك ربـّي وَاحِدٌ أَحَدُ

وَقَدْ أُمِـــــرْنَا بِفِكْرٍ فـــي بَدَائِعِه فَإنْ تَفَكـرَّ فِيه مَعْشَـــــرٌ لَحَـدوا

[In all you do, there is assent to legal precedent with which you are complacent,

even when you profess, "God is One!

[59] Even in al-Maʿarrī's prosaic *Risālat al-ghufrān*, a long imagined journey through heaven and hell and which responds to a dubious correspondent, the Syrian poet does not resort to confining the semantic reference of general expressions.

We are commanded to ponder the marvels of His creation, but if people did,

they would become atheists!]

The word in question appears in the first hemistich: *taqlīd*, a technical term in Islamic law that means following established legal precedent, whether in court decisions or everyday worship practice.[60] For some, it also implies unthinking acceptance of doctrine,[61] and in this sense al-Maʿarrī's lines could be read as a rationalist attack on religious authority. Even more provocative is the suggestion that people accept Islam's bedrock principle of monotheism (*tawḥīd*) only through such blind assent, and that if people actually thought about God and His creations, they would, as al-Maʿarrī declares, "become atheists" [*laḥadū*].

To confront any likely remonstrations on this point, al-Maʿarrī explains that these verses represent a poetic riddle, or *lughz*. He cautions not to read the word *taqlīd* by its

[60] There are various translations of this term, a fact that speaks to its several shades of meaning. Nader El-Bizri calls *taqlīd* "mimetic assent," reflecting its everyday worship aspect more than its role in legal proceedings. See: Nader El-Bizri, "God: Essence and Attributes," *The Cambridge Companion to Classical Islamic Philosophy*, ed. Timothy Winter (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 128. By contrast, Sherman Jackson equates it with *stare decisis* or "cognate of precedent," a technical term that refers to using principles or rules established in previous cases in order to decide subsequent cases in court. See: Jackson, "Legal Scaffolding," 167.

[61] Recent scholarship has questioned this narrative. See, for example: Jackson, "Legal Scaffolding"; Ahmed Fekry Ibrahim, "Rethinking the *Taqlīd* Hegemony: An Institutional, *Longue-Durée* Approach," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 136, no. 4 (2016), 801-16.

common legal usage, since in that case, يقول به أَحَدٌ يُعَوَّل عليه من الشرعية إذا عنَوا به تقليد لا التابِع للمتبوع [no one would be justified under *sharīʿah* law (in confessing God's oneness) by imitating the precedent of another].[62] Then, al-Maʿarrī reveals that the word *taqlīd* admits of two other possible meanings. One derives from its root etymology, "to adorn with a necklace [*qilādah*]," which, al-Maʿarrī explains, would in this instance denote how the "word of Truth" (*kalimat al-ḥaqq*, or pronouncing the name of God) adorns a person like a necklace. The other meaning is "to give a piece of dried camel skin [*maṭṭ*]," referring to a presumed practice among pre-Islamic Arab nomads as a way to ward off enemies.[63] According to al-Maʿarrī, this second meaning symbolizes anything beneficial, such as the profession of monotheism cited in the poem.

By revealing a tangled thicket of polysemy in this way, al-Maʿarrī turns an apparent attack on blind faith into an affirmation, even a demand, for belief in the oneness of God. He also shows that the rationalist indictment leveled in the second line — namely that people

[62] Al-Maʿarrī, *Zajr*, 45.

[63] Perhaps because of this original meaning, words from the same root as *taqlīd* took on a secondary association with treasure and precious objects. Lane's *Lexicon* preserves several sayings and anecdotes with this meaning under the terms *iqlīd* and *miqlad*, both of which mean "key." See: Edward Lane, *An Arabic English Lexicon*, 8 vols. (London: Williams & Norgate, 1863), 2558.

would cease to have faith in God, if only they thought more about it — is in fact criticism not of belief in a God who does not really exist, but of mortals' inability to comprehend a God who *does*. Although al-Maʿarrī does not pursue this point further in the *Zajr*, it becomes clear in the final line of the epigrammatic tercet from which the verses in question are taken:

وَأَهْـلُ كُلِّ جِدَالٍ يُمْسِـــكُونَ بـه إذا رَأَوا نُـــورَ حَقٍّ ظَاهِرٍ جَحَـدُوا

[And those inclined to dispute every point—

they lay hold upon and contend over Him,

And if they truly beheld the light of Truth manifest,

they would deny it][64]

In this way, al-Maʿarrī sets up an ethical poetics by denying safe passage to religious conviction. He uses the ambiguity of poetic language as a tool to involve readers in the very process that he claims will bring them to God, namely ratiocination. In the Syrian poet's view, those who go no further in their faith than "mimetic assent" to prescribed doctrine (*taqlīd*) will become atheists (*laḥadū*, literally "deviate") and deny the truth when they see it. This is why such people cannot see God even when He is there before them.

[64] Abū l-ʿAlāʾ al-Maʿarrī, *Sharḥ al-luzūmiyyāt*, 3 vols., ed. Ḥussayn Naṣṣār et al. (Cairo: Al-Hayʾah al-Miṣriyyah al-ʿĀmmah li l-Kitāb, 1994), 1:353.

Aside from al-Maʿarrī's own use of the term *lughz*, his reliance on polysemy for a *didactic* purpose fits more squarely under the rubric of *ilghāz* than other types of wordplay. It stands in contrast to a device called *tawriyah*, for example, which, like *ilghāz*, exploits the multivalent capacity of language by admitting two senses of the same word, a "nearer meaning" (*maʿnā qarīb*) that hides another, "farther meaning" (*maʿnā baʿīd*) intended by the poet.[65] However, some medieval theorists thought that *tawriyah* did not signify the same rhetorical intent as *ilghāz*. In contrast to the more benign intent of *tawriyah*, the figure of *ilghāz* uses a common linguistic form or meaning to hide a non-obvious one, for the express purpose of tricking readers into thinking the apparent meaning was the right one. This was often put to pedagogical ends by forcing an audience to engage more deeply with the text than a cursory reading might permit.

One proponent of this definition of *ilghāz* vis-à-vis *tawriyyah* was the Syrian poet, literary theorist, political climber, and *protégé* of al-Maʿarrī himself, Ibn Sinān al-Khafājī (d. AD 1073). In his work of rhetoric and poetics, *Sirr al-faṣāḥah* (The Secret of Eloquence), al-Khafājī describes both the general nature of *ilghāz* and its frequency in al-Maʿarrī's works:

[65] S.A. Bonebakker, "Tawriya," *Encyclopedia of Islam, Second Edition* <http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_SIM_7460>. For a similar definition, see: W.P. Heinrichs, "Rhetorical Figures," *Encyclopedia of Arabic Literature*, ed. Julie Scott Meisami and Paul Starkey (London and New York: Routledge, 1998), 660.

إنّ الموضوع على وجه الإلغاز قد قصد قائلُه إغماض المعنى وإخفاءَه

وجعل ذلك فنّاً من الفنون التي تُستخرج بها أفهام الناس، وتُمتحن أذهانهم فلمّا

كان وضعُه على خلاف وضع الكلام في الأصل كان القول فيه مخالفاً لقولنا في

فصيح الكلام . . . وقَدْ كان شيخنا أبو العلاء يتسحسن هذا الفنّ ويستعمله

في شعره كثيراً . . .[66]

[The one who pronounces upon a subject in the manner of *ilghāz* intends its meaning to be made obscure and hidden. He makes this into an art by which he puts to the test people's intelligence, so that their intellect is proved. Because its composition is contrary to the original way of speaking, its style is in contradiction to our clearly uttered words . . . Our master Abū l-ʿAlāʾ considered this device to be beautiful, and made frequent use of it in his poetry.][67]

[66] ʿAbdallah ibn Muḥammad ibn Sinān al-Khafājī, *Sirr al-faṣāḥah* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyyah, 1982), 227.

[67] Pieter Smoor, "Enigmatic Allusion and Double Meaning in Maʿarrī's Newly-Discovered 'Letter of a Horse and a Mule': Part II," *Journal of Arabic Literature* 13 (1982), 36. The English rendering is Smoor's. For more on *ilghāz*, *lughz*, and other related figures, both in general and as they appear in al-Maʿarrī's writings, see also: Pieter Smoor, "The Weeping Wax Candle and Maʿarrī's

And with unforgettable imagery, the scribe and literary encyclopedist Shihāb al-Dīn Aḥmad al-Nuwayrī (d. AD 1332) discusses the meaning of *lughz* in his work *Nihāyat al-arab fī funūn al-adab* (The Heart's Desire in the Arts of Culture). He traces it back to a verb "which describes the action of a field rat when it burrows its way first straight ahead but then veers off to the left or right in order to more successfully elude its enemies."[68]

The definitions of al-Khafājī and al-Nuwayrī affirm the simultaneously devious and benevolent quality of *ilghāz*. Premodern poets, grammarians, and belletristic prose writers made use of its purposeful ambiguity to display superiority over others, especially at the expense of religious figures, as often as they used it to guide readers to better judgment. Indeed the two functions are never far apart. For instance, medieval lexicographer Ibn Fāris (d. AD 1004) wrote a work called *Legal Decisions by Arab Jurists* (*Futyā faqih al-ʿarab*) in which he deploys grammatical knowledge to find and exploit loopholes in the law, thereby besting religious authorities in verbal debate. The trickster-like cunning of Ibn Fāris was later used as a

Wisdom-tooth: Night Thoughts and Riddles from the *Gāmiʿ al-awzān*," *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 138 (1988), 283-312. For more on the device of *tawriyyah*, see: S.A. Bonebakker, *Some Early Definitions of the Tawriya and Ṣafadī's* Faḍḍ al-xitām ʿan at-tawriya wa-'listixdām (Berlin: De Gruyter Mouton, 1966).

[68] Smoor, "Weeping Wax Candle," 284. For a sense of *Nihāyat al-adab* as a whole, Elias Muhanna has recently put out an abridged English translation. See: Shihab al-Din al-Nuwayri, *The Ultimate Ambition in the Arts of Erudition: A Compendium of Knowledge from the Classical Islamic World*, trans. Elias Muhanna (London, UK: Penguin Books, 2016).

trope in the *Maqāmah al-ḥarbiyyah* (The Assembly of the Ḥarbiyyah District) of al-Ḥarīrī (d. AD 1122),[69] a poet and grammarian whose texts were considered as devilishly entertaining as they were instructive. This brief example illustrates a more general phenomenon in medieval Arab-Islamic textual culture of blending seriousness (*al-jadd*) with play (*al-hazl*), making it hard to distinguish one from the other.[70]

As with *takhṣīṣ al-ʿāmm*, the rhetorical figure of *ilghāz* thus raises questions of sincerity in al-Maʿarrī's case. The coincidence in *ilghāz* of a rhetorically generous function — that is, the impulse to guide or teach — with deceit and trickery speaks to the variety of motives driving al-Maʿarrī's self-commentary, some nobler than others. Readers may therefore speculate that al-Maʿarrī's gloss of *taqlīd* and other words is nothing more than an artful dodge meant to fend off censure by religious authorities, or worse. At the same time, this more disingenuous aspect of al-Maʿarrī's self-gloss cannot be straightforwardly extracted from the earnestness of his opinions about poetry and a desire to help his audience learn. It therefore speaks to the many-

[69] Smoor, "Enigmatic Allusion II," 41.

[70] For more general information on the interplay of *al-hazl wa l-jadd*, see, for example: U. Marzolph, "Hazl," *Encyclopedia of Arabic Literature*, ed. Julie Scott Meisami and Paul Starkey (London and New York: Routledge, 1998), 281. For specific instances in medieval texts, see, for example: *Rasāʾil ṭayf al-khayāl fī l-jadd wa l-hazl*, ed. Sayyid Kasrawī Ḥasan (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyyah, 2009); Eric Ormsby, "Ibn Ḥazm," *The Literature of Al-Andalus*, ed. María Rosa Menocal, Raymond P. Scheindlin, and Michael Sells (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 245.

sided persona telegraphed by al-Maʿarrī's texts and its aptness to be manifested in multiple ways throughout the very same text, especially in less friendly rhetorical circumstances.

Conclusion: Commentary and Reception

The congruence of polysemic textual persona and function in the *Zajr* reveals an effective way to protect oneself and one's creative output from harassment. By leaving the true nature of his views open to reader interpretation, al-Maʿarrī channels a principle identified by Leo Strauss about all who write beneath the shadow of persecution, namely that "the burden of proof rests with the censor."[71] It is al-Maʿarrī's detractors who must show that his expression of heterodox views was not an accident, or that he used ambiguous wording specifically for that purpose.

Of course, whether the Syrian poet's audience was convinced by his exegetical moves to get around censorship is another matter. If we are to believe secondary accounts that al-Maʿarrī had to compose still another commentary in order to silence his opponents, then indeed, authorial and semantic polysemy did not serve its intended function. Then again, to speak of intent is to miss the point that al-Maʿarrī's texts do not give away their purpose so

[71] Leo Strauss, "Persecution and the Art of Writing," *Social Research* 8, no. 1 (1941), 492.

easily. Above all, the Syrian poet's words force readers into a dialectic that has not resolution but rather continued ratiocination as a primary goal.

At another level, the *Zajr* opens the boundaries for understanding medieval Arabic literary commentary. As intimated by its technical term *sharḥ*, literally "slicing," such commentary traditionally serves to clarify literary meaning through analysis thereof. In practical terms, this means that commentaries provide lexical, grammatical, prosodic, and contextual information pursuant to interpreting poetic lines.[72] While this often entails speculation about alternate meanings — especially on points of perennial confusion, such as the dual referent of *qifā nabkī* (Stop you two, and let us weep!) in the opening line of Imrūʾ al-Qays' pre-Islamic *muʿallaqah*[73] — that speculation derives from a rhetorical stance of generosity. Commentary is typically meant to *help* readers, by giving them the tools necessary to understand poetic import.

---

[72] Margaret Larkin notes about commentaries on the poetry of al-Mutanabbī that " See: Margaret Larkin, "Abū l-ʿAlāʾ al-Maʿarrī's *Muʿjiz Aḥmad* and the Limits of Poetic Commentary," *Oriens* 41 (2013), 479. Michael Cooperson has an unpublished paper written to demonstrate how medieval Arabic literary commentary works, using the Chuck Berry song "Promised Land" as a source text. It includes lexical, literary, musical, biographical, and cultural references for almost every word or phrase, overwhelming the reader with information but always with the intent to aid interpretation. See: Michael Cooperson, "*Promised Land* by Chuck Berry," unpublished paper, nd.

[73] For an overview of this issue plus a possible interpretation, see, for example: Jareer Abu-Haidar, " 'Qifā nabki': The Dual Form of Address in Arabic Poetry in a New Light," *Journal of Arabic Literature* 19, no. 1 (Mar. 1988), 40-8.

In contrast, the *Zajr* starts from an explicitly polemical, antagonistic relationship between author and reader. Its exegetical goal derives from this stance: to destabilize semantic meaning as counterintuitive, thereby showing unfriendly audiences how they mistook the poem's meaning, rather than to stabilize that meaning for the reader's benefit. Therefore it may be helpful to think of the Zajr as a kind of anti-*sharḥ*, both in its rhetorical assumption of a hostile audience and the subversive interpretations brought to bear on the text. In this sense, it resonates with the digressive, parodic commentarial practices of Mamlūk writers like Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn al-Ṣafadī (d. AD 1363), who wrote to teach his readers by entertaining them and also to lampoon the traditional generic practices of literary commentary.[74]

In addition, studying the *Zajr* turns our collective attention to how texts are received *within* antiquity. This speaks to broader literary historical issues like reception and canonization. It can be tempting for modern readers — myself included — to conflate the form in which we encounter medieval Arabic poetry with its textual ontology. Often that encounter happens with a critical edition, the variant readings and commentary tradition having been concealed by the process of textual criticism, then typeset and printed in a bound volume. But glosses like the *Zajr* remind us of the many modalities that texts can inhabit, even within the lifetime of an individual author like al-Maʿarrī. Not the least of these modalities are the many

[74] Tuttle, "Expansion and Digression," 79-169.

exegetical discourses attached to source texts, a fact that, when borne in mind, can help us see the process of reception already going on within the Arabic literary *turāth* tradition.

Chapter 4. The Missionary and the Skeptic: Debating Veganism

Between al-Maʿarrī and al-Muʾayyad fī l-Dīn al-Shīrāzī

To be a vegan in the medieval Islamic world was an embattled position.[1] Most inhabitants of that world assented to the idea that animals are granted by God for human use, and that *ḥalāl* stipulations for butchery and preparation were the strictest required standard.[2]

---

[1] Paulina B. Lewicka, *Food and Foodways of Medieval Cairenes* (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 260. I acknowledge at the outset my anachronistic use of the term "vegan," which is a modern approximation of the position al-Maʿarrī seems to take against consuming all animal products, not just meat. Regarding the Arabic terms, al-Maʿarrī infuses his stance with ethical import by calling it *ṣawm al-dahr*, "lifelong fasting," which he claims only to break for the two ʿĪd celebrations. Meanwhile, al-Muʾayyad uses the phrase *taḥrīmihi ʿalā nafsihī al-luḥūm wa-l-albān*, "forbidding from himself animal flesh and dairy products," perhaps meant to signal al-Maʿarrī's apparent attempt to play God by deciding what is illicit and what is not. While the word "vegan" is a poor substitute for these Arabic expressions, it does capture some sense of the self-imposed abstention from animal products and the ethical imperative for doing so.

[2] That being said, there were indeed voices in medieval Islam calling for a moderate intake of meat and other animal products. For example, Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī famously discusses the need for such temperance in the section "Kitāb kasr al-shahwatayn" ("On Breaking the Two Desires," referring to hunger and sexual lust) of his magnum opus, *Iḥyāʾ ʿulūm al-dīn* (Revival of the Religious Sciences). His position derives from the principle that خير الأمور أوسطها (*khayr al-umūr awsaṭuhā,* "things are best in their moderated state"). Thus for medieval thinkers like al-Ghazālī, the issue of al-Maʿarrī's total abstention from animal products therefore seems to be one of degree rather than kind. See: Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyāʾ ʿulūm al-dīn* (Beirut: Dār Ibn Ḥazm, 2005), 964–94. Timothy Winter has translated this part of the *Iḥyāʾ* into English. See: T.J. Winter, trans., *Al-Ghazālī: On Disciplining the Soul* (Kitab riyadat al-nafs) *& On Breaking the Two Desires* (Kitāb kasr al-shahwatayn), *Books XXII and XXIII of the Revival of the Religious Sciences* (Iḥyāʾ ʿulūm al-dīn) (Cambridge, UK: The Islamic Texts Society, 1995).

It is thus no surprise to find keen interest among medieval observers in the hard line taken by Syrian poet, belletrist, ascetic, and alleged heretic Abū l-ʿAlāʾ al-Maʿarrī (d. AD 1058) against using *all* animal products. The best-known and best-preserved example of such interest is an exchange of five letters in literary Arabic between al-Maʿarrī and the Persian poet, intellectual, and Fāṭimid missionary at Cairo, al-Muʾayyad fi-l-Dīn al-Shīrāzī (d. AD 1078). Al- Muʾayyad writes al-Maʿarrī ostensibly to learn about his veganism, but his true intention of debunking the Syrian poet's dietary practice is evident throughout the correspondence. In turn, an aging al-Maʿarrī repels al-Muʾayyad's attack against a regimen that he has followed for nearly half a century.[3]

[3] There are three editions of the letters. The first appeared in 1894 by Shāhīn Effendī ʿAṭiyyah, along with a brief commentary. See Shāhīn Effendī ʿAṭiyyah, *Rasāʾil Abi-l-ʿAlāʾ al-Maʿarrī* (Beirut: Al-Khūrī, 1894). The second is by David Margoliouth at Oxford, who, in addition to the text—prepared from a single manuscript at Oxford's Bodleian Library—provides his partial English translation. See D. S. Margoliouth, "Abu'l-`Alā al-Ma`arrī's Correspondence on Vegetarianism," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland* (April 1902): 289–332. The best edition, which conveys much more content of the letters than Margoliouth's, was made by Iḥsān ʿAbbās from five complete or partial manuscripts. See Abu-l-ʿAlāʾ al-Maʿarrī, *Rasāʾil Abi-l-ʿAlāʾ al-Maʿarrī, al-juzʾ al-awwal*, ed. Iḥsān ʿAbbās (Beirut: Dār al-Shurūq, 1982). The text's content itself has not been preserved independently but is instead reproduced in a medieval biographical encyclopedia, Yāqūt al-Ḥamawī's *Muʿjam al-udabāʾ*, as well as one of the later sessions of *Al-Majālis al-muʾayyadiyyah*. This fact raises a number of conceptual questions about authorship, transmission, and reception. For this essay, I have chosen to rely on the ʿAbbās edition.

From al-Muʾayyad's side, the impetus for writing is a twenty-three-line *qaṣīdah luzūmiyyah* (poem in double end rhyme) by al-Maʿarrī. The poem's first line gives a call—al-Muʾayyad's word is *daʿwah*, "invitation" or, perhaps in this case, "preaching"—to practice veganism, implying that those who do not are intellectually and spiritually ignorant. Al-Muʾayyad claims to have encountered this poem at the Fāṭimid court in Cairo and decided to answer its summons to seek out al-Maʿarrī for further wisdom, although as noted, his real purpose was more polemical than this. Even so, al-Muʾayyad must have appreciated al-Maʿarrī's choice to express a moral invitation in verse, since he himself used poetry as a potent weapon in the Fāṭimid Shīʿite missionary arsenal. More broadly, each author occupies at once the rhetorical position of *missionary*, in exhorting others to proper thought and action, and of *heretic*, in being the target of such exhortation and even public refutation.

The presence of such shared elements between these men signals the first argument I wish to make. Despite being at odds in their intellectual and sociopolitical pre-commitments, both al-Maʿarrī and al-Muʾayyad frame poetry throughout their correspondence as a specific mode of discourse, namely *daʿwah*. They each use rhyme, meter, and literary devices as a powerful medium to convey an overall cosmic worldview that also serves as a normative ethical behavior. For al-Muʾayyad, a professional Fāṭimid missionary in the service of the court, *daʿwah* was an institutionalized duty enacted through poetic discourse, hence his

inclination to see al-Maʿarrī's verse as hortatory. From al-Maʿarrī's side, his poem on veganism arguably constitutes *daʿwah* because it seeks to impart a general awareness, akin to knowledge, that all things suffer and die, including humans themselves.[4]

As a second point, poetry as *daʿwah* or preaching suggests an audience, someone to whom the call is made. This public function of poetry and indeed the entire correspondence between al-Maʿarrī and al-Muʾayyad can be seen in a passage from the multi-volume *Al-Majālis al-muʾayyadiyyah* (The sessions of al-Muʾayyad), a work written to preserve the wisdom of al-Muʾayyad's esoteric teachings for the community of Fāṭimid adherents. The passage in question relates a gathering in which those present fiercely debate al-Maʿarrī's vegan practice, which some believe justifies his murder, as it presents clear evidence of heresy. At this point, al-Muʾayyad interjects that killing al-Maʿarrī would only heap more glory on him. A better

[4] To date, Margoliouth's and ʿAbbās's introductions to their edited texts are the fullest secondary treatment of the correspondence itself. Also noteworthy is Elias Saad Ghali's study of al-Maʿarrī's veganism as part of his overall skeptical outlook. See Elias Saad Ghali, "Le végétalisme et le doute chez Abul-ʿAlāʾ al-Maʿarrī (363-449/973-1058)," *Bulletin d'Études Orientales* 32–33 (1980–1981), 99–112. In addition, Daniel de Smet has written about al-Muʾayyad's engagement with another heterodox thinker, Ibn al-Rāwandī, whose writings survive only through their polemical secondary treatment in the *Majālis al-muʾayyadiyyah*. See Daniel de Smet, "Al-Muʾayyad fi d-Dīn ash-Shirāzī et la polémique ismaélienne contre les 'Brahamanes' d'Ibn ar-Rāwandī," in *Egypt and Syria in the Fatimid, Ayyubid and Mamluk Eras*, ed. U. Vermeulen and D. de Smet (Leuven: Peeters, 1995), 85–98. Each of these studies makes a vital contribution to scholarship on al-Maʿarrī, although they tend to focus more on the polemical content of al-Maʿarrī's veganism than on its function as a discursive and cultural signifier.

course, he argues, would be to publicly expose al-Maʿarrī's groundless arguments, thereby diverting converts from veganism to the Fāṭimid missionary's more moderate approach.

With this in mind, I submit that veganism becomes a signifier pointing beyond itself and signaling confessional legitimacy.[5] Attitudes toward food consumption, in many ways a private matter, thus come to serve a public function in the performance of cultural identity. In turn, foodways as a cultural signifier play a role in the battle between al-Maʿarrī and al-Muʾayyad for hearts and minds, against the backdrop of a fractured Islamic polity in which various claimants to sovereignty tried to expand their spheres of influence. In recent years, scholars have turned more attention to the performative side of pre-modern Mediterranean and Middle Eastern foodways.[6] My essay contributes to this growing body of work by focusing on food's relevance to *intra*-confessional legitimacy—rather than *inter*-confessional, especially Christianity versus Islam—and to the social role of such polemic.

---

[5] I purposely focus less on the actual content of these arguments, since this aspect of the letters has received more attention in previous studies, than on how they signal discursive identity within a given rhetorical and cultural context.

[6] See, for example: G.J.H. van Gelder, *God's Banquet: Food in Classical Arabic Literature* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2000); Lilia Zaouali, *Medieval Cuisine of the Islamic World: A Concise History With 174 Recipes* (University of California Press, 2009); Hannele Klemettilä, *The Medieval Kitchen: A Social History With Recipes* (London, UK: Reaktion Books, 2012); Jodi Campbell, *At the First Table: Food and Social Identity in Early Modern Spain* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2017); M.R. Ghanoonparvar, *Dining at the Safavid Court: 16th Century Royal Persian Recipes* (Costa Mesa, CA: Mazda Publishers, 2017).

In this way, both poetry as *daʿwah* and disputation as legitimizing discourse take part in the same process of sociopolitical contestation. At another level, juxtaposing al-Muʾayyad's persona in the *Majālis* to that of his correspondence with al-Maʿarrī speaks to the co-presence of multiple audiences, overlapping yet often separate, each imposing its own exigencies that can alter the rhetorical presentation of a speaker's identity and message. That al-Maʿarrī's verse reached al-Muʾayyad in Cairo in the poet's lifetime shows both the existence of these multiple audiences and their possible contiguity. The fact that those audiences contended and still contend over the significance of veganism underscores how readers play an active role in making meaning, and how the polysemy of cultural signifiers renders them germane beyond their time, yet also perpetually disputed.

A Battle for Hearts and Minds

Although political power in the Islamic world had been gradually decentralizing for centuries, at least as far back as Umayyad removal of the capital city from the Arabian desert and its replacement at Damascus, never before had rival caliphs thrown their hats into the ring. Never in the history of Islam as a social organization had multiple, competing nodes of power sprung up and vied for dominance from Córdoba to Khorasan, each asserting sole authority to rule the Muslim *ummah*. Yet within just a few years of eminent jurist and historian Muḥammad ibn

Jarīr al-Ṭabarī's (d. AD 923) grand apocalyptic vision of the disintegration that characterized his time,[7] the Islamic world was split between fully three separate dynasties, each claiming caliphal investiture.

The first were the ʿAbbāsids, a Sunnī dynasty headquartered at Baghdad and fighting to keep its grip on an ever-expanding empire. The second were the Fāṭimids, an Ismāʿīlī Shīʿite denomination based in Cairo and with large swaths of North Africa, Syria, Iraq and the Ḥijāz under their control. They challenged the authority of the ʿAbbāsid caliphate through lineage claims tracing back to the eponym Fāṭimah, daughter of the prophet Muḥammad. Finally, the Córdoban Umayyads traced their ancestry to the last surviving Damascene Umayyad, ʿAbd al-Raḥmān I, called *ṣaqr quraysh* (the falcon of Quraysh, i.e. the tribe of the Prophet). Like the Fāṭimids, this moniker signals an appeal to the lineage of Muḥammad in resistance to ʿAbbāsid authority.

[7] Muḥammad ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh al-rusul wa-l-mulūk*, ed. Muḥammad Abū l-Faḍl Ibrāhīm, 11 vols. (Cairo: Dār al-Maʿārif), 9:361–66, 481–89. In no uncertain terms, al-Ṭabarī portrays events like the Zanj rebellion (AD 869–83) and the "Anarchy at Samarra" beginning with the fratricide of al-Mutawakkil and ending in the forced execution of al-Mustaʿīn (AD 861–66) as disastrous events that threatened the very existence of Islamdom. For secondary analysis of this period, see, for example, Michael Bonner, "The Waning of Empire, 861–945," in *The New Cambridge History of Islam*, vol. 1, *The Formation of the Islamic World, Sixth to Eleventh Centuries*, ed. Charles F. Robinson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 305–59.

Suspended between each of these centers of gravity were various rump states, like the Būyids and Ghaznavids east of Baghdad,[8] the North African Ḥammādids in modern-day Algeria and the Zīrids at Qayrawān, and the Andalusian *ṭawāʾif* city-states. Such marginal polities represented a contested sphere of influence for the three caliphates, who vied for control through political stratagem, military might, and diplomacy. Al-Maʿarrī himself lived under such a disputed area: that of the Ḥamdānids, and later the Mirdāsids, of Aleppo, a Shīʿite Berber dynasty caught between their confessional counterparts in Egypt, namely the Fāṭimids, and the Christian Byzantines to the northwest.[9]

Al-Maʿarrī discusses the constant threat of Byzantine encroachment on northern Syria in a winding prosaic meditation placed in the mouths of animal characters, *Risālat al-ṣāhil wa-l-*

[8] These two dynasties were part of the broader "Iranian intermezzo," a term coined by Vladimir Minorsky to describe the presence of various eastern Islamic rump states between the decline of the ʿAbbāsids and the eleventh-century emergence of the Seljuqs. See Vladimir Minorsky, "The Iranian Intermezzo," in *Studies in Caucasian History I: New Light on the Shaddadids of Ganja II* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1953), 110-16.

[9] For basic information about these dynasties, see, for example, Ramzi Jibran Bikhazi, "The Ḥamdānid Dynasty of Mesopotamia and North Syria, 254–404/868–1014" (doctoral dissertation, University of Michigan, 1981); Stefan Heidemann, *Die Renaissance der Städte in Nordsyrien und Nordmesopotamien: Städtische Entwicklung und wirtschaftliche Bedingungen in ar-Raqqa und Harran von der Zeit der beduinischen Vorherrschaft bis zu den Seldschuken*, Islamic History and Civilization: Studies and Texts 40 (Leiden: Brill, 2002). For analysis of how Ḥamdānid and Mirdāsid rulers are portrayed in al-Maʿarrī's writings, see Pieter Smoor, *Kings and Bedouins in the Palace of Aleppo, As Reflected in Maʿarrī's Works* (Manchester: University of Manchester, 1985).

shāḥij (The epistle of the horse and the mule).[10] Just a century after al-Maʿarrī's death, Syria generally and Antioch in particular had become a crossroads between the Byzantines, the Armenian Christians of Cilicia, the Muslim Zengids of Syria, the crusader kingdom of Jerusalem, and several Jewish communities.[11] Recent scholarship has underscored Antioch's political and military importance in order to challenge the traditional view of Jerusalem's dominance during the crusades.[12]

But the power of ideas was just as important as political and military influence to the project of bringing marginal states like the Syrian Ḥamdānids into caliphal orbit. Indeed, northern Syria constituted a lively corridor of inter-religious polemic, philosophical disputation, and literary and cultural exchange. The Fāṭimids in particular represented an ideological threat to many with competing claims on Islamic orthodoxy. Throughout the tenth and eleventh centuries, the Fāṭimid Caliph-Imams undertook a "well organized and highly secret institution for religious education and proselytization" known officially as the *daʿwah*

[10] Abu-l-ʿAlāʾ al-Maʿarrī, *Risālat al-ṣāhil wa-l-shāḥij*, ed. ʿĀʾishah ʿAbd al-Raḥmān "Bint al-shāṭiʾ" (Cairo: Dār al-Maʿārif, 1984).

[11] For a recent study of this era, see Andrew D. Buck, *The Principality of Antioch and Its Frontiers in the Twelfth Century* (Suffolk, UK: Boydell Press, 2017).

[12] See, for example, Thomas S. Asbridge, *The Creation of the Principality of Antioch, 1098–1130* (Suffolk, UK: Boydell Press, 2000).

(preaching).[13] This involved dispatching missionaries to other lands to preach in person, as well as disseminating written texts and corresponding with key rulers, intellectuals, and patrons. In turn, to combat the influence of this *daʿwah*, public figures spent much time refuting Fāṭimid pretensions to spiritual and political authority. Al-Ghazālī devoted an entire treatise, *Faḍāʾiḥ al-bāṭiniyyah wa-faḍāʾil al-mustaẓhiriyyah* (The disgraces of the esotericists and the virtues of the exotericists), to anti-Fāṭimid rhetoric in order to win hearts and minds away from their obscurantist and allegedly heretical version of Islam.[14]

In this struggle for ideological converts, the issue of veganism was significant as a marker of religious and cultural legitimacy. While much of the Islamic world was opposed to completely avoiding animal products, out of a desire for moderation in socio-religious practice, some were intrigued by Byzantine cosmopolitanism spreading from Constantinople. This helped make "vegetable-friendly culinary standards" more of a mainstream practice

[13] Tahera Qutbuddin, *Al-Muʾayyad al-Shīrāzī and Fatimid* Daʿwa *Poetry: A Case of Commitment in Classical Arabic Literature* (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 4.

[14] For more on al-Ghazālī's opposition to the Fāṭimids, see, for example, Farouk Mitha, *Al-Ghazālī and the Ismailis: A Debate on Reason and Authority in Medieval Islam* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2002). For a Fāṭimid response to al-Ghazālī, see ʿAlī ibn Muḥammad ibn al-Walīd, *Dāmigh al-bāṭil wa-ḥatf al-munāḍil*, ed. Muṣṭafā Ghālib (Beirut: Muʾassasat ʿIzz al-Dīn, 1982).

within Islamic lands.[15] Adding to this trend was the widespread Byzantine interest in the writings of Galen, with their emphasis on a moderate diet. [16]

That these ideas and practices were not perceived as innate to Islamic lands meant that for many, veganism and related practices could be associated in the popular imagination with foreign influence and even heresy.[17] In al-Maʿarrī's case, scholars have traditionally looked for an Indic source to explain his penchant for veganism,[18] which is present in the teachings of both Hinduism and Jainism and would also qualify as a marker of foreignness. Although this connection was once seen as dubious, recent research does suggest cross-influences between

[15] Lewicka, *Food and Foodways*, 258. Of course meat was an expensive luxury in medieval Islamic lands, meaning the average diet was largely vegetarian to begin with.

[16] For more on Galen as a canonical source of Byzantine medicine, see, for example, Vivian Nutton, "From Galen to Alexander: Aspects of Medicine and Medical Practice in Late Antiquity," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 38 (1984), 1–14.

[17] In the Christian Byzantine milieu, medicine in general was associated with heterodox belief. See Nutton, "From Galen to Alexander," 6–7.

[18] Margoliouth, for example, considers but ultimately rejects as implausible the idea that al-Maʿarrī developed an interest in veganism from Jain teachings at Baghdad. See Margoliouth, "Correspondence," 291. At a more general level, Norman Calder discusses the frequent association in Islamic heresiographical literature between heterodoxy and Indian *barāhimah*, with earlier (ninth-century) caricatures giving way to later (tenth through twelfth centuries), more accurate yet still polemical portrayals. See Norman Calder, "The Barāhima: Literary Construct and Historical Reality," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London* 57, no. 1 (1994): 40–51. For examples of polemic against the *barāhimah* in al-Muʾayyad's writings, see de Smet, "Al-Muʾayyad fi d-Dīn ash-Shirāzī."

Ayurveda and Islamic medicine, for instance, the relocation of Indian physicians from Balkh to Baghdad in the wake of Muslim conquest of the former.[19]

Another possible explanation is that al-Maʿarrī was affected by Byzantium, especially the two previously cited elements of cosmopolitanism and Galenic theory, close as al-Maʿarrī's hometown was to the frontiers of Christian Greek lands. In fact, direct traces of that impact can be detected in the life and works of al-Maʿarrī himself. Regarding a general cultural influence, secondary sources relate that in his youth, al-Maʿarrī traveled to Byzantine Christian territory, either Antioch or Latakia,[20] where he supposedly first encountered arguments in favor of veganism. Although accounts of these travels differ in their details and show marked polemical motivation both pro and contra,[21] they do agree on the fact that al-Maʿarrī ventured beyond Islamic Syria and that this affected his worldview. As for Galen, al-

[19] Dominik Wujastyk, "From Balkh to Baghdad: Indian Science and the Birth of the Islamic Golden Age in the Eighth Century," *Indian Journal of History of Science* 51, no. 4 (2016): 679-90.
[20] See Ibn al-ʿAdīm, "Al-Inṣāf wa-l-taḥarrī fī dafʿ al-ẓulm wa-l-tajarrī ʿan Abī l-ʿAlāʾ al-Maʿarrī," in *Taʿrīf al-qudamāʾ bi-Abi-l-ʿAlāʾ*, ed. Ṭaha Ḥusayn et al (Cairo: Dār al-Qawmiyyah li-l-Ṭibāʿah wa-l-Nashr, 1944), 555–56. Al-Maʿarrī's trip to Antioch is also recounted by seventeenth-century Syrian litterateur Yūsuf al-Badīʿī (d. AD 1662). See Yūsuf al-Badīʿī, *Awj al-taḥarrī ʿan ḥaythiyyat Abi-l-ʿAlāʾ al-Maʿarrī*, ed. Ibrāhīm al-Kīlānī (Damascus: Maṭbaʿat al-Turqī, 1944), 55. For the trip to Latakia, see Jamāl al-Dīn Abū l-Ḥasan ibn Yūsuf al-Qifṭī, *Inbāh al-ruwāt ʿalā anbāʾ al-nuḥāt*, ed. Muḥammad Abu-l-Faḍl Ibrāhīm, 4 vols. (Cairo: Dār al-Kutub al-Miṣriyyah, 1950), 1:49.
[21] For further discussion of this polemic, see Tahir K. al-Garradi, "The Image of al-Maʿarrī as an Infidel among Medieval and Modern Critics," (Doctoral dissertation, University of Utah, 1987), 16–20.

Maʿarrī names him directly in referring al-Muʾayyad to *al-kutub al-mutaqaddimah* (ancient writings) on medicine that recommend veganism as a healthy lifestyle.[22]

The Byzantium hypothesis has its challenges. For one, ascetics of both Christian and Muslim traditions adopted extreme dietary restrictions, and therefore al-Maʿarrī might not have had to look far beyond his own cultural tradition. This fact militates against the idea that Byzantine cosmopolitanism had more of an impact in greater Syria than asceticism, although it is unlikely that mainstream populations would have been affected by the latter any more than by the former. For another, vegan ideas might have arisen in several places at once and led to an overall sociocultural *Zeitgeist* whose particular points of contact may be difficult to identify. This lack of certainty calls for more studies of how both Indian and Greek thought shaped al-Maʿarrī's worldview and that of northern Syria as a whole.[23]

Still, the fact that a Byzantine influence existed seems likely, or at least possible. More importantly, such a prospect sheds light on al-Maʿarrī's intellectually-fluid milieu and his own interactions with other public figures. These include al-Muʾayyad fi-l-Dīn al-Shīrāzī, who

[22] Abu-l-ʿAlāʾ al-Maʿarrī, *Rasāʾil Abi-l-ʿAlāʾ*, ed. Iḥsān ʿAbbās (Beirut: Dār al-Shurūq, 1982), 111.
[23] This assumes a general influence by Greek texts on Islamic thought and medicine, a fact that has been well-established by scholarship. See, for example, Dimitri Gutas, *Greek Thought, Arabic Culture* (London: Routledge, 1998); Bashar Saad, Hassan Azaizeh, and Omar Said, "Tradition and Perspectives of Arab Herbal Medicine: A Review," *Evidence-Based Complementary and Alternative Medicine* 2, no. 4 (2005): 475–79; Donald Campbell, *Arabian Medicine and Its Influence on the Middle Ages* (London: Routledge, 2013).

would have been concerned about the intellectual and cultural influence coming in to Islamic Syria from Constantinople and other lands to the west. He was also mindful of al-Maʿarrī's local prominence as a thinker and a writer, and in a realm controlled by fellow Shīʿite Muslims. In addition, al-Muʾayyad may have been aware of al-Maʿarrī's association with Ḥusayn ibn ʿAlī al-Maghribī (d. AD 1027), an author, statesman, and onetime scribe to the Fāṭimids, and who later rebelled against them.[24]

These points are clearly reflected by al-Muʾayyad's decision to confront al-Maʿarrī in writing. More than an intellectual inquiry or even a mere attempt to proselyte, al-Muʾayyad's letters arguably present us with what we might today call propaganda. The object thereof—al-Maʿarrī—constituted a plum prize if he could be convinced to publicly recant his veganism or, at the very least, if he could be exposed as a heretic. Moreover, this public relations effort was not just a personal motivation for al-Muʾayyad but also a chief raison d'être for the Fāṭimid dynasty in which he was a key player. As Tahera Qutbuddin explains, "The Fatimid Caliph-Imams had established a distinctive religio-political organization called the *daʿwa*" from their

[24] For general information about al-Maghribī's life and works, see C. E. Bosworth, "Al-Maghribī, al-Ḥusayn ibn ʿAlī," in *Encyclopedia of Arabic Literature*, ed. Julie Scott Meisami and Paul Starkey (London: Routledge, 1998), 488. For the specific point of his rebellion against the Fāṭimids, see ʿAbbās, *Rasāʾil*, 87.

court at Cairo,[25] thus enshrining missionary work as both a theological imperative and a sociopolitical principle. Al-Muʾayyad himself successfully carried the Fāṭimid message to other lands for many years, eventually being given responsibility over the entire proselyting program as *dāʿī al-duʿāt* (chief missionary). That the Fāṭimids would place such a premium on missionary work makes sense in view of the contemporary political decentralization and the stakes of garnering converts.

Just as al-Muʾayyad may have sensed al-Maʿarrī's predilection for Byzantine culture and ideas, so too might al-Maʿarrī have guessed at al-Muʾayyad's missionary motivations. The fact that al-Maʿarrī engages his Fāṭimid interlocutor in debate, yet without giving in to his arguments, speaks to al-Maʿarrī's awareness of the delicate balance between Cairo and Constantinople that needed maintaining by the Mirdāsids, and also of al-Maʿarrī's own very public role in that process. Such awareness of the power of ideas to influence the fractured political landscape is not the only parallel between the two men's lives. Both were renowned as poets but did not get paid for their craft, and, as we will discuss shortly, both relied on poetry to influence others through ideas. At another level, both al-Maʿarrī and al-Muʾayyad were public figures who were rejected by intellectual communities they hoped to impress, al-

[25] Qutbuddin, *Al-Muʾayyad al-Shīrāzī*, 4. "In Qurʾānic usage," writes Qutbuddin, "[the term *daʿwa*] denotes the call made to humankind by God, through His prophets, to believe in the true religion," and it was in this sense that the Fāṭimids used it as well.

Maʿarrī at Baghdad and al-Muʾayyad at Shīrāz.[26] Both were proclaimed as heretics by prominent Muslim voices, whether Abu-l-Faraj Ibn al-Jawzī's (d. AD 1201) pronouncement that al-Maʿarrī was one of three great heretics against Islam,[27] or al-Ghazālī's indictment of Fāṭimid Shīʿite Islam as a whole.

In this way, each poet ends up occupying the both rhetorical position of the missionary, and that of the heretic. They each try to exhort the other as well as those watching their debate, while at the same time becoming the object of such exhortation and, as with al-Ghazālī's works, public refutation. Aside from permitting a richer, more nuanced contrast when determining what distinguishes al-Maʿarrī from al-Muʾayyad, these parallels are also grounds for a kind of shared respect between the two men. Their formal exchange of pleasantries, a rhetorical obligation in personal correspondence, seems also to carry with it a

[26] This is recorded in several medieval biographical entries. For more information, see Al-Garradi, "Image," 23–35. For details of al-Muʾayyad's rejection, see Qutbuddin, *Al-Muʾayyad al-Shīrāzī*, 23–24. In brief, having been appointed *dāʿī* of Fars—of which Shīrāz was the capital— al-Muʾayyad entered the service of the Būyid prince Abū Kālijār al-Marzubān (d. AD 1048), whom he converted to Fāṭimid Ismāʿīlism. This and other missionary activity gained him Sunnī enemies within Abū Kālijār's court and among the ʿAbbāsids, based on information gleaned from several of al-Muʾayyad's poems written at the time. The pressure evidently became great enough that he was obliged to leave greater Persia in 1046 AD.

[27] Abu-l-Faraj ibn al-Jawzī, *Al-Muntaẓam fī taʾrīkh al-mulūk wa-l-umam*, 17 vols., ed. Muḥammad ʿAbd al-Qādir ʿIṭā and Muṣṭafā ʿAbd al-Qādir ʿIṭā (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyyah, 1995), 16:23–24. The other two figures singled out for heresy (*zandaqah*) in this passage are Ibn al-Rāwandī (d. AD 911) and Abū Ḥayyān al-Tawḥīdī (d. AD 1023).

more voluntary, mutual acknowledgment between intellectual equals. It is the coincidence of this civility with a simultaneous expression of disagreement that makes al-Maʿarrī's and al-Muʾayyad's correspondence truly an encounter, one in which two people confront each other by first acknowledging the other's presence. That such individual encounters occurred publicly and in writing complicates the view of a fractured eleventh-century Islamic world, the very instability of which permitted interaction across spatial and intellectual borders made porous.

The Soundness and Sickness of Knowing

To briefly summarize the exchange between al-Maʿarrī and al-Muʾayyad, the latter initiates communication with a direct yet civil inquiry into the former's *ʿillah* (grounds) for veganism, especially since Islam permits animals for human use. In explanation of his reasons for writing, al-Muʾayyad cites the first line of a *qaṣīdah* that reached him all the way in Cairo and is contained in al-Maʿarrī's best-known work, *Luzūm mā lā yalzam* (Self-imposed necessity), a collection of poems written in double end-rhyme and addressing themes of *zuhd* (renunciation), *waʿẓ* (memento mori), and rationalist critique of religious authority. [28] In

[28] Regarding my translation of these terms, they are a convenient shorthand that cannot do justice to the original concepts. This is especially true of *zuhd*, which, as Leah Kinberg points out, encompasses an entire way of life and may therefore be called simply "ethics." See L.

response, al-Maʿarrī's first letter underscores the fact that animals feel pain as sufficient grounds for a vegan lifestyle, then makes the broader point that human reason is unable to comprehend God's mercy.

Al-Muʾayyad's answer emphasizes God's mercy toward all living creatures, then poses a rhetorical question: by superseding God's law through vegan practice—since presumably the use of animals decreed by God does not contravene God's mercy toward living beings—does al-Maʿarrī think he can outdo his creator in mercy? Al-Maʿarrī's second and final letter does not answer this question, but rather reiterates the point about animal suffering. He also says that practical matters like financial lack and force of habit prevent him from giving up his lifestyle. Al-Muʾayyad ends the correspondence just as he started it, ostensibly conveying gratitude for the intellectual exchange and with hope that al-Maʿarrī will come to a correct belief in time.

At the heart of this discussion lies the fundamental issue of human knowledge. Both men argue their position for or against veganism by first attempting to show that those who

---

Kinberg, "What is Meant By *Zuhd*?" *Studia Islamica* 61 (1985): 44. Michael Cooperson makes a similar observation, arguing that *zuhd*, "renunciation," is the "natural consequence of [a general attitude of] scrupulosity." See Michael Cooperson, *Classical Arabic Biography: Heirs to the Prophets in the Age of al-*Maʾmūn (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 113-15. For a study that gives a sense of the many themes treated in the *Luzūm*, see, for example, Stefan Sperl, *Mannerism in Arabic Poetry: A Structural Analysis of Selected Texts (3rd Century AH–9th Century AD/5th Century AH–11th Century AD)* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 97–154.

follow the other's path do so out of ignorance. From his side, al-Muʾayyad begins his second letter with a wish for his opponent's incorrect belief to be cured:

حوشيَ الشيخ – أدام الله سلامتَه – مِنْ أنْ يكونَ مِمَنْ فَطِنَ في مَرَض دينِه وعقلِه لِعِلَّتِه،

وأجَاب دعوةَ الداعي مِنه، بالبيتِ الشائعِ عَنه، لِنَيل شفاءِ غُلَّتِه، يزيده إلى عِلَّتِه عِلّةً،

وقد ضَمِنَ له الصِحّة، وضيقةً إلى ضيقتِه من حيثُ أَمَّلَ الفُسْحَة، أنْ يكونَ كما قال

المتنبّي: أظمتْنِيَ الدُنيا فَلَمَّا جِئتُهَا مُسْتَسقياً مَطَرَتْ عليَّ مَصَائبا

[May the shaykh—God preserve his safety—be excluded from those who notice the cause (ʿ*illah*) of their illness through their ailing mind and faith; and then, seeking relief from that sickness, respond to the inviter's call (to health) couched in that well-known verse [of yours], only to have more sickness (ʿ*illah*) added in return; and who has been given health, only to have poverty's straitness added to straitness, such that he hopes for release. Indeed may the sheikh be kept from being like al-Mutanabbī said: *The world stirred my thirst, but when I came to her to slake it, she rained troubles on me*.][29]

[29] ʿAbbās, *Rasāʾil*, 118. This is my English translation.

Here al-Muʾayyad takes up the very metaphor with which al-Maʿarrī begins the poem on veganism: knowledge as health or soundness, and ignorance as sickness. He cleverly plays with the word *ʿillah*, which can mean "cause" but also "illness," then quotes a line from the highly influential praise poet al-Mutanabbī (d. AD 965).[30] It is a trope common enough in Arabic texts not to be unusual, [31] but which has special resonance in a debate over food consumption. Al-Muʾayyad sets high stakes for that debate by connecting physical fitness, mental soundness, and spiritual integrity.

Al-Maʿarrī does not follow his correspondent in the health-sickness imagery, at least in their correspondence, but he does premise his argument in favor of veganism on the limits of

[30] Both al-Maʿarrī and al-Muʾayyad were great admirers of this poet. In the case of the former, his two commentaries on al-Mutanabbī, *Muʿjiz Aḥmad* (Aḥmad's miracle) and *Al-Lāmiʿ al-ʿazīzī* (The lightning flash of ʿAzīz) stand as evidence of such admiration. See Abu-l-ʿAlāʾ al-Maʿarrī, *Sharḥ dīwān al-Mutanabbī (Muʿjiz Aḥmad)*, 4 vols., ed. ʿAbd al-Majīd Diyāb (Cairo: Dār al-Maʿārif, 1986–1988); Abu-l-ʿAlāʾ al-Maʿarrī, *Al-Lāmiʿ al-ʿazīzī*, vol. 1, ed. M. Saʿīd al-Mawlāwī (Riyāḍ: Markaz al-Malik Fayṣal li-l-Buḥūth wa-l-Dirāsāt al-Islāmiyyah, 2008). On the side of al-Muʾayyad, Iḥsān ʿAbbās notes his penchant for quoting al-Mutanabbī throughout his works, not just here. See ʿAbbās, *Rasāʾil*, 118. Qutbuddin points out a poem in which al-Muʾayyad speaks about al-Mutanabbī as مَنْ لَا يَنْكُرُ فَضْلَهُ الشُعَرَاءُ (*Man lā yankuru faḍlahū al-shuʿarāʾ*, "One whose merit no poet would deny"). See Qutbuddin, *Al-Muʾayyad al-Shīrāzī*, 179.

[31] An example of this metaphor that will be familiar to students of Islamic law is the idea of soundness, *ṣiḥḥah*, when evaluating sayings of the Prophet, *aḥādīth*. It is a technical term that encompasses actual physical health as well as the metaphorical "health" or strength of a saying's provenance. It is from this term's root that the first rhyme word—*al-ṣaḥāʾiḥī*, "sound/healthy things"—in al-Maʿarrī's veganism poem is derived.

human knowledge. In the first of two letters, he counters the view that God's decree of animal use by humans is sufficiently merciful and therefore morally good, with several examples of tragic deaths, such as the slaughter of combatants at the Battle of Uḥud. He then wonders, أفهذا خيرٌ أم شرٌّ (Is this good or evil?).[32] The rhetorical question appears to cast doubt on God's goodness and mercy, or at least, the ability of human beings to understand that goodness and mercy. Al-Maʿarrī does not answer his own question, contenting himself with ambiguity: هذه العُقَد قد جهد في حلّها المتكلّمون من أهل الشرائع، فلم يجدوا لها انحلالاً، وأصبح مقالهم ضلالاً (These are knots that many of the best speculative theologians from various schools of thought did not know how to untie, since they could not find a solution for them, and therefore their pronouncements fell into error).[33]

Characterstic of al-Maʿarrī, he then gets distracted from the topic and cites dozens of lines of poetry by people he considers heretics. "God keep me from the saying of the unbeliever!" is his opening supplication. The question arises as to the relevance of these verses to veganism, especially when al-Maʿarrī ostensibly wants to distance himself from their

[32] ʿAbbās, *Rasāʾil*, 109.

[33] Here, "speculative theologians" (*al-mutakallimūn min ahl al-sharāʾiʿ*) refers to Jews and Christians, as opposed to Muslim sectarians.

content. He makes a similarly subversive move in his long prosaic text *Risālat al-ghufrān* (The epistle of forgiveness). There, he purports to answer questions about heretics posed by his interlocutor, the aging grammarian Ibn al-Qāriḥ (d. AD 1030), only to content himself with tangents on wordplay, etymology, and anecdotes.[34] As in the correspondence on veganism, it may be that al-Maʿarrī's concern is to not be caught in a heterodox opinion, hence the subversive style.

But especially in his exchanges with al-Muʾayyad, al-Maʿarrī seems to be making a point about humankind's incomplete knowledge. By suddenly inserting dozens of lines of heretical poetry, even after he has absolved himself of their content, al-Maʿarrī illustrates the confusion that can result when humans try to interpret God's nature too rigidly, since that divine nature can often seem inscrutable and even contradictory. As with the senseless tragedies that a nonetheless merciful God allows to happen, there is a blurry relationship between appearance and reality, echoed in the opacity of al-Maʿarrī's scandalous poetic citations. By drawing attention to the limits of mortal understanding, he arguably appeals to the same epistemological humility that underpins his vegan ethic. That humility stems from a

[34] Abu-l-ʿAlāʾ al-Maʿarrī, *Risālat al-ghufrān*, ed. ʿĀʾishah ʿAbd al-Raḥmān "Bint al-Shāṭīʾ" (Cairo: Dār al-Maʿārif, 1963), 414–24.

basic awareness, a soundness of knowledge held always in mind that all living beings become sick, suffer, and die.

The Poetic Preaching (*Daʿwah*) of Veganism

It is to this vegan imperative that I now turn. As noted, al-Maʿarrī and al-Muʾayyad were both practicing poets who used their verse compositions as a means to spread ideas. In the sense that either of them did so to convince others to think or act in a certain way, I prefer to think of this poetic discourse as *daʿwah*, namely a discursive mode that both "implies commitment on the part of the person who calls and asks for commitment from the one who responds."[35] Granted, the term *daʿwah* has the more technical meaning in Fāṭimid history of missionary proselyting as a religio-political institution, which does not apply in al-Maʿarrī's case. Nor in his case does the term refer to advocating a closed set of confessional tenets the way it does with al-Muʾayyad. Even so, I believe that *daʿwah* as a rhetorical posture sums up what both al-Maʿarrī and al-Muʾayyad are trying to do with poetry when they exhort readers.

In the correspondence at hand, al-Muʾayyad himself takes this view of al-Maʿarrī's call to veganism and which supposedly prompted his first letter. After offering formal pleasantries and expressing admiration for his Syrian counterpart, al-Muʾayyad explains that news of al-

[35] Qutbuddin, *Al-Muʾayyad al-Shīrāzī*, 5.

Maʿarrī's vegan practice had reached all the way to Cairo.[36] "I heard the poetic summons [*dāʿiyat al-bayt*] which is attributed to you," al-Muʾayyad writes before quoting the poem's first line verbatim:

غدوتَ مريضَ العقل والدين فالقنِي لتسمع أنباءَ الأمورِ الصحائحِ

[You are ailing in mind and faith, so come see me!

Hear of things as they truly are.][37]

"And that [summons]," continues the Fāṭimid poet in explanation of his motive for writing, "invites [*tadʿū*] one to seek illumination by the author's lights." In both sentences, al-Muʾayyad describes the line of poetry using words—first a noun (*dāʿiyah*), and then a verb (*tadʿū*)—that share etymology and lexical meaning with the term *daʿwah*. More than a phenomenological portrayal of just one verse, al-Muʾayyad's description of al-Maʿarrī's poem as *daʿwah* might be understood as responding to a specific kind of speech, one with a technical meaning for al-Muʾayyad and with which he was intimately familiar. He perceives actual preaching plus invitation in al-Maʿarrī's poem, whether or not it was intended it that way, although I see no reason to think that this was not al-Maʿarrī's aim, as we will shortly discuss.

[36] ʿAbbās, *Rasāʾil*, 100.

[37] Abu-l-ʿAlāʾ al-Maʿarrī, *Sharḥ al-luzūmiyyāt*, 3 vols., ed. Ḥussayn Naṣṣār et al. (Cairo: Al-Hayʾah al-Miṣriyyah al-ʿĀmmah li-l-Kitāb, 1994), 1:362–64. For the entire text of the poem and my English translation, see the appendix.

The warrant for this assessment is al-Mu'ayyad's own concept and practice of poetry as *daʿwah*. On the one hand, from within the Fāṭimid community, al-Muʾayyad's verse served a didactic function, imparting to adherents the lessons that would improve their religious learning. This role of his poetry is illustrated especially by verse in praise of the Fāṭimid Caliph-Imam,[38] such as the following line dedicated to the caliph al-Mustanṣir bi-llāh (d. AD 1094):

هو الذِكْرُ الحَكيمُ الحَيُّ قَامَتْ دَلائِلُهُ مِنَ الذِكرِ الحَكيمِ

[He is the living Wise Remembrance whose

Proofs are established from the Wise Remembrance]

On the other hand, with respect to a broader audience that would have included al-Maʿarrī, al-Muʾayyad's verse was meant to help "indirectly and subtly convince every person in the Islamic world of the righteousness of the Fāṭimids' claim to the Imamate."[39] To this end, al-Muʾayyad composed numerous versified polemics, often aimed at specific sectarian and philosophical groups, plus more general indictments of those who rejected the Fāṭimid

[38] Qutbuddin, *Al-Muʾayyad al-Shīrāzī*, 276. Al-Muʾayyad's poem translations are by Qutbuddin unless otherwise noted.

[39] Ibid., 278.

message. It thus served a similar function to that of the prosaic *Al-Majālis al-muʾayyadiyyah*, with doctrinal teaching and polemical disputation being a high priority.[40]

In one especially vivid metapoetic image, al-Muʾayyad describes his own verse as a kind of double-edged sword wielded to protect the righteous and assault the wicked:

مصـــائِدٌ لِـــرَاغبٍ مُـسْتَرْشِـــدِ مَصَـــائبٌ لِكُـــلِّ عَـــاتٍ مُعْـتَدِ

[Snares for the desirous, the seeker of right guidance,

Calamities for every insolent aggressor][41]

It is arguably such an approach to poetry that the Fāṭimid missionary brings to bear on his conception of, and response to, al-Maʿarrī's own verse. More than merely an expression of the poet's inner state, al-Maʿarrī's call to veganism is treated by al-Muʿayyad as a sermon on right ethical practice, along with an unequivocal invitation—even a demand—to follow that practice. Moreover, as seen in the opening line of al-Maʿarrī's poem, there is even a sense of that call being an intellectual and spiritual litmus test similar to al-Muʾayyad's, with those who refuse animal products occupying a separate, higher ethical sphere than those who do not.

[40] Both Qutbuddin and Pieter Smoor agree on the point of how al-Muʾayyad's poetry functions, despite their divergent conclusions about its aesthetic quality. See Qutbuddin, *Al-Muʾayyad al-Shīrāzī*, 276; Pieter Smoor, "Wine, Love, and Praise for the Fāṭimid Imāms, the Enlightened of God," *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 142, no.1 (1992), 100.

[41] Qutbuddin, *Al-Muʾayyad al-Shīrāzī*, 279.

Al-Maʿarrī's poetry has not previously been classified by scholars under the same general rubric of *daʿwah* as al-Muʾayyad's. While this Arabic word does not carry the same doctrinal and sociopolitical technicality in al-Maʿarrī's case, the idea of preaching with intent to convert does describe the poem under debate between al-Maʿarrī and al-Muʾayyad. Before addressing that poem in more detail, I wish to make a brief point, which is that al-Maʿarrī does not dispute al-Muʾayyad's assessment of the poem as *daʿwah*, nor does he deny being a vegan. In fact, al-Maʿarrī claims that it was God who decreed that he abstain from animals: إنّ الله — عَزَّتْ عظمتُهُ — حَكَمَ علَيَّ بالإزْهَاد، فَطَفقْتُ مِن العُدمِ في جِهَاد (Indeed God—great be His grandeur!—commanded me to refrain [from animal products], and so straightaway I undertook that personal poverty with great effort).[42]

The fact that al-Maʿarrī does not equivocate on these points like he does in *Risālat al-ghufrān* and other works, but rather confesses a particular ethical belief and practice, stands in stark contrast to most instances in which his convictions are interrogated by a suspicious party. And while the Syrian poet's letters to al-Muʾayyad are not completely devoid of such equivocation, as seen with the point of his citation of poetry from heretics, they clearly admit to vegan belief and practice. This fact, along with al-Maʿarrī's tacit acceptance that al-

[42] ʿAbbās, *Rasāʾil*, 104.

Muʾayyad describes his poetry as *daʿwah*, lends persuasive weight to the argument that, like his Fāṭimid interlocutor and mutatis mutandis, al-Maʿarrī too thought of his poem on veganism as a kind of moral exhortation to correct behavior.

Turning now to the particulars of that poem, it is preserved in its entirety in al-Maʿarrī's collection of double end rhyme poetry *Luzūm mā lā yalzam* (Self-imposed necessity). Although al-Maʿarrī does not quote the whole poem in his correspondence with al-Muʾayyad, he does spend several pages of his second letter explicating the four lines that immediately follow the first:

فلا تَأْكُـلَنْ ما أَخْـرجَ الماءُ ظالمـا ولا تبـغِ قوتا من غريـض الذبائـحِ

وأبَيْضَ أُمّـاتٍ أرادتْ صَريحَـهُ لأطفـالها دون الغوانـي الصرائـحِ

ولا تفجعـنَّ الطيـر وهـي غوافلٌ بما وضـعت فالظُلـمُ شرُّ القَبائـحِ

وَدَعْ ضَرَبَ النَّحـلِ الذي بكرتْ له كواسبُ مـن أزهارٍ نبتٍ فوائـحِ

[Don't ever eat what the water gives up under duress,

or seek fare in the newly slain,

Or mothers' fresh milk—purer than highborn maids—

which they wished for their babes;

Do not terrify carefree birds, who know not what is done,

for cruelty is the basest of evils,

And shun thick, white honey, struck fresh early in the

morning from fragrant blooms]

Al-Maʿarrī takes each of these imperatives in turn, affirming the behavior they attribute to the various animals mentioned.[43] He quotes popular sayings, poetry, and even *ḥadīth*s from the Prophet and other central figures in Islamic history to demonstrate this. Here and indeed throughout much of the letter, the discussion stays close to the issue of animal suffering, which is the proximate cause of al-Maʿarrī's vegan ethics.

Yet a review of the rest of the poem—which, as mentioned, is not reproduced in the correspondence between al-Maʿarrī and al-Muʾayyad—reveals broader themes that, in my view, help us understand both the ultimate cause of al-Maʿarrī's veganism and the nature of the *daʿwah* mode in which it receives expression. At the poem's end, al-Maʿarrī links his opening calls for veganism to the pair of themes that dominate this and indeed much of al-Maʿarrī's verse, namely *zuhd* and *waʿẓ*. In lines 13–15, he meditates on the virtue of generosity:

ويُعجبـــني دأبُ الذيـــن ترهَّبـــوا سوى أكلِهم كدَّ النفوس الشحائـحِ

[43] Ibid., 124–26.

وأطيــبُ منهُمْ مَطْعــما في حيـاته سُعـــاةُ حلالٍ بيـــن غادٍ ورائــحِ

فما حَبَـــسَ النفسَ المسيـــحُ تعبدا ولكن مشى في الأرض مشية سائحِ

[I am pleased by the manner of those God-fearing monks, except for the way they eat the toil of miserly souls.

[Superior to them are the Muslim ascetics, striving after what is *ḥalāl* day in and day out, who are better able to fathom his [Jesus Christ's] life:

[The messiah hoarded not his soul just to worship God, but took up the journey with the step of a traveler.]

Here, the traditional Arab virtue of liberality is deployed by al-Maʿarrī in backhanded criticism of monks or others who profess to piety but do not renounce avarice. This criticism of hypocritical inaction is embodied in the image of Jesus holding nothing back from others, not even his own soul. Misers hoard because they have placed their hearts on material possessions, affirms al-Maʿarrī, whereas the true ascetic does not care whether his stores are full. This theme of *zuhd* continues up to the end of the poem, where its companion theme, *waʿẓ*, appears in vivid imagery:

وما ينفــعُ الإنســـان أنّ غمائــما تَسُحُّ عليه تحت اِحدى الضَّرائـــحِ

ولو كان في قُربٍ من المـــــاء رغبةٌ لنافَــسَ ناسٌ في قبــور البطائـــحِ

[A mortal gains not from rainclouds that gush on him,

when he is beneath a tomb;

[If people truly desired water, they would vie over

flat graves of moistened earth.]

Here, the postmortem struggle for water, a traditional symbol of anything beneficial, implies the futility of seeking profit in worldly pleasures. If humans would truly have something of value, insists the poet, they must look to the next life, denoted by the image of graves. With these lines, al-Maʿarrī clarifies his warrant for asceticism: death comes to us all, and therefore putting one's hope in this world and hoarding its spoils is a futile enterprise. He thus also warns of hypocrisy and the need to fight it through rightness of action as a testament to true belief.

This is the true core of al-Maʿarrī's vegan ethics. His call in this poem to avoid doing harm to animals taps into the deeper cycles of decease and rebirth that underlie all consumption of the dead to regenerate the living. By ending on the grim note of memento mori, he conveys an unequivocal message: let all recoil from bringing about the demise of any living thing, according to the same energy with which humans recoil from their own demise. Furthermore, in this way al-Maʿarrī's discursive mode of *daʿwah* functions not to educate readers in a coherent system of esoteric doctrine, as with al-Muʾayyad's poetry. Rather, it aims

to raise their awareness at a more general level, to make them conscious of their behavior and its effect on other living beings. It therefore takes part in a broader pacifist ethic and interest of al-Maʿarrī in animals as living beings in their own right.

Yet as noted, and despite his clear admission of veganism to al-Muʾayyad, the Syrian poet subverts reader interpretation throughout the correspondence. After spending most of the first letter discussing high-minded ethical justifications for veganism, al-Maʿarrī writes that even if he were not morally inclined to avoid eating meat, he is too destitute to afford it on a regular basis. Earlier in the same letter, he also describes how veganism has become something of a habit, and therefore changing it now is an impracticality. Although at first glance these added explanations might seem to detract from the ethical defense of veganism, to my mind they confirm the point made earlier about the debatable nature of ethics. By forcing readers to engage in dialogue and meaning making, al-Maʿarrī involves them in the same interpretive process that led him to veganism in the first place.

Legitimizing Moral Wisdom

The notion of a dialogue connects with the broader issue of audience, and also to how writers go about projecting legitimacy to that audience. Whether al-Maʿarrī and al-Muʾayyad intended for their words to reach specific readers, they were no doubt conscious that they would be

seen by people other than themselves. Indeed, the very notion of *daʿwah* implies people to whom a call to belief or action goes,[44] which in al-Muʾayyad's situation as a missionary is an assumption of institutionalized preaching. But al-Maʿarrī too was engaged as a public figure, which even a cursory glance at his collected letters makes clear. Especially given the contemporary setting of widespread political fracture and fluid intellectual and patronage networks, it is reasonable to assume that both poets wrote about veganism with an awareness of the potential for their words to have an impact beyond their own geographical and intellectual borders. This includes whether and how readers saw them as legitimate sources of wisdom.

Moreover, there is textual evidence that al-Muʾayyad and al-Maʿarrī knew that they were putting their arguments on display for others to read, in addition to trying to convince each other. As shown, al-Muʾayyad cites the opening line of al-Maʿarrī's poem at the start of his first letter to explain why he decided to write, namely in response to the Syrian poet's *dāʿiyat al-bayt* (poetic summons). Then, after two exchanges, in his final letter, the Fāṭimid missionary describes the setting in which he first heard that summons:

[44] In the context of Persian poetry, J. T. P. (Hans) de Bruijn asserts three core aspects of the "homiletic mode" of verse, the first of which is that "a homily is delivered to an audience," whether nominal or actual. See J.T.P. de Bruijn, "The Preaching Poet: Three Homiletic Poems by Farīd al-Dīn ʿAṭṭār," *Edebiyât* 9, no. 1 (1998), 87.

وحضرتُ مجلساً جليلاً أُجري فيه ذِكرُه، فقال الحاضرون فيه غثّاً وسميناً، فحفظتُهُ بالغيب

وقلت: إنّ المعلومَ من صلابتُه في زهده يحميه من الظِنّةِ والرَيْب، وقام في نفسي أنَّ عنده

من حقائق دين الله سرّاً، قد أسبلَ عليه من التقيّة ستراً، وأمراً تميّز به عن قومٍ يكفِّرُ

بعضهم بعضاً، ويلعنُ بعضهم بعضاً . .

[I attended a highbrow intellectual gathering in which talk of you was going round. Those present were saying all manner of things (lit. "both thin and fat") about you, and so I defended you in your absence. I said: "This man's well-known rigor in his ascetic lifestyle protects him from doubt and error!" And then it occurred to me that you must have had some secret knowledge of God's divine truths that had sheltered you from having to dissimulate your religion (lit. "lowered a curtain between you and *taqiyyah*"), some crucial thing that distinguished and guarded you from people who call each other unbelievers and who curse each other.]

It was against this backdrop, explains al-Muʾayyad, that he first heard the opening lines of al-Maʿarrī's poem, especially the injunction to seek out the Syrian thinker for true guidance. This

was all the confirmation he needed that, indeed, al-Maʿarrī possessed some special knowledge unavailable to others and which warranted his veganism.

However, as Iḥsān ʿAbbās points out, this account of al-Muʾayyad's defense of al-Maʿarrī to his detractors in Cairo is at odds with a second portrayal with the same basic premise, yet which reaches nearly the opposite conclusion. In one *majlis* of the *Majālis al-muʾayyadiyyah*,[45] the narration describes an intellectual gathering in which those present are arguing about al-Maʿarrī and his vegan practices, which some take to be clear evidence of heresy. They therefore call vociferously for his death. Amid this heated discussion, an unnamed interlocutor proposes an alternative:

> بل الواجب أنْ يجرد له من يهتك بالمناظرة والمحاجة ستره، ويكشف للناس عواره لينقص في عيونهم وينحط من درجته ما بين ظهرانيهم، فمكث غير بعيد حتى توجه من وجهناه من داعينا للقاء التركمانية، فانعقد بينه من المناظرة مكاتبة لا مشافهة ما نورده بفصّه فينفع الله السامعين.
>
> [No, instead we must dispatch unto him someone who will pierce through his façade by means of debate (*al-munāẓarah*) and disputation (*al-muḥājjah*), and who

[45] Cited in ʿAbbās, *Rasāʾil,* 86. For the full text and my English translation, see the appendix.

will expose his faults to people so that he falls short in their eyes and his status among them is debased!" And it was not long before the missionary whom we dispatched set off to meet with the Turkmen (of Syria), and there was had between him (and al-Maʿarrī) a written rather than a verbal exchange, which we reproduce verbatim. May God be of aid to those who hear!]

Despite the anonymity, we are given to understand that the single speaker is al-Muʾayyad himself. The *Majālis* would have been read out in the name of the Fāṭimid Caliph-Imam, who in this context is ostensibly referring to his *dāʿī* (missionary), namely al-Muʾayyad. Thus the latter does intervene on al-Maʿarrī's behalf, as he wrote to the Syrian poet, but with a markedly different impetus in mind: to garner intellectual converts to the Fāṭimid cause.

In turn, that motivational difference between the two accounts indicates the presence of at least two separate readerships for al-Muʾayyad. One includes readers of the *Majālis*, being his Fāṭimid adherents in Cairo, while the other comprises al-Maʿarrī and any of his sympathizers, for whom the more generous account might have been intended. It also shows an awareness by al-Muʾayyad of those separate readerships and the stakes for projecting legitimacy to them. While both the letter to al-Maʿarrī and the episode from the *Majālis* claim to seek knowledge about veganism from the Syrian poet, the spur to doing so indicates how al-Muʾayyad anticipates that his actions will be perceived by each audience. This demonstrates

how a written message—here, arguments for and against veganism—and the identity of its author can act as a signifier of legitimacy, one that shifts to a greater or lesser degree given the needs of a particular rhetorical situation. After all, it is not as simple as saying that al-Muʾayyad lied to al-Maʿarrī in claiming he defended the Syrian poet's reputation, since this is strictly speaking a true statement. Nor does defense of an absent al-Maʿarrī necessarily exclude the more self-serving motive of delegitimizing arguments for veganism.

Al-Maʿarrī too acknowledges the possibility of plural readerships, though not in direct reference to his encounter with al-Muʾayyad. Indeed, he does not discuss that encounter independent of the correspondence itself, which may be due in part to al-Maʿarrī's advanced age at the time of their writing. Instead, we can infer such recognition of multiple audiences from a point made by the Syrian poet in explicating his own verse on veganism. Alluding to the first line, namely the call for those ailing in mind and faith to seek him out for truth, al-Maʿarrī states فإنّما خاطب به مَنْ غَمَرَهُ الجهل، لا مَنْ للرياسة عَلَمٌ وأهل (Rather in this line, the poet addresses those who have been inundated by ignorance, not those who are a beacon of, and fit for, guidance).[46] Granted that it is difficult to say whether al-Maʿarrī makes this comment in

[46] Here, the beacon of guidance is a likely reference to al-Muʾayyad himself. Margoliouth's edition gives the variant reading عَلَمٌ وأَصْل (*ʿalam wa-aṣl*), which he translates as "beacon and source." See Margoliouth, "Correspondence," 297. The word for guidance, *riyāsah*, often denotes popular following based on perceived religious authority.

earnest, we can nevertheless extrapolate an awareness by al-Maʿarrī of multiple audiences, some to whom the call does not apply and others to whom it does.

Furthermore, al-Maʿarrī's self-gloss on the first line relies on an argument from a field other than literature, namely *fiqh* (jurisprudence), but which relates to it in terms of attention to the nature of language.[47] The argument has to do with general versus specific language, *al-ʿumūm wa l-khuṣūṣ*, which in the writings on *uṣūl al-fiqh* (principles of law) is used to determine the scope of a certain law's applicability.[48] General nouns like *al-muslim* or *al-muʾmin*, for example, are scrutinized for their potential specificity—let alone terms that are clearly delimited, like proper names and relative pronouns—to interpret the language of precedent. Although a minority of premodern legal scholars denied the existence of truly all-inclusive language in Arabic, most agreed that this was not a useful category in legal cases. They

[47] It is not unreasonable to assume al-Maʿarrī's familiarity with legal principles, as many of the men in his extended family served as judges and legal scholars in Aleppo.

[48] For more general information on this argument and its importance to classical Islamic jurisprudence, see B. G. Weiss, "ʿUmūm wa-khuṣūṣ," in *Encyclopedia of Islam*, 2nd ed., ed. P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C. E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, and W. P. Heinrichs (Leiden: Brill, 2012). For a fuller exposition, see Bernard Weiss, "Chapter Eight: General and Unqualified Expressions," in *The Search for God's Law: Islamic Jurisprudence in the Writings of Sayf al-Dīn al-Āmidī*, rev. ed. (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2010), 382–439; Joseph Lowry, trans., *Al-Shāfiʿī: The Epistle on Legal Theory* (New York, NY: New York University Press, 2013). For a treatment of *ʿumūm wa-khuṣūṣ* in the context of *ijtihād* (legal interpretation) versus *taqlīd* (cognate of precedent, or stare decisis), see Sherman A. Jackson, "*Taqlīd*, Legal Scaffolding and the Scope of Legal Injunctions in Post-Formative Theory: *Muṭlaq* and *ʿĀmm* in the Jurisprudence of Shihāb al-Dīn al-Qarāfī," *Islamic Law and Society* 3, no. 2 (1996), 165–92.

therefore made the distinction between statements that obtained generally and those that were delimited for a given set of circumstances or group of people.

By saying that his call to veganism applies to the ignorant rather than the wise, al-Maʿarrī is arguably drawing from the province of *uṣūl al-fiqh* to delimit the scope of a term from the seemingly general to the actually specific. This is not the only place in which al-Maʿarrī makes this move. He also deploys it in a commentary on his poetry of *Luzūm mā lā yalzam* written to fend off charges of heresy: *Zajr al-nābiḥ* (Driving off the barking dog), which exists in a unique manuscript of *Luzūm mā lā yalzam* as a gloss written in the margins.[49] Throughout that commentary, al-Maʿarrī takes lines of poetry that seem to indict a whole category of people, such as *rijāl al-dīn* (religious authorities, lit. "men of religion") or even *al-nās* ("people" in a general sense). He then makes the claim that those lines apply to only a select group, especially those who have little capacity for rational thought.

The immediate relevance of this argument has to do with the nature of language. Al-Maʿarrī's claims of specificity for what appears to be a universal call to veganism highlights the suppleness of both legal and literary discourse, especially the capacity of that discourse for

[49] Abu-l-ʿAlāʾ al-Maʿarrī, *Luzūm mā lā yalzam* (OR 5319), British Library, London. In 1965, an edition was published that reformats the text for readability. See Abu-l-ʿAlāʾ al-Maʿarrī, *Zajr al-nābiḥ: "Muqtaṭafāt,"* ed. Amjad al-Ṭarābulsī (Damascus: Al-Maktabah al-Hāshimiyyah bi-Dimeshq, 1965).

multiple referents. Yet it also speaks to al-Maʿarrī's tacit mindfulness of the presence of various readers. Whether his gloss on the first line is sincere, he was at least conscious of multiple audiences, given the claim that some have a greater need for the call to veganism than others, and of the fact that people might understand the poem differently. Moreover, we know that al-Maʿarrī must have acknowledged multiple audiences because al-Muʾayyad talks in their correspondence of how al-Maʿarrī's poetry traveled all the way to Cairo. That both al-Maʿarrī and al-Muʾayyad seem aware of their plural readerships helps us understand the rhetorical stakes for legitimizing their claims, as well as the signifying role played by veganism therein.

Conclusion: Food as a Perpetual Signifier

Al-Muʾayyad's explanation of his motives was the last letter he addressed to al-Maʿarrī, who, aged eighty-five and ailing as he had claimed, died in his hometown of Maʿarrat al-Nuʿmān soon after their correspondence (al-Muʾayyad lived for another twenty years). Nothing survives of al-Maʿarrī's response, if it ever existed. Disappointing though this finale may seem, it nonetheless seems fitting given al-Maʿarrī's affinity for subversive style and non-committal argument. It also lends some satisfying irony to the episode with al-Muʾayyad, in view of al-Maʿarrī's oeuvre as a whole. He himself was in a similar position to al-Muʾayyad's when writing

Risālat al-ghufrān. That work comprises the answer to a letter from the aging grammarian Ibn al-Qāriḥ, whom al-Maʿarrī makes into the protagonist of the *Risālah*, imagining him to have died and gone to paradise in the meantime. And while no such eschatological portrayal appears in al-Muʾayyad's final letter, still al-Maʿarrī's absence lingers at its end, a palpable stand-in for his presence.

Such a want of closure reiterates the prospect of many potential audiences for the debate over veganism, audiences that are both immediate and distant. Even for his contemporaries, al-Maʿarrī's evasive style and insistence on the contingency of human knowledge puts an onus on the reader to participate in meaning making, thereby engaging them in a dialectical, indeed conversational mode of rhetoric. How much more so for those who encounter his words long after the fact? In other words, those who in Erving Goffmann's language "overhear" the message displaced from its original utterance, rather than have it aimed directly at them?[50] The responsibility of audiences to cooperate interpretively with al-Maʿarrī and al-Muʾayyad constitutes both the power and the puzzle of foodways as a signifier, the polysemy of which ensures that such cultural practices will remain perpetually disputed and, therefore, relevant.

[50] Erving Goffmann, "Footing," *Forms of Talk* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1981), 124-59.

Appendix: Source Texts

Al-Maʿarrī's luzūmiyyah ḥāʾiyyah (meter: *ṭawīl*)[51]:

غدوتَ مريضَ العقل والدين فالقِني
لتسمع أنباءَ الأمورِ الصحائحِ

You are ailing in mind and faith, so come
see me! Hear of things as they truly are:

فلا تأكلنْ ما أُخْرِجَ الماءَ ظالما
ولا تبغِ قوتا من غريض الذبائحِ

Don't ever eat what the water gives up under
duress, or seek fare in the newly slain,

ولا بَيْضَ أُمّاتٍ أرادتْ صَريحَهُ
لأطفالها دون الغواني الصرائحِ

Or mothers' fresh milk—purer than
highborn maids—which they wished
for their babes;

ولا تفجعنَّ الطير وهي غوافلٌ
بما وضعت فالظُلمُ شرُّ القَبائحِ

Do not terrify carefree birds, who know not
what is done, for cruelty is
the basest of evils,

وَدَعْ ضَرَبَ النَّحلِ الذي بكرتْ له
5

And shun thick, white honey, struck fresh
early in the morning, collected from

[51] Abu-l-ʿAlāʾ al-Maʿarrī, *Sharḥ al-luzūmiyyāt*, 3 vols., ed. Ḥussayn Naṣṣār et al. (Cairo: Al-Hayʾah al-Miṣriyyah al-ʿĀmmah li-l-Kitāb, 1994), 1:362–64.

fragrant blooms—

كواسبُ من أزهارٍ نبتٍ فوائحِ

The hive didn't amass it just to give it away

or gather it just to be charitable;

فما أحرزَتْه كي يكون لغيرها

ولا جمعتْهُ للندى والمَنائحِ

I've washed my hands of all these things, but

would that I'd heeded my condition

before my brow started to grey.

مسحتُ يدي من كُلِّ هذا فليتني

أَبهتُ لشأني قبل شَيب المسائحِ

O you, people of my era! Know you the

secrets I've learned

but don't lightly betray?

بني زمني هل تعلمون سرائرا

علمتُ ولكنّي بها غيرُ بائحِ

[In this,] you stumbled into error. Won't you

come to be guided by what my heart's

purest intentions have told you?

سريتُمْ على غَيٍّ فهلَّا اهتديتمُ

بما خَبَّرَتْكُمْ صافِياتُ القرائحِ

The tempter to fault called to you.[52] Why

10 وصاح بكم داعي الضلال فما لكم

[52] Namely, whoever told them that consuming animal products was acceptable. Unlike the criticism of hypocritical monks in line 13, it is unclear from both text and context whether this criticism is general or meant for a specific person or group, or whether the *dāʿī* (caller) to fault is mainly a notional one deployed for rhetorical force. If the latter, then it might be thought of as serving a parallel function to the *ʿādhil* (blamer) of profane love poetry. For more on this and

did you answer with the best that such a tempter could hope for?

أجبتُمْ على ما خَيَّلَتْ كل صائحِ

When you learn the true nature of your faith [as it stands], you will come to know the most appalling of scandals!

متى ما كُشفتمْ عن حقائق دِينكم

تكشفتُم عن مُخزيات الفضائحِ

But if you are truly guided aright, then do not dye swords blood red, or make twigs into probes for wounds.

فإن ترشُدوا لا تخضبوا السيف من دمٍ

ولا تلزموا الأميال سَبْر الجرائحِ

I am pleased by the manner of those God-fearing monks, except for the way they eat the toil of miserly souls,

ويُعجبني دأبُ الذين ترهَّبوا

سوى أكلِهم كدَّ النفوس الشحائحِ

Superior to them are the Muslim ascetics, Striving after what is ḥalāl day in and day out, who are better able to fathom his [Jesus Christ's] life:

وأطيبُ منهُمْ مَطْعما في حياته

سُعاةُ حلالٍ بين غادٍ ورائحِ

The messiah hoarded not his soul just to

فما حَبَسَ النفسَ المسيحُ تعبدا

15

related figures, see, for example, Teresa Garulo, "Raḳīb," in *Encyclopedia of Islam*, 2nd ed., ed. P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C. E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, and W. P. Heinrichs (Leiden: Brill, 2012).

worship God, but took up the journey	ولكن مشى في الأرض مشية سائحِ
with the step of a traveler.	
I'm covered in earth by one loathe to do so,	يُغيّبني في التُرب من هو كارهٌ
When death's hateful stench	
Does not go away from me;	إذا لم يُغيبني كريهُ الروائح
He is wary of being so close to bones, like	ومن يتوقى أن يُجاور أعظما
those of demolished camels cast	
about in a game of *maysir* —	كأعظُمِ تلك الهالكات الطرائحِ
But the worst thing a good friend [like him]	ومن شرِّ أخلاقِ الأنيس وفعلهم
can do is join the wail of funeral	
callers, the chest-beating	خُوارُ النَّواعي والتِدام النوائِحِ
of hired mourners.[53]	

[53] Throughout his poetry, al-Maʿarrī stoically insists that weeping for the dead is a futile activity, since it has no power to bring them back. One of the best-known examples is the first line of a *rithāʾ* (elegy) poem: غَيْرُ مُجْدٍ في مِلَّتي وَاعْتِقَادي / نَوْحُ باكٍ وَلَا تَرَنُّمُ شَادِ (*Ghayru mujdin fī millatī w-iʿtiqādī nawḥu bākin wa-lā tarannamu shādī*, "In my confession and creed, neither the wail of one crying nor a singer's joyful quavering has any effect"). That is to say, nothing one does or says, whether out of grief or cheer, can stop death. See Abu-l-ʿAlāʾ al-Maʿarrī, *Saqṭ al-zand* (Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, 1957), 7. Here, the juxtaposed opposites of mournful weeping and happy singing may also be a merism, namely the rhetorical combination of two contrasting words to refer to entirety, common in pre-modern Arabic poetry and prose.

Yet I pardon the wrongs of both friend and foe, so I can make my abode in God's house, between the tomb's ledger stones,

وأصفحُ عن ذنبِ الصديق وغيرِه

لسُكْنَايَ بيتَ الحقِّ بين الصفائحِ

I do not like to accept praise from a man, even if he were truthful! So how could I bear lying praises and flatterings?[54]

وأزهدُ في مدح الفتى عندَ صِدقِه

فكيف قَبولي كاذباتِ المدائحِ

Souls remain sturdy for riding [of mortal life] like robust mounts, till gaunt, they fade to haggard beasts;

وما زالتِ النفسُ اللَّجوجُ مطِيةً

إلى أن غدتْ اِحدى الرذايا الطلائحِ

A mortal gains not from rainclouds that gush on him, when he is beneath a tomb,

وما ينفعُ الإنسان أنّ غمائما

تَسُحُّ عليه تحت اِحدى الضَّرائحِ

[54] Al-Maʿarrī takes a firm and explicit stance in his later writings against flattery in general and panegyric poetry in particular. This is a broadly philosophical position but one that is informed by biography. At the beginning of *Luzūm mā lā yalzam*, al-Maʿarrī attaches an introduction describing his own production of praise poetry in his youth, which he then decided: رَفَضْتُ الشِّعْرَ رَفْضَ السَقْبِ غِرْسَهُ والرألِ تريكَتَهُ (*Rafaḍtu al-shiʿr rafḍ al-saqb ghirsahū wa-al-raʾl tarīkatahū*, "I rejected poetry like a camel calf rejects its afterbirth, or a newborn ostrich rejects its eggshells"). See Al-Maʿarrī, *Sharḥ*, 1:49.

ولو كان في قُربٍ من الماء رغبةٌ

لنافَسَ ناسٌ في قبور البطائحِ

And if people truly desired water, they would

vie over flat graves of moist earth.

Al-Muʾayyad fi-l-Dīn al-Shīrāzī, on al-Maʿarrī[55]:

قد انتهى إليكم خبر الضرير الذي نبغ بمعرّة النعمان، وما كان يُعزَى إليه من الكفر والطغيان، على كون الرجل متقشّفاً، عن كثير من المآكل التي أحلّ الله له متعفّفاً، وقد كان خبره يتوصل إلى كل صقع بما يحرّك النفوس للفتك به، حميةً بزعمهم للدين، وغيرةً على الإسلام والمسلمين. وكان جرى ذكره في مجلس الناظر الذي ينظر في ذلك الوقت، فحطب عليه الحاضرين وأغرّوا بدمه، وقالوا الغيرة على الدين تبيح قتلَهُ، فقال أحد الحاضرين: إنّ كلامكم على غير موضوع، وإنْ كان الرجل من العجز والضعف والإشراف على القبر بالغامية القصوى، وأنّه متى بسطت له اليد على هذه السبيل اكتسب من الذكر الجميل الثناء بعد الموت ما لا حاجة بنا إليه بل الواجب أنْ يجرد له من يهتك بالمناظرة والمحاجة ستره، ويكشف للناس عواره لينقص في عيونهم وينحط من درجته ما بين ظهرانيهم، فمكث غير بعيد حتى توجه من وجهناه من داعينا للقاء التركمانية، فانعقد بينه من المناظرة مكاتبة لا مشافهة ما نورده بنصّه فينفع الله السامعين.

[55] Abu-l-ʿAlāʾ al-Maʿarrī, *Rasāʾil Abī al-ʿAlāʾ al-Maʿarrī, al-juzʾ al-awwal*, ed. Iḥsān ʿAbbās (Beirut: Dār al-Shurūq, 1982), 86.

[The story has reached you about the blind man who gained notoriety at Maʿarrat al-Nuʿmān, and what was attributed to him of unbelief (*kufr*) and excess-driven impiety (*ṭughyān*), due to his extreme abstention (*mutaqashshifan*) from many foods which God has permitted in moderation (*mutaʿaffifan*). Word of him reached every corner and moved people to destroy him, out of passion (*ḥamiyyatan*) from their allegiance to the faith, and out of their sense of honor (*ghīratan*) for Islam and all Muslims. One day, talk of him was going round the session of the overseer charged with supervising at that time, and everyone gathered was emboldened after his blood, saying that honor for religion (*ghīrah ʿalā al-dīn*) permitted them to kill him. But then one of the attendees said: "Your words make no sense! If it's really true that the man is old and weak and staring down at the grave from its closest portico, when death's hand is finally reached out to him, he will have glory from peoples' admirable mention of him, a glory that we ourselves could never hope for. No, instead we must dispatch unto him someone who will pierce his façade through debate (*al-munāẓarah*) and disputation (*al-muḥājjah*), and who will expose his faults to people so that he falls short in their eyes and his status among them is debased!" And it was not long before the missionary whom we dispatched set off to meet with the Turkmen (of Syria), and there was had between him (and al-Maʿarrī) a written rather than a verbal exchange, which we reproduce verbatim. May God be of aid to those who hear!]

Chapter 5. Remembering al-Maʿarrī: Authorship and Canon in Early Twentieth-Century Arabic Thought

"All the neo-classicists, in one way or another, played the role of community spokesmen..."[1] This remark by Muhammad Mustafa Badawi captures the simultaneous consensus and dispute about early twentieth-century Arab thinkers—the so-called "neo-classicists"[2] — as public figures. Most scholars agree that discussion among these thinkers contributed publicly to notions of collective identity, social reform, and new cultural production in Arab societies.[3] Yet there is continued debate about the nature of Arab public

[1] M.M. Badawi, *A Short History of Modern Arabic Literature* (Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press, 1993), 30.

[2] Here one must be cautious not to follow Badawi's periodization too closely. While he and other authors such as Salma Khadra Jayyusi use a western periodiziation of Neoclasssical/Romantic/Modernist literary epochs, and that in order to show that Arabic poetry could achieve the same accomplishments as Western European literatures, Arab poets from the 1860s to 1900 referred to their work as "revivalist" (*iḥyāʾ*), a relatable but separate conception of their overall project.

[3] See, for example: Elizabeth Suzanne Kassab, *Contemporary Arab Thought: Cultural Critique in Comparative Perspective* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010); Yehoshua Porath, *In Search of Arab Unity 1930-1945* (London and New York: Routledge, 2013), 153. Yasir Suleiman in particular has devoted several monographs to debates about language and cultural tradition, in the context of sociopolitical conflict. See Yasir Suleiman, *The Arabic Language and National Identity: A Study in Ideology* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2003); *A War of Words: Language and Conflict in the Middle East* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2004); *Arabic, Self, and Identity: A Study in Conflict and Displacement* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2011); and *Arabic in the Fray: Language Ideology and Cultural Politics* (Edinburgh, UK: Edinburgh University Press, 2013).

intellectualism and the many guises it assumes. Of special concern in recent scholarship is the extent to which early twentieth-century Arab public engagement was a response to foreign influence.[4] There is also a growing interest in the dynamic between the public role of intellectuals and the more private concerns that inform it.[5]

It is to this last point of the discussion that this chapter contributes. Modern literary debates over al-Maʿarrī's beliefs are a chance to explore the private intellectual concerns that may have undergirded public engagement by early twentieth-century Arab thinkers, even as those debates also complicate the very idea of the "public." An instructive case study can be found in the quarrel between Egyptian thinker Ṭaha Ḥusayn (d. 1973) and Iraqi poet and activist Maʿrūf al-Ruṣāfī (d. 1945) over the link between al-Maʿarrī's difficult poetic style and

[4] Recent studies have added nuance and depth to the longstanding view that early twentieth-century Arab public intellectualism was a response to colonial rule. See, for example Stephen Sheehi, *Foundations of Modern Arab Identity* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2004); Shaden M. Tageldin, *Disarming Words: Empire and the Seduction of Translations in Egypt* (Berkeley, CA and London: University of California Press, 2011); and Tarek El-Ariss, *Trials of Arab Modernity: Literary Affects and the New Political* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013).

[5] See, for example Yaron Ayalon, "Revisiting Ṭāhā Ḥusayn's *Fī al-Shiʿr al-Jāhilī* and its Sequel," *Die Welt des Islams* 49 (2009), 98-121; Mohamed al-Nowaihi, "Towards the Reappraisal of Classical Arabic Literature and History: Some Aspects of Taha Husayn's Use of Modern Western Criteria," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 11, no. 2 (April 1980), 190. In particular, the notion of "commitment," following Sartre's phrase *littérature engagée*, has been used to describe a private intellectual stance that also informs public engagement. See, for example: Hussein N. Kadhim, *The Poetics of Anti-Colonialism in the Arabic* Qaṣīdah (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 173; Boutheina Khaldi, "Multiple Intellectual Engagements?" *Journal of Arabic Literature* 43 (2012), 197-226.

his overall worldview, including the source of al-Maʿarrī's thoroughgoing "pessimism" (*tashāʾum*) or "anger" (*sukhṭ*) and his subsequent motives for writing.

In 1939, Ḥusayn published a work of cultural criticism called *Maʿa Abī al-ʿAlāʾ fī sijnih* (Together With al-Maʿarrī in his Prison),[6] in which he argues that al-Maʿarrī's torturous poetics derive from a misanthropy borne of a life filled with personal tragedy. In 1942, al-Ruṣāfī responded to this critique with the short treatise *ʿAlāʾ bāb sijn Abī al-ʿAlāʾ* (At the Door of al-Maʿarrī's Cell), published posthumously in 1947 and edited by leading socialist thinker and journalist Muḥammad ʿAlī al-Zarqā.[7] For him, al-Maʿarrī's difficult style was not the result of tragedy but rather a desire to challenge readers to clearn hearts (*qulūb ṭāhirah*) and pure intent (*nufūs zakiyyah*).

In my view, these conclusions about al-Maʿarrī's worldview as reflected in his poetics are traceable to each author's assumptions about the nature of poetry and, in turn, the "reading practices" that such assumptions support. The notion of reading practices has lately taken hold in medieval studies of reading as a private indulgence, a social institution, and an economic enterprise, as well as part of the spread and transformation of educational

[6] Ṭaha Ḥusayn, *Maʿa Abiʾl-ʿAlāʾ fī sijnih* (Cairo: Dār al-Maʿārif, 1981).

[7] Maʿrūf al-Ruṣāfī, *ʿAlā bāb sijn Abiʾl-ʿAlāʾ*, ed. Muḥammad ʿAlī al-Zarqā (Damascus: Dār al-Madā liʾl-Thaqāfa waʾl-Nashr, 2002).

institutions.[8] Authors have also invoked the notion in reference to modern phenomena, for example Saba Mahmoud's description of contrasting experiences of religious symbols in the context of the 2005 Danish cartoons of Muhammad.[9] When I use the phrase "reading practices" in this chapter, I mean the physical, aesthetic, ethical, and affective experience of encountering symbolic or signifying texts in general, together with the cultural value systems that inform such encounters. The socioeconomic implications of reading as a public institution lie beyond the scope of study.

Regarding the reading practices of Ḥusayn and al-Ruṣāfī, in his doctoral dissertation on al-Maʿarrī as well as *Fī al-shiʿr al-jāhilī*, Ḥusayn approaches poetry from a historicist standpoint, or what Ḥusayn himself calls *taʾrīkh adabī* ("literary history"), reading into texts a passive reflection of the broader sociohistorical milieu in which they were composed.[10] I argue that the

[8] For such a study as related to premodern Arab-Islamic civilization, see Konrad Hirschler, *The Written Word in the Medieval Arab Lands: A Social and Cultural History of Reading Practices* (Edinburgh, UK: Edinburgh University Press, 2012).

[9] Saba Mahmoud, "Religious Reason and Secular Affect: An Incommensurable Divide?" in *Is Critique Secular? Blasphemy, Injury, and Free Speech* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: The Regents of the University of California, 2009), 73.

[10] This is my admittedly broad definition of "historicism," without implying direct indebtedness to a Hegelian or other specific western European philosophical approach. I find it particularly appropriate to Ḥusayn's view of the past as a stable, recuperable phenomenon, in contrast with that of postmodernist historiography. For more on historicism and related issues, see, for example: Frederick Beiser, "Historicism," *The Oxford Handbook of Continental Philosophy*, ed. Brian Leiter and Michael Rosen (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2007), 155-179.

core of this approach continues in Ḥusayn's more impressionistic writings of the 1920s and 1930s, including the autobiographical trilogy *Al-Ayyām* but also *Maʿa Abī al-ʿAlāʾ fī sijnih*, the subjective style of which speaks to Ḥusayn's concern with al-Maʿarrī's poetic language as revealing his social identity. Meanwhile, al-Ruṣāfī sees poetry as an active vehicle for social change, inasmuch as it touches human hearts and inspires people to be better as individuals. Such a stance — which helps explain al-Ruṣāfī's attribution of a morally didactic function to al-Maʿarrī's poetry — is clear from al-Ruṣāfī's critique of Egyptian intellectual Zakī Mubārak (d. 1952), who argued for the primacy of prose over poetry, and from al-Ruṣāfī's own poetics of clear style married with politically- and socially-engaged content.

While Huṣayn and al-Ruṣāfī are not specifically debating al-Maʿarrī's beliefs, somewhat in contrast to other cases in this study, they do consider his authorship, thereby demonstrating the continuity of debates over al-Maʿarrī's style and persona—over his legacy—begun in his own lifetime. Their discussion also lends perspective to each man's role as a public figure. Private intellectual concerns bring to light the cultural values at work in public debate by showing what individuals think is important to society as a whole. And while the topic of Ḥusayn's and al-Ruṣāfī's sociopolitical commitments is not my main focus, I do speculate in the conclusion about the importance of their debate over al-Maʿarrī to their role as public intellectuals. Two points stand out in particular. First, early twentieth-century

debates about the classical literary tradition, *al-turāth*, were part of a broader conversation about Arab cultural identity, especially the notion of *aṣālah*, "authenticity."[11] Although neither Ḥusayn nor al-Ruṣāfī use this term in their writings about al-Maʿarrī, the fact that both emphasize the Syrian poet's sincerity as the basis of his authorship seems to take part in discussions of authentic Arab cultural origins.

Second, the debate between Ḥusayn and al-Ruṣāfī took place mainly among other intellectuals, critics, and poets, and it is arguably for these readers that Ḥusayn wrote *Maʿa Abī al-ʿAlāʾ fī sijnih*, rather than or perhaps in addition to the intended readerships of his literary autobiography or policy statements like *Mustaqbal al-thaqāfah fī Miṣr* (The Future of Education in Egypt). Also, like so many of their generation of intellectuals, both Ḥusayn and al-Ruṣāfī were stripped of government posts and tried for apostasy, suggesting authorial commitment to some readerships at the expense of others. These points signal the plurality of reading "publics" and the need to recognize that plurality when considering the public role of intellectuals, who may in some works aim at a different level of social engagement.

[11] For book-length treatments of authenticity (*al-aṣālah*) and its role in early twentieth-century debates about Arab culture, see, for example: ʿAbd al-Ḥamīd al-Jubayrah, *Al-Aṣālah wa al-ḥadāthah fī takwīn al-fikr al-ʿarabī al-naqdī al-ḥadīth* (Tripoli, Lebanon: Manshūrāt Dār al-Shamāl, 1986); Daniel Brown, *Rethinking Tradition in Modern Islamic Thought* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Burhan Ghalioun, *Islam et politique: la modernité trahie* (Paris: La Découverte, 1997); Kassab, *Contemporary Arab Thought*. Other concepts of importance to the Romantic paradigm include authorial "sincerity," for example.

Two Views of Poetry

Ṭaha Ḥusayn and Literary History

Ṭaha Ḥusayn was just twenty-five years old in 1914 when he completed the first of two doctoral degrees obtained in his lifetime. His dissertation, submitted to the literature faculty of Cairo University and later published in 1919 as a monograph with the title *Tajdīd dhikrā Abī al-ʿAlāʾ* (Renewing al-Maʿarrī's Memory), relies on an approach adapted explicitly from European literary scholars and which Ḥusayn calls "literary history" (*taʾrīkh adabī*). Paramount to this historicist outlook — which I argue continues in its essence on into Ḥusayn's more personal writings of the 1920s and 1930s, including *Maʿa Abī al-ʿAlāʾ fī sijnih* — are two key elements. The first is a bedrock of skepticism vis-à-vis his subject matter, or at least the idea that critical engagement with that subject matter is not off limits, while the second is a concern for the how literary texts get influenced by their contemporary sociohistorical milieu.

In the second volume of his autobiography *Al-Ayyām*, Ḥusayn recalls being introduced to thinking about literature as fodder for active, not passive, intellectual engagement while still a student at al-Azhar.[12] After three years of coursework, he had become disenchanted with traditional instruction by repetition and rote, which in turn betrayed the broader educational philosophy that logic texts like al-Jurjānī's commentary on the *Isagogue*, or grammar works Ibn

[12] Ṭaha Ḥusayn, *Al-Ayyām fī mujallad wāḥid* (Cairo: Markaz al-Ahrām, 1992), 282-6.

Hishām's *Qaṭr al-nadā*, reflected age-old wisdom to be imbibed completely and uncritically. He recounts many instances of engaging his professors in debate, only to be told, إنّ طول اللسان لم يثبت قط حقّا ولم يمحّ باطلاً ("No amount of chatter can make a truth false, or an error true"[13]). Separately but still relevant to Ḥusayn's overall experience, he was also upset by an atmosphere of contention and backbiting, which only added to his feelings of isolation.[14]

This changed in Ḥusayn's fourth year, when he took a class with Sayyid al-Marṣafī (d. 1931).[15] Al-Marṣafī was a longtime Azharī lecturer on Arabic literature and the author of *Asrār al-Ḥamāsah*, a commentary on the eighth-century anthology of pre-Islamic poetry *Al-Ḥamāsah* by Abū Tammām (d. 788)[16]; and *Raghbat al-āmil fī Kitāb al-kāmil* (The Desirer's Hope on the

[13] This is Hilary Wayment's translation. See: Ṭaha Ḥusayn, *The Stream of Days*, trans. Hilary Wayment (London and New York: Longman, Green, and Co., 1948), 110.

[14] For details of this period of Ḥusayn's life as it relates to his development as a novelist, see: Matti Moosa, *The Origins of Modern Arabic Fiction*, 2nd ed. (Boulder and London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1997), 296.

[15] Not to be confused with Ḥusayn al-Marṣafī (d. 1890), an influential literary scholar and anthologist best known for two works: *Al-Wasīlah al-adabiyyah ilā al-ʿulūm al-ʿarabiyyah* (The Literary Method for the Arabic Sciences), an anthology plus analysis of classical literary texts; and *Risālat al-kalim al-thamān* (Treatise of the Eight Words), a study of new terms circulating in Egyptian political discourse on the eve of the Urabi revolt. For more information on Ḥusayn al-Marṣafī's life and works, see, for example: J. Brugman, *An Introduction to the History of Modern Arabic Literature in Egypt* (Leiden: Brill, 1984), 324-7.

[16] Sayyid al-Marṣafī, *Asrār al-Ḥamāsah* (Cairo: Dār al-Kutub al-Khadiwiyyah, 1916).

Kāmil), a commentary on the *Al-Kāmil* (A Comprehensive Grammar) of al-Mubarrad (d. 898).[17] While neither work departs radically from the traditional focus of poetic commentary (*sharḥ*) on lexical and grammatical issues, they do rely on the spirit of debate that was equally vital to that commentary tradition. For example, in *Asrār al-Ḥamāsah* al-Marṣafī attends to variant readings and takes license with the organization and even word orders preferred by Abū Tammām, who, in al-Marṣafī's words, كثيرا ما كان يعتمد على ذوقه (He often relied on his [own personal] tastes).[18] In Ḥusayn's account, it was this critical spirit of al-Marṣafī's textual analysis — plus his infective wit and charisma — that first caught Ḥusayn's attention and which saved him from altogether abandoning his studies at al-Azhar.

Along with the neo-Cartesianism which Ḥusayn imbibed enthusiastically at Paris,[19] al-Marṣafī's critical perspective on literature had a major impact on his reading practices. In the

[17] Sayyid al-Marṣafī, *Raghbat al-āmil fī Kitāb al-kāmil* (Cairo: 1929).

[18] Al-Marṣafī, *Asrār*, ز. Other scholars have made the point that the premodern Arabic commentary tradition is more critical that is commonly assumed. See for example Peter Gran, *The Islamic Roots of Capitalism: Egypt, 1760-1840* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1998), and Timothy Mitchell, *Colonising Egypt* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1991). For a contrary view, see the brief notice on al-Marṣafī's scholarship in Muḥammad ʿAbd al-Jawād, *Al-Shaykh al-Ḥusayn al-Marṣafī* (1952), 138-9.

[19] "I want to create in literature that philosophical method inaugurated by Descartes . . . and everyone knows that the basic principle of this method is that the researcher divests himself of every thing he knew previously and welcomes the subject of his research with a mind

narrative of *Al-Ayyām*, there is a moment of clarity when Ḥusayn buys his new copy of Abū Tammām's *Ḥamāsah* plus the commentary of al-Khaṭīb al-Tibrīzī (d. 1109), has it "elegantly bound" (*jalladahu jalīdan ẓarīfan*), and begins to memorize the poetry as it if were a primer on law or grammar:

> وكان الصبي يحس أن هذا الكتاب لا ينبغي أن يقرأ على هذا النحو ولا أن يفهم على هذا النحو. كان الشيخ الفتى وأصحابه يرون ديوان الحماسة متناً، وكتاب التبريزي شرحا، وكانوا يأسفون على أن أحداً لم يكتب على هذا الشرح حاشية.[20]
>
> [The boy felt instinctively that this was not the way to take an anthology of poetry. The young sheikh and his friends regarded the *Hamasa* as a text [*matn*], with Tibrizy's work as its primary commentary [*sharḥ*], and were sorry to find that the commentary had not in its turn been glossed [*ḥāshiyah*].[21]]

Here Ḥusayn laments not that rote learning is too traditional, but that it is not traditional enough. For him, it fails to recognize the critical spirit embodied in the medieval practice of

---

completely empty of what has been previously said about it." (my translation) See Ṭaha Ḥusayn, Ḥusayn, *Fī al-shᶜir al-jāhilī* (Cairo: Dār al-Kutub al-Miṣriyyah, 1984), 67-8.

[20] Ḥusayn, *Al-Ayyām*, 281.

[21] Wayment, *The Stream of Days*, 115.

attaching multiple "primary" commentaries (*shurūḥ*) and secondary "glosses" (*ḥawāshī*) to a text (*matn*) whose meaning was thereby presumed debatable. It was this critical spirit that "enraptured the boy" during his classes with al-Marṣafī and which marks his analysis in *Fī al-shiʿr al-jāhilī* (On Pre-Islamic Poetry), Ḥusayn's controversial study in which the author states an explicit preference for "doubt" (*shakk*) over "faith" (*īmān*) in approaching pre-Islamic poetry and its relationship to the Qurʾān.[22]

In Ḥusayn's reading practices, this spirit of critique — *al-naqd al-adabī,* "literary criticism" —that derives in part from the medieval Arabic commentary tradition gets wedded to a second major component, namely attention to the relationship between literary language and the sociohistorical circumstances of its production. Ḥusayn writes in the introduction to *Tajdīd dhikrā Abī al-ʿAlāʾ* that "there is no claim made in this book [about al-Maʿarrī's poetry] that does not rely on a source [*maṣdar*]."[23] According to Ḥusayn, such concern for

[22] Ḥusayn, *Fī al-shʿir al-jāhilī*, 14-15. These terms invite comparison to Paul Ricoeur's "school of suspicion" (*école du soupçon*) and "school of reminiscence" (*école de la réminiscence*) — the former applied to Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud collectively — while bearing in mind their historicity in the reception of Freud following the "linguistic turn" of western philosophy as an academic discipline. For Ricoeur's use of the terms themselves, see Paul Ricoeur, *De l'interpretation: Essai sur Freud*, 2nd ed. (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1995) 44. For discussion of their significance to philosophical interpretations of Freud, see, for example Paul Robinson, *Freud and His Critics* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1993), 195.

[23] Ṭaha Ḥusayn, *Tajdīd dhikrā Abī al-ʿAlāʾ*, 6th repr. (Cairo: Dār al-Maʿārif, 1963), 12. That Ḥusayn claimed to adopt historicism as a European critical method reflects the widespread influence of positivism in western scholarly discourse. For an overview of this development, see: Loic

sociohistorical context was a later addition to the spirit of critique inherited from al-Marṣafī, whose emphasis on close reading and fluent composition he calls "the old method" (*al-manhaj al-qadīm*).[24] This approach is useful, he avers, but only insofar as it gets augmented by "the new method" (*al-manhaj al-jadīd*) of European orientalists like Carlo Nallino and Enno Littman, with whom Ḥusayn studied at the Egyptian University (*al-jāmiʿāh al-miṣriyyah*), renamed Cairo University after the 1952 revolution.[25]

Put very briefly, to Ḥusayn these European scholars stressed the importance of reconstructing the sociocultural milieu of literary production using archeological "traces" (*āthār*) or historical "sources" (*maṣādir*). This principle as taught to Ḥusayn and others at the Egyptian University was no less emphasized in their professors' own research. Nallino, a scholar of Islam, published widely on Middle Eastern social institutions like charitable trusts

---

Wacquant, "Positivism," *The Blackwell Dictionary of Twentieth-Century Social Thought*, eds. William Outhwaite and Tom Bottomore (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1992), 205.

[24] Ḥusayn, *Tajdīd dhikrā*, 8-9.

[25] For more information on Nallino's life and works, see, for example: Vincenzo Strika, "C.A. Nallino e l'impresa libica," *Quaderni di Studi Arabi* 2 (1984), 9-20; Francesco Gabrieli, *Orientalisti del Novecento* (Rome: Instituto per l'Oriente C.A. Nallino, 1993); Anna Baldinetti, ed., *Carte private di Carlo Alfonso e Maria Nallino, Inventari* (Rome: Instituto per l'Oriente C.A. Nallino, 1995). For similar information on Littman, see, for example: H.H. Biesterfeldt, "Enno Littman: Leben und Arbeit. Ein autobiographisches Fragment (1875-1904), *Oriens* 29 (1986), 1-101.

(*awqāf*)[26] and sociolinguistic topics like Egyptian colloquial Arabic,[27] while Littman framed his work on Ethiopic inscriptions with numerous ethnographic details obtained on the *Deutsche Aksum Expedition*, an 85-day archeological expedition to northern Ethopia.[28] That both professors valued the insights into texts afforded by social history exercised an importance influence on Ḥusayn's own approach to literary meaning.

The combination of historicizing literary texts plus an overall stance of critique is the core of Ḥusayn's reading practice, which he calls throughout his works *taʾrīkh adabī*, "literary history" and which for the sake of shorthand I call historicism. Its application is arguably best exemplified in *Fī al-shiʿr al-jāhilī*, which was banned from publication in 1927 and for which Ḥusayn was stripped of his government post and tried for apostasy. In this study, Ḥusayn

[26] Anna Maria Medici, "Waqfs of Cyrenaica and Italian Colonialism in Libya (1911-41)," *Held in Trust: Waqf in the Islamic World*, ed. Pascale Ghazaleh (Cairo and New York: The American University in Cairo Press, 2011), 159-60. In contrast to the stereotype of the armchair orientalist, Medici stresses Nallino's knowledge of local legal and social institutions and, in turn, his criticism of the Italian-led commission on local *waqf* reform for ignoring those institutions and trying to impose a top-down approach imitative of French colonial rule.

[27] C.A. Nallino, *L'Arabo parlato in egitto: grammatical, dialoghi e raccolta di circa 6000 vocaboli* (Milan: Manuali Hoepli, 1900). It was this work that work Nallino the favor of King Fu'ad I of Egypt and, in turn, a teaching position at the Egyptian University, where Ṭaha Ḥusayn was one of his first students.

[28] Yohannes Gebreselassie, "Enno Littman: An Assessment of His Legacy in the Light of Ongoing Scholarly Debates," *Ityopis* extra issue 1 (2015), 157-71.

submits the following conclusion: الاستدلال بنصوص القرآن على عربية هذا الشعر ولا بهذا الشعر على عربية القرآن (The Qurʾānic text's elucidation of this [pre-Islamic] poetry's language, not this poetry's elucidation of the language of the Qurʾān). In other words, argues Ḥusayn, pre-Islamic poetry was not only collected but actually *composed* two centuries after its supposed appearance, which casts doubt on portrayals of the pre-Islamic period as an age of "ignorance," *jāhiliyyah*, and Islam's improvement upon it.

In support of this claim, Ḥusayn draws attention to the political and religious stakes of poetic transmission (*intiḥāl al-shiʿr*) in the early Islamic period. He discusses a number of cases in which contemporary social struggles colored the transmission of pre-Islamic poetry, including the later Shīʿite attribution to the Companion al-Nuʿmān ibn Bashīr of poetry critical of Muʿāwiyah[29]; the appeal to the pre-Islamic poets of Muḍar and Rabīʿah in settling a dispute between the prophetic "supporter" (*nāṣir*) ʿAbd al-Raḥmān ibn Ḥassān and a man from Quraysh;[30] and the narration by storytellers (*quṣṣāṣ*) of poetry allegedly composed by *jinn*, as a substantiating gloss on verses from Sūrat al-Jinn.[31] With these and other examples, Ḥusayn illustrates how tribal and ethnic strife (*al-shuʿūbiyyah*) were key factors in the transmission of

[29] Ḥusayn, *Fī al-shiʿr al-jāhilī*, 70-2.

[30] Ibid., 73-6.

[31] Ibid., 81-3.

poetry and the poetic lore (*akhbār*) that grew up around it. This shows the kind of insight made available by Ḥusayn's historicist outlook, which insight remains relevant to literary scholarship to this day.[32]

In my view, the essence of Ḥusayn's historicism from his early academic work can be detected in the more impressionistic writings of the 1920s and 1930s, including *Al-Ayyām* but also *Maʿa Abī al-ʿAlāʾ fī sijnih*. While some scholars emphasize the rupture between the focus of these writings on the private inner life of their subjects and Husayn's earlier "deterministic" approach to literature as influenced by sociohistorical milieu,[33] both retain the core focus on how literary texts are colored by extra-literary and especially social factors. This focus is reflected even in the personal style that marks both *Al-Ayyām* and *Maʿa Abī al-ʿAlāʾ fī sijnih*,

[32] Whether or not it justifies arguing for the inauthenticity of pre-Islamic poetry, the point that literary production gets influenced by contemporary sociopolitical factors is one that few academics would dispute. For an example of how ideas expressed by Ḥusayn in *Fī al-shiʿr al-jāhilī* remain current, the view of the *akhbār* tradition as hermeneutical "lore" has resurfaced in western scholarship since the 1970s. See, for example: Suzanne Stetkevych, "The Ṣuʿlūk and His Poem: A Paradigm of Passage Manqué," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 10, no. 4 (Oct.—Dec. 1984), 661-78; Samer M. Ali, "Reinterpreting al-Buḥturī's Īwān Kisrā Ode: Tears of Affection For the Cycles of History," *Journal of Arabic Literature* 37, no. 1 (2006), 46-67.

[33] See, for example: Roger Allen, "Ṭaha Ḥusayn," *Essays in Arabic Literary Biography: 1850-1950*, ed. Roger Allen (Wiesbaden: Harrasowitz-Verlag, 2010), 142. Another factor in Ḥusayn's "determinism" may be the thought of Gustave Lanson, who was in vogue when Ḥusayn was studying at the Sorbonne. For more on Lanson's approach, see for example Hans Robert Jauss, *Towards an Aesthetic of Reception*, trans. Timothy Bahti (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1982), 67.

which muses at an explicitly personal level, yet with enough critical distance to offer intuitive reflection on the life circumstances that affected al-Maʿarrī's writing. This personal engagement reflected in writing style resembles what I call "cultural criticism," written in the same spirit as works for a broader readership by Ḥusayn's contemporaries like Ibrāhīm al-Muwayliḥī, Jurjī Zaydān, and Maḥmūd Muḥammad Shākir. Also, both *Fī al-shiʿr al-jāhilī* and the second printing plus introduction to *Tajdīd dhikrā Abī al-ʿAlāʾ* — each characterized by Ḥusayn's "deterministic" analysis — were published in the late 1920s, at the same time as his more inward–focused works. This point further mitigates against drawing a hard line between the two periods of Ḥusayn's intellectual development.

In fact, the link between Ḥusayn's personal stance in *Maʿa Abī al-ʿAlāʾ fī sijnih* and his overall historicist approach to literature can be seen in his very choice of al-Maʿarrī as a subject of sustained critical engagement.[34] Initially Ḥusayn shied away from al-Maʿarrī's poetry because of its disparaging assessment by the "old method" of Ḥusayn's teachers at al-Azhar, even al-Marṣafī. It was the "new method" of European teachers at the Egyptian University that helped him past the bias toward early ʿAbbāsid poetic style and which let him see the sociohistorical — if not literary — value of al-Maʿarrī's verse. Due to this paradigm shift, Ḥusayn was also attracted by feelings of kinship with a fellow *littérateur* blinded by smallpox

[34] Ḥusayn, *Tajdīd dhikrā*, 9-10.

from a young age and who did not shy away from critiquing religious authority. For these reasons, Ḥusayn could no longer deny his curiosity about "this, the man I had despised and avoided."

Al-Rusafi and the Emotional Power of Poetry

Maʿrūf al-Ruṣāfī's response to Ṭaha Ḥusayn, *ʿAlā bāb sijn Abī al-ʿAlāʾ*, takes what is in some ways a fundamentally different approach to reading poetry than Ḥusayn's *Maʾa Abī al-ʿAlāʾ*. Whereas the latter work rests on the assumption of poetry as reflective of the time and place of its production, al-Ruṣāfī's essay assumes that poetry is a medium to *change* the time and place of its production. Unlike Ḥusayn, al-Ruṣāfī does not state this view explicitly at the outset, but it can be detected throughout al-Ruṣāfī's literary criticism as well as his own verse. That it endures throughout his literary career is a testament to its deep hold on al-Ruṣāfī's attitudes toward poetry and, in turn, to its importance for understanding his opinions about al-Maʿarrī.

ʿAlā bāb is the product of the Iraqi poet's later years, a period that culminated in the mature thought of a lifetime devoted to intellectual toil, yet also the bitterness of poverty and old age. Once the spiritual protégé of the Baghdad theologian Maḥmūd Shukrī al-Ālūsī (d. 1924); and even more, a disciple of principles laid out by the Committee of Union and Progress

(CUP), al-Ruṣāfī later gave himself up to dissolute living and was at one point tried for apostasy because of his views about the Sufi doctrine of *waḥdat al-wujūd*. Celebrated for a quarter century as a "national fighter" whose poetry spoke for the Iraqi people,[35] in 1937 he was forced by destitution to give up writing verse and work odd jobs or borrow money.[36] A longtime supporter of Ottoman rule and the idea of pan-Islamism, the post-war breakup of the Ottoman Empire and ensuing struggle among local Arab politicians left al-Ruṣāfī disillusioned about the future prospects of his Iraqi homeland.[37]

During this period of disappointment and reflection, 1941 and 1942 al-Ruṣāfī found himself in the eastern Baghdad district of al-ʿAẓamiyyah at the house of Khayrī al-Hindāwī (d. 1957), a fellow poet and outspoken supporter of Ottoman rule. Al-Ruṣāfī's lack of employment (*al-baṭālah*) left plenty of time to read and write, and it was at this time that he read Ṭaha Ḥusayn's assessment of al-Maʿarrī and responded with *ʿAlā bāb sijn Abī al-ʿAlāʾ*, published posthumously in 1947. Al-Ruṣāfī also penned a second work that opens a window on the reading practices informing his views of al-Maʿarrī's poetry and worldview: *Rasāʾil al-taʿlīqāt*

[35] Salma Khadra Jayyusi, *Trends and Movements in Modern Arabic Poetry*, vol. 1 (Leiden: Brill, 1977), 193.

[36] R. Husni, "Al-Ruṣāfī, Maʿrūf ʿAbd al-Ghanī," *Encyclopedia of Arabic Literature*, ed. Julie Scott Meisami and Paul Starkey (London and New York: Routledge, 1998), 667.

[37] Kadhim, *Anti-Colonialism*, 85.

(Commentating Letters).[38] It comprises three long essays each responding to a previous text, the first two by the Egyptian intellectual Zakī Mubārak (d. 1952) — known by the nickname *al-Dakātirah* for having earned three doctorates[39] — and the third by the Italian prince and orientalist Leone Caetoni.[40]

It is the second letter that bears most directly on the frameworks that seem to guide al-Ruṣāfī's assessment of al-Maʿarrī. Therein he answers arguments made by Zakī Mubārak in his 1931 study of medieval prose style, *Al-Nathr al-fannī fī al-qarn al-rābiʿ*.[41] This work is presented by Mubārak as a corrective to the centuries-long predominance of poetry over prose in the

[38] Maʿrūf al-Ruṣāfī, *Rasāʾil al-taʿlīqāt* (Beirut: Dār Rayḥāniyyah, 1957).

[39] For more information, see, for example: Mahmud Shihabi, *Zaki Mubarak: A Critical Study* (Jeddah: Tihama, 1981); Arthur Goldschmidt, "Zakī Mubārak," *Biographical Dictionary of Modern Egypt* (Boulder, CO and London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2000), 133; Landau, Jacob, "Zakī Mubārak on the Arabic Language," *Proceedings of the 20th Congress Européenne des Arabisants et Islamisants, Part 1*, ed. K. Dévényi (Budapest: Csoma de Kõrös, 2002), 37-41. His life and works, totaling over 40 books, are badly in need of further study, despite his having been a key figure in the early twentieth-century Egyptian literary, cultural, and political scene.

[40] For information on his life and works, see, for example: Francesco Gabrieli, "Caetani, Leone," *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*, vol. 16 (Rome:, 1973). Al-Ruṣāfī read Caetoni's work in Turkish translation, as he did other works written in European languages, which as Terri DeYoung points out about acted as an important intellectual and cultural filter for al-Ruṣāfī's reception of western thought trends. See: Terri DeYoung, "Maʿrūf al-Ruṣāfī," *Essays in Arabic Literary Biography: 1850-1950*, ed. Roger Allen (Wiesbaden: Harrasowitz-Verlag, 2010), 278.

[41] Zakī Mubārak, *Al-Nathr al-fannī fī al-qarn al-rābiʿ*, vol. 1 (Cairo: Al-Maktabah al-Tijāriyyah al-Kubrā, 1931, repr. 1934).

collective Arab imagination, as evinced for example by the volume of study accorded to poetry versus prose: فالشعر في نظر النقاد من العرب أكثر حظّاً من الفنّ وأولى بالنقد والوزن

(Poetry in the view of Arab literary critics is artistic to a greater degree [than prose] and more properly deserving of assessment and weighing).[42] He shows the continuity of this view in his own time from medieval works like *Al-ʿUmdah* of Ibn Rashīq al-Qayrawānī, then resists it by studying formal and generic features of "arts prose" (*al-nathr al-fannī*), including prose rhyme (*sajʿ*), *maqāmāt*, epistles, folktales (*qiṣaṣ*), and historical anecdotes (*akhbār*), by which he demonstrates that prose too contains a rhythmic structure (*naẓm*) similar to poetry.

In response, al-Ruṣāfī defends poetry's status with an appeal to its power to stir human emotions.[43] He first claims that Zakī Mubārak's arguments confuse two possible definitions of *naẓm*, the first referring to language generally — whether poetry or prose — and denoting the overall stylistic unity of a text,[44] while the second refers specifically to metered language

[42] Ibid., 17.

[43] Al-Ruṣāfī, *Rasāʾil*, 101. Here it is important to note that such "emotionalism" is found among other revivalist poets. See for example Roger Allen, *The Arabic Literary Heritage: The Development of its Genres and Criticism* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 106. This illustrates that the idea predated the influence of Romanticism, but also shows why later writers who encountered similar ideas in Romanticism found them meaningful.

[44] This, as al-Ruṣāfī points out, is the sense of *naẓm* fleshed out by ʿAbd al-Qāhir al-Jurjānī among others, who defines it as **تعليق الكلم بعضها ببعض** (the hanging together of words one with the other) and applies it even and especially to the Qurʾān. See: ʿAbd al-Qāhir al-Jurjānī, *Dalāʾil*

(*mawzūn*) and which denotes poetry to the exclusion of prose. Then al-Ruṣāfī explains that, given the allowance in the first definition of *naẓm* for stylistic unity in both poetry and prose, the second definition distinguishes the power of the former to convey meaning more acutely than the latter: فإنّ الشاعر يستطيع أنْ يعمد إلى حقيقة مادّية جافّة فيلبسها ثوباً قشيباً من الخيال ويظهرها للناس بصورة شعرية تتصل بالمشاعر والعواطف والقلوب (For a poet can take a dry, mundane truth and clothe it in brand new trappings from his imagination, then depict it to others in a poetic image that connects to their feelings and affections and hearts).

Al-Ruṣāfī explains that the "poetic image" (*ṣūrah shiʿriyyah*) which allows it to connect to people's hearts relies on poetic form, but also that form's capacity to convey emotion. This view — which constitutes the first major assumption brought to bear on al-Maʿarrī's verse in *ʿAlā bāb* — is one that al-Ruṣāfī first contemplated many years before he wrote *Rasāʾil al-taʿlīqāt*, and the fact that he returned to it after many decades speaks to its longevity in his poetics. He attributes it to conversations in Istanbul with reformist (*mujaddid*) thinkers, as well as a French book on psychology that claimed a poet's purpose should be to "illuminate and stir the emotions, and leave an influence on the souls of others." An admittedly crude summary of the

al-iʿjāz fī ʿilm al-maʿānī, ed. Muḥammad Raḍwān al-Dāyah and Fāyiz al-Dāyah (Damascus: Dār al-Fikr, 2007), 101-2.

movement of *l'art pour l'art* in nineteenth-century French literature, this outlook nevertheless grounded al-Ruṣāfī's conviction that the primary function of verse should be to touch people's hearts.[45]

Such a conviction manifests in the content of al-Ruṣāfī's own poetry. For example, in a praise poem called "Khawāṭir shāʿir" (Thoughts of a Poet) dedicated to Lebanese poet Amīn al-Rīḥānī, al-Ruṣāfī compares poetry as a category to the effect of wine on the senses:

وذاك لأنّ الشعر أوسع من لُغاً يكون على فعل اللسان لها قصر

وما الشعر إلا كل ما رَنحَ الفتى كما رنحتْ أعطاف شاربِها الخمر

[And this, since poetry is more than speech,

which is the deed of a tongue falling short

Poetry is but what moves the man, just as

wine moves the affections of its drinker][46]

[45] DeYoung, "Maʿrūf al-Ruṣāfī," 278. There is an argument to be made, as DeYoung does, that al-Ruṣāfī's later writings about the origin of his poetics were a reconstruction of initial encounters with the then-fashionable western notion of *l'art pour l'art*. Given that this might be the case, still the development of al-Ruṣāfī's poetic output does speak to the core importance of language's emotional power.

[46] Maʿrūf al-Ruṣāfī, *Dīwān al-Ruṣāfī*, ed. Muṣṭafā al-Saqā (Cairo: Dār al-Fikr al-ʿArabī, 1953), 185.

Indeed as al-Ruṣāfī expresses in the first of these two lines, "poetry" as a concept goes beyond language, whether verse or prose, to encompass all human emotion. In another poem written early in his career, "Al-ʿĀlam shiʿr" (The World is Poetry) al-Ruṣāfī goes even further:

وما المرء إلا بيت شعر عروضه مصائب لكن ضربه حُفرةُ القبر

[Man is a line of poetry: the meter, vicissitudes;

and the final foot, the hollow of the grave][47]

While less a boastful claim about the nature of verse and more a metaphor for life's hardships, this line does depict al-Ruṣāfī's view that poetry encapsulates in miniature the entire human condition. It touches the full range of human emotion, which ultimately is nothing other than verse itself.

Yet although such a conviction was inspired by a French intellectual movement — *l'art pour l'art* — that envisioned poetry as largely detached from political life, it took shape in al-Ruṣāfī's poetry with the explicit goal of social reform, to "reorder society's priorities" as DeYoung puts it. This goal, which is the second major assumption that al-Ruṣāfī brings to bear on al-Maʿarrī, can be seen in al-Ruṣāfī's early poetic output but especially in the verse composed after 1910. Starting in his own lifetime and still today, al-Ruṣāfī was best known as

[47] Ibid., 6.

the voice of the Iraqi people on matters of political and social import. With poems like "Umm al-yatīm" (The Orphan's Mother), "Ilā al-ʿummāl" (To the Workers), "Waylāt al-ḥarb" (The Cries of War), and others, al-Ruṣāfī's politically and socially-relevant subject matter speaks to his vision of poetry as *littérature engagée*, using the emotional power of verse to protest war, advocate for the working class, and promote equal rights for women.[48]

Not only political and social content but also a clear, declarative style is equally important to al-Ruṣāfī's poetics of social reform. On this point, the editor of al-Ruṣāfī's 1932 *dīwān*, ʿAbd al-Qādir al-Maghribī, compares the Iraqi poet favorably to the ʿAbbāsid panegyrist al-Buḥturī, long upheld as a symbol of clarity in verse ever since medieval debates contrasting him with the conscious, even excessive use of literary devices (*badīʿ*) by Abū Tammām.[49] Indeed al-Ruṣāfī's reputation as a poet who spoke for the Iraqi people rested in large part on the accessibility of his verse. This might be one reason for the disagreement expressed by Muḥammad ʿAlī al-Zarqā, the editor of al-Ruṣāfī's *ʿAlā bāb sijni Abī al-ʿAlāʾ* and a leading socialist intellectual in his own right, with al-Ruṣāfī's claim that al-Maʿarrī wrote for an elite audience. Al-Ruṣafī himself was the quintessential poet *engagé* of his generation and, according to al-

[48] For more on this point, see, for example: Sasson Somekh, "The Neo-Classical Arabic Poets", *The Cambridge History of Arabic Literature: Modern Arabic Literature*, ed. M.M. Badawi (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 59-60.

[49] Al-Ruṣāfī, *Dīwān*, ٤.

Zarqā, would therefore not countenance a view of poetry that was not written for "the people" (*al-shaʿb*).[50] As we will see, al-Zarqā's objection echoes al-Ruṣāfī's own claim that al-Maʿarrī must have had another motive for his difficult poetics other than merely passing the time or punishing himself.

Poetry as a vehicle for social reform — with its capacity to stir human emotion and, ideally, a clear and accessible style — constitutes the major assumption brought to bear on al-Maʿarrī's poetry in *ʿAlā bāb sijn Abī al-ʿAlāʾ*. This is noteworthy in al-Ruṣāfī's case. Like Ḥusayn, the Iraqi poet wrote analytical works that interrogate pre-modern Arab-Islamic narratives. The best example is his revisionist biography of the prophet Muḥammad, *Kitāb al-shakhṣiyyah al-muḥammadiyyah aw ḥall al-lughz al-muqaddas* (The Figure of Muḥammad, or Solving the Sacred Mystery), which calls into question the historical accuracy of anecdotes about the Prophet's life.[51]

Al-Ruṣāfī could have taken a similarly skeptical approach to al-Maʿarrī's life and works. The fact that he chose instead to defend the poet's legacy, by focusing on the real effects of poetry on its hearer, underscores the importance of al-Ruṣāfī's role as a *practitioner*, not just a

[50] Al-Ruṣāfī, *ʿAlā bāb*, 12-14.

[51] Maʿrūf al-Ruṣāfī, *Kitāb al-shakhṣiyyah al-muḥammadiyyah aw ḥall al-lughz al-muqaddas* (Köln: Manshūrāt al-Jamal, 2002). See also: Abdou Filali-Ansary, "Imposture and Rebellion: Consideration of the Personality of the Prophet Muhammad by Ma`ruf al-Rusafi," *Diogenes* 226, no. 57 (2010), 62-74.

critic, of poetry to his reading practices. On the other hand, and despite this difference, al-Ruṣāfī and Ḥusayn do share a concern for the link between poetry and society, whether Ḥusayn's insight that poetry reflects its time and place or al-Ruṣāfī's vision of poetry as a medium of social change.

Reading al-Maʿarrī: Worldview, Authorship, Style

The Origins of Doubt

The reading practices outlined above shed light on Ḥusayn's and al-Ruṣāfī's debate over the link between al-Maʿarrī's difficult poetic style and his overall worldview. While neither author proceeds linearly, fleshing out their views of al-Maʿarrī's worldview before showing how it informs his poetics, the remaining pages do take this structure for the sake of both analysis and clarity. First I examine where each modern author locates the origins of al-Maʿarrī's doubt (*shakk*) and pessimism (*tashāʾum*). Their respective answers to this question lead to assumptions about al-Maʿarrī's authorship — above all, his reasons for writing poetry in the first place — as a function of the Syrian poet's doubt and pessimism. This is the focus of the second section. Finally, in the third section I explore how assumptions about al-Maʿarrī's authorship lead Ḥusayn and al-Ruṣāfī to conclusions about the Syrian poet's writing style and how it should be understood by readers.

In order to understand al-Maʿarrī's difficult poetics as a function of his authorship, both Ḥusayn and al-Ruṣāfī first seek the origins of al-Maʿarrī's doubtful stance vis-à-vis human life and society. Indeed it is not the fact of al-Maʿarrī's skepticism that Ḥusayn and al-Ruṣāfī are debating, but rather the source of that skepticism and how knowing it sheds light on al-Maʿarrī's poetry. Ḥusayn especially portrays al-Maʿarrī throughout *Maʿa Abī al-ʿAlāʾ* as a fragile man in need of special care. He states: ما رأيك في أنّي أحب أبا العلاء وأريد أنْ أسير معه في هذا الحديث سيرة الصديق الوفي الأمين فلا أسوؤه في نفسه ولا في رأيه (Bear in mind that I hold al-Maʿarrī dear, and that in saying what I say about him, I walk with him like an honest and loyal friend, scorning neither his person nor his opinions).[52] Ḥusayn wanted to state his sympathies explicitly because, he explains, no one was harder on al-Maʿarrī than al-Maʿarrī himself, a fact that sets the Syrian poet apart from his medieval contemporaries.

For Ḥusayn, this self-punishment began early in al-Maʿarrī's life, due above all to the blindness that medieval chroniclers record as occurring at age four, the result of a struggle with small pox (*al-judarī*). Such a debilitating handicap led to painful experiences that taught al-Maʿarrī not to trust other people's motives. "There is no doubt that from the very beginning of this ordeal [*miḥnah*] imposed on him by nature," explains Ḥusayn, "al-Maʿarrī felt a great

[52] Ibid., 23.

distance between himself and his peers [*atrābihi*]."[53] This was exacerbated by the poet's experiences at Baghdad, where as Ḥusayn points out, some purportedly called him names like *iṣṭīl*, a slur for a blind person that denotes a confidence artist who fakes the handicap to swindle others.[54]

However, in considering the possibility that it was ill treatment at Baghdad — rather than the blindness itself — that constitutes the source of al-Maʿarrī's doubtful worldview, Ḥusayn weighs that possibility against the positive portrayal of Baghdad and its people in a letter addressed by al-Maʿarrī to his hometown of Maʿarrat al-Nuʿmān and which was supposedly sent to them in advance of his return:

والله يجعلهم أحلاسَ الأوطان لا أحلاس الخيل والركاب، ويسبغ عليهم

النعمة سبوغ القمراء الطلقة على الظبي الغرير ويحسن جزاءَ البغداديين، فلقد

[53] Ibid., 56.

[54] For the definition of *iṣṭīl* as a swindler pretending to have lost his sight, see: Abū ʿUthmān ʿAmr ibn Baḥr al-Jāḥiẓ, *Kitāb al-bukhalāʾ*, ed. Muḥammad Ṭāhir al-Ḥājirī (Cairo: Dār al-Kātib al-Miṣrī, 1948), 45.

صفوني بما لا أستحقه، وشهدوا لي بالفضيلة على غير علم، وعرضوا عليَّ أموالهم

عرض الجد، فصادفوني غير جذل بالصنيعات.[55]

> [God grant that you [they] may be able to abide in your [their] homes and not have to be always on your [their] horses and stirrups; and God shed upon you [them] his favor as the full moonlight is shed upon the hare-brained gazelle. And may he give good recompense to the people of Baghdad, for they praised me more than I deserved, and testified to my merits before they knew them, and quite seriously offered me their goods.][56]

For Ḥusayn, these words carry enough weight to mitigate against the claim that al-Maʿarrī's trials in Baghdad are the starting point for his pessimistic outlook; that Ḥusayn reproduces the entire letter, which runs two edited pages, speaks to this fact. He therefore surmises that it was blindness that first set off al-Maʿarrī's doubtful stance toward the world, with any maltreatment at Baghdad being a secondary exacerbation. As Ḥusayn explains it, the "sudden

[55] Ḥusayn, *Maʿa Abī al-ʿAlāʾ*, 86. See also: David Margoliouth, *The Letters of Abu ʾl-ʿAlāʾ* (Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press, 1898), 35 (in the Arabic section).

[56] This is Margoliouth's translation, with my insertions to show how the passage can be read as referring to the people of Baghdad rather than of Maʿarrat al-Nuʿmān. See: Margoliouth, *Letters*, 44.

trial" (*al-āfah al-ṭāriʾah*) of al-Maʿarrī's handicap coincided with his already "standoffish bent" (*al-gharīzaḥ al-waḥshiyyah*, lit. "savage disposition"), meaning al-Maʿarrī's natural inclination away from human society, leading to a "philosophical prison" (*sijn falsafī*) imposed by al-Maʿarrī on himself. That prison is encapsulated by al-Maʿarrī's allegedly self-appointed status as "the twofold captive" (*rahīn al-maḥbasayn*), referring to his voluntary seclusion at home and involuntary entrapment in a sickly body.[57]

This explanation is consonant with Ḥusayn's general view of poetry as revealing the broader circumstances of its production. Although the attention to al-Maʿarrī's inner state differs from the "deterministic" focus in works like *Fī al-shiʿr al-jāhilī* on broader sociopolitical forces, it shares the same concern for extra-literary criteria and their influence on the text. And yet this aspect of Ḥusayn's reading practices does not by itself account for the fact that Ḥusayn found al-Maʿarrī's blindness more compelling than a poor reception at Baghdad, at least on the point about trying to locate the source of al-Maʿarrī's pessimism, on which point both al-Ruṣāfī and Ḥusayn look to the Syrian poet's life for insight. In my view, Ḥusayn also draws on his own experiences with blindness to understand al-Maʿarrī's writings. This reflects a predilection throughout *Maʿa Abī al-ʿAlāʾ* for subjective engagement with al-Maʿarrī which, as I argued in the first section, is a natural outgrowth of the Egyptian critic's tendency to read

[57] Ḥusayn, *Maʿa Abī al-ʿAlāʾ*, 59-65.

poetry as a window on its time and place, even though the rhetorical positioning differs markedly from the critical distance assumed in *Tajdīd dhikrā Abī al-ʿAlāʾ*.

Furthermore, blindness especially plays a key role in Ḥusayn's own self-fashioning, and therefore its influence on his personal approach to al-Maʿarrī is unsurprising.[58] At one point in the first part of Ḥusayn's autobiographical work *Al-Ayyām*, the narrator makes a direct reference to al-Maʿarrī when describing Ḥusayn's own embarrassment after spilling food on himself at the dinner table, since he could not see where to put his hands. "Al-Maʿarrī would hide himself [*yatasattar*] when eating, even from his servant," says Ḥusayn, drawing a parallel between his own life and the poet's.[59] He then recounts an anecdote in which al-Maʿarrī, having heard his students talk about how delicious Aleppo's melons were, sends his servant to buy some. But the servant does not put them in their normal spot, thus compelling al-Maʿarrī to either feel around for them on his own or ask where they are. Since he is reluctant to do either for fear of looking vulnerable, the melons spoil without al-Maʿarrī ever having tasted them. "Our friend understood these episodes [*al-aṭwār*] from al-Maʿarrī's life," concludes the narrator of *Al-Ayyām*, "because he saw himself in them."

[58] Fedwa Malti-Douglas has examined at length the central role played by this handicap in Ḥusayn's self-conception. See: Fedwa Malti-Douglas, *Blindness and Autobiography: Al-Ayyam of Taha Husayn* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988).

[59] Ṭaha Ḥusayn, *Al-Ayyām fī mujallad wāḥid* (Cairo: Markaz al-Ahrām, 1992), 27.

In *Maʿa Abī al-ʿAlāʾ fī sijnih*, the most engaging moment of Ḥusayn's personal reflection on al-Maʿarrī takes the form of an imagined conversation between al-Maʿarrī and Ḥusayn as the latter walks along the beach in Naples, enjoying the natural beauty with his wife and two sons despite being physically unable to see his surroundings:

وكنت أحدث أبا العلاء بأنّ تشاؤمه لا مصدر له في حقيقة الأمر إلّا العجز عن ذوق الحياة، والقصور عن الشعور بما يمكن أنْ يكون فيها من جمال وبهجة، ومن نعيم ولذة. وكان أبو العلاء يقول لي: فإنّك ترضى عما لا تعرف، وتعجب بما لا ترى. وكنت أقول له: إنْ لم أعرف كل شيء فقد عرفت بعض الأشياء، وإنْ لم أرَ الطبيعة فقد أحسستها.[60]

[I told al-Maʿarrī that in fact his pessimism afforded nothing but a failure to enjoy life, an inability to feel whatever beauty and joy, comfort and pleasure it might hold. Al-Maʿarrī responded, "So you're happy with what you can't know, and pleased by what you can't see?" I said, "Maybe I don't know everything, but I do know some things. And maybe I can't see nature, but I can feel it."]

[60] Ibid., 13.

Here we can see the unmistakable role of imagination as a part of, rather than in contrast to, Ḥusayn's overall approach of *taʾrīkh adabī*. By relying on his own life experience with blindness, as is my argument, Ḥusayn extends his overall concern for extra-literary criteria to the poet's inner state as well as the personal interactions and broader sociopolitical trends that inform it. This helps account for the fact that Ḥusayn found blindness a more convincing origin of doubt than mistreatment at Baghdad.

Like Ḥusayn, al-Ruṣāfī also looks to al-Maʿarrī's life circumstances to understand why he adopted a cynical view of the world. Yet for him the argument that Maʿarrī's pessimism started with being blinded by small pox as a child implies an irrational basis for the poet's overall disposition. "In fact," writes the Iraqi poet, "pessimism is defined as having doubts unsupported by reason or experience."[61] In al-Ruṣāfī's conception, al-Maʿarrī was not the kind of person to let his feelings run away with him, "but rather his rational mind ruled him [*yaḥkum*] unfettered by emotion."[62] He would not have reacting unthinkingly to the circumstances of his life, even such a personal tragedy as blindness. Al-Ruṣāfī therefore prefers the term "anger" (*sukhṭ*) to describe al-Maʿarrī's skeptical attitude toward life, religion, and

[61] Ibid., 51.

[62] Ibid., 52.

other people, since, al-Ruṣāfī explains, the word *sukhṭ* allows for a connection, not a rupture, between al-Maʿarrī's thinking and his lived experience.

Al-Ruṣāfī bases this argument on lines of poetry from *Luzūm mā lā yalzam* in which al-Maʿarrī rejects unthinking belief in favor of disinterested reflection. The Iraqi poet cites the following as a representative example of many such statements:

كَذَبَ الظَنُّ لاَ إمَامَ سِوَى العقـ ـلِ مُشِيراً فِي صُبْحِهِ والمِسَاءِ

[Intuition lies; there is but one guide, reason,

pointing the way both day and night] [63]

It is disingenuous, argues al-Ruṣāfī, for Ḥusayn to ignore these sentiments when imputing to al-Maʿarrī an unthinking distrust of humankind. The fact that al-Maʿarrī so forcefully professes reason throughout *Luzūm mā lā yalzam* mitigates against the image of al-Maʿarrī as an emotionally reactive or passive recipient of his own life circumstances, or of his verse as a passive mirror reflecting those circumstances.

Al-Ruṣāfī further advances this view by confronting Ḥusayn's assumption that al-Maʿarrī took his handicap to be a categorical negative, an assumption that is complicated by several instances where al-Maʿarrī vaunts his blindness as a virtue rather than a source of

[63] Ḥusayn, *Maʿa Abī al-ʿAlāʾ*, 52.

grief. For example, in *Risālat al-ghufrān*, al-Maʿarrī imagines a meeting with the blind medieval poet Bashshār ibn Burd, whose sight has been restored as a form of punishment since it lets him see the horrors of hell.[64] Elsewhere, and in a more tongue-in-cheek vein, al-Maʿarri's older contemporary al-Thaʿālibī (d. 1038) preserves the following quip attributed to the Syrian poet:

أنا أحمد الله على العمى كما يحمده غيري على البصر، فقد صنع لي وأحسن بي إذ كفاني رؤية الثقلاء البغضاء[65] (I praise God for my blindness just like others praise Him for their sight. It was a favor and a mercy to me, for I'd enough of seeing dim-witted, loathsome people). For al-Ruṣāfī, statements like these chip away at the argument that al-Maʿarrī thought of his blindness as devoid of any positive benefit, thereby suggesting that the poet had thought long and hard about the significance of his handicap rather than merely reacting to it.

Instead of the poet's loss of sight, al-Ruṣāfī posits that it was al-Maʿarrī's trip to Baghdad that soured his view of humanity. He challenges Ḥusayn, for example, over the significance of al-Maʿarrī's letter to the people of Maʿarrat al-Nuʿmān.[66] Although in that letter

[64] Abuʾl-ʿAlāʾ al-Maʿarrī, *Risālat al-ghufrān*, 9th repr., ed. ʿAʾishah ʿAbd al-Raḥmān "Bint al-Shāṭiʾ" (Cairo: Dār al-Maʿārif, 1977), 310.

[65] Abū Manṣūr al-Thaʿālibī, *Tatimmat yatīmat al-dahr fī maḥāsin ahl al-ʿaṣr*, vol. 5, ed. Mufīd Muḥammad Qumayḥah (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyyah, 1983) 16.

[66] Al-Ruṣāfī, *ʿAlā bāb*, 71-9.

al-Maʿarrī seems to express nostalgia for Baghdad and grief at having to leave, al-Ruṣāfī attributes these statements to *politesse* both for the people of Iraq and to his own scribe, since he would have written the letter via dictation. For al-Ruṣāfī, it is difficult to square the positive tone of the letter with al-Maʿarrī's adverse portrayal in *Luzūm mā lā yalzam* of Baghdad and its people.

In support of this point, al-Ruṣāfī interprets the following couplet as an expression of bitterness, although from a different angle it appears to convey the opposite:

يا لهف نفسي عَلَى أَنِّي رَجَعْتُ إلى هذي البِلَادِ وَلَمْ أَهْلُكْ بِبَغْدادا

إذا رَأَيْتُ أُمُوراً لَا تُوافِقُني قُلْتُ الإيابُ إلى الأوْطَانِ أَدَّى ذا

[What a pity that I [lived to] return to these lands

instead of perishing in Baghdad!

If life's events turn out disagreeably, I will say,

'Returning to the homeland made it so'][67]

One can easily understand these lines to mean that al-Maʿarrī longed for Baghdad, but al-Ruṣāfī sees in them evidence that even his return home gets spoiled by the memory of ill treatment in Iraq. In this reading, al-Maʿarrī's mistreatment by the intellectual elites of

[67] Al-Ruṣāfī, *ʿAlā bāb*, 71.

Baghdad represents conscious sabotage on their part, hence his pronounced disappointment since he was able to detect that sabotage through critical reflection.

Although such examples do privilege a single event in al-Maʿarrī's, through them al-Ruṣāfī tries to promote above all the notion that it was not any one hardship that led to al-Maʿarrī's skeptical worldview. Rather it was a lifetime of such trials that, when weighed in the balance of reasoned consideration, led al-Maʿarrī to a doubtful view of humankind and, therefore, to withdraw from their company. Of note in this conclusion is al-Ruṣāfī's emphasis on the Syrian poet's cognitive agency. He was not, according to the Iraqi poet, a passive victim of circumstance, but rather an active agent who consciously chose his life's course through reason.

In my assessment, this view can be explained — at least in part — by al-Ruṣāfī's insistence that poetry in general be what Sartre described as *littérature engagée*, namely an expression of culture that is at the same time deeply and immediately connected to contemporary political and social matters. For al-Ruṣāfī, this requires that those who write do so from an active, rather than passive, engagement with extra-literary circumstances, hence al-Ruṣāfī's emphasis on al-Maʿarrī's ability to choose his reaction to personal tragedy. This helps shed light on the fact that al-Ruṣāfī did not find it convincing that blindness alone was enough to make al-Maʿarrī a sad and suspicious person, since this ignores both the Syrian

poet's reverence for reason and his individual agency. As we will see in following sections, the emphasis on poetry as a tool for social engagement is a key factor in how al-Ruṣāfī conceives of al-Maʿarrī's authorship and, by extension, why he chose the particular style that he did.

In addition, there is another element of al-Ruṣāfī's thinking that may affect where he locates the origin of al-Maʿarrī's doubtful worldview: a desire for intellectual consistency. As noted, al-Ruṣāfī could not reconcile positive statements about Baghdad in the letter to Maʿarrat al-Nuʿmān with the more negative statements in *Luzūm mā lā yalzam*. He therefore he gives weight to the latter over the former, presumably rejecting the possibility of ambivalent, conflicted feelings on al-Maʿarrī's part. Such a desire for consistency by al-Ruṣāfī reflects a trend in his overall career. As a public intellectual, he was dissatisfied by what he perceived as widespread hypocrisy holding back social reform in the Middle East. He famously supported the 1916 Arab Revolt against Ottoman rule, only to later turn his back on the movement out of disgust for the corruption of its leadership.[68] He bemoaned the "hollow freedom" in Iraqi society under the mandate regime, as well as the unequal treatment of men and women by Muslim clerics purported to be "people of knowledge" (*ʿulamāʾ*).[69]

[68] Kadhim, *Anti-Colonialism*, 95.

[69] Orit Bashkin, "Representations of Women in the Writings of the Intelligentsia in Hashemite Iraq, 1921-1958," *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies* 4, no. 1 (Winter 2008), 57.

Al-Rusāfī's general distaste for intellectual and moral inconsistency extends to Ṭaha Ḥusayn himself. In debating al-Maʿarrī's worldview, at one point al-Rusāfī criticizes Ḥusayn for harboring disjointed opinions about the Syrian poet. "Sometimes he veers to the right," protests al-Rusāfī, "other times to the left." Coupled with his concern for poetry as a form of social engagement, consistency as a desirable intellectual value leads al-Rusāfī to certain conclusions about al-Maʿarrī's authorship that differ in large degree from Ḥusayn's.

Authorship and the Will to Write

As we might expect, where Ḥusayn and al-Rusāfī locate the source of al-Maʿarrī's skeptical outlook on life affects how they each conceive of the Syrian poet's authorship, most especially the reasons that al-Maʿarrī decided to write. For Ḥusayn, personal tragedy showed al-Maʿarrī how little control he had over his life's circumstances, which created in him a thoroughgoing desire to exert control where he could: knowledge of the truth and its expression in poetry. It was such a will to control that compelled him to write, even despite his wishes to the contrary. Al-Maʿarrī's reluctance to be an author is, for Ḥusayn, made clear by the following three lines of a *luzūmiyyah*:

خُذي رَأيي وَحَسْبُكِ ذاكَ مِنّي عَلَى مَا فِيَّ مِنْ عوجٍ وأَمْتِ

وَمَاذا يَبْتَغى الجُلساءُ عِنْدي أَرَادوُا مَنْطِقي وَأَرَدْتُ صَمْتي

وَيوُجَدُ بَيْنَنَا أمَدٌ قَصيٌّ فأَمّوا سَمْتهمُ وَأَمْتُ سَمْتي

[Take my view; ‘tis enough for you to tell

what crookedness and contortion is in me

And what my interlocutors demanded;

they wanted me to speak, and I, to be silent

Between them and me is an utmost limit;

for they repaired to their side, and I to mine][70]

By this, Ḥusayn says, al-Maʿarrī means not only his philosophical outlook (*al-raʾy al-falsafī*) but indeed his “entire identity” (*shakhṣiyyatahu al-kāmilah*).[71] With a reference in the first line to physical disability — both “crookedness” (*ʿiwaj*) and “contortion” (*amt*) describe the condition of a human back bent over by old age — al-Maʿarrī speaks of his perceived inability to convey his thoughts or emotions. Language always falls short, a daunting prospect that, for Ḥusayn, pervades not only the poet’s creative output but indeed his entire person.[72]

[70] Ḥusayn, *Maʿa Abī al-ʿAlāʾ*, 136.

[71] Ibid., 137.

[72] The inability to speak, often with autobiographical undertones, is a common trope throughout al-Maʿarrī’s writings. In his *Risālat al-ṣāhil wa-al-shāḥij*, for example, the main

However, al-Maʿarrī's fear of falling short in language was overcome by his need to discover, and then speak, the truth. For Ḥusayn, this is the Syrian poet's defining characteristic. Throughout his writings on al-Maʿarrī, not just *Maʿa Abī al-ʿAlāʾ fī sijnih*, Ḥusayn uses the term *falsafah* ("philosophy") to describe al-Maʿarrī's overall worldview and which for Ḥusayn is expressed so clearly in the poetry of *Luzūm mā lā yalzam*. In *Tajdīd dhikrā Abī al-ʿAlāʾ*, Ḥusayn devotes the fifth and longest section to "Falsafat Abī al-ʿAlāʾ" (Al-Maʿarrī's Philosophy), collating by topic the views expressed in *Luzūm mā lā yalzam* on God, angels and *jinn*, resurrection, marriage, ethics, politics, mathematics, and many other subjects.[73] In a special issue of the Egyptian literary periodical *al-Hilāl* commemorating al-Maʿarrī, Ḥusayn

---

character is a blind mule chained to a waterwheel who enlists the help of other animals in delivering a message to then-governor of Aleppo, ʿAzīz al-Dawlah.

[73] In this way, it resembles a comparable effort by Reynold Nicholson, Ḥusayn's contemporary and whose 1921 monography *Studies in Islamic Poetry* includes a statement taking Ḥusayn to task for his use of the word "philosophy" to describe al-Maʿarrī's opinions. See: Reynold Alleyne Nicholson, *Studies in Islamic Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1921), 51; Ṭaha Ḥusayn, "Al-Maʿarrī: A-shāʿir am faylasūf?" in *Al-Hilāl* 8, no. 46 (June 1938), 848. Others then and since have questioned the use of the moniker "philosopher" in reference to the Syrian poet. David Margoliouth wrote as early as 1898 that al-Maʿarrī could not appreciate his own philosophical musings or carry them to their logical conclusions. See: David Margoliouth, *The Letters of Abuʾl-ʿAlā of Maʿarrat al-Nuʿmān* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1898), xxxviii. More recently, and in a more generous spirit, Gregor Schoeler and Geert Jan van Gelder remark that, "Although he has been called 'the poet among philosophers and the philosopher among poets,' it does not do him justice to consider him a philosopher." See: Gregor Schoeler and Geert Jan van Gelder, *The Epistle of Forgiveness, Volume 1: A Vision of Heaven and Hell* (New York: New York University Press, 2013), xix.

clarifies that a philosopher is someone who seeks the truth wherever it is to be found[74] — not necessarily someone with a coherent and self-enclosed philosophical "system" — as well as one who applies his knowledge in real life.[75]

In *Maʿa Abī al-ʿAlāʾ*, Ḥusayn elaborates the search for truth as the primary condition of authorship, not only for al-Maʿarrī but indeed for Ḥusayn himself. "Reason is never at rest," writes Ḥusayn, extrapolating from al-Maʿarrī's life to the human condition generally. "It is agitated, knowing no contentment; defiant, knowing no suppression."[76] Here as before, there is a role played by the autobiographical stance that grows organically from Ḥusayn's historicist conception of literature. As part of his explanation for writing the book, Ḥusayn cites this burden as the goad that spurs him to, at times, paint the poet in an unfavorable light. He states: وأنا أعرف أنّ العلم يكلف أصحابه أهوالا ثقالا، ويحملهم من بعض الأمر على ما لا يحبون أنْ يُحْمَلوا عليه، فيضطرهم أحيانا إلى هتك الأستار وفضح الأسرار (I am aware that knowledge imposes heavy loads on those possessed of it, and at times it leads them to places

[74] Ḥusayn, "A-shāʿir am faylasūf?" 849.

[75] Ḥusayn, *Tajdīd*, 233.

[76] Ḥusayn, *Maʿa Abiʾl-ʿAlāʾ*, 54.

where they would rather not go, compelling them to throw back the curtains and expose hidden things).[77]

Al-Maʿarrī's begrudging need to express "philosophical" truths also compelled him to control language by resisting prevailing forms of literature, especially the prestigious *qaṣīdah*. In this vein, Ḥusayn begins *Maʿa Abī al-ʿAlāʾ* by reproducing part of the introduction to Paul Valéry's 1936 essay *Degas danse dessin*.[78] In part, the explicit comparison between al-Maʿarrī and nineteenth-century French painter Edgar Degas adds to Ḥusayn's depiction of al-Maʿarrī as a misanthrope whose art was an expression of his overall withdrawal from society.[79] But Ḥusayn is also making a connection between al-Maʿarrī's innovations in Arabic poetry and Degas's forays into what would later be known as Impressionism. Trained in the style of the Dutch masters, Degas began experimenting with bright colors and bold brushstrokes to give the impression of movement, hence the name of the new style of painting. Impressionism eventually became typified by techniques like Degas's, even though he himself rejected this label in preference of the term "realism."[80] His shift in palette, style, and technique reflects

[77] Ḥusayn, *Maʿa Abiʾl-ʿAlāʾ*, 23.

[78] Paul Valéry, *Degas danse dessin* (Paris: Ambroise Vollard, 1936).

[79] For a discussion of Degas's misanthropy and views on the public life of artists, see: Alfred Werner, *Degas Pastels* (New York: Watson-Guptill, 1969), 11. See also: Carol Armstrong, *Odd Man Out: Readings of the Work and Reputation of Edgar Degas* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1991).

[80] Robert Gordon and Andrew Forge, *Degas* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1988), 31.

reverence for the old masters but dissatisfaction with their techniques to adequately capture contemporary life as opposed to historical subject matter.

It is a similar dissatisfaction with existing trends that Ḥusayn identifies as the source of al-Maʿarrī's poetic innovation. Ḥusayn uses the phrase ارتياب الرجل بأحكام الناس في أمور الفنّ (misgivings about peoples' artistic judgments)[81] to liken al-Maʿarrī's formal reinvention of the Arabic *qaṣīdah* to Degas's repurposing the techniques of the Dutch masters. But whereas Degas took great pride in the meticulous labor required to paint, Ḥusayn claims that it was the luxury of free time that shaped al-Maʿarrī's innovations in verse: اللزوميات ليست نتيجة العمل وإنما هي نتيجة الفراغ، وليست نتيجة الجد والكد وإنما هي نتيجة العبث واللعب (The *Luzūmiyyāt* are not the result of labor, but of leisure; not of gravity and effort, but diversion and play).[82] In other words, al-Maʿarrī's self-imposed seclusion at home meant long hours to himself, and therefore poetry became a way to creatively occupy his active mind. Ultimately, argues Ḥusayn, such productive use of leisure time derives from the Syrian poet's refusal to be held back by physical disability and emotional loss.

[81] Ḥusayn, *Maʿa Abiʾl-ʿAlāʾ*, 11.

[82] Ibid., 101.

Al-Ruṣāfī's response to these claims manifests the extent to which his view of poetry as a vehicle of social change, and of the poet as an active agent of such change, affect his opinions of al-Maʿarrī. To the Iraqi poet, the idea that poetry's *raison d'être* starts and stops with a disinterested search for truth — or even more troublingly, self-entertainment — is an affront to his conception of ethical authorship. As al-Ruṣāfī explains:

فإنْ قيل ان كان أبو العلاء قد فعل كان ذلك لإظهار تفوقه على أقرانه في البيان فإنّ ذلك يدلّ على زهو وعجب منه لا مزيد عليهما، ونحن لا نعلم شيئا من ذلك في أخلاق أبي العلاء، بل كان أبعد الناس عن ذلك.[83]

> [If one says that al-Maʿarrī had done this to make a display of his superiority in eloquence to his contemporaries, it would indicate nothing more or less than vanity and conceit on his part. But I know of nothing like this in al-Maʿarrī's moral character. In fact he couldn't have been further from it.]

Here al-Ruṣāfī implicitly denies the Horatian ideal of art, *aut prodesse volunt aut delectare poetae* (poets should both instruct and delight).[84] Al-Ruṣāfī assumes that intellectual pleasure, and the

[83] Al-Ruṣāfī, *ʿAlāʾ bāb*, 39.

[84] H. Rushton Fairclough, ed. and trans., *Horace: Satires, Epistles, and Ars Poetica* (London: William Heinemann, Ltd.; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1942), 478.

accompanying risk of being tendentious, is subordinate to moral instruction and social change, the highest function of poetic language. An ethical authorship, in the Iraqi poet's view, rejects disingenuous play or deceit for its own sake.

For this reason, al-Ruṣāfī denies that *Luzūm mā lā yalzam* was the product of leisure rather than work (he ignores Ḥusayn's argument that al-Maʿarrī was compelled to write by his desire to know the truth, perhaps out of agreement with it). He takes issue with Ḥusayn's argument, for example, that because al-Maʿarrī relied on others to read and dictate due to his blindness, it afforded more free time than if he had worked through such books himself.[85] To al-Ruṣāfī, this claim assumes that al-Maʿarrī was unable or unwilling to draw on his own mental reservoir for knowledge of Arabic. The Iraqi poet rejects this assumption. "Everything al-Maʿarrī said or dictated," he writes, "whether prose or poetry, came solely from his memory."[86] For him, al-Maʿarrī's entire surviving corpus points to the poet's prodigious mental retention, a fact bolstered by the traditional view that blind people are known for such an ability.[87]

---

[85] Ḥusayn, *Maʿa Abiʾl-ʿAlāʾ*, 101.

[86] Al-Ruṣāfī, *ʿAlā bāb*, 38.

[87] For medieval sources on blindness and the blind, including the association between blindness and prodigious memory, see, for example: Ibn Qutaybah, *Al-Maʿārif* , ed. Tharwat ʿUkāshah (Cairo: Dār al-Maʿārif, 1965), 587-9; and Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn al-Ṣafadī, *Nakt al-himyān fī nukat al-ʿumyān*, ed. Aḥmad Zakī Bey (Cairo: Al-Maṭbaʿah al-Jamāliyyah, 1911), 66-70. For a modern academic treatment, see: Fedwa Malti-Douglas, "Mentalités and Marginality: Blindness and Mamlûk

Therefore al-Ruṣāfī concludes that it was for another, higher purpose that al-Maʿarrī chose to write in such a difficult style: قلت إنه لم يفعل ذلك تكبّرا على أقرانه بل تهكّما بهم وبما يدعون من شرف وفضل في البيان (I said previously that al-Maʿarrī did not write this way out of a sense of superiority over his contemporaries, but rather to mock them and their claims to talent and skill in eloquence).[88] But this mockery (*tahakkum*) is not an end in itself. Instead, al-Ruṣāfī claims that it was a tool for al-Maʿarrī to trouble the intellectual waters, to awaken his contemporaries to their own self-satisfaction with linguistic accomplishment at the expense of moral development. In a vivid rhetorical move, al-Ruṣāfī puts this argument in the mouth of al-Maʿarrī himself. "I see nothing of value in your great eloquence," al-Ruṣāfī imagines the Syrian poet saying, "if it is not connected to pure souls [*nufūs zakiyyah*] and wholesome, unsullied hearts [*qulūb ṭāhirah naqiyyah*]."[89]

Al-Ruṣāfī does not unpack this statement in *ʿAlā bāb*, but in my view, its probable meaning becomes clear in the context of al-Ruṣāfī's overall conception of poetry. The "pure souls" and "unsullied hearts" are the hoped-for result of poetry's capacity to stir human

Civilization," *The Islamic World from Classical to Modern Times: Essays in Honor of Bernard Lewis*, ed. C.E. Bosworth et al. (Princeton: Darwin Press, 1989), 229-30.

[88] Al-Ruṣāfī, *ʿAlā bāb*, 39.

[89] Ibid., 44.

emotion, which in turn leads to individual desire for social reform. Indeed for al-Ruṣāfī, poetry itself *is* that stirring of emotion, beyond language's ability to convey thoughts or feelings. Of course al-Ruṣāfī's own practice of poetry as a medium of social engagement would call for clear, accessible language, which seems at odds with the idea that al-Maʿarrī's opaque style could inspire reader emotion. But here too al-Ruṣāfī finds a connection. By emphasizing the struggle through the thicket of al-Maʿarrī's difficult poetics and, by extension, the humility engendered therefrom, he underscores the continued process of soul-searching that constitutes any lasting betterment of society. In so doing, he again tries to show that al-Maʿarrī was a rational actor who did not merely react to his life circumstances but who consciously responded to them.

From Worldview to Style

Both Ḥusayn and al-Ruṣāfī discuss in concrete terms the ramifications of al-Maʿarrī's doubt and authorship on his poetics. As noted, Ḥusayn sees the stylistic difficulty of al-Maʿarrī's writings — the degree of which is contested by al-Ruṣāfī, a point we will consider soon — as an indication of the Syrian poet's desire for control and knowledge of the truth. From this starting point in the poet's historical position, Ḥusayn argues that al-Maʿarrī's facility to exploit rhyme, meter, word form, and lexical meaning with apparent effortlessness

approaches a kind of genius. For Ḥusayn, it represents the Syrian poet's most important legacy as far as literary innovation is concerned.

In chapter 7, for example, Ḥusayn discusses the way in which al-Maʿarrī coaxes lexical "play" (*al-ʿabath*) out of Arabic etymology (*ishtiqāq*) through paranomasia (*jinās*). He cites the following line as an example:

نُودِيتُ أَلْوَيْتَ فانْزِلْ لا يُرادُ أَتَى سَيْري لِوَى الرمل بل للنَبْتِ إلْواءُ

[Someone called to me: "You've turned/withered [*alwayta*],

so alight where you would not."

To my journey's course came the twisting [*liwā*] sand,

nay the wilting [*ilwāʾ*] of plants][90]

Here the wordplay revolves around variations on the root ل–و–ي , which carries associations of both "twisting" — here, "turning away" in departure — as well as "withering" or "decaying." After leaving the reader in suspense in the first hemistich as to which is the intended meaning, al-Maʿarrī seems to choose the second, "withering," with the subordinate

[90] Ḥusayn, *Maʿa Abī al-ʿAlāʾ*,

conjunction *bal*.[91] This interpretation receives further support in the next line, which describes the poet's advancing age:

وَذاكَ أنّ سَوادَ الفَوْدِ غَيرُه في غرّةٍ مِنْ بياض الشَيْبِ أَضوَاءُ

[And this, since in the blackness of hair around the temples lies its opposite —

Flashes from the beauty mark of whiteness on the hoary head]

"See how he gives a clear explanation of himself," Ḥusayn says of these two lines, the overall focus of which is life's decay with the passing of time, rather than twisting or turning away. To Ḥusayn, the dense, pithy wordplay plus clever self-explanation constitute the poet's genius and his most important contribution to literary history.

At the same time, Ḥusayn considers these elements a major poetic flaw. He notes the high frequency with which they occur throughout *Luzūm mā lā yalzam*, leading to a sense of exaggeration (*mubālaghah*) and gratuitous posturing, as if the poet wanted primarily to put his own talent on display. Yet at a more fundamental level, such poetics — overwrought and torturous, in the Egyptian author's view — defy what Ḥusayn considers to be literary beauty.

[91] This rhetorical move — a literary device called *tawriyyah* and also related to the poetic riddle, *lughz* — appears frequently throughout al-Maʿarrī's writings. For more information, see, for example: Pieter Smoor, "Enigmatic Allusion and Double Meaning in Maʿarrī's Newly-Discovered 'Letter of a Horse and a Mule': Part II," *Journal of Arabic Literature* 13 (1982), 23-52; "The Weeping Wax Candle and Maʿarrī's Wisdom-tooth: Night Thoughts and Riddles from the *Gāmiʿ al-awzān*," *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 138 (1988): 283-312.

"Al-Maʿarrī," he writes, "who perfected [*aḥsana*, literally "made it pure"] the structure of the *qaṣīḍah* in his early poetry of *Saqṭ al-zand*, went on to destroy it [*afsada*, literally "corrupted it"] completely in his *Luzūmiyyāt*."[92] Of especial concern to Ḥusayn is the privileging of formal over thematic unity, compared to the balanced structure and composition of the early ʿAbbāsid-era courtly *qaṣīdah*.

By contrast, al-Maʿarrī's poems are only coherent in rhyme, meter, and general subject matter. "Although there are poems [in *Luzūm mā lā yalzam*] that achieve unity of thought and feeling, they are rare." Even when al-Maʿarrī does succeed in achieving thematic unity, Ḥusayn continues, the same subjects are repeated *ad nauseam*, especially the poet's pessimistic outlook on life and the specter of death: فكان أول ما أنتج له هذا التكرار والإعادة اللذين ينتهيان بالقارئ إلى ملل وسأم لا سبيل إلى وصفهما، ولا إلى احتمالهما إلّا أنْ يكون القارئ من الذين يتخذون البحث صناعة (The first thing effected by him was this repetition and rehashing of topics, by which the reader ends up feeling an indescribable sense of tedium and *ennui* and which is only tolerated if one is writing an academic study).[93]

[92] Ibid., 149.

[93] Ḥusayn, *Maʿa Abiʾl-ʿAlāʾ*, 132-3.

As mentioned, Ḥusayn attributes al-Maʿarrī's prosodic, etymological, and rhetorical play to a desire to exert control over language, in order to make up for a lack of such control over his tragic life circumstances. Albeit speculative, this conclusion does show the importance of Ḥusayn's overall reading practice — especially the focus of Ḥusayn's *taʾrīkh adabī* on poetry as reflecting the broader social context, including the author's identity — to his views of al-Maʿarrī. Yet the comment about how al-Maʿarrī destroyed the beauty of his earlier poetry also reveals the continued influence of Ḥusayn's Azharī background, the "old method," with its predilection for the perceived elegance and balance of earlier ʿAbbāsid poets like Abū Nuwās, Abū Tammām, and above all, al-Mutanabbī. To the Egyptian thinker, the value of al-Maʿarrī's verse is not in its aesthetic or literary beauty but rather how it reveals the poet's worldview and expresses it through innovative (if torturous) stylistics.

That the old method continued to play a role in Ḥusayn's literary and cultural writings speaks to both his impressionistic engagement with al-Maʿarrī in *Maʿa Abī al-ʿAlāʾ* and, more generally, the practical power of literary taste.[94] It also underscores the importance to

[94] The point of taste, while for many years a secondary consideration of academic literary studies, has been raised again in recent work. Rita Felski especially draws attention to the continued importance of common motives for reading — including personal taste — to academic literary studies. See, for example: Rita Felski, *Uses of Literature* (Malden, MA and Oxford: Blackwell, 2008); *The Limits of Critique* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 2015).

Ḥusayn's intellectual program of maintaining a critical spirit. Yet while a reading of works like *Fī al-shiʿr al-jāhilī* sometimes gives the impression — in my view at least — of maintaining that critical spirit primarily for its own sake, Ḥusayn's stance in *Maʿa Abī al-ʿAlāʾ* is more balanced and generous to his subject matter. He lauds just as much he lambasts. Therefore Ḥusayn's commitment to critical treatment of the Arabic literary tradition does not fall into the trap of bald disparagement but maintains sympathy with long-dead poets even as it takes them to task.

Al-Ruṣāfī does not share this view of Ḥusayn's writing. On the point of form especially, and in keeping with a concern for poetry as a medium for social good, he departs from what he sees as Ḥusayn's portrayal of al-Maʿarrī as a tortured soul trying desperately to control life where he could. Al-Ruṣāfī rejects the idea that al-Maʿarrī wrote in obscure diction and exacting literary forms because he wanted to show off his talents, on the grounds that such textual elements would not have posed a challenge to al-Maʿarrī like they did for others.[95] Moreover, and as indicated at the start of this section, al-Ruṣāfī points out that much of *Luzūm mā lā yalzam* is not as difficult as Ḥusayn and others claim.

[95] Al-Ruṣāfī, *ʿAlā bāb*, 40.

On the latter point, al-Ruṣāfī cites lines from several poems that, as he claims, would not be hard for anyone with "even with the least bit of learning in Arabic." The following are a representative example:

قَدْ تَمَادَتْ عَلَى الفَسَادِ البرايا وَاسْتَوَتْ في الضَلَالةِ الأديانُ

[All creation persists in being corrupt; all faiths are alike in being erroneous][96]

Compared to the verses reproduced by Ḥusayn, the simplicity of this statement comes across with the force of a declaration. A second line from another poem gives a similar sense:

والمرءُ يَنْكُرُ مَا لَمْ تَحْجرْ عَادَتُهُ بِمِثْلِهِ ثُمَّ يَبْغي الحُوت في الغدر

[Man rejects what was never forbidden by daily life,

then he demands fish from the river][97]

In al-Ruṣafī's estimation, the clear Arabic of these and many lines like them mitigate against the argument that *Luzūm mā lā yalzam* is categorically hard to read, an argument for which Ḥusayn is only one of many proponents.

That al-Ruṣāfī emphasizes clarity in much of al-Maʿarrī's verse resonates with the Iraqi poet's own authorial practice, particularly the focus on using accessible language as essential

[96] Ibid., 41.

[97] Ibid.

to touching human emotion. At the same time, al-Ruṣāfī recognizes the possibility that al-Maʿarrī had an elite audience in mind and that it was not for "the great mass" (*al-sawād al-aʿẓam*) that he composed *Luzūm mā lā yalzam*.[98] Al-Ruṣāfī calls attention, for example, to the Syrian poet's use of technical terms and erudite allusions to fields like grammar, prosody, Islamic law, and astronomy. This intimates al-Ruṣāfī's willingness to engage al-Maʿarrī in a nuanced way, but to me it also signals a possible awareness of the plurality inherent in any readership, including his own, an awareness that has implications for discussions of public intellectualism in the early twentieth-century Arab world. This point will be revisited shortly.

In terms of specific textual features that Ḥusayn considers defective, repetition of themes does not pose a difficulty for al-Ruṣāfī the way it does for Ḥusayn. Whereas the former sees reiteration of the same themes as cause for boredom, the latter argues that it affords readers the chance to think about broad topics from a number of angles. As an example, al-Ruṣāfī cites two lines from separate poems on the theme of "invective" (*hijāʾ*) against humankind (*al-bashar*) as fallen and vicious:

بَني الدَهْرِ إنّي إنْ ذَمَمْت فعالكم فإنّي بِنَفْسي لَا مَحَالةَ أَبَداً

[O mortals! If I wanted to disparage your deeds,

[98] Ibid., 47-50.

there would never be anything to stop me!][99]

Here the phrase "never be anything to stop me," *lā maḥālata abadan*, implies the countless blameworthy actions committed by humanity and whose censure would occupy the poet forever. Continuing in this vein, al-Maʿarrī turns his vitriol against humankind on himself, as he ponders the cosmic effects of mortal vice:

إنْ كَانَ كُلّ بَني حَواءَ يَشْبِهُني فَبِئسَ مَا وَلَدَتْ في النَاسِ حواءُ

[If all Eve's progeny were like me, how wretched were the humans that she bore]

By taking the same theme — disparagement of humanity — and approaching it from another angle, al-Maʿarrī deepens and enriches that theme more than if he had not meditated continuously on the same general idea. For this reason, al-Ruṣāfī concludes that al-Maʿarrī's continuous thematic reprisal lends his subject matter a nuance otherwise unavailable, especially since each general topic admits of numerous subtopics, tropes, and images, making it difficult to cover any one subject comprehensively.[100]

Likewise, al-Ruṣāfī defends the Syrian poet against Ḥusayn's claim that all but a few of the *luzūmiyyāt* lack thematic unity. He points to the common theme of "gnomic wisdom and *memento mori* " (*al-ḥikmah waʾl-mawʿiẓah*) tying together the many threads woven throughout

[99] Ibid., 53.

[100] Ibid., 53.

al-Maʿarrī's poetry, a point that, by implication, highlights the seeming contradiction in Ḥusayn's text between claiming at once a lack of thematic unity and incessant thematic repetition. To display the importance of *ḥikmah* and *mawʿiẓah* as unifying ideas, al-Ruṣāfī includes a chart of major subtopics — Deity (*al-ilah*), religion (*al-adyān*), reason (*al-ʿaql*), life and death (*al-ḥayāt wa al-mawt*), doubt and certainty (*al-shakk wa al-yaqīn*) — and describes how they all relate back to an overarching gnomic mode.[101] The variety of these subtopics al-Ruṣāfī commends as a virtue that lets al-Maʿarrī cover many themes in limited space.

To further this argument, al-Ruṣāfī compares the poetry of *Luzūm mā lā yalzam* to holy writ. "Take the Qurʾān and read any *sūrah* (from the longer ones of course)," he challenges the reader, "then read a second and a third and a fourth, and you will not feel to have moved from one *sūrah* to the next since you find the topic of discussion repeated in each one, differing only in wording and order."[102] Subjects repeated in the Qurʾān include prophetic counsel, repentance, the final judgment, and didactic anecdotes like Yūsuf in Egypt and the Seven

[101] Ibid., 56-7.

[102] Ibid., 54. The comparison of poetry to the Qurʾān is not meant to place them in the same generic field, but instead to show that the elements of al-Maʿarrī's poetry considered defective by Ḥusayn do in fact represent positive qualities. In other places, al-Ruṣāfī draws a firm distinction between the language of the Qurʾān and of poetry as broad categories. See, for example: Al-Ruṣāfī, *Rasāʾil al-taʿlīqāt*, 122.

Sleepers, all of which leave a greater impression on readers *because* of their reiteration, not in spite of it.

The Qurʾān also lacks thematic unity, according to al-Ruṣāfī, in the sense that it treats a wealth of subtopics all loosely connected to the overarching tension between God's oneness (*tawḥīd*) and the counterclaim that God shares His power (*shirk*). Al-Ruṣāfī affirms that this *tawḥīd-shirk* binary is the engine of all Qurʾānic textual motion, but that it appears in many different shades and degrees scattered throughout even one individual *sūrah*. To him, it is this very topical eclecticism that constitutes the Qurʾān's unique quality: "if we organized its *sūrah*s by topic, the Qurʾān would lose something of its matchlessness [*iʿjāz*], fractured by a gap in its graceful style and eloquence."[103] Read with an eye to al-Ruṣāfī's overall reading process, the comparison of *Luzūm mā lā yalzam* to the Qurʾān speaks to his focus on poetry's emotive power, a focus arguably informed by al-Ruṣāfī's own status as a practicing poet.

Furthermore, the comparison may also signal al-Ruṣāfī's hope for poetry's inspiring nature to be a vehicle for social change. In the preface he draws a similar connection between

[103] Ibid., 58. For an overview of *ʿijāz*, see: Richard C. Martin, "Inimitability," in *The Encyclopedia of the Qurʾān*, Vol. 2 (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 526-36. For the fullest pre-modern theoretical treatment of *iʿjāz*, see: ʿAbd al-Qāhir al-Jurjānī, *Kitāb dalāʾil al-iʿjāz*, ed. Yāsīn al-Ayyūbī (Beirut: Al-Maktabah al-ʿAṣriyyah, 2000). For discussion of literary imitation in general, see: R.R. Edwards, "Imitation," in *The New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, 4th ed. (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2012), 675-80.

the Qurʾān and al-Maʿarrī's poetry, and between al-Maʿarrī himself and a spiritual guide (*murshid*): وأبو العلاء بلزومياته كان أستاذي ومرشدي إلى الحقيقة منذ أيام الصبا، أيام كانت لزومياته قرآني الثاني أعبد الحقيقة بتلاوتها كما أعبد الله بتلاوة القرآن (Through his *luzūmiyyāt*, al-Maʿarrī has been my teacher and guide since the days of my youth, days when the *luzūmiyyāt* were a second Qurʾān by which I worshipped the truth, just as through the actual Qurʾān I worshipped God).[104] To me, this sentiment invites speculation about the moralizing role that al-Ruṣāfī imputes to al-Maʿarrī, a role that could be seen as analogous — though not equivalent — to that of Muḥammad (al-Ruṣāfī never makes this link explicit). Just as the Prophet of Islam sought to improve his own milieu by inspiring individuals to be better, perhaps al-Ruṣāfī believes that al-Maʿarrī too might inspire people to improve themselves and, by extension, their society.

Conclusion

This last point returns us to Badawi's quote about neo-classical authors as community spokesmen. By way of conclusion, I want to suggest some ways in which a seemingly rarefied debate over medieval poetry has implications for Arab public intellectualism in the early

[104] Al-Ruṣāfī, *ʿAlā bāb*, 35.

twentieth century. Of course much of what Ḥusayn and al-Ruṣāfī write about al-Maʿarrī and *Luzūm mā lā yalzam* constitutes private engagement with a literary classic. Imputing political intention on every point ignores the fact that both modern thinkers were also men of letters who enjoyed reading *and* writing literature on a personal level. Moreover, each author engages in an explicitly personal way with his subject, which constitutes a different mode of writing than one that addresses how society as a whole should be organized and maintained.

Yet as Stephen Covey once pithily remarked, "Public policy is private morality writ large."[105] The individual and the collective are intertwined, and thus examining what authors like Ḥusayn and al-Ruṣāfī find important about poetry can help to understand the cultural values that inform their hopes for society. Indeed even in their private reading practices, both authors are interested in poetry's relationship to its social context, whether in the assumption of Ḥusayn's *taʾrīkh adabī* that poetry reflects individual identity and sociopolitical trends, or that of al-Ruṣāfī's focus on the power of poetry to improve society by stirring human emotion; this constitutes another reason why it can be risky to impose labels like "Neoclassical" on a different literary tradition.

[105] Stephen R. Covey, A. Roger Merrill and Rebecca R. Merrill, *First Things First* (New York: Free Press, 1996), 202.

Also, throughout their careers both authors relied on literature and its interpretation as a form of direct social engagement. For example, in his introduction to first edition of *Tajdīd dhikrā Abī al-ʿAlāʾ*, Ḥusayn commends a fusion of literary study methods from al-Azhar and Cairo University — the old and new schools, respectively — to the Egyptian public school curriculum.[106] Al-Ruṣāfī burst onto the Iraqi literary scene with an Arabic rendition of the Ottoman national anthem, and for decades schoolchildren have memorized his poems as expressions of Iraqi nationalism.[107] These and other examples indicate a willingness, indeed a commitment by Ḥusayn and al-Ruṣāfī to the idea of literature as a public matter.

In my view, the debate over al-Maʿarrī between Ḥusayn and al-Ruṣāfī touches on at least two aspects of modern Arab public intellectualism. The first is a discussion that continued throughout the twentieth century about Arab cultural identity, especially the relationship of the Arabic tradition, *al-turāth*, to the modern Arab self both individual and collective. One aspect of this discussion dealt with Islamic sociopolitical reform based on a reexamination of normative religious practice — the *sunna* — and its reliance on an imperfect corpus of *ḥadīth*.[108] Another engaged with both the religious and secular elements of *turāth* as a factor in Arab

[106] Ḥusayn, *Tajdīd dhikrā*, 8.

[107] Kadhim, *Anti-Colonialism*, 87.

[108] Brown, *Rethinking*, 35.

cultural authenticity, *aṣālah*, which was the topic of several groundbreaking pan-Arab conferences in Egypt and Kuwait during the 1970s and 1980s.[109]

While the content and, for Susan Kassab, the quality of definitions vary from one author to another, the general sense of *aṣālah* is not a concept but rather a process, one by which modern Arabs seek to relate their cultural tradition to present circumstances. Daniel Brown calls this "the prism of tradition," namely the way in which twentieth-century Arab thinkers refract their contemporary world through a view of the past. Of special importance to the need for this prism was the incursion of foreign influence, whether political or cultural, hence why Emilio Gonzalez-Ferrin calls *aṣālah* a "response to Otherness."[110]

The refractive reexamination of *aṣālah*, and its attendant spirit of soul-searching, is in my opinion an important element of Ḥusayn's and al-Ruṣāfī's debate over al-Maʿarrī. Although neither author uses the word *aṣālah* — which does not pose a difficulty, since the term became current only in the 1950s — they arguably engage in efforts to relate the past to the present that the term *aṣālah* describes. Furthermore, Ṭaha Ḥusayn and his questioning of the Arabic tradition in *Fī al-shiʿr al-jāhilī* often figures in as an early participant in *aṣālah*-related

[109] Kassab, *Contemporary Arab Thought*, 10.

[110] See: Emilio Gonzalez-Ferrin, "The War of 'Authenticities," review of *Islam and the Tyranny of Authenticity*, by Aaron W. Hughes, *Reviews of the Enoch Seminar*, 5 August 2016. < http://enochseminar.org/review/10221>

discourse,[111] even if scholars make a distinction between what they perceive as the simplistic reconciliation-criticism binary of his generation, versus the more complex engagement with the past among Arab intellectuals starting in the 1950s and especially in the 1970s.[112] By reviving al-Maʿarrī's memory for a new generation and wrestling over the significance of his poetics to religious and social identity, Ḥusayn and al-Ruṣāfī make an important contribution to the debate over modern Arab cultural identity.

The other way in which the discussion between Ḥusayn and al-Ruṣafī sheds light on Arab public intellectualism has to do with the idea of the public itself. By dint of their subject matter and especially the difficult nature of al-Maʿarrī's poetry, I infer that the two authors are writing for an elite audience with high levels of education and knowledge of the Arabic *turāth*. The critical response to their views seems to support this view. Al-Ruṣāfī's defense of al-Maʿarrī takes part in widespread reaction to Ḥusayn's ideas primarily among intellectuals, critics, and poets.[113] Ḥusayn Anwar al-Jundī places Ṭaha Ḥusayn in the "embrace of Orientalism,"[114] while an anonymous contemporary article compares Ḥusayn's general scholarly method to "chewing water" (*maḍgh al-māʾ*) in the sense that it pretends to substance

[111] ʿAbd al-Ḥamīd al-Jubayrah, *Al-Aṣālah wa-al-ḥadāthah*, 155-217.

[112] Kassab, *Contemporary Arab Thought*, 10.

[113] For an anthology of contemporary objections to Ṭaha Ḥusayn, see Maḥmūd Mahdī al-Istānbūlī, ed., *Ṭaha Ḥusayn fī mīzān al-ʿulamā waʾl-udabāʾ* (Beirut: Al-Maktab al-Islāmī, 1983).

[114] Ibid., 383-91.

where there is none. Zakī Mubārak calls Ṭaha Ḥusayn an "empty drum, his knowledge of the history of Arabic literature limited to a bleak harvest of empty husks."[115] Muḥammad Salīm al-Jundī, a scholar of Arabic literature and himself a compiler of *akhbār* about al-Maʿarrī,[116] takes Ḥusayn to task for attributing to al-Maʿarrī a firm set of beliefs where his poetry does not warrant such attribution.[117]

These interlocutors represent one readership among many. They do not debate Ḥusayn's autobiography or al-Ruṣāfī's public lectures about Arabic language, for example, which would have targeted a distinct yet potentially overlapping "public." Also, during their careers both Ḥusayn and al-Ruṣāfī faced scrutiny for views expressed about the Arab-Islamic tradition. Ḥusayn lost his teaching post at Cairo University and was tried for apostasy in 1931 over his book *Fī al-shiʿr al-jāhilī*,[118] while al-Ruṣāfī was widely criticized for his social reformist views[119] and was similarly tried for apostasy due to his assent to the doctrine of *waḥdat al-wujūd*.[120] While these troubles did not come from their debate about al-Maʿarrī, they do

[115] Ibid., 330.

[116] Muḥammad Salīm al-Jundī, *Al-Jāmiʿ fī akhbār Abiʾl-ʿAlāʾ al-Maʿarrī wa-āthārih*, ed. Hāshim ʿAbd al-Hādī (Damascus: Al-Majmāʿ al-ʿIlmī al-ʿArabī, 1962).

[117] Al-Istānbūlī, *Ṭaha Ḥusayn*, 270-1.

[118] P. Cachia, "Ḥusayn, Ṭaha," *Encyclopedia of Arabic Literature*, Vol. 2, ed. Julie Scott Meisami and Paul Starkey (London and New York: Routledge, 1998), 297.

[119] Kadhim, *Anti-Colonialism*, 90.

[120] DeYoung, "Maʿrūf al-Ruṣāfī," 282.

manifest the plurality of readerships for whom Ḥusayn and al-Ruṣāfī wrote. The resulting conclusion that "public" intellectual engagement is not a single phenomenon, but instead a range of potential levels of engagement with many different *publics*, raises important questions about early twentieth-century intellectuals and their role in society.

Conclusion: No Longer So Distant

I began this dissertation with the title "The Life We Image: Abū l-ʿAlāʾ al-Maʿarrī and His Spiritual Legend." I expected it to be mainly about reception, about the way readers have retained al-Maʿarrī in their imagination for centuries thereafter. That reception, I speculated, would amount to a "spiritual legend" which left out as much about the poet's life and works as it kept; and that these omissions therefore required the study of the individual circumstances of readers that led them to adopt, recycle, exploit, and manipulate the facts of al-Maʿarrī's life. But much has changed since the project was originally conceived, including the title.

What I found, after being submerged in al-Maʿarrī's corpus for more than a year, was a record of debates, disputes, and dialectics within the writings themselves. These paratexts, auxiliary writings that surround many works, tell a story of controversy begun in the poet's lifetime. In a few cases they finger actual individuals who called al-Maʿarrī to account for things he said in *Luzūm mā lā yalzam*. I therefore think of them as "thresholds of doubt," that is, porous borderlands between the words of a text and the world of words that simultaneously shape that text and lie beyond it. Paratexts bid readers to step inside the text or turn back. In al-Maʿarrī's case, they invite if not compel a response to his unflinching intellect and brash

charisma. For the poet himself, they are a chance to propound an authorship and husband a legacy.

Like an ocean at high tide, the feeling that texts, paratexts, and contexts are inseparable crept up on me slowly as I finished chapter 2, the last remaining chapter, about the preface to *Luzūm mā lā yalzam*. I found myself needing to rely on poems from the *Luzūm* itself to convey my understanding of the project he tacitly envisioned for that work. After some frustration that I couldn't just stick to the preface, I realized that this frustration proved the point I wanted to make: that no poem, no *dīwān*, and indeed no author is born *sui generis*. They do not occur in a cultural and historical vacuum. Instead they come into the world through a negotiated process that builds on what came before and implicates many participants. Paratexts record this process, thereby shifting the boundary of what we call a text.

Although my focus has moved from al-Maʿarrī's reception throughout the intervening centuries to his own writerly embattlements against controversy, there remains an overall concern for literary persona. Al-Maʿarrī is a polarizing figure. His language is difficult. His formal choices are torturous. He writes subversively and can't be pinned down. He criticizes religious authority and singles out interlocutors for attack. No wonder, then, that one struggles to find readers without strong feelings about him for or against. So while the

dissertation came eventually to focus on how this divided response began in his lifetime instead of how it played out over the centuries, the problem of his reputation lingered on.

Reading more by al-Maʿarrī is a good start to seeing him from a different angle. Being a canonized Arabic author, his status among Middle Eastern Arabs is akin to that of an English language writer like Charles Dickens; someone to be studied piecemeal in grade school, but not read seriously and comprehensively in adulthood. This esteemed obscurity carries over into academic studies in Arabic and Western languages alike, which studies tend to focus either on *Luzūm mā lā yalzam* or *Risālat al-ghufrān*. Even my own dissertation falls into this category! But I have still made an effort to bring in little-read texts attached to the *Luzūm*, partly because I think they are important to that work, and partly to encourage others to penetrate his extant corpus more deeply. Seven or eight primary works survive, plus several commentaries on his own poetry and that of others. These texts are all absorbing pieces of the puzzle that is al-Maʿarrī's literary legacy; we ignore them to our detriment.

Not just a wider data set but also fresh approaches can rejuvenate thinking about al-Maʿarrī. Scholars will differ in their preferences, but for my money, concepts from semantics, pragmatics, and stylistics—that is, functional linguistics—are a boon to authorship studies. They are especially useful at a time when scholars are working to fill the vacuum left by the poststructuralist "linguistic turn," in which the verbal sign, referring only to itself, acted as a

"master metaphor across various fields of study."[121] In contrast to this turn, Roger Fowler describes in *Linguistic Criticism* how literary studies can benefit from the view of functional linguistics that all language, including literary language, plays a communicative, social role[122]:

> We want to show that a novel or a poem is a complexly structured text; that its structural form, by social semiotic processes, constitutes a representation of a world, characterized by activities and states and values; that this text is a communicative interaction between its producer and its consumers, within relevant social and institutional contexts. These characteristics of the novel or poem are no more than what functional linguistics is looking for in studying 'non-literary' materials such as, say, conversations or letters or official documents.

By seeing language as a communicative medium rather than a closed, self-referring system, this approach can help chart new paths in literary studies.

Whatever one's method, premodern authors like al-Maʿarrī offer us a glimpse at a past now approaching, now receding. It is this close-far dynamic that I sensed in the words of al-Maʿarrī's readers at the outset of my study and which explains his appeal to new readers like

[121] Julie Orlemanski, "Philology and the Turn Away from the Linguistic Turn," *Florilegium* 32 (2015): 158.

[122] Roger Fowler, *Linguistic Criticism,* 2nd ed. (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1996), 14-15.

me, who inevitably come to see a part of themselves in that past no longer distant so much as unfamiliar. Making it less so, however slightly, is my hope for this dissertation.

Bibliography

Abbreviations:

EI2	(Encyclopedia of Islam, Second Edition)
EAL	(Encyclopedia of Arabic Literature
NPEPP	(New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics)
TQ	(*Taʿrīf al-qudamāʾ bi-Abī al-ʿAlāʾ*)

ʿAbd al-Jawād, Muḥammad. *Al-Shaykh al-Ḥusayn ibn Aḥmad al-Marṣafī*. Cairo: Dār al-Maʿārif, 1952.

Abu-Haidar, Jareer. " 'Qifā nabki': The Dual Form of Address in Arabic Poetry in a New Light." *Journal of Arabic Literature* 19.1 (Mar. 1988): 40-8.

Agius, Dionisius A., and Richard Hitchcock, eds. *The Arab Influence in Medieval Europe: Folia Scholastica Mediterranea*. Reading: Ithaca Press, 1994.

Ahmed, Asad Q. and Margaret Larkin. "The *Ḥāshiya* and Islamic Intellectual History." *Oriens* 41.3-4 (2013): 213-16.

Ali, Samer M. "Reinterpreting al-Buḥturī's Īwān Kisrā Ode: Tears of Affection For the Cycles of History." *Journal of Arabic Literature* 37.1 (2006): 46-67.

Allen, Roger. *The Arabic Literary Heritage: The Development of its Genres and Criticism*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2005.

---. "Ṭaha Ḥusayn." *Essays in Arabic Literary Biography: 1850-1950*. Ed. Roger Allen. Wiesbaden: Harrasowitz-Verlag, 2010. 137-48.

Al-Anbārī, Abū l-Barakāt. *Nuzhat al-alibbāʾ fī ṭabaqāt al-udabāʾ*. Ed. Ibrāhīm al-Sāmarrāʾī. Zarqa, Jordan: Maktabat al-Manār, 1985.

Antoon, Sinan. "Abūʾl-ʿAlāʾ al-Maʿarrī." *Essays in Arabic Literary Biography, 925-1350*. Ed. Terry DeYoung and Mary St. Germain. Wiesbaden: Harrasowitz Verlag, 2011. 228-34.

Arberry, A.J. trans. *The Koran Interpreted*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1964.

Armstrong, Carol. *Odd Man Out: Readings of the Work and Reputation of Edgar Degas*. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1991.

Asbridge, Thomas S. *The Creation of the Principality of Antioch, 1098–1130*. Suffolk, UK: Boydell Press, 2000.

Ascoli, Albert Russell. *Dante and the Making of a Modern Author*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2008.

ʿAṭiyyah, Shāhīn Effendī. *Rasāʾil Abi-l-ʿAlāʾ al-Maʿarrī*. Beirut: Al-Khūrī, 1894.

Ayalon, Yaron. "Revisiting Ṭāhā Ḥusayn's *Fī al-Shiʿr al-Jāhilī* and its Sequel." *Die Welt des Islams* 49 (2009): 98-121.

Al-Bābartī, Akmal al-Dīn Muḥammad. *Sharḥ al-Talkhīṣ*. Ed. Muḥammad Muṣṭafā Ramaḍān Ṣufiyyah. Tripoli, Libya: Al-Manshaʾah al-ʿĀmmah, 1983.

Badawi, M.M. *A Short History of Modern Arabic Literature*. Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press, 1993.

Al-Badīʿī, Yūsuf. *Awj al-taḥarrī ʿan ḥaythiyyat Abi-l-ʿAlāʾ al-Maʿarrī*. Ed. Ibrāhīm al-Kīlānī. Damascus: Maṭbaʿat al-Turqī, 1944.

Balakian, Anna. "Dada." NPEPP.

Baldinetti, Anna, ed. *Carte private di Carlo Alfonso e Maria Nallino, Inventari*. Rome: Instituto per l'Oriente C.A. Nallino, 1995.

Al-Bāqillānī, Abū Bakr Muḥammad ibn Ṭayyib. *Kitāb ʿijāz al-Qurʾān*. Ed. al-Sayyid Aḥmad Ṣaqr. Cairo: Dār al-Kutub, 1963.

Bashkin, Orit. "Representations of Women in the Writings of the Intelligentsia in Hashemite Iraq, 1921-1958." *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies* 4.1 (Winter 2008): 53-82.

Bauer, Thomas. "Mamluk Literature: Misunderstandings and New Approaches." *Mamlūk Studies*

Review 9.2 (2005): 105-32.

Bearman, P., Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, and W.P. Heinrichs, eds. *Encyclopedia of Islam, Second Edition*. Leiden: Brill Online, 2012.

Beeston, A.F.L., T.M. Johnstone, R.B. Serjeant, and G. R. Smith, eds. *The Cambridge History of Arabic Literature, Volume 1: Arabic Literature to the End of the Umayyad Period*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1983.

Beiser, Frederick. "Historicism" *The Oxford Handbook of Continental Philosophy*. Ed. Brian Leiter and Michael Rosen. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2007. 155-179.

Belhaj, Abdessamad. "The Council of Dictation (*imlāʾ*) as Collective Authorship: An Inquiry into *adab al-imlāʾ wa l-istimlāʾ* of al-Samʿānī." *Conceptions of Authorship in Pre-Modern Arabic Texts*. Ed. Lale Behzadi and Jaakko Hämeen-Anttila. Bamberg: University of Bamberg Press, 2015. 93-106.

Bencharifa, Mohammed, ed. *Shurūḥ Andalusiyyah ghayr maʿrūfah li-Saqṭ al-zand*. Casablanca: Maṭbaʿat al-Najāḥ al-Jadīdah, 2011.

Biesterfeldt, H.H. "Enno Littman: Leben und Arbeit. Ein autobiographisches Fragment (1875-1904)." *Oriens* 29 (1986): 1-101.

Bikhazi, Ramzi Jibran. "The Ḥamdānid Dynasty of Mesopotamia and North Syria, 254–404/868–1014." Doctoral dissertation, University of Michigan, 1981.

Blankinship, Kevin. "Review: Christian Peltz, *Der Koran des Abū l-ʿAlāʾ*." *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 76.1 (April 2017): 203-6.

Blurton, Heather et al., participants. "Medieval Bestsellers vs. Masterpieces Conference." 5 May 2016. Loma Pelona Center, University of California. Santa Barbara, CA.

Bonebakker, S.A. *Some Early Definitions of the Tawriya and Ṣafadī's* Faḍḍ al-xitām ʿan at-tawriya wa-'listixdām. Berlin: De Gruyter Mouton, 1966.

Bonner, Michael. "The Waning of Empire, 861–945." *The New Cambridge History of Islam*, vol. 1,

The Formation of the Islamic World, Sixth to Eleventh Centuries. Ed. Charles F. Robinson. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2010. 305–59.

Bosworth, C.E. "al-Maghribī, al-Ḥusayn ibn ʿAlī." EAL.

Brown, Daniel. *Rethinking Tradition in Modern Islamic Thought*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1996.

Brugman, J. *An Introduction to the History of Modern Arabic Literature in Egypt*. Leiden: Brill, 1984.

Buck, Andrew D. *The Principality of Antioch and Its Frontiers in the Twelfth Century*. Suffolk, UK: Boydell Press, 2017.

Bürgel, Johann Christoph. "'Die beste Dichtung ist die lügenreichste': Wesen und Bedeutung eines literarischen Streites des arabischen Mittelalters im Lichte komparatischer Betrachtung." *Oriens* 23-24 (1974): 7-102.

---. "Lüge und Warheit in der klassischen islamischen Dichtung: Ein Beitrag zur Wesenbestimmung der arabischen und persichen Poesie." *Folia Orientalia* 15 (1974): 259-62.

Cachia, Pierre. "The Dramatic Dialogues of al-Maʿarrī." *Journal of Arabic Literature* 1 (1970): 129-36.

---. "From Sound to Echo in Late *Badīʿ* Literature." *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 108.2 (Apr.-June 1988): 219-25.

---. "Ḥusayn, Ṭaha." EAL.

Calder, Norman. "The Barāhima: Literary Construct and Historical Reality." *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London* 57.1 (1994): 40–51.

---. "*Tafsīr* From Ṭabarī to Ibn Kathīr: Problems in the Description of a Genre, Illustrated With Reference to the Story of Abraham." *Approaches to the Qurʾān*. Ed. Gerald R. Hawting and Abdul-Kader A. Shareef. London and New York: Routledge, 1993. 101-40.

Campbell, Donald. *Arabian Medicine and Its Influence on the Middle Ages*. London: Routledge, 2013.

Campbell, Jodi. *At the First Table: Food and Social Identity in Early Modern Spain*. Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2017.

Cantarino, Vincente. "Dante and Islam: History and Analysis of a Controversy (1965)." *Dante Studies* 125: Dante and Islam (2007): 37-55.

Cooper, J. "Al-Sharīf al-Murtaḍā" and "Al-Sharīf al-Raḍī." EAL.

Cooperson, Michael. *Classical Arabic Biography: Heirs to the Prophets in the Age of al-Maʾmūn*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2000.

---. "*Promised Land* by Chuck Berry." Unpublished paper, n.d.

Coupland, Nikolas. "The Sociolinguistics of Style." *The Cambridge Handbook of Sociolinguistics*. Ed. Rajend Mesthrie. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2011. 138-56.

Covey, Stephen R., A. Roger Merrill and Rebecca R. Merrill. *First Things First*. New York: Free Press, 1996.

Cowell, Dustin. "On the Ancients and the Moderns, from al-ʿUmdah by Ibn Rashíq al-Qayrawàní." *Alif: Journal of Comparative Poetics* 2 (Spring 1982): 67-75.

Dana, Joseph. "Meaningful Rhyme in the Hebrew Poetry of Spain (Selected Examples from the Sacred Poetry of Rabbi Moses ibn Ezra)." *The Jewish Quarterly Review* 76.3 (Jan. 1986): 169-89.

Al-Dardīr, Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad al-ʿAdawī. *Sharḥ al-kharīdah al-bahiyyah fī ʿilm al-tawḥīd*. Ed. ʿAbd al-Salām ibn ʿAbd al-Hāwī (n.d.).

Darling, Linda. "*Mirrors for Princes* in Europe and the Middle East: A Case of Historiographical Incommensurability." *East Meets West in the Middle Ages and Early Modern Times: Transcultural Experiences in the Premodern World*. Berlin and Boston: De Gruyter, 2013. 223-42.

De Bruijn, J.T.P. "The Preaching Poet: Three Homiletic Poems by Farīd al-Dīn ʿAṭṭār." *Edebiyât* 9.1 (1998): 85-100.

Derrida, Jacques. "This is Not an Oral Footnote." *Annotation and Its Texts*. Stephen A. Barney. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1991. 192-205.

De Smet, Daniel. "Al-Muʾayyad fi d-Dīn ash-Shirāzī et la polémique ismaélienne contre les 'Brahamanes' d'Ibn ar-Rāwandī." *Egypt and Syria in the Fatimid, Ayyubid and Mamluk Eras*. Ed. U. Vermeulen and D. de Smet. Leuven: Peeters, 1995. 85–98.

DeYoung, Terri. "Maʿrūf al-Ruṣāfī." *Essays in Arabic Literary Biography: 1850-1950*. Ed. Roger Allen. Wiesbaden: Harrasowitz-Verlag, 2010. 274-83.

Al-Dhahabī, Shams al-Dīn. *Taʾrīkh al-islām wa-wafāyāt al-mashāhīr wa l-aʿlām*. 53 vols. Ed. ʿUmar ʿAbd al-Salām Tadmurī. Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-ʿArabī, 1994.

Drory, Rina. *Models and Contacts: Arabic Literature and its Impact on Medieval Jewish Culture*. Leiden: Brill, 2000.

Edwards, Robert R. "Imitation." NPEPP.

---. "Walter Map: Authorship and the Space of Writing." *New Literary History* (Spring 2007): 273-92.

El-Ariss, Tarek. *Trials of Arab Modernity: Literary Affects and the New Political*. New York: Fordham University Press, 2013.

El-Bizri, Nader. "God: Essence and Attributes." *The Cambridge Companion to Classical Islamic Theology*. Ed. Timothy Winter. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2008. 121-40.

Elinson, Alexander. "Review: Lourdes María Alvarez, trans., *Abū al-Ḥasan al-Shustarī: Songs of Love and Devotion*." *Journal of Arabic Literature* 42 (2011): 95-7.

El Shamsy, Ahmed. "The Social Construction of Orthodoxy." *The Cambridge Companion to Classical Islamic Theology*. Ed. Tim Winter. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2008. 97-117.

Endress, Gerhard. "The Language of Demonstration: Translating Science and the Formation of Terminology in Arabic Philosophy and Science." *Early Science and Medicine* 7.3, Certainty, Doubt, Error: Aspects of the Practice of Pre- and Early Modern Science (2002): 231-54.

"'Eschatological Tourism and 'Collaborative Authorship': An Interview with Gregor Schoeler on Translating al-Maʿarrī." *Library of Arabic Literature Blog*. New York University. 13 March 2014. <www.libraryofarabicliterature.org/2014/eschatological-tourism-and-collaborative-authorship-an-interview-with-gregor-schoeler-on-translating-al-maʿarri/>

Fakhreddine, Huda. *Metapoesis in the Arabic Tradition*. Leiden: Brill, 2015.

Felski, Rita. *The Limits of Critique*. Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 2015.

---. *Uses of Literature*. Malden, MA and Oxford: Blackwell, 2008.

Filali-Ansary, Abdou. "Imposture and Rebellion: Consideration of the Personality of the Prophet Muhammad by Ma`ruf al-Rusafi." *Diogenes* 226.57 (2010): 62-74.

Fischer, August. *Der "Koran" de Abu l-ʿAlāʾ al-Maʿarrī*. Leipzig: 1942.

Fowler, Roger. *Linguistic Criticism*. 2nd Ed. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1996.

Friedmann, Yohannes. "Literary and Cultural Aspects of the Luzūmiyyāt." *Studia Orientalia. Memoriae D.H. Baneth dedicata*. Jerusalem: The Magnes Press, The Hebrew University, 1979. 347-65.

Frolov, Dmitry. "The Circles of Ḫalīl and the Structure of *Luzūmiyyāt* of *Abū l-ʿAlāʾ al-Maʿarrī*," *Studies in Near Eastern Languages and Literatures: Memorial Volume of Karel Petrácek*. Ed. P. Zemanek. Prague: Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic, Oriental Institute, 1996. 223-36.

---. *Classical Arabic Verse: History and Theory of* ʿArūḍ. Leiden: Brill, 2000.

Gabrieli, Francesco. "Caetani, Leone." *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*. 88 vols. Rome: Instituto

Dell'Enciclopedia Italiana, 1960-2017. 16: 100.

---. *Orientalisti del Novecento*. Rome: Instituto per l'Oriente C.A. Nallino, 1993.

Gallagher, Catherine. "The Rise of Fictionality." *The Novel, Volume 1: History, Geography, and Culture*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006. 336-63.

Al-Garradi, Tahir Khalifa. "The Image of al-Maʿarrī as an Infidel Among Medieval and Modern Critics." Doctoral dissertation, University of Utah, 1987.

Gasparov, M.L. *A History of European Versification*. Ed. G.S. Smith and Leofranc Holford-Strevens. Trans. G.S. Smith and Marina Tarlinskaja. Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press, 1996.

Gebreselassie, Yohannes. "Enno Littman: An Assessment of His Legacy in the Light of Ongoing Scholarly Debates." *Ityopis* extra issue 1 (2015): 157-71.

Genette, Gérard. *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation*. Trans. Jane E. Lewin. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1997.

Ghali, Elias Saad. "Le végétalisme et le doute chez Abul-ʿAlāʾ al-Maʿarrī (363-449/973-1058)." *Bulletin d'Études Orientales* 32–33 (1980–1981): 99–112.

Ghalioun, Burhan. *Islam et politique: la modernité trahie*. Paris: La Découverte, 1997.

Ghanoonparvar, M.R. *Dining at the Safavid Court: 16th Century Royal Persian Recipes*. Costa Mesa, CA: Mazda Publishers, 2017.

Al-Ghazālī, Abū Ḥāmid. *Iḥyāʾ ʿulūm al-dīn*. Beirut: Dār Ibn Ḥazm, 2005.

Goffmann, Erving. *Forms of Talk*. Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1981.

Goldschmidt, Arthur, Jr. *Biographical Dictionary of Modern Egypt*. Boulder, CO and London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2000.

Gonzalez-Ferrin, Emilio. "The War of 'Authenticities." Review of *Islam and the Tyranny of Authenticity* by Aaron W. Hughes. *Reviews of the Enoch Seminar*. 5 August 2016.

<http://enochseminar.org/review/10221>

Gordon, Robert and Andrew Forge. *Degas*. New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1988.

Gran, Peter. *The Islamic Roots of Capitalism: Egypt, 1760-1840*. Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1998.

Green, Mitchell. "Narrative Fiction as a Source of Knowledge." *Narration as Argument*. Ed. Paula Olmos. Basel, Switzerland: Springer International Publishing, 2017. 47-61.

Gruendler, Beatrice. "Motif vs. Genre: Reflections on the Dīwān al-Maʿānī of Abū Hilāl al-ʿAskarī." *Ghazal as World Literature I: Transformations of a Literary Genre*. Ed. Thomas Bauer and Angelika Neuwirth. Beirut: Ergon Verlag, 2005. 57-86.

Gutas, Dimitri. *Greek Thought, Arabic Culture*. London: Routledge, 1998.

Halliday, M.A.K. *The Essential Halliday*. Ed. Jonathan J. Webster. New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2009.

Al-Ḥamawī, Yāqūt. *Muʿjam al-udabāʾ, irshād al-arīb ilā maʿrifat al-adīb*. 7 vols. Ed. Iḥsān ʿAbbās. Beirut: Dār al-Gharb al-Islāmī, 1993.

Ḥasan, Sayyid Kasrawī, ed. *Rasāʾil ṭayf al-khayāl fī l-jadd wa l-hazl*. Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyyah, 2009.

Heidemann, Stefan. *Die Renaissance der Städte in Nordsyrien und Nordmesopotamien: Städtische Entwicklung und wirtschaftliche Bedingungen in ar-Raqqa und Harran von der Zeit der beduinischen Vorherrschaft bis zu den Seldschuken*. Islamic History and Civilization: Studies and Texts 40. Leiden: Brill, 2002.

Heinrichs, Wolfhart. "Literary Theory: The Problem of its Efficiency." *Arabic Poetry: Theory and Development, Third Giorgio Levi Della Vida Biennial Conference*. Ed. G.E. von Grunebaum. Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1973. 19-69.

---. "Rhetorical Figures." EAL.

Hillenbrand, C. "Ibn al-Habbāriyya." EAL.

Al-Ḥillī, Ṣafī al-Dīn. *Sharḥ al-kāfiyah al-badīʿiyyah, fī ʿulūm al-balāghah wa-maḥāsin al-badīʿ*. Ed. Nasīb Nishāwī. Damascus: Majmaʿ al-Lughah al-ʿArabiyyah bi-Dimeshq, 1983.

Hirschler, Konrad. *The Written Word in the Medieval Arabic Lands: A Social and Cultural History of Reading Practices*. Edinburgh, UK: Edinburgh University Press, 2012.

Hobbins, Daniel. *Authorship and Publicity Before Print: Jean Gerson and the Transformation of Late Medieval Learning*. Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009.

Horace. *Horace: Satires, Epistles, and Ars Poetica*. Ed. and trans. H. Rushton Fairclough. London: William Heinemann, Ltd.; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1942.

Ḥusayn, Ṭaha. *Al-Ayyām fī mujallad wāḥid*. Cairo: Markaz al-Ahrām, 1992.

---. *Fī al-shʿir al-jāhilī*. Cairo: Dār al-Kutub al-Miṣriyyah, 1984.

---. *Maʿa Abī l-ʿAlāʾ fī sijnihi*. Cairo: Dār al-Maʿārif, 1981.

---. "Al-Maʿarrī: A-shāʿir am faylasūf?" *Al-Hilāl* 8.46 (June 1938): 848-50, 959-61.

---. *The Stream of Days*. Trans. Hilary Wayment. London and New York: Longman, Green, and Co., 1948.

---. *Tajdīd dhikrā Abī al-ʿAlāʾ*. 6th repr. Cairo: Dār al-Maʿārif, 1963.

Ḥusayn, Ṭaha, et al., eds. *Taʿrīf al-qudamāʾ bi-Abī al-ʿAlāʾ*. Cairo: Wizārat al-Maʿārif al-ʿUmūmiyyah, 1944, repr. 1965.

Husni, R. "Al-Ruṣāfī, Maʿrūf ʿAbd al-Ghanī." EAL.

Ibn al-Abbār, Muḥammad ibn ʿAbdallah. *Al-Takmilah li-Kitāb al-ṣilah*. 4 vols. Ed. ʿAbd al-Salām al-Harrās. Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1995.

Ibn Abī Ḥusaynah, al-Ḥasan ibn ʿAbd Allāh. *Dīwān Ibn Abī Ḥuṣaynah, samiʿahu wa-sharaḥahu Abu l-*

ʿ*Alāʾ al-Maʿarrī*. 2 vols. Ed. Muḥammad Asʿad Ṭalas. Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, 1956; repr. 1999.

Ibn al-ʿAdīm, Kamāl al-Dīn ʿUmar ibn Aḥmad. *Bughyat al-ṭalab fī taʾrīkh Ḥalab*. 11 vols. Ed. Suhayl Zakkār. Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1988-9.

Ibn ʿAqīl, Abū l-Wafāʾ. *The Notebooks of Ibn ʿAqīl:* Kitāb al-funūn. 2 vols. Ed. George Makdisi. Beirut: Dār al-Mashriq, 1970-71.

Ibn al-Ashtarkūwī, Muḥammad ibn Yūsuf al-Saraqusṭī. *Al-Maqāmāt al-Luẓumīyah by Abū l-Ṭāhir Muḥammad ibn Yūsuf al-Tamīmī al-Saraqusṭī ibn al-Aštarkūwī (d. 538/1143)*. Ed. and trans. James T. Monroe. Leiden: Brill, 2002.

Ibn al-Athīr, Ḍiyāʾ al-Dīn. *Al-Mathal al-sāʾir, fī adab al-kātib wa l-shāʿir*. 4 vols. Ed. Aḥmad al-Ḥufī and Badawī Ṭabāna. Cairo: Dār Nahḍat Miṣr, 1973.

Ibn Faḍl Allāh al-ʿUmrī, Shihāb al-Dīn Aḥmad. *Masālik al-abṣār fī mamālik al-amṣār*. 27 vols. Ed. Kāmil Salām al-Jabūrī. Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyyah, 2010.

Ibn al-Habbāriyyah, Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad. *Al-Ṣādiḥ wa l-bāghim*. 2 vols. Ed. Wuraydah Jumʿah ʿAwd. Benghazi: Jāmiʿat Qāryūnus, 1999.

Ibn al-Jawzī, Abū l-Faraj. *Al-Muntaẓam fī taʾrīkh al-mulūk wa l-umam*. 19 vols. Ed. Muḥammad ʿAbd al-Qādir ʿAṭā and Muṣṭafā ʿAbd al-Qādir ʿAṭā. Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyyah, 1995.

Ibn al-Jawzī, Abū l-Muẓaffar Yūsuf Sibṭ. "Mirʾāt al-zamān fī tawārīkh al-iʿyān." TQ.

Ibn Kathīr, Abū l-Fidāʾ Ismāʿīl. *Al-Bidāyah wa l-nihāyah*. 21 vols. Ed. Ṣalāḥ Muḥammad al-Khiyamī et al. Doha: Wizārat al-Awqāf wa l-Shuʾūn al-Islāmiyyah, Dawlat Qaṭar, 2015.

Ibn Khallikān, Abū l-ʿAbbās Shams al-Dīn. *Wafayāt al-aʿyān wa-anbāʾ abnāʾ al-zamān*. 8 vols. Ed. Iḥsān ʿAbbās. Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, 1963.

Ibn Khaṭīb al-Tibrīzī, Abū Zakariyā Yaḥyā ibn ʿAlī. *Sharḥ dīwān Abī Tammām*. 2 vols. Ed. Rājī al-Asmar. Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-ʿArabī, 1994.

---. *Al-Wāfī fī l-ʿarūḍ wa l-qawāfī*. Ed. ʿUmar Yaḥyā and Fakhr al-Dīn Fajāʾuh. Aleppo: Al-Maktabah al-ʿArabiyyah bi-Ḥalab, 1970.

Ibn Manẓūr, Muḥammad ibn Mukarram. *Lisān al-ʿarab*. 20 vols. Cairo: Bulāq, 1883-91; repr. Beirut, 1955-56.

Ibn al-Muʿtazz, ʿAbd Allāh. *Kitāb al-badīʿ*. Ed. Ignatius Krachkovsky. London: E.J.W. Gibb Memorial Publication, 1935; repr. Damascus: Dār al-Ḥikmah, 1960.

Ibn Qutaybah, ʿAbd Allāh ibn Muslim. *Al-Maʿārif*. Ed. Tharwat ʿUkāshah. Cairo: Dār al-Maʿārif, 1965.

Ibn Quzmān, Abū Bakr ʿAbd al-Mālik. *The Mischievous Muse: Extant Poetry and Prose by Ibn Quzmān of Córdoba (d. AH 555/AD 1160)*. 2 vols. trans. James T. Monroe. Leiden: Brill, 2016.

Ibn al-Walīd, ʿAlī ibn Muḥammad. *Dāmigh al-bāṭil wa-ḥatf al-munāḍil*. Ed. Muṣṭafā Ghālib. Beirut: Muʾassasat ʿIzz al-Dīn, 1982.

Ibrahim, Ahmed Fekry. "Rethinking the *Taqlīd* Hegemony: An Institutional, *Longue-Durée* Approach." *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 136.4 (2016): 801-16.

Ishākiyān, Avetik. *Malḥamat al-Maʿarrī*. Trans. Niẓār B. Niẓāriyān. Aleppo: Dār al-Ḥiwār, 1975; repr. 1994.

Al-Istānbūlī, Maḥmūd Mahdī, ed. *Ṭaha Ḥusayn fī mīzān al-ʿulamā waʾl-udabāʾ*. Beirut: Al-Maktab al-Islāmī, 1983.

Jackson, Sherman A. "*Taqlīd*, Legal Scaffolding and the Scope of Legal Injunctions in Post-Formative Theory: *Muṭlaq* and *ʿĀmm* in the Jurisprudence of Shihāb al-Dīn al-Qarāfī." *Islamic Law and Society* 3.2 (1996): 165–92.

Al-Jāḥiẓ, Abū ʿUthmān ʿAmr ibn Baḥr. *Kitāb al-bukhalāʾ*. Ed. Muḥammad Ṭāhir al-Ḥājirī. Cairo: Dār al-Kātib al-Miṣrī, 1948.

Jauss, Hans Robert. *Towards an Aesthetic of Reception*. Trans. Timothy Bahti. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1982.

Jayyusi, Salma Khadra. *Trends and Movements in Modern Arabic Poetry*. Volume 1. Leiden: Brill, 1977.

Johansen, Jørgen. *Literary Discourse: A Semiotic-Pragmatic Approach to Literature*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002.

Al-Jubayrah, ʿAbd al-Ḥamīd. *Al-Aṣālah wa al-ḥadāthah fī takwīn al-fikr al-ʿarabī al-naqdī al-ḥadīth*. Tripoli, Lebanon: Manshūrāt Dār al-Shamāl, 1986.

Al-Jundī, Muḥammad Salīm. *Al-Jāmiʿ fī akhbār Abī l-ʿAlāʾ al-Maʿarrī wa-athārihi*. 3 vols. Damascus: Al-Majmaʿ al-ʿIlmī al-ʿArabī, 1962-64.

Al-Jurjānī, ʿAbd al-Qāhir. *Dalāʾil al-iʿjāz fī ʿilm al-maʿānī*. Ed. Muḥammad Raḍwān al-Dāyah and Fāyiz al-Dāyah. Damascus: Dār al-Fikr, 2007.

---. *Kitāb dalāʾil al-iʿjāz*. Ed. Yāsīn al-Ayyūbī. Beirut: Al-Maktabah al-ʿAṣriyyah, 2000.

Kadhim, Hussein N. *The Poetics of Anti-Colonialism in the Arabic* Qaṣīdah. Leiden: Brill, 2004.

Kassab, Elizabeth Suzanne. *Contemporary Arab Thought: Cultural Critique in Comparative Perspective*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2010.

Al-Khafājī, ʿAbdallah ibn Muḥammad ibn Sinān. *Sirr al-faṣāḥah*. Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyyah, 1982.

Khaldi, Boutheina. "Multiple Intellectual Engagements?" *Journal of Arabic Literature* 43 (2012): 197-226.

Kilito, Abdelfattah. *Abū l-ʿAlāʾ al-Maʿarrī aw matāhāt al-qawl*. Casablanca: Dār Tubqāl, 2000.

Kinberg, L. "What is Meant By *Zuhd*?" *Studia Islamica* 61 (1985): 27-44.

Klemettilä, Hannele. *The Medieval Kitchen: A Social History With Recipes*. London, UK: Reaktion Books, 2012.

Landau, Jacob. "Zakī Mubārak on the Arabic Language." *Proceedings of the 20th Congress Européenne des Arabisants et Islamisants, Part 1*. Ed. K. Dévényi. Budapest: Csoma de Kõrös, 2002. 37-41.

Lane, Edward William. *Arabic-English Lexicon*. London, UK: Willams & Norgate, 1863.

Al-Laqqānī, Ibrāhīm. *Sharḥ al-nāẓim ʿalā al-jawharah*. 2 vols. Ed. Marwān Ḥusayn ʿAbd al-Ṣāliḥīn al-Bijāwī. Cairo: Dār al-Baṣāʾir, 2009.

Larcher, Pierre. "Arabic Linguistic Tradition II." *The Oxford Handbook of Arabic Linguistics*. Ed. Jonathan Owens. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2013.

Larkin, Margaret. "Abū l-ʿAlāʾ al-Maʿarrī's *Muʿjiz Aḥmad* and the Limits of Poetic Commentary." *Oriens* 41 (2013): 479-97.

Larsson, Göran. *Ibn García's shuʿūbiyya Letter: Ethnic and Theological Tensions in Medieval al-Andalus* Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2003.

Lazard, Gilbert. "The Case For Pure Linguistics." *Studies in Language* 36.2 (2012): 241-59.

Leech, Geoffrey and Mick Short. *Style in Fiction: A Linguistic Introduction to English Fictional Prose*. 2nd Ed. London, UK: Routledge, 1997.

Levin, Harry. "The Title as a Literary Genre." *The Modern Language Review* 4 (Oct. 1977): xxiv-xxv.

Lewicka, Paulina B. *Food and Foodways of Medieval Cairenes*. Leiden: Brill, 2011.

Limon, Jerzy. "Theater's Fifth Dimension: Time and Fictionality." *Poetica* 41.1-2 (2009): 33-54.

Lowry, Joseph, trans. *Al-Shāfiʿī: The Epistle on Legal Theory*. New York, NY: New York University Press, 2013.

Al-Maʿarrī, Abū l-ʿAlāʾ. *ʿAbath al-Walīd*. Ed. Nādiya ʿAlī al-Dawlah. Beirut: Al-Sharikah al-Muttaḥidah li l-Tawzīʿ, 1987.

---. *Dīwān Abī Tammām bi-sharḥ al-Khaṭīb al-Tibrīzī*. Ed. Muhammad ʿAbduh ʿAzzām. Cairo: Dār al-

Maʿārif, 1964.

---. *Al-Fuṣūl wa l-ghāyāt* (838). Digital Scan, Egyptian National Archives, Cairo

---. *Al-Fuṣūl wa l-ghāyāt fī tamjīd Allāh wa l-mawāʿiẓ*. Ed. Maḥmūd Ḥasan Zanātī. Beirut: Al-Maktab al-Tijārī li l-Ṭibāʿah wa l-Tawzīʿ wa l-Nashr, 1938.

---. *Al-Lāmiʿ al-ʿazīzī* (Hamidiye 1148), Süleymaniye Library, Istanbul.

---. *Al-Lāmiʿ al-ʿazīzī*, Volume 1. Ed. M. Saʿīd al-Mawlāwī. Riyāḍ: Markaz al-Malik Fayṣal li-l-Buḥūth wa-l-Dirāsāt al-Islāmiyyah, 2008.

---. *Luzūm mā lā yalzam*, 2 vols., ed. ʿAzīz Zand. Cairo: Maṭbaʿat al-Maḥrūsah, 1891-95.

---. *Luzūm mā lā yalzam, al-juzʾ al-awwal* (OR 5319). Digital Scan. British Library, London.

---. *Luzūm mā lā* yalzam. 3 vols. Ed. Ibrāhīm al-Anbārī. Cairo: Wizārat al-Tarbiyyah wa l-Taʿlīm, 1959.

---. "Mulqā l-sabīl." *Rasāʾil al-bulaghāʾ*. Ed. Muḥammad Kurd ʿAlī. Cairo: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿArabiyyah al-Kubrā, 1913. 214-31.

---. *Rasāʾil Abī al-ʿAlāʾ al-Maʿarrī, al-juzʾ al-awwal*. Ed. Iḥsān ʿAbbās. Beirut: Dār al-Shurūq, 1982.

---. *Risālat al-ghufrān*. Ed. ʿĀʾishah ʿAbd al-Raḥmān "Bint al-Shāṭiʾ." Cairo: Dār al-Maʿārif, 1963.

---. *Risālat al-malāʾikah*. Ed. Muḥammad Salīm al-Jundī. Beirut: Al-Maktab al-Tijārī li l-Ṭibāʿah wa l-Tawzīʿ wa l-Nashr, 1966.

---. *Risālat al-ṣāhil wa-l-shāḥij*. Ed. ʿĀʾishah ʿAbd al-Raḥmān "Bint al-shāṭiʾ," Cairo: Dār al-Maʿārif, 1984.

---. *Saqṭ al-zand*. Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, 1957.

---. *Sharḥ dīwān Ḥamāsat Abī Tammām, al-mansūb li-Abī l-ʿAlāʾ al-Maʿarrī*. 2 vols. Ed. Ḥusayn Muḥammad Naqshah. Beirut: Dār al-Gharb al-Islāmī, 1991.

---. *Sharḥ dīwān al-Mutanabbī li-Abī l-ʿAlāʾ al-Maʿarrī, "Muʿjiz Aḥmad"*. 4 vols. Ed. ʿAbd al-Majīd Diyāb. Cairo: Dār al-Maʿārif, 1986-88; repr. 1996.

---. *Sharḥ al-luzūmiyyāt*. 3 vols. Ed. Ḥusayn Naṣṣār et al. Cairo: Al-Hayʾah al-Miṣriyyah al-ʿĀmmah li l-Kitāb, 1994.

---. *Shurūḥ Saqṭ al-zand*. 5 vols. Ed. Ṭaha Ḥusayn et al. Cairo: Al-Hayʾah al-Miṣriyyah al-ʿĀmmah li l-Kitāb, 1945-9; repr. 1987.

---. *Zajr al-nābiḥ: "Muqtaṭafāt"*. Ed. Amjad al-Ṭarābulsī. Damascus: Al-Maktabah al-Hāshimiyyah bi-Dimeshq, 1965.

Mahmoud, Saba. "Religious Reason and Secular Affect: An Incommensurable Divide?" *Is Critique Secular? Blasphemy, Injury, and Free Speech*. New York, NY: Fordham University Press, 2013. 58-94.

Al-Mallah, Majd Yaser. *In the Shadows of the Master: Al-Mutanabbī's Legacy and the Quest For the Center in Fāṭimid and Andalusian Poetry*. London, UK: Berkshire Academic Press, 2012.

Malti-Douglas, Fedwa. *Blindness and Autobiography: Al-Ayyam of Taha Husayn*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988.

---. "Mentalités and Marginality: Blindness and Mamlûk Civilization." *The Islamic World from Classical to Modern Times: Essays in Honor of Bernard Lewis*. Ed. C.E. Bosworth et al. Princeton, NJ: Darwin Press, 1989. 229-30.

Margoliouth, David S. "Abu'l-`Alā al-Ma`arrī's Correspondence on Vegetarianism." *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland* (April 1902): 289–332.

---. *The Letters of Abu l-`Ala of Ma`arrat al-Nu`man; edited from the Leyden manuscript, with the life of the author*. Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press, 1898.

Al-Marṣafī, Sayyid. *Asrār al-Ḥamāsah*. Cairo: Dār al-Kutub al-Khadiwiyyah, 1916.

---. *Raghbat al-āmil fī Kitāb al-kāmil*. Cairo: Dār al-Kutub, 1929.

Martin, Richard C. "Inimitability." *The Encyclopedia of the Qurʾān*. 6 vols. Ed. Jane Dammen McAuliffe. Leiden: Brill, 2006. 2:526-36.

Marzolph, U. "Hazl," EAL.

Matejka, Ladislav and Krystyna Pomorska, eds. *Readings in Russian Poetics: Formalist and Structuralist Views.* Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1971.

McAuley, Denis E. "An A to Z of Sufi Metaphysics: Ibn ʿArabī's *Muʿashsharāt*." *The Meeting Place of British Middle East Studies: Emerging Scholars, Emergent Research & Approaches*. Ed. Amanda Phillips and Refqa Abu-Remaileh. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2009. 60-77.

McAuliffe, Jane Dammen, ed. *Enyclopaedia of the Qurʾān*, 6 vols. Leiden, Boston, and Köln: Brill, 2001-06.

Medici, Anna Maria. "Waqfs of Cyrenaica and Italian Colonialism in Libya (1911-41)." *Held in Trust: Waqf in the Islamic World*. Ed. Pascale Ghazaleh. Cairo and New York: The American University in Cairo Press, 2011. 155-78.

Meisami, Julie Scott and Paul Starkey, eds. *Encyclopedia of Arabic Literature*. London and New York: Routledge, 1998).

Minorsky, Vladimir. *Studies in Caucasian History I: New Light on the Shaddadids of Ganja II*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1953.

Mitchell, Timothy. *Colonising Egypt*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1991.

Mitha, Farouk. *Al-Ghazālī and the Ismailis: A Debate on Reason and Authority in Medieval Islam*. London: I. B. Tauris, 2002.

Mittelmark, Howard and Sandra Newman. *How Not to Write a Novel: 200 Classic Mistakes and How to Avoid Them—A Misstep-By-Misstep Guide*. New York, NY: HarperCollins, 2008.

Monroe, James T. and Mark F. Pettigrew. "The Decline of Courtly Patronage and the

Appearance of New Genres in Arabic Literature: The Case of the Zajal, the Maqāma, and the Shadow Play." *Journal of Arabic Literature* 34.1-2, The Arabic Literature of al-Andalus (2003): 138-77.

Moosa, Matti. *The Origins of Modern Arabic Fiction*. 2nd ed. Boulder and London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1997.

Morray, David W. *An Ayyubid Notable and His World: Ibn al-`Adim and Aleppo as Portrayed in His Biographical Dictionary Associated With the City*. Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1994.

Mubārak, Zakī. *Al-Nathr al-fannī fī al-qarn al-rābiʿ*. 3 vols. Cairo: Al-Maktabah al-Tijāriyyah al-Kubrā, 1931, repr. 1934.

Muḥyī l-Dīn, ʿAbd al-Razzāq. *Adab al-Murtaḍā min sīratihi wa-āthārihi*. Baghdad: Maṭbaʿat al-Maʿārif, 1957.

Al-Nabulusī, ʿAbd al-Ghanī. *The Arch Rhetorician, or The Schemer's Skimmer: A Handbook of Late Arabic badīʿ Drawn From ʿAbd al-Ghanī an-Nābulsī's* Nafaḥāt al-azhār ʿalā Nasamāt al-Asḥār. Ed. and trans. Pierre Cachia. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 1998.

Nallino, C.A. *L'Arabo parlato in egitto: grammatical, dialoghi e raccolta di circa 6000 vocaboli*. Milan: Manuali Hoepli, 1900.

Nänny, Max . "Iconic Uses of Rhyme."*Outside-In-Inside-Out: Iconicity in Language and Literature*. Ed. Constantino Maeder, Olga Fischer, and William Herlofsky. Amsterdam: Benjamins, 2005. 195-215.

Nāṣir-I Khusraw, Abū Muʿīn Ḥamīd al-Dīn. *Nasir-I Khusraw's Book of Travels: Safarnamah*. Ed. and trans. Wheeler M. Thackston. Costa Mesa, CA: Mazda Publishers, 2001.

Nicholson, Reynold Alleyne. *Studies in Islamic Poetry*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1921.

Nicholson, Reynold Alleyne, trans. *The Tarjumán al-Ashwáq.* London, UK: Royal Asiatic Society, 1911.

Al-Nowaihi, Mohamed. "Towards the Reappraisal of Classical Arabic Literature and History: Some Aspects of Taha Husayn's Use of Modern Western Criteria." *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 11.2 (April 1980): 189-207.

Nutton, Vivian. "From Galen to Alexander: Aspects of Medicine and Medical Practice in Late Antiquity." *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 38 (1984): 1–14.

Al-Nuwayri, Shihab al-Din. *The Ultimate Ambition in the Arts of Erudition: A Compendium of Knowledge from the Classical Islamic World*. Trans. Elias Muhanna. London, UK: Penguin Books, 2016).

Ormsby, Eric. "Ibn Ḥazm." *The Literature of Al-Andalus*. Ed. María Rosa Menocal, Raymond P. Scheindlin, and Michael Sells. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2000. 237-51.

Peltz, Christian. *Der Koran des Abū l-ʿAlāʾ*, 2 vols. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz-Verlag, 2013.

Poonawala, I. "Taʾwīl." EI2.

Porath, Yehoshua. *In Search of Arab Unity 1930-1945*. London and New York: Routledge, 2013.

Preminger, Alex et al, eds. *The New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993.

Al-Qayrawānī, ʿAlī ibn al-Ḥuṣrī. *Abū l-Ḥasan ʿAlī ibn al-Ḥuṣrī al-Qayrawānī*. Ed. Muḥammad Marzūqī and Yaḥyā ibn al-Ḥajja al-Jilānī. Tunis: Maktabat al-Manār, 1963.

Al-Qayrawānī, Al-Ḥasan ibn al-Rashīq. *Al-ʿUmdah fī maḥāsin al-shiʿr wa-ādābihi wa-naqdihi*. 2 vols. Ed. Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn Hawwārī and Hudā ʿAwdah. Beirut: Dār wa-Maktabat al-Hilāl, 1996.

Al-Qifṭī, Jamāl al-Dīn Abū l-Ḥasan ʿAlī ibn Yūsuf. *Inbāh al-ruwāt ʿalā anbāh al-nuḥāt*. 4 vols. Ed. Muḥammad Abū l-Faḍl Ibrāhīm. Cairo: Dār al-Fikr al-ʿArabī and Beirut: Muʾassasat al-Kutub al-Thaqāfiyyah, 1986.

Qutbuddin, Tahera. *Al-Muʾayyad al-Shīrāzī and Fatimid* Daʿwa *Poetry: A Case of Commitment in Classical Arabic Literature*. Leiden: Brill, 2005.

Reynolds, Dwight et al. *Interpreting the Self: Autobiography in the Arabic Literary Tradition.* Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2001.

Ricoeur, Paul. *De l'interpretation: Essai sur Freud*. 2nd ed. Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1995.

Robinson, Paul. *Freud and His Critics*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1993.

Rosen, Tova. "The Muwashshah." *The Literature of al-Andalus*. Ed. María Rosa Menocal, Raymond P. Scheindlin, and Michael Sells. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2000. 165-89.

Roush, Sherry. *Hermes' Lyre: Italian Poetic Self-Commentary From Dante to Tommasco Campanella*. Toronto: Univerity of Toronto Press, 2002.

Al-Ruṣāfī, Maʿrūf. *ʿAlā bāb sijn Abī l-ʿAlāʾ*. Ed. Muḥammad ʿAlī al-Zarqā. Damascus: Dār al-Madā, 1946; repr. 2002.

---. *Dīwān al-Ruṣāfī*. Ed. Muṣṭafā al-Saqā. Cairo: Dār al-Fikr al-ʿArabī, 1953.

---. *Kitāb al-shakhṣiyyah al-muḥammadiyyah aw ḥall al-lughz al-muqaddas*. Köln: Manshūrāt al-Jamal, 2002.

---. *Rasāʾil al-taʿlīqāt*. Beirut: Dār Rayḥāniyyah, 1957.

Saad, Bashar, Hassan Azaizeh, and Omar Said. "Tradition and Perspectives of Arab Herbal Medicine: A Review." *Evidence-Based Complementary and Alternative Medicine* 2.4 (2005): 475–79.

Al-Ṣafadī, Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn Khalīl ibn Aybak. *Kitāb al-wāfī bi l-wafayāt*. 29 vols. Ed. Aḥmad al-Arnaʾūṭ and Turkī Muṣṭāfā. Beirut: Dār Iḥyāʾ al-Turāth al-ʿArabī, 2000.

---. *Nakt al-hiymān fī nukat al-ʿumyān*. Ed. Aḥmad Zakī Bey. Cairo: Dār al-Madīnah, 1911.

Saleh, Walid A. "The Last of the Nishapuri School of Tafsīr: Al-Wāḥidī (d. 468/1076) and His Significance in the History of Qur'anic Exegesis." *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 126.2 (2006): 223-43.

Al-Sayrāfī, Abu Saʿīd. *Kitāb Ṣanʿat al-shiʿr*. Ed. Jaʿfar Mājid. Beirut: Dār al-Gharb al-Islāmī, 1995.

Schoeler, Gregor. "Musammaṭ." EI2.

Schoeler, Gregor and Geert Jan van Gelder, ed. and trans. *The Epistle of Forgiveness, Volume 1: A Vision of Heaven and Hell*. New York: New York University Press, 2013.

Searle, John R. "Chomsky's Revolution in Linguistics." *New York Review of Books*. June 29, 1972.

Seidensticker, Tilman. "Ibn al-Jawzī." EAL.

Sell, Roger D. ed. *Literary Pragmatics*. London, UK: Routledge, 1991.

Sells, Michael. *Stations of Desire: Love Elegies from Ibn ʿArabī and New Poems*. Jerusalem: Ibis Editions, 2000.

Sheehi, Stephen. *Foundations of Modern Arab Identity*. Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2004.

Shihabi, Mahmud. *Zaki Mubarak: A Critical Study*. Jeddah: Tihama, 1981.

Shklovsky, Viktor. "Art as Technique." *Russian Formalist Criticism: Four Essays*. Ed. L.T. Lemon and M.J. Reis. Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1965. 3-24.

Short, T.L. *Peirce's Theory of Signs*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2007.

Smoor, Pieter. "Enigmatic Allusion and Double Meaning in Maʿarrī's Newly-Discovered 'Letter of a Horse and a Mule': Part I." *Journal of Arabic Literature* 12 (1981): 49-73.

---. "Enigmatic Allusion and Double Meaning in Maʿarrī's Newly-Discovered 'Letter of a Horse and a Mule': Part II." *Journal of Arabic Literature* 13 (1982): 23-52.

---. *Kings and Bedouins in the Palace of Aleppo, As Reflected in Maʿarrī's Works*. Manchester, UK: University of Manchester, 1985.

---. "The Weeping Wax Candle and Maʿarrī's Wisdom-tooth: Night Thoughts and Riddles from the *Gāmiʿ al-awzān*." *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 138 (1988): 283-312.

---. "Wine, Love, and Praise for the Fāṭimid Imāms, the Enlightened of God." *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 142.1 (1992): 90-104.

Somekh, Sasson. "The Neo-Classical Arabic Poets." *The Cambridge History of Arabic Literature: Modern Arabic Literature*. Ed. M.M. Badawi. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1992. 36-81.

Sperl, Stefan. *Mannerism in Arabic Poetry: A Structural Analysis of Selected Texts (3rd Century AH–9th Century AD/5th Century AH–11th Century AD)*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1989.

Stern, S.M. "Some Noteworthy Manuscripts of the Poems of Abu'l-'Alā' al-Ma'arrī." *Oriens* 7.2 (1954): 322-47.

Stetkevych, Suzanne Pinckney. "Abūʾl-ʿAlāʾ al-Maʿarrī wa-shiʿriyyat al-iltizām: naḥw qirāʾah taḥlīliyyah li-*Saqṭ al-zand*." *Proceedings of the Third International Conference for Literary Criticism, Cairo, Egypt, 10-14 Dec. 2003*. 2 vols. Ed. ʿIzz al-Dīn Ismāʿīl. 2006. 2:308-16.

---. "The Snake in the Tree in Abu al-ʿAlaʾ al-Maʿarri's *Epistle of Forgiveness*: Critical Essay and Translation." *Journal of Arabic Literature* 45 (2014): 1-80.

---. "The Ṣuʿlūk and His Poem: A Paradigm of Passage Manqué." *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 10.4 (Oct.—Dec. 1984): 661-78.

Stewart, Devin. "Rhythmical Anxiety: Notes on Abūʾl-ʿAlāʾ al-Maʿarrī's (d. 449/1058) *al-Fuṣūl waʾl-Ghāyāt* and Its Reception." *The Qurʾan and* Adab: *The Shaping of Literary Traditions in Classical Islam*. Ed. Nuha Alshaar. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2016. 239-72.

Strauss, Leo. "Persecution and the Art of Writing." *Social Research* 8.1 (1941): 488-504.

Strika, Vincenzo. "C.A. Nallino e l'impresa libica." *Quaderni di Studi Arabi* 2 (1984): 9-20.

Suleiman, Yasir. *Arabic in the Fray: Language Ideology and Cultural Politics*. Edinburgh, UK: Edinburgh University Press, 2013.

---. *The Arabic Language and National Identity: A Study in Ideology*. Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2003.

---. *Arabic, Self, and Identity: A Study in Conflict and Displacement*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2011.

---. *A War of Words: Language and Conflict in the Middle East* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2004.

Al-Suyūṭī, Jalāl al-Dīn ʿAbd al-Raḥmān. *Bughyat al-wuʿāt fī ṭabaqāt al-lughawiyyīn wa l-nuḥāt*. 2 vols. Ed. Muḥammad Abū al-Faḍl Ibrāhīm. Cairo: Maṭbaʿat ʿĪsā al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī wa-Shurakāhu, 1964.

Al-Ṭabarī, Muḥammad ibn Jarīr. *Taʾrīkh al-rusul wa-l-mulūk*. 11 vols. Ed. Muḥammad Abū l-Faḍl Ibrāhīm. Cairo: Dār al-Maʿārif, 1990-2006.

Tageldin, Shaden M. *Disarming Words: Empire and the Seduction of Translations in Egypt*. Berkeley, CA and London: University of California Press, 2011.

Al-Tanūkhī, Abū Yaʿlā ʿAbd al-Bāqī. *Kitāb al-qawāfī*. Ed. ʿUmar al-Asʿad and Muḥyi al-Dīn Ramaḍān. Beirut: Dār al-Irshād, 1970.

Al-Thaʿālibī, Abū Manṣūr. *Tatimmat yatīmat al-dahr fī maḥāsin ahl al-ʿaṣr*. 5 vols. Ed. Mufīd Muḥammad Qumayḥah. Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyyah, 1983.

Toorawa, Shawkat M. *Ibn Abī Ṭāhir Ṭayfūr and Arabic Writerly Culture: A Ninth-Century Bookman in Baghdad*. London and New York: RoutledgeCurzon, 2005.

Tuttle, Kelly. "Expansion and Digression: A Study in Mamlūk Literary Commentary." Doctoral dissertation, The University of Pennsylvania. 2013.

Valéry, Paul. *Degas danse dessin*. Paris: Ambroise Vollard, 1936.

Van den Berg, Gabrielle. "Stanzaic Poetry." *Encyclopedia Iranica Online*. December 6, 2012.

Van Gelder, Geert Jan. *Beyond the Line: Classical Arabic Literary Critics on the Coherence and Unity of the Poem*. Leiden: Brill, 1982.

---. *God's Banquet: Food in Classical Arabic Literature*. New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2000.

---. *Sound and Sense in Classical Arabic Poetry*. Wiesbaden: Harrasowitz Verlag, 2012.

Verity, A.C.F. "Two Poems of Abū'l-ʿAlā Al-Maʿarrī." *Journal of Arabic Literature* 2 (1971): 37-47.

Wacquant, Loic. "Positivism." *The Blackwell Dictionary of Twentieth-Century Social Thought*. Ed. William Outhwaite and Tom Bottomore (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1992) 205-6.

Walsh, Richard. *The Rhetoric of Fictionality: Narrative Theory and the Idea of Fiction*. Columbus, OH: The Ohio State University Press, 2007.

Al-Warāklī, Ḥasan. *Al-Maqāmāt al-luzūmiyyah: Taʾlīf Abī l-Ṭāhir Muḥammad ibn Yūsuf al-Tamīmī al-Saraqusṭī*. Rabat: Maṭābiʿ Manshūrāt ʿUkāẓ, 1995.

Weiss, Bernard G. *The Search for God's Law: Islamic Jurisprudence in the Writings of Sayf al-Dīn al-Āmidī*. Rev. ed. Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2010.

---. "*ʿUmūm wa-khuṣūṣ*." EI2.

Werner, Alfred. *Degas Pastels*. New York: Watson-Guptill, 1969.

Winter, T.J. trans. *Al-Ghazālī: On Disciplining the Soul* (Kitab riyadat al-nafs) *& On Breaking the Two Desires* (Kitāb kasr al-shahwatayn), *Books XXII and XXIII of the Revival of the Religious Sciences* (Iḥyāʾ ʿulūm al-dīn). Cambridge, UK: The Islamic Texts Society, 1995.

Wujastyk, Dominik. "From Balkh to Baghdad: Indian Science and the Birth of the Islamic Golden Age in the Eighth Century." *Indian Journal of History of Science* 51.4 (2016): 679-90.

Zamora, Lois Parkinson and Monika Kaup. "Baroque, New World Baroque, Neobaroque:

Categories and Concepts." *Baroque New Worlds: Representation, Transculturation, Counterconquest*. Ed. Lois Parkinson Zamora and Monika Kaup. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010. 1-35.

Zaouali, Lilia. *Medieval Cuisine of the Islamic World: A Concise History With 174 Recipes*. University of California Press, 2009.

Al-Zirkilī, Khayr al-Dīn. *Al-Aʿlām*, 7 vols. Beirut: Dār al-ʿIlm li l-Malāyīn, 2002.

Zwartjes, Otto. *Love Songs From al-Andalus: History, Structure, and Meaning of the Kharja*. Leiden: Brill, 1997.