

Sacred Nostalgia:
A gloss, translation, and commentary on a selection of
poems by ‘Umar ibn al-Fāriḍ

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Introduction

My experience of living in the Arab world, limited as it is, has at least impressed upon me the central importance poetry plays among its people, for I never had to go out of my way to study it—it, on the contrary, seemed to always come to me. The first poet to meet me was the celebrated Maḥmūd Darwīsh, a national hero of Palestine and beloved throughout the Middle East. I found that I needed say no more than “*aḥinnu ilá khubzi ummi*” before the rest of the room would chime in and finish the poem. In Egypt, famous lines of other contemporary poets, such as Aḥmad Shawqī, Ṣalāḥ Jahīn and Aḥmad Fu’ād Nijm were soon added to my repertoire. As time went on, a second layer of older Egyptian poetry began to emerge: on a trip to Alexandria, a friend of mine said that she had a mind to visit the tomb of al-Būṣīrī (d. 1294-7), the composer of the *Qaṣīdat al-Burdah*, one of the most recited and widespread pieces of poetry in the Islamic world; it turned out that she had grown up singing this poem and had a large portion of it memorized. As Suzanne Stetkevych explains, it is largely the union of the classical form of the *qaṣīdah*, with its elegiac, supplicatory, and panegyric modes, with religious subject matter that makes the poem so appealing and powerful—in directing its praise and supplication to the Prophet Muḥammad, the poem is understood to possess a certain innate blessing (*barakah*) that the reader may hope to assume in its performance (Stetkevych, 2006, 152-153).

A fascinating detail of the story of the *Burdah* is that it was partially composed in response to and imitation of an earlier poem by ‘Umar ibn al-Fāriḍ (d. 1235), a short *qaṣīdah* of 18 lines (the poem entitled “Nar Layla” in this study). Ibn al-Fāriḍ is a pillar of popular classical poetry in his own right; in an introduction to a collection of his poetry, translated into English by Th. Emil Homerin, Michael Sells tells an anecdote in which, while studying in Syria, he mentions casually to a fellow passenger in a service taxi that he is studying mystical Islamic poetry, and the immediate follow-up question is

if he has read the *Khamrīyah* (Ibn al-Fāriḍ’s most famous work) and what does he think of it (Homerin, 2001, xi). Celebrated as both a fine poet and a Sufi saint, his diwan has been commented on by many prominent thinkers, most prominently al-Qayṣarī (d. ca. 1350) and al-Nābulusī (d. 1731), whose *Kashf al-sirr al-ghāmiḍ* systematically discusses the mystical inner meaning “that many had come believe lay hidden beneath every verse of Ibn al-Fāriḍ’s poetry” (Homerin, 1994, 78). It is thus far beyond the purview of this humble essay to summarize, redact, or in any way contribute to the massive body of literature devoted to understanding this poet; it is rather a close study of a few poems from the perspective of a student who seeks to approach the poetry on the basis of its own language, without al-Qayṣarī, al-Nābulusī, al-Dhahabī, Ibn Khaldūn, or any other such illustrious names as a guide.

The major sources relied on for this paper were works by Suzanne and Jaroslav Stetkevych, whose rich background in the poetic tradition and its development were invaluable in learning new ways to appreciate the language of the poetry; Th. Emil Homerin, who is the *ustādh par excellence* in all things to do with Ibn al-Fāriḍ; Jean-Yves L’Hopital’s detailed gloss and commentary on Ibn al-Fāriḍ’s diwan, which was the only critical edition I found that provided full vocalization; A. J. Arberry’s *The Mystical Poems of Ibn al-Fāriḍ*, whose English translations and copious notes were very helpful in getting a second (or third) opinion on how to approach the text; and Maḥdī Muḥammad Nāṣir al-Dīn’s annotated edition of the Diwan, which was perhaps the most thorough in its coverage, but was scant on depth (my favorite was reading the line (“I yearn for the waters of ‘Udhayb,” and turning to the footnote for ‘Udhayb, only to find: “*mawda‘ fīhi mā*”).

Nar Layla

نَار لَيْلَى

A. J. Arberry classifies this poem as the archetypal “love-ode” of the tradition Ibn al-Fāriḍ is writing from, “a rhapsody up many themes familiar in its kind of composition, each theme being given little more than a passing reference of recognition” (Arberry, 1956, 96). The themes he identifies are: the appeal for sympathy (ll. 1-2), the address to the messenger (ll. 3-6), old friends (l. 7), passionate anguish (ll. 8-9), the reply to the censurer (l. 10), the oath of loyalty (ll. 11-12), the visitation of a ghost in sleep (l. 13), regret for times past (ll. 14-15), the gazelle (l. 16), and a depiction of love as a cruel judge (ll. 17-18).

A second set of themes, barely touched on by Arberry but discussed heavily in Jaroslav Stetkevych’s work, is the of elegiac mode of the piece, activated through a schema of references to specific place-names and symbols that, through their long history of intertextual significance and elaboration, resonate keenly for the poet and his audience and elicit emotions and images that exceed the possible range of meaning for

the words themselves. This process takes place through the expansion and development of the *naṣīb*, the elegiac opening mood of the tripartite *qaṣīdah*. By the time of Ibn al-Fāriḍ, the *naṣīb* has developed such a rich topography of images and subtexts it can now function on its own as an independent poem—but in gaining such independence it reclaims the tripartite structure and re-enacts it in its own way. Thus the dream-apparition seen in the first two lines is evocative of the moment of reflection and nostalgia, the poet returning to the ruins of the abandoned campsite (the *atlāl*), that comprise the *naṣīb* of this *naṣīb*. The poet’s message to the camel-driver re-enacts the journey phase (*raḥīl*) of the *qaṣīdah*, in which a powerful vocabulary of place-names, all dating back to the *jāhiliyyah* poetry of pre-Islamic Arabia, are revived and remembered in a nostalgic visitation of places and people long since gone. Stetkevych says:

But how different this late mystic poet’s travel theme is from its archaic Bedouin antecedents! The road along which this *raḥīl* progresses is studded with evocative names that one would not expect to find except in a *naṣīb*, names charged with unmistakable, warm nostalgic feeling that can lead only back into memories, names to which one *returns* in thought rather than journeys to in fact . . . The poet’s *raḥīl* is thus a vision of the past. (Stetkevych, 1993, 87-88)

Stetkevych’s analysis relies on a sensitivity to mood, rather than on theme; thus the place-names, which would be meaningless to a reader unfamiliar with the tradition (such as yours truly), are still important and are, in a certain way, untranslatable. Their significance is not enhanced by locating them on the map; it is rather through their repetition and elaboration in other poems that their thickness as terms becomes evident. The opening lines, as we will see, are actually a repetition of a formula—in Ibn al-Fāriḍ’s work alone, there are at least four poems that begin with almost the same thought, and Stetkevych notes its analogue in poems by al-Buḥtūrī, Ibn Khafājah, Majnūn Laylá, (Stetkevych, 1993, 86), and Imr al-Qays (Arberry, 1956, 37). These poems all build off of and contribute to each other, adding layers of empathetic mood and imaginative significance both to the new compositions and the ones that preceded them. For this reason, in glossing this poem, I made an attempt to identify what these places might actually be or what they are known for, but in the translation I left them as simple place-names, allowing their significance to grow in its own natural way as we continue on. Even after a few poems, names like Sal’, al-Zawrā’, and al-Raqmatayn—places I have never been or even heard of before this undertaking—are now affective; one starts to feel a certain way upon hearing them uttered.

A final note about the translation: My general preference in translating poetry is to follow the syntax and word count of the original poem as much as I can, although this is sometimes only possible to do when the translation is accompanied by a gloss. A word like *munḥaná*, which appears a number of times in these poems, is a good example: if

I wanted to supply the full sense of the word in the translation itself, I would probably have to write “the sinuous twisting of the desert ravine” every time. Such a tactic would instantly kill any sense of poetic brevity—*ījāz*, as it is called in Arabic. Through the gloss, the density of this term can be explored beforehand, leaving me feeling at ease to be bold and choose a single word that appeals to me in the translation itself.

While I do not find it helpful to translate a work of poetry by re-casting it into a recognizable poetic structure in the target language (writing in heroic couplets, for example—such an approach greatly weakens the ties that bind the poem and the translation together), I do think it is important to constantly be aware of the fact that this is *poetry*, and should *feel* like poetry when being read in English. I thus began each poem in blank verse, and if I began to notice certain words, sounds, or rhythms emerge in the new language, I would seek to coax them further out of the woodwork and use them as my poetic refrain. This approach was helpful in this poem in particular, as many of the place-names make part of the *qāfīyah*, the end-rhyme, of the original; thus ‘Alam, Iḍam, Na‘mān, and others gave me a closing sound for each line, hovering somewhere between *m* and *n*, as well as allowing me to emphasize these names as being central to the poem, giving them a prominent place in the rhythm and refrain of the translation. It is a fine line to walk, because I hate to rewrite or force a line to fit a pre-set scheme that does not exist in the Arabic at all, and when it seemed to go out of control, I would keep the line in blank verse.

الْقَصِيدَةُ

البحر البسيط

U-U-|UU-|U-U-|UU-||

أَمْ بَارِقٌ لَاحٍ فِي الزَّوْرَاءِ فَالْعَلَمِ	هَلْ نَارٌ لَيْلَى بَدَتْ لَيْلًا بِذِي سَلَمِ	1
وَمَاءٌ وَجَرَّةٌ هَلَّا نَهَلَةٌ بِفَمِ	أُرْوَاخٌ نَعْمَانٌ هَلَّا نَسَمَةٌ سَحْرًا	2
ظِي السَّجَلِ بِذَاتِ الشَّيْحِ مِنْ إِصْمِ	يَا سَائِقَ الظَّنِّ يَطْوِي البِيدَ مُعْتَسِفًا	3
حَمِيلَةَ الضَّالِّ ذَاتِ الرَّندِ وَالخُرْمِ	عُجْ بِالْحِمَى يَا رَعَاكَ اللَّهُ مُعْتَمِدًا	4
بِالرَّقْمَتَيْنِ أَثِيْلَاتٍ بِمُنْسَجِمِ	وَقِفْ بِسَلْعٍ وَسَلِّ بِالْحِزْعِ هَلْ مُطْرَتِ	5
فَاقْرَ السَّلَامَ عَلَيْهِمْ غَيْرَ مُحْتَشِمِ	نَاشِدْتُكَ إِنْ جُرْتَ العَقِيْقَ ضَعِي	6
حَيًّا كَمِيْتٍ يُعِيرُ السُّقْمَ لِلسُّقْمِ	وَقُلْ تَرَكْتُ صَرِيْعًا فِي دِيَارِكُمْ	7

وَمِنْ جُفُونِي دَمْعٌ فَاضَ كَالدَّيْمِ	فَمِنْ فُؤَادِي لَهَيْبٌ نَابٌ عَن قَبَسِ	8
بِشَادِنٍ فَحَلَا عُضْوٌ مِّنَ الْأَمِّ	وَهَذِهِ سُنَّةُ الْعُشَاقِ مَا عَلِقُوا	9
كَفَّ الْمَلَامَ فَلَوْ أَحَبَبْتَ لَمْ تَلْمِ	يَا لَأَيْمًا لَأَمْنِي فِي حُبِّهِمْ سَفْهًا	10
عَهْدِ الْوَثِيقِ وَمَا قَدْ كَانَ فِي الْقَدَمِ	وَحُرْمَةِ الْوَصْلِ وَالْوَدِّ الْعَتِيقِ وَبِالِ	11
لَيْسَ التَّبَدُّلُ وَالسُّلْوَانُ مِنْ شِيَمِي	مَا حُلْتُ عَنْهُمْ بِسُلْوَانٍ وَلَا بَدَلِ	12
بِمَضْجِعِي زَائِرٌ فِي غَفْلَةِ الْحُلْمِ	رُدُّوا الرُّقَادَ لِحَفْنِي عَلَّ طَيْفُكُمْ	13
عَشْرًا وَوَاهَا عَلَيْهَا كَيْفَ لَمْ تَدْمِ	أَهَّا لِأَيَّامِنَا بِالْحَيْفِ لَوْ بَقِيَتْ	14
أَوْ كَانَ يُجِدِي عَلَى مَا فَاتَ وَانْدَمِي	هَيْهَاتَ وَانْسَفِي لَوْ كَانَ يَنْفَعُنِي	15
عَهْدْتُ ظَرْفِي لَمْ يَنْظُرْ لِغَيْرِهِمْ	عَنِّي إِلَيْكُمْ طِبَاءَ الْمُنْحَى كَرَمًا	16
أَفْتَى بِسَفْكِ دَمِي فِي الْحِلِّ وَالْحَرَمِ	طَوْعًا لِقَاضٍ أَتَى فِي حُكْمِهِ عَجَبًا	17
يُحِرُّ جَوَابًا وَعَن حَالِ الْمَشُوقِ عَمِي	أَصَمُّ لَمْ يَسْمَعْ لِلشَّكْوَى وَأَبْكُمْ لَمْ	18

Gloss

1	<i>hal</i>	<i>nāru</i>	<i>Laylá</i>	<i>badat</i>	<i>bi-Dhū Salamī</i>	
	did	(the) fire	(of) Layla	appear	at Dhū Salam	
				manifest		
	<i>am</i>	<i>bāriqun</i>	<i>lāḥa</i>	<i>fī</i>	<i>al-Zarwā'i</i>	<i>fa</i> <i>al-ʿAlami</i>
	or	flashing, gleaming	appeared	in	al-Zarwā'	and al-ʿAlam
		(of/like lightning)	sparkled			so
			glimmered			then

Did the fire of Layla appear at night, at Dhu Salam

Or as a flash that glimmered in al-Zarwā' and al-ʿAlam?

Laylá: The first double entendre of the poem is, of course, Layla's name; although unambiguously marked as a name due to orthography, the name *Laylá* is virtually identical to *laylah*, night, in pronunciation. **Dhū Salam, al-Zawrā', al-ʿAlam:** These are all place names, located by the commentators to be in the vicinity of the holy city of Medina. Arberry names al-Zawrā' as a marketplace in Medina itself, and al-ʿAlam (sometimes al-ʿAlamān, in the dual form) is a set of ridges that separate Mecca from Medina. Dhū Salam, a valley on the pilgrim-road between Basra and Mecca, is sometimes remarked to be a place where tamarisks grow (L'Hopital, 2001, 171). As a symbol, the tamarisk is in the same category as the lote-tree, which is closely associated

with the site of union with God.

2	<i>arwāḥa</i> breath spirit (voc. pl.)	<i>Naʿmāni</i> Naʿmān	<i>hallā</i> is there not why not where is	<i>nasmātun</i> (a) breeze	<i>saḥaran</i> dawn (adv. of time)
	<i>wa-māʿa</i> and water (voc.)	<i>Wajrata</i> (of) Wajrah	<i>hallā</i> is there not why not where is	<i>nahlatun</i> (a) first sip	<i>bi-fami</i> in mouth

Is there not a morning breeze, O winds of Naʿmān?

Is there not a sip of water for the mouth, O water of Wajrah?

Arwāḥa: Although ‘winds’ seems like an appropriate translation here, the word *rūḥ* definitely carries the connotation of spirit, soul, and life as well, linking it well with **nahlah**, the life-giving first draught of water. It could also be the plural of *rīḥ*, which is more literally meant as ‘wind.’ **Naʿmān** and **Wajrah** are both identified as harsh regions outside the city, places where the life-giving properties of a cool morning breeze and a mouthful of water would be most keenly appreciated. Nāṣir al-Dīn also says that these place names also indicate the beginning stations of the mystical path, with the waters of Wajrah as divine knowledge (*ʿilm ilāhī*) and the winds of Naʿmān as the stages of ascent (*aqṭāb al-manāzil*).

3	<i>yā</i> O (vocative part.)	<i>sāʾiqa</i> driver	<i>al-zaʿni</i> caravan	<i>yaṭwī</i> (who) crosses rolls folds	<i>al-bīda</i> wilderness steppe	<i>muʿtasifan</i> straying lost
	<i>ṭayya</i> fold pleat roll	<i>al-sijilli</i> (of the) scroll	<i>bi-dhāt al-shiḥ</i> of/at Dhāt al-Shiḥ of wormwood	<i>min</i> from of	<i>Iḍami</i> Iḍam	

O driver of the caravan who folds the wildernesses

the folding of a scroll at Dhāt al-Shiḥ (the wormwood trees) in Iḍam

Zaʿn: The caravan, specifically the litter or palanquin, is an important feature of the early *qaṣīdah*, a symbol for the departure of the beloved that introduces an elegiac mood (Stetkevych, 1993, 21). **Dhāt al-Shiḥ:** some commentators define this as a place-name, but literally *dhāt* means ‘of,’ or ‘possessing,’ and the *shiḥ* is apparently the wormwood or mugwort, a bitter shrub. **Iḍam** is the name of a valley that runs through the Ḥijāz, in which Medina is situated. **Yaṭwī** . . . **ṭayya:** The two principle clusters of meaning embedded in the verb *yaṭwī* are that of folding,

pleating, rolling, wrapping, etc., and that of crossing, traversing, etc. The *mafʿūl mutlaq* linked to this verb—*ṭayya al-sijilli*, ‘the rolling of a scroll’—disambiguates the word, but it can still be read with the subtext of ‘crossing’ in mind. In addition, it strongly recalls the Qurʾānic language of the Day of Judgement and the Book of Life, in which the deeds of each individual are held to account:

يَوْمَ نَطْوِي السَّمَاءَ كَطَيِّ السِّجِلِّ لِلْكُتُبِ (سُورَةُ الْأَنْبِيَاءِ ١٠٤)

The Day when we roll up the heavens like a scroll of writing, Q21:104.

al-Bīda: related to the verb *bāda*, *yabīdu*, which means to perish, expire, and pass away; thus the contrasting themes of life and death are strongly rooted to delineated spaces, as we shall see.

4	<i>ʿuj</i>	<i>bi-al-ḥimá</i>	<i>yā</i>	<i>raʿāka</i>	<i>Allāhu</i>	<i>muʿtamidan</i>
	turn aside	sanctuary	O	protect/provide	God	intending
	turn off	refuge		for you		seeking
	<i>khamūlata</i>	<i>al-ḍāli</i>		<i>dhāta</i>	<i>al-randi</i>	<i>wa-al-khuzumi</i>
	(the) thicket	(of) ḍāl		of	laurel	lavender
		(like a lote tree)		possessing	sweet bay	wild myrte

Turn off at the sanctuary, may God keep you, seeking
the thicket of *ḍāl*, with its laurel and lavender

al-Ḥimá: indicates a protected place, a refuge; in Bedouin society, the *ḥimá* played a critical role in provided certain areas where violence was prohibited, thus lending it a certain aura of inviolability and sanctity—for this reason the word ‘sanctuary’ could be a good word. **Yā raʿāka Allāh**, lit. ‘O you who God (may) protect,’ is built around the essentially pastoral meaning of the verb *raʿá*, to tend and protect, which is often extended metaphorically to denote the relationship between a ruler and his subjects. While there seems to be no sure identification for the *ḍāl* tree, it is a rich symbol that “invariably resonates with memories of the beloved” (Homerin, 1994, 7). It is also tightly linked to the *sidrah*, the lote-tree of the Qurʾān where Muḥammad arrived at the threshold of beholding God’s presence (Cf. Q53:14-16). Complimented by the sweet-smelling *rand* and *khuzum* flowers, the valley of *ḍāl* can easily be understood as a locus for union with God as well as the beloved.

5	<i>wa-qif</i>	<i>bi-Salʿin</i>	<i>wa-sal</i>	<i>bi-al-jizʿi</i>	<i>hal</i>	<i>muṭīrat</i>
	and stop	at Salʿ	and ask	(at, of)	has	were rained
				the winding valley		(passive voice)
	<i>bi-al-Raḡmatayni</i>	<i>uthaylātun</i>		<i>bi-munsajimi</i>		
	at al-Raḡmatān	tamarisk trees		streaming		
				flowing		

And stop at Sal^ʿ and ask of the winding valley if
the tamarisk trees at al-Raḡmatān were rained upon with flowing (rains)

Sal^ʿ is a mountain near Medina. **al-Raḡmatayn**, literally, ‘the two reservoirs’ or ‘the two valley-sides’ are also near Medina. **al-Jiz^ʿ** is a thick term; to translate it as ‘valley’ would somewhat miss the point, as it seems to refer more precisely to the twists and turns of the valley, its very sinuosity. This emphasis on curvature and twisting is repeated in line 16, when the poet employs the word *munḥanā*, derived from the root word ‘to twist, turn, deviate.’ The **uthaylāt**, the tamarisks, are another kind of tree closely associated with spaces of union. **Munsajim** is polysemous, for its root refers to the shedding of tears, thus the rain that falls upon the holy site of Medina is likened to the tears that the lover sheds for his beloved.

6	<i>nāshadtuka</i>	<i>Allāha</i>	<i>in</i>	<i>juzta</i>	<i>al-‘Aqīqa</i>	<i>duḥan</i>
	I ask	by God	if	you passed	the ‘Aqīq	at forenoon
	beg					
	implore you					
	(past tense)					
	<i>fa-iqra</i>	<i>al-salāma</i>	<i>‘alayhim</i>	<i>ghayra</i>	<i>muḥtashimi</i>	
	then/so say	peace	upon them	not	bashful	
	recite	(greetings)			modest	
					reticent	

I implore you by God, if you pass the ‘Aqīq at forenoon
then greet them without being bashful

Ḍuḥá, the forenoon light, recalls the famous *Sūrat al-Ḍuḥá* in the Qur’ān: “By the forenoon light, and the night when it falls calmly, Your Lord did not forsake you or scorn you . . . Did He not find you an orphan, and then gave you refuge? And found you in error, and then guided you?” (Q93:1-7, (Fakhry, 2004, 626)). The ‘**Aqīq** is an extremely important toponym recurring throughout Arabic poetry as the “river epitomized,” the emblem of a golden age lost long ago (Stetkevych, 1993, 112-13).

7	<i>wa-qul</i>	<i>taraktu</i>	<i>ṣarī’an</i>	<i>fī</i>	<i>diyārikumu</i>
	and say	I left	one collapsed	in	your lands
			felled		domains
			helpless		realms
	<i>ḥayyan</i>	<i>ka-maytin</i>	<i>yu‘īru</i>	<i>al-suqma</i>	<i>lil-saqami</i>
	alive	as one dead	he wanders	the sickness	to the illness
	living		strays		
			roams		

And say: I left one fallen in your lands
 alive as one dead, he wanders from illness to malady

L'Hopital notes a variant reading of the second *misra*: **mayyitan ka-ḥayyin**, which would be all the more striking; the poet is actually dead, although he seems alive. **Saqam** and **suqm** are obviously very closely related to each other, but there is an important distinction: the former is a disease (*malade*), but the latter is an incurable illness (*la malade inguérisable*, (L'Hopital, 2001, 174)).

8	<i>fa-min</i> for/so from/of	<i>fu'ādi</i> my heart	<i>lahībun</i> a fire a blaze combustion	<i>nāba</i> took the place substituted	<i>ʿan</i> of	<i>qabasin</i> a firebrand a torch
	<i>wa-min</i> and from	<i>jufūnī</i> my eyelids	<i>damʿun</i> tear(s)	<i>fāḍa</i> overflowed flooded flowed over		<i>ka-al-diyami</i> like the continuous rains

For from my heart is a blaze that took the place of a torch
 and from my eyelids are tears that flowed over like the steady *diyam* rains

Lahīb . . . qabas: i.e., the blaze emanating from the poet's heart is so bright it could act as a torch. Nāṣir al-Dīn points out that the kind of fire described by *lahīb* is pure and without smoke (Nāṣir al Dīn, 1990, 186)—this should also evoke memories of Moses' encounter with God in the burning bush (cf. Q27:7-10). The **diyam** is a name for a specific kind of steady, ceaseless rain, rather like the subcontinental *monsoon*. While the pure, immolating fire and the overflow of constant tears are set in opposition to each other, both images are evocative of the destruction of both the body (*fanāʿ*) and the world (*yawm al-dīn*).

9	<i>wa-hādhīhi</i> and this	<i>sunnatu</i> tradition way	<i>al-ʿushshāqi</i> (of) the lovers	<i>mā</i> did not	<i>ʿaliqū</i> they clung adhered got attached
	<i>bi-shādinin</i> to a fawn	<i>fa-khalā</i> and/so was devoid	<i>ʿuḍw</i> a (any) member limb	<i>min</i> of	<i>al-alami</i> pain

And this is the way of lovers; they did not get attached
 to a fawn and any limb was devoid of pain

The syntax of this line is difficult to import directly into English. The idea is something like “Never did they get bound to a fawn and any of their limbs were devoid of pain,” or, more to the point, Homerin’s translation: “This is the lovers’ law: bound to a fawn every limb is racked with pain” (Homerin, 1994, 6). The **shādīn**, a gazelle’s fawn, like the synonymous **zaby** on line 16, is emblematic of beauty. The use of animal imagery is important on a variety of levels; one of which is that, if animals are considered to lack the soul, which acts as the bridge for union with the Divine, then the infatuation with gazelle-like beauty is limited to the purely physical and temporal realm. Cf. Ibn Sīnā’s *Risālah fī al-‘Ishq* [Von Grunebaum (1952)]. On the other hand, the gazelle can be taken as a metaphor for the Divine itself, as L’Hopital and Nablūsī suggest, which will dramatically alter the reading of both this line and line 16.

10	<i>yā</i>	<i>lā’iman</i>	<i>lāmanī</i>	<i>fī</i>	<i>ḥubbihim</i>	<i>safahan</i>
	O	one who rebukes	rebuked me	in	love of them	stupidly
		reprimands				insolently
		censures				
	<i>kuff</i>	<i>al-malāma</i>	<i>fa-law</i>	<i>aḥbabta</i>	<i>lam</i>	<i>talum</i>
	cease	reproof	for/and if	you loved	did not	reproach
	forbear	rebuke				blame
	desist	censure				

O you who foolishly rebuked me for loving them
 cease the rebuke, for if you loved, you would not blame

The repetition of **lāma**, **yalūmu** in four different forms is one of the strengths of this line, almost impossible to recreate in English without feeling repetitive.

11	<i>wa-ḥurmati</i>	<i>al-waṣli</i>	<i>wa-al-widdi</i>	<i>al-‘atīqi</i>	<i>wa-bi-al-</i>
	by the sanctity	(of) union	and by the love	ancient	and by the
	sacredness		friendship	antique	
	<i>‘ahdi</i>	<i>al-wathāqi</i>	<i>wa-mā</i>	<i>kāna</i>	<i>fī</i>
	oath	firm	and what	was	in
	compact	strong			
	pledge	steadfast			
					<i>qidami</i>
					old times
					antiquity
					pre-existence
					eternity

By the sanctity of union and by ancient love and by the
 steadfast covenant and that which was in times of yore

All of these are strong objects for making oaths upon, and they undoubtedly speak of different things, depending on the perspective of the reader. Perhaps the strongest of the sequence is the

‘**ahd al-wathīq**, which can easily be understood as the primordial contract between God and Man, seen in the Qur’ān 7:172: “ ‘Am I not your Lord?’ They said: ‘Yes, we testify’ ” (Fakhry, 2004, 171).

12	<i>mā</i>	<i>ḥultu</i>	<i>‘anhum</i>	<i>bi-sulwānin</i>	<i>wa-lā</i>	<i>badalin</i>
	did not	I turned away departed withdrew	from them	in/with neglect (willful) forgetfulness	and not	(in) exchange alternate replacement
	<i>laysa</i>	<i>al-tabaddulu</i>	<i>wa-al-sulwānu</i>	<i>min</i>	<i>shiyami</i>	
	is not	change conversion substitution	and forgetfulness	of	my character disposition quality	

I did not withdraw from them in neglect and not in exchange
substitution and forgetfulness are not of my nature

Sulwān: Willful forgetting and disregard. It can range from distracting oneself from their woes, through drink, finding solace in other relations and activities, or shirking one’s commitments and responsibilities. **Badal** and its cognate **tabaddul** carry a similar flavor of disloyalty and fickleness, i.e. the willingness to trade or exchange one thing (person, fealty, attachment) for another. The scorn in which the poet regards these traits is amplified by the solidity and permanence of the objects he swears by in the previous line.

13	<i>ruddū</i>	<i>al-ruqāda</i>	<i>li-jafnī</i>	<i>‘alla</i>	<i>ṭayfukumu</i>
	return restore	sleep lying down	to my eyelid(s)	perhaps	your (pl.) image ghost spectre
	<i>bi-maḍja‘ī</i>	<i>zā‘irun</i>	<i>fī</i>	<i>ghaflati</i>	<i>al-ḥulumi</i>
	at my bed place of rest	(is) a visitor	in	unawareness negligence inattention	(of) dreaming

Return sleep to my eyes, perhaps your image
will visit my bed in the inattention of a dream

The visitation of the **ṭayf** in Arabic poetry is a widespread motif. **Ghaflah** is a word rich in meaning, as the gloss above illustrates. When something comes *‘alā ghaflah*, it is completely unexpected and unprepared for. It is a nice way to describe the state of dreaming, in which the slumberer is completely defenseless against the comings and goings of visions and apparitions.

An interesting undertone of this would be that the poet, in begging sleep to come back to him, sees something restorative or redeeming in the lowering of his guard.

14	<i>āhan</i>	<i>li-ayāminā</i>	<i>bi-al-khayfi</i>	<i>law</i>	<i>baqiyat</i>	
	oh	for our days	at al-Khayf	if (only)	they lasted	
	alas				remained	
	ah					
	<i>‘ashran</i>	<i>wa-wāhan</i>	<i>‘alayhā</i>	<i>kayfa</i>	<i>lam</i>	<i>tadum</i>
	(as) ten	and woe	upon/for	how	did not	persevere
		alas	them			persist
						go on

Oh, for our days at al-Khayf, if only they were ten
 alas for them, how they did not go on / how could they go on

al-Khayf: Another place-name in the Ḥijāz, most likely a mountain or ridge in Minā. More importantly, the name resonates within the sequence of places in this poem that recall a idyllic period of wholeness, union, and sanctity. **‘Ashran**, *ten*, might be a significant number inasmuch that it matches the number of days and nights for the *ḥajj* pilgrimage—otherwise, it could merely signify a long duration of time. The tone of the second *misra‘* is a little elusive for me; whether **kayfa** is intended descriptively or as an rhetorical question, I’m not sure.

15	<i>hayhātī</i>	<i>wā</i>	<i>asafī</i>	<i>law</i>	<i>kāna</i>	<i>yanfa‘unī</i>		
	if only	<i>wah</i> , cry of	my sorrow	if	it was	being useful		
	what an idea	woe or wonder	regret			of avail to me		
	it is far-fetched							
	preposterous							
	<i>aw</i>	<i>kāna</i>	<i>yujdī</i>	<i>‘alá</i>	<i>mā</i>	<i>fāta</i>	<i>wā</i>	<i>nadamī</i>
	or	it was	being appropriate	for	what	passed	the <i>wah</i>	(of) my regret
			useful	upon				
			serving					

If only the cry of my sorrow was useful to me
 or the cry of my regret was useful for what has passed

Although the words for expressing grief and pain in the previous line, *āh* and *wāh*, are obviously onomatopoeic, they are still proper nouns, perhaps translatable into something like “the

‘oh’s and ‘woe’s,” whereas in this line, the poet slips into the literal sound of these cries themselves, which bookend the content of the verse. **Hayhāt** is an important modal verb . . .

16	<i>‘annī ilaykum</i> (expression) get away from me leave me alone	<i>zibā’a</i> (voc.) fawns gazelles	<i>al-munḥaná</i> (of) the ravine valley slope	<i>karaman</i> kindly generously	
	<i>‘ahidtu</i> I promised bound have known	<i>ṭarfī</i> my gaze glance look	<i>lam</i> did not	<i>yanzur</i> look gaze	<i>li-ghayrihim</i> to others than them

Please leave me alone, gazelles of the valley

I promised that my gaze would not look upon others than them

The **zibā’** are once again the topic, although in a markedly different way than they are in line 9. Here, they are directly addressed and linked to the **munḥaná**, recalling *al-jiz’* of line 5. The reader’s interpretation of this twisted, curving space will undoubtedly affect the understanding of the gazelles that inhabit it. However, the fact that the poet rejects them as objects of desire and tells them to leave him alone, due to his having already committed himself to another, suggests that they should be seen as inferior in some way in the poet’s estimation.

17	<i>ṭaw’an</i> obeying compliant	<i>li-qāḍīn</i> to a judge	<i>atá</i> (who) came	<i>fī</i> in	<i>ḥukmihi</i> his decree verdict order	<i>‘ajaban</i> astonishing remarkable odd
	<i>aftá</i> he decreed gave a fatwa	<i>bi-safki</i> in/for the shedding	<i>dammī</i> (of) my blood	<i>fī</i> in	<i>al-ḥilli</i> permitted unhallowed legitimate	<i>wa-al-ḥarami</i> holy restricted sacrosanct inviolable

Obeying a judge who brought (came in) an astonishing decree

he allowed the shedding of my blood in places both sacred and profane

al-Ḥilli and **al-ḥarami** are key points in this line, and are most likely the reason for the poet’s astonishment (‘**ajab**). The *ḥaram*, a place-name often synonymous with Mecca, constitutes the most serious of inviolates, reaffirmed by the word’s proximity to *īhrām*, the state of ritual purity one enters to perform the *ḥajj*. Coming from the root meaning “to forbid,” the *ḥaram* was

a space in which all forms of violence were absolutely forbidden—if this judge (or should it be Judge?) has overruled the sanctity of this space in his decree, that would be astonishing indeed.

18	<i>aṣammu</i>	<i>lam</i>	<i>yuṣghi</i>	<i>lil-shakwá</i>	<i>wa-abkamu</i>	<i>lam</i>
	deaf	did not	listen	to the complaint	dumb	did not
			heed		mute	
			pay attention			
	<i>yuḥir</i>	<i>jawāban</i>	<i>wa-‘an</i>	<i>ḥāli</i>	<i>al-mashūqi</i>	<i>‘amī</i>
	answer	an answer	and about	state	(of the) lover	blind
	reply		and as for	case	love-stricken	
	give					

Deaf, he did not heed the complaint, and mute, he did not
give an answer, and as for the state of the lover, he is blind

Yuṣghi: Some editions have *yasma‘*, “he did not hear,” instead [Nāsir al Dīm \(1990\)](#). **Yuḥir** is always paired with *jawāb* in this way. **Mashūq**, and not *ma‘shūq*, is an unusual word coming from the stem *shāqa*, to yearn for, crave, and desire. I’m not sure what pattern it falls into, for if it were *ism maf‘ūl* it would be *mashwūq*, the one who is desired, yet the translations I have read say that it is the one who is inflamed by longing, in other words, the lover.

The total unresponsiveness of the judge, his deafness, muteness, and blindness, is an important key in reading this final line. Certainly the poet could be personifying such things as Fate, Luck, or Love, all of which are frequently described in such ways. In addition, the Neoplatonic understanding of God as the eternal embodiment of perfection can imply that he himself could be seen as such a judge. If love is the force that brings the world into being and causes all creation to be drawn back to its source, then it would be ludicrous to imagine that God could love anything less perfect than himself. He will not respond directly to the lover’s lament. However, the wisdom of God’s creation is such that any meditation on love will, by its very nature, bring the lover closer to God, just as the poet’s re-visitation of the holy environs of the Ḥijāz have done for him in this poem.

Translation

Did Layla’s fire appear at night, at Dhu Salam,
or a bolt that flashed across al-Zarwá’ and al-‘Alam?

Where is the breath of dawn, winds of Na‘mán?
is there a taste to be had of you, waters of Wajrah?

O driver of the caravan, who winds across the wastes
 the winding of the scroll at Dhat al-Shih, in Iḍam
 Make for the sanctuary—may God protect you!—and seek
 the thicket of ḍal, of sweet bay and lavender
 And then stop at Sal‘, and ask the curling valley of al-Raqmatayn
 if the tamarisks there have been showered with rain?
 By God, I beg you! If, by forenoon, you cross the ‘Aqíq,
 then without reserve, send them my salám
 And say: I left one fallen in your realm
 alive as one dead, he wanders from malady to malaise
 For from my heart leaps a blaze that stands for a brand
 while tears flood my eyes like the rains of díyam
 This is the way of lovers, never are they bound to a fawn
 without every limb consumed by pain
 You who foolishly rebuke me for loving them
 stop such reproach, for if you loved, you would not blame
 By the sanctity of union, by time-honored love
 by the steadfast covenant, and all that has gone
 I did not turn from them for solace or something new
 such wheeling and dealing are not of my mien
 Return sleep to my eyes—perhaps your shade
 will call upon my night in the negligence of a dream
 Ah, for our days at al-Khayf, if only they had been ten
 and woe that they could not remain
 How nice it would be if my ‘woe’s could lend a hand
 or if my ‘oh’s of remorse not be in vain
 O gazelles of the sinuous valley, be kind and leave me alone
 for my gaze I bound and will not err to others not of them
 In deference to a judge who issued an astonishing decree
 my blood may be spilt in both sacred and profane

 Deaf, he did not heed my complaint;
 Dumb, no answer did he grant;
 And as for the state of one in love;
 Blind.

That Layla of the Banu ‘Ámir تِلْكَ لَيْلَى الْعَامِرِيَّةُ

This poem is next in the sequence due to its striking similarity to *Nar Layla*. It does not yet have a gloss, and the translation is cobbled together from the original Arabic with Arberry’s and L’Hopital’s versions to help me when I got lost. Additionally, no effort has (yet) been expended in polishing the translation in any way, so it should be read as a work in progress. Nonetheless, as a complement to the first poem, I think it is worth reading before furthering our discussion.

Arberry’s interpretation of this poem is interesting; he conjectures that Ibn al-Fārid addressed this poem to his friends in Mecca after a long interval of silence, which would place its time of composition in the latter part of his life.

الْقَصِيدَةُ

البحر الكامل

UU-U-|UU-U-|UU-U-||

<p>أُمٌ فِي رُبِّي نَجْدٍ أَرَى مِضْبَاحَا لَيْلًا فَصَيَّرَتِ الْمَسَاءَ صَبَاحَا إِنْ جُبْتُ حَزْنًا أَوْ طَوَيْتِ بِطَاحَا وَإِ هُنَاكَ عَهْدُهُ فَيَّاحَا عَرَّجَ وَأُمٌّ أَرِيئَهُ الْفَوَّاحَا فَانشُدُ فُوَادًا بِالْوُبَيْطِحِ طَاحَا غَادَزْتُهُ لِحَنَابِكُمْ مُلْتَاحَا لِأَسِيرِ إِفِّ لَا يُرِيدُ سَرَاحَا فِي طَيِّ صَافِيَةِ الرِّيَّاحِ رَوَّاحَا مَرْحًا وَيَعْتَقِدُ الْمُرَّاحِ مَرْحَا يَلْقَى مَلِيًّا لَا بَلَغْتَ نَجَّاحَا أَنْ لَا يَرَى الْإِفْبَالَ وَالْإِفْلَاحَا</p>	<p>1 أَوْمِيضُ بَرَقِ بِالْأَبْيَرِ لَاحَا 2 أُمٌ تِلْكَ لَيْلَى الْعَامِرِيَّةُ أَسْفَرَتْ 3 يَا رَاكِبَ الْوَجْنَاءِ وَقَيْتِ الرَّدَى 4 وَسَلَكْتَ نَعْمَانَ الْأَرَاكِ فَعُجَّ إِلَى 5 فَبِأَمِّنِ الْعَلَمَيْنِ مِنْ شَرْقِيهِ 6 وَإِذَا وَصَلْتَ إِلَى ثَنِيَّاتِ اللَّوَى 7 وَأَقْرَ السَّلَامِ أَهْيَلَهُ عَنِّي وَقُلْ 8 يَا سَاكِنِي نَجْدٍ أَمَا مِنْ رَحْمَةٍ 9 هَلَا بَعَثْتُمْ لِمَشُوقِ تَحِيَّةً 10 يَحْيَا بِهَا مِنْ كَانَ يَحْسَبُ هَجْرَكُمْ 11 يَا عَاذِلَ الْمُشْتَاكِ جَهْلًا بِالَّذِي 12 أَتَعَبْتَ نَفْسَكَ فِي نَصِيحَةٍ مِنْ يَرَى</p>
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أَحْشَاءُهُ التُّجُلُ الْعُيُونُ جِرَاحًا	أَقْصِرْ عَدِمْتُكَ وَأَطْرِحْ مِنْ أُنْحَنَتْ	13
أَرَأَيْتَ صَبًّا يَأْلُفُ النَّصَاحَا	كُنْتَ الصَّدِيقَ قُبَيْلَ نُضْجِكَ مُغْرَمًا	14
لِفَسَادِ قَلْبِي فِي الْهَوَى إِضْلَاحَا	إِنْ رُمْتَ إِضْلَاحِي فَإِنِّي لَمْ أُرِدْ	15
لَيْسَ الْخَلَاعَةَ وَأُسْتَرَّاحَ وَرَاحَا	مَاذَا يُرِيدُ الْعَادِلُونَ بِعَدْلِ مَنْ	16
ظَمَعَ فَيَنْعَمَ بَالَهُ أُسْتِرَّوَاحَا	يَا أَهْلَ وَدِّي هَلْ لِرَاجِي وَضَلِكُمْ	17
مَلَأْتُ نَوَاجِي أَرْضِي مِضْرَ نَوَاحَا	مُذْ غِبْتُمْ عَنِّي نَاطِرِي لِي أَنْتُمْ	18
مِنْ طِيبِ ذِكْرِكُمْ سُقِيْتُ الرِّاحَا	وَإِذَا ذَكَرْتَكُمْ أَمِيلُ كَأَنِّي	19
أَلْفَيْتُ أَحْشَائِي بِذَلِكَ شِعَاحَا	وَإِذَا دُعِيْتُ إِلَى تَنَاسِي عَهْدِكُمْ	20
كَانَتْ لِيَالِينَا بِهِمْ أَفْرَاحَا	سَقِيًّا لِأَيَّامٍ مَضَتْ مَعَ حَيْرَةٍ	21
سَكَنِي وَوَرِدِي الْمَاءِ فِيهِ مَبَاحَا	حَيْثُ الْحِمَى وَطَنِي وَسَكَانُ الْعَضَى	22
ظَرَبِي وَرَمَلَةً وَادِيَيْهِ مَرَّاحَا	وَأَهْيَلُهُ أَرَبِي وَظِلُّ نَخِيلِهِ	23
أَيَّامٍ كُنْتُ مِنَ اللَّغُوبِ مُرَّاحَا	وَأَهَا عَلَى ذَلِكَ الزَّمَانِ وَطِيبِهِ	24
بَيْتِ الْحَرَامِ مُلَبِّيًا سَيَّاحَا	فَسَمًّا بِمَكَّةَ وَاللَّقَامِ وَمَنْ أَنَّى أَلْ	25
إِلَّا وَأَهْدَتْ مِنْكُمْ أَرْوَاحَا	مَا رَنَحَتْ رِيحَ الصَّبَا شَيْخَ الرَّبِّي	26

Translation

Is it a flash of lightning that shone over Ubrayq,
or a lamp that I see in the hills of Najd?

Or is it that Layla of the Banu ‘Ámir
who removed the veil from the night and made it day?

O rider of the powerful camel—may God keep you from destruction!
if you cross the rugged land or roll over the valley basins,

If you pass by Na‘mán of the thorn-bush, turn aside
to a valley there of vast dimensions, which I know

At the right of the two mountains of ‘Alamayn, on the eastern side of Na‘mán,
make for Arín of sweet smells

And when you have arrived at the paths of sandy Liwá
 look for a dying heart in Ubiṭih̄
 Give salám to its people, and say:
 I left him thirsting for your presence
 O people of Najd, is there no mercy
 for a captive of a friend who does not want to be free?
 Have you not sent greetings to the lover
 in the folds of pure winds, at evening?
 He will be revived by it, he who considered your separation
 jest, and considers joking around to be a joke
 O ingrate who reproaches the lover, ignorant of what he endures,
 may you never see success!
 Have you tired yourself in advising he who sees
 that he will not see good fortune or prosperity?
 Cease—may I be free of you—and leave
 he whose entrails have been wounded by the wide-of-eyes
 You were a friend, before your advising one in love
 have you ever seen the gentle ṣaba be kind to advisors?
 If you wanted me to reform, I did not,
 for the corruption of my heart in passion, want reform
 What do these moralists want, in reproaching one
 clothed in depravity, and very comfortable?
 O people of my love, is there hope for one who desires
 union with you, and that his spirit may be blessed with rest?
 Since you have been absent from my sight,
 my wails have filled the corners of Egypt
 And when I think of you, I feel as one made drunk
 from the sweetness of your memories
 And when I am called to feign to forget your pledge
 I realize my insides are still avaricious (for you)
 May the days that passed in the neighborhood be kept fresh
 our days with them were joyous
 When the sanctuary was my country, and the people of Ghada my people,
 and finding water was easy,

And its people was my desire, and the shadows of its palm my pleasure,
 and the sands of its valleys my comfort
 Alas for that time and its sweetness
 the days when I was comforted from weariness
 I swear by Mecca, the shrine of Abraham,
 and those who come to the sacred house crying “Here I am”
 Never did the eastern breeze shake the wormwood of the hills
 Except when the breezes come from your spirits

It is interesting, now, to compare these two poems that begin on practically the same note, riffing off a motif that runs strong throughout the Arabic poetic tradition. Given the rich history and prominent place of this opening, we can start to imagine what sort of tone it would set for the poem: *Was it a flash of lightning, or was it Layla* will immediately transport the audience through time and space, bringing them to the landscape of classical Arabia at the dawn of Islam. Place-names are sprinkled into the scene, adding richness and density of meaning; in *Nar Layla* the poetic imagination is cast into the urban space of Medina, with the busy marketplaces of al-Zawrāʾ and the ravines and hillocks of Dhāt al-Shih̄ and al-ʿAlam, while in this poem, the mention of Ubrayq (a place of broken rocks, sand, and soil—Arberry translates it as “the mottled mountain”) and the Najd plateau may bring the listener further out into the wilderness, perhaps in the guise of a pilgrim making his way to the holy city. There is a note of wistfulness introduced immediately in *Nar Layla*, as if the thought of such places cannot help but bring the poet’s mind to its waters and winds that he misses so much.

Both poets then turn to their messenger. The messenger is an important figure in both poems and the only true friend to the poet—in another poem (“This is the ‘Aqīq,” below) he is addressed as “yā ṣāhibī,” ‘my friend and companion.’ The mention of this figure is immediately accompanied by a supplication for his good health and protection, followed by detailed instructions on what to do and where to go. In this passage, the poet continues his dream-like journey through the landscape of his nostalgia, traversing the valleys, mountains, and river-beds of Naʿmān, al-Raqmatayn, the ʿAqīq, and many others. The sense of wandering is especially prominent in this poem, in which the poet seems to turn into his own ruminations for a moment, recovering the details of the valley that he once knew so well and now seeks to recapture. The thing that is most urgently required is the passing on of greetings, *qirāʾat al-salām*, which I kept in English as *salām*. The *salām* is significant not merely as a greeting; it is in fact a *daʿwah*, a supplication to God for that person’s safety. It is also a gateway for a cry for help—one of the strongest motives for the poet’s urgency seems to be the intensity of his longing for those he is separated from.

This question of the Beloved is one of the deep issues behind this poetry and the reason for its praise and condemnation by various readers throughout history. On the

surface, those he longs to be reunited with are those inhabitants of the Ḥijāz themselves; this idea is more prominent in this poem than in *Nar Layla*, and in other poems it is quite explicit. At other times, however, the beloved is an individual, often called upon by the various names of Layla, Salmá, and ‘Azzah. The beloved is also merged with or distinguished from the beautiful creatures of the desert—the fawn, the gazelle, the antelope. Both of these incarnations of Love, of course, can then be sublimated onto God, giving rise to the rich mystical interpretations like those of al-Qayṣarī. In *Nar Layla*, the poet invokes both Layla and the gazelle as names or forms of the beloved; interestingly, he asks such creatures to leave him alone, even while his symptoms match those of one who is “bound to a fawn” (l. 9). This poem, on the other hand, invokes the name of Layla in its opening, setting up its elegiac tone, and then expands its scope to encompass a whole people. His beloved “you” is always plural (*kum*), and there is no further reference to an individual personage (except for the oblique “wide-of-eyes,” *al-nujlu al-‘uyūnu*, which could very well be a way of describing the gazelle, true to the classical tradition (Sells, 1989, 5). In this regard, the two poems accomplish very different tasks while being situated within a shared form and sequence, one playing with the motifs and pronouns to address a people, the other lending itself to a mystical interpretation.

The reprover, the *lā’im* in *Nar Layla* and the *‘ādhil* in this poem, are set up in contrast to the messenger. Where the messenger is trustworthy, loyal, and sympathetic to the poet, the reprover is tiresome in his ignorance and stupidity. Arberry remarks on a certain symmetry between the two figures in Ibn al-Fāriq’s poems; both receive equal amounts of time in the poet’s attention, and are lavished with praise or scorn in parallel amounts (Arberry, 1956, 36). The act of reproaching someone for a feeling that they completely misunderstand is truly reprehensible in the poet’s view—far better to be wounded by the arrows of love than to put up with the nonsense and prattle of the ignorant. What is interesting to me vis-à-vis these two poems in their treatment of the reproacher is this: this sentiment of understanding versus ignorance, of separating people into two categories based on their having knowledge of this particular experience, is a theme that is very widespread and powerful in mystical and philosophical circles, throughout the centuries. In the Islamicate context, the distinction between the *ahl al-khawāṣ* (the elite) and the *ahl al-‘awām* (the common) was very important when it came to religious exegesis, philosophical inquiry, and mystical practice, and even in the hands of thinkers completely opposed to one another’s ideas, they were common intellectual currency. Yet the strongest injunction against the reprover (and here I read, the one who lacks knowledge, understanding, and experience) occurs in this poem, which is, up to this point in our reading, the one I would say is less inclined towards a mystical interpretation; whereas in *Nar Layla* the figure of the reprover is an object of irritation but seemingly unimportant in the grand scheme of things. The poet brushes him off like a pest and continues on his meditation. Perhaps the best way to approach this difference is to consider the mood and frame of mind evoked by these two perspectives. Whatever else may be the case, it is clear that the emphasis in *Nar Layla* is strongly on the sorrow

and desolation of the poet, while this poem seems to be more engaged with the outside world, more willing to distribute praise and blame to the people who interact with the poet, in memory or in the flesh.

The oath, an important component of the third part of the *qaṣidah*, is also used to different effect in these two poems. The object of the oaths themselves are probably a clue in and of themselves as to the content that will follow; in *Nar Layla*, the poet swears by the bounds of loyalty and friendship, even evoking the primordial covenant between God and Man (*al-‘ahd al-wathīq*)—what follows is a powerful commitment to revisit the beloved in any way, even “in the negligence of a dream,” and to avoid the gazes of all other “gazelles.” In this poem, the oath is by “Mecca, the Shrine of Abraham, and those who come to the sacred house crying ‘Here I am!’ ” This final image, *mulabbīyan sayyāha*, is a reference to the cry *Labbayka*, “To thee I come, O Lord!” (Arberry, 1956, 36)—the pilgrims themselves. The community of believers is again at the forefront of the poet’s attention, complementing his desire to re-connect with his friends of the Ḥijāz. The *bayt al-ḥaram*, the holy sanctuary, is the epitome of strength and steadfastness in this poem; as the nexus of the sacred environs of Islam, there could be nothing more appropriate for the poet to make an oath by in this context. In *Nar Layla*, however, the poet can divert this concept of inviolateness, *ḥaram*, into a wholly esoteric landscape, just by the content of his oath and what follows. Love, the deaf, mute, and blind judge of the poem’s finale, is able to overrule the divine sanctions against bloodshed in these sacred spaces. The things that bind are not the community of friends and believers, who tie the poet back to the holy moment of divine revelation, but rather a deeper sense of eternity in which time plays no significant role, and union with the Beloved is the singular force that gives rise to all creation and gives it purpose.

This is the ‘Aqīq

هَذَا الْعَقِيقُ

For this last, meditative poem, we return to a detailed gloss and a more polished translation. This translation, I have to admit, is perhaps the more forced of the two, and I had to take some liberties with English grammar to make the rhyme scheme work the way I wanted, which may come across as a bit jarring. In addition, the poem itself uses some language that is exceptionally dense and difficult to unpack without losing its richness—in these cases, I found it was best to abandon my usual strategy of parallel rendering and re-order the sequence of ideas and objects in the verse in order to make it comprehensible.

Unlike the two previous poems, geography does not play as major a role in the poem’s composition. The most prominent place is the ‘Aqīq, which, as Stetkevych shows in *Zephyrs of Najd*, is a cornerstone in the geography of Arabic poetics. Although the actual ‘Aqīq was probably a relatively small river-bed in the Ḥijāz, by the twelfth century

CE it had developed in the Arabic tradition as the quintessential river, a place that would bespeak of green gardens and sweet repose. The *ḥimá*, the sanctuary that appears in *Nar Layla*, also occurs in this poem, in direct connection with the gazelle. Finally, the waters of ‘Udhayb remind one of the waters of Wajrah, and they provide the final image for the poem’s closure. Otherwise, the journey through pastoral Arabia is cut to the chase and the poet’s thoughts seem to fall directly on the figure of the Beloved, represented by the gazelle.

The subtext of gender markings between the poet and the gazelle are intriguing to me. Many of the poem’s lines cannot be understood except by looking for gender markers in the verbs and enclitic pronouns, and in addition, the relationship between the poet and the gazelle seems to me to be highly charged with a gendered performance of certain roles. The lover is, without exception in my experience, male, or at least takes on the role of the male: he is the one who seeks, who entreats, who makes the journey, who wastes away in longing—all of these are actions of change and dynamism, which will inevitably be rebuffed by the female object of desire, which is unmoved, unresponsive, and intractable—in essence, static. Often in Persian poetry, the beloved is portrayed looking at herself in the mirror, an understanding of beauty that maintains that it cannot be attracted to anything less beautiful than itself; a creature of formidable beauty, therefore, cannot help but be drawn to its own loveliness. This relationship is maintained in this poem, with the gazelle diverting itself with the grandeur of its own beauty (*multahiyān bi-‘izzi jalālihi*), while the poet stands outside, racked by insomnia, tracing the outline of the beloved’s ghost, sacrificing his soul to the gazelle. At the same time, many of the gazelle’s characteristics seem to lend themselves to a male figure: his total self-sufficiency, and the sense of his “owning” others, especially when paired with the poet’s soul as the feminine *muhjah*. The dynamic seems typical and eye-catching at the same time, and any possible significance it may carry would depend greatly on how much emphasis one puts on the gendered undertones of Arabic nouns.

One other challenging element of this poem is the possibility of dissimulation, introduced by the line *mutawālihan in kunta lasta bi-wālihi*. While these two words for witless, stunned, bewildered, shocked, etc. (*mutawālih* and *wālih*), are almost identical out of context, here they are placed in opposition to each other: “be this, if you are not that.” The major difference between the two is that the former can mean to merely *seem* to be in such a state (see the gloss below for more details). This raises an interesting question for me: is the poet hinting that it is not necessarily the state of love-strickenness itself that is critical for approaching the beloved, that the external affectation is what is needed? The oath, again in this poem, provides a key into the focus of the poet’s thoughts. While the oath has been made in the name of primordial eternity and communal elements, it is in this case in the name of the very sweetness (*tīb*) that has been expended for the sake of union with the beloved and his/her pleasure. There is no reason to believe, in fact, that all this *tīb* was entirely genuine—indeed, many of the prominent treatises on love of this time period, and others dating back to Ovid and Horace, make a

point of the necessity of dissimulation in winning over and keeping the love of another, and much of the art of being a successful lover lies in one's ability to lie well and decipher the lies of others. The poet's oath throws the themes of sacrifice, weariness, humiliation, and bewilderment into a new light. Completely isolated from the beloved, the poet can do nothing more than carry out the performance of one who is sick with love, hoping that these missives (*irsāl*, l. 4) will perhaps meet a similar outward manifestation of affect, the beloved's mirage.

الْقَصِيدَة

البحر الكامل

UU-U-|UU-U-|UU-U-||

صَلَّ الْمُتَيَّمُ وَاهْتَدَى بِضَلَالِهِ	مَا بَيْنَ ضَالِ الْمُنْحَى وَظِلَالِهِ	1
لِلصَّبِّ قَدْ بَعَدَتْ عَلَى آمَالِهِ	وَبِذَلِكَ الشَّعْبِ الْيَمَانِي مُنِيَّةٌ	2
مُتَوَالِهَا إِنْ كُنْتَ لَسْتَ بِوَالِهِ	يَا صَاحِبِي هَذَا الْعَقِيقُ فَكَيْفَ بِهِ	3
إِرْسَالُ دَمْعِي فِيهِ عَنِ إِرْسَالِهِ	وَأَنْظُرُهُ عَنِّي إِنْ طَرَفِي عَاقَنِي	4
عِلْمٌ بِقَلْبِي فِي هَوَاهُ وَحَالِهِ	وَأَسْأَلُ غَزَالَ كِنَاسِهِ هَلْ عِنْدَهُ	5
إِذْ ظَلَّ مُلْتَهِيًّا بِعِزِّ جَمَالِهِ	وَأَظُنُّهُ لَمْ يَدِرْ ذَلِكَ صَبَابَتِي	6
مَنْ عَالِيَهُ لِأَنَّهَا مِنْ مَالِهِ	تَفْدِيهِ مُهَجَّتِي الَّتِي تَلِفَتْ وَلَا	7
إِذْ كُنْتُ مُشْتَاقًا لَهُ كَوِصَالِهِ	أَثَرِي دَرَى أَنِّي أَحِنُّ لِهَجْرِهِ	8
لِلظَّرْفِ كَيْ أَلْقَى خَيَالَ خَيَالِهِ	وَأَبَيْتُ سَهْرَانًا أُمَثَلُ طَيْفَهُ	9
إِنْ كُنْتُ مِلْتُ لِقِيلِهِ وَلِقَالِهِ	لَا ذُقْتُ يَوْمًا رَاحَةً مِنْ عَاذِلِ	10
مَا مَلَّ قَلْبِي حُبَّهُ لِإِلَالِهِ	فَوَحَّقَ طَيْبِ رِضَى الْحَبِيبِ وَوَصَلِهِ	11
بِحَشَائِبِي لَوْ يُطْفَى بِبَرْدِ زُلَالِهِ	وَأَهَا إِلَى مَاءِ الْعُدَيْبِ وَكَيْفَ لِي	12
شَرَفًا فَوَاطِمِي لِأَمْعِ آلِهِ	وَلَقَدْ يَجِلُّ عَنِ اشْتِيَاقِي مَاؤُهُ	13

Gloss

1	<i>mā</i>	<i>bayna</i>	<i>ḍāli</i>	<i>al-munḥanā</i>	<i>wa-ḥilālihi</i>
	what	between	(the) lote tree	(of the) twisting valley	and its shadows
	<i>ḍalla</i>	<i>al-mutayyamu</i>	<i>wa-ihtadā</i>	<i>bi-ḍalālihi</i>	
	lost	the enslaved	and was guided	in his going astray	
	went astray			erring	
				confusion	
				madness	

That which is between the *ḍāl* tree of the twisting valley and its shadows
the one enslaved by love went astray and found guidance in his straying

One should, at first, note the incredible resonance of the sounds *ḍāl*, *ḥāl*, and *lām* in this first line—*ḍāl*, *ḥilāl*, *ḍalla*, *ḍalālihi*. The **ḍāl** tree is sonically bound into a sequence of images all having to do with darkness, confusion, error, and losing one's way. Further intertextual resonances can be found particularly in the interplay between **ḍalla** and **ihtadā**, two words for going astray and being guided that occur in the most oft-recited Sūrah of the Qur'ān, al-Fātiḥah, in which God is supplicated to guide the believer along the straight path (*iḥdīnā al-ṣirāṭa al-mustaqīm*), keeping him or her away from the ranks of those who have lost their way. Note also the sonic and syntactic counterposition of **al-munḥanā** and **ihtadā**. **al-Mutayyam** is from the verb *tāma*, to enslave and enthrall, usually in love.

2	<i>wa-bi-dhālika</i>	<i>al-shi'bi</i>	<i>al-yamānī</i>	<i>munyatun</i>
	and in/by that	mountain path	Yemeni	(is a) wish
		trail		object of desire
	<i>lil-ṣabbi</i>	<i>qad</i>	<i>ba'udat</i>	<i>‘alā</i> <i>‘āmālihi</i>
	for the outpour	already	was distant	from his hopes
	casting		unlikely	desires
	flowing		(stative)	

And in that Yemeni trail is a desired one
which for the outpouring (of his love) was already far from his hopes

Ṣabb is the noun form of the verb that generally means 'to pour,' 'to cast,' 'to effuse.' Its use here, as I understand it, is to indicate the purview or range of where the lover's hopes could be cast. The pairing of **qad** and **ba'udat** firmly places the action of the verb in the realm of eternity, reinforcing the fact that this is not a temporary state or that there was once a time which such hopes were not so far-fetched.

3	<i>yā</i>	<i>ṣāhibī</i>	<i>hādhā</i>	<i>al-‘aḳīq</i>	<i>fa-ḳif</i>	<i>bi-hi</i>
	O	my companion friend	this (is)	the ‘Aḳīq	so stop halt	at/by it
	<i>mutawālihan</i>	<i>in</i>	<i>kunta</i>	<i>lasta</i>	<i>bi-wālihi</i>	
	confused bewildered grief-stricken out of one’s wits	if	you were	not	(among the) confused bewildered afflicted	

O my companion, this is the ‘Aḳīq, so stop by it
seeming dazed and bewildered, even if you are not so

The critical wordplay of this line arises between **wālih** and **mutawālih**, which both come from the root *walaha*, to lose one’s wits on account of grief, distress, or infatuation. *Wālih* is the more concrete of the two, being the direct active participle (*ism fā‘il*) of the basic verb, and this is, interestingly, what the poet suggests the love-struck one is not; he advises him to arrive at the ‘Aḳīq *mutawālihan*, which is a derived verb on the pattern *tafā‘ala*, indicating, among other possible meanings, to visibly express or display such behavior—thus *tanāwama* is to pretend to sleep, *taghāfala* is to display indifference. This suggestion of dissimulation, especially for one who is supposed to be completely beside himself in love, is an important element of this poem.

4	<i>wa-inzurhu</i>	<i>‘annī</i>	<i>inna</i>	<i>ṭarfī</i>	<i>‘āqanī</i>
	and regard it	for me in my place	indeed	my gaze	impeded restrained prevented me
	<i>irsālu</i>	<i>damī</i>	<i>fīhi</i>	<i>‘an</i>	<i>irsālihi</i>
	the sending the missive	(of) my tear(s)	in it (the gaze)	from	sending it (the gaze)

And regard it (the ‘Aḳīq) for me, for indeed the emission of my tears
prevented me from dispatching my gaze

L’Hopital’s gloss makes reading this syntax a bit easier: despite the fact that there is only one possible reading that works with the grammar, the words come all out of their logical order and would probably come off as disorienting the first time they were heard—given the theme of this poem, this may not be in any way an inappropriate choice on the part of the poet. The simplest syntax of this sentence would be:

إِرْسَالُ دَمْعِي عَاقَبِي عَنِ إِرْسَالِ ظَرْفِي

5	<i>wa-is'al</i> and ask	<i>ghazāla</i> (the) gazelle	<i>kināsīhi</i> of its refuge hideaway	<i>hal</i> does	<i>‘indahū</i> it have
	<i>‘ilmun</i> knowledge cognisance	<i>bi-qalbī</i> of/about my heart	<i>fī</i> in	<i>hawāhu</i> its desire love	<i>wa-ḥālīhi</i> and its state condition

And ask the gazelle (in) its refuge if it knows
about my heart, in its desire and condition

Kinās is a rare enough word; interestingly, I found it directly in connection with the gazelle (*al-zaby*), as a place in the forest where it can go to hide and conceal itself. L’Hopital believes the pronoun *-hi* refers not to the gazelle but rather to the ‘Aqīq valley itself, i.e., *Ask the gazelle in the shelter of the ‘Aqīq...* Considering that *kinās* is directly linked to the gazelle in its definition, perhaps it could go either way. As usual, the gazelle is a symbol for the beloved, and as usual, it is either unaware or unmoved by the lover’s torment. I’m not sure why **hawāhu** has a *ḍammah* instead of a *kasrah* at the end, but coming after the preposition *fī*, it must be ‘in his desire.’

6	<i>wa-aẓunnuhu</i> and I consider think suspect it	<i>lam</i> did not	<i>yadri</i> know understand	<i>dhulla</i> ignominy humiliation lowliness	<i>ṣabābatī</i> my ardent love longing
	<i>idh</i> and then	<i>ẓalla</i> remained continued	<i>multahiyan</i> toying amusing oneself diverting	<i>bi-‘izzi</i> with the glory honor power	<i>jamālihi</i> of its beauty

I suspect that it did not understand the humiliation of my ardor
and continued amusing itself with the majesty of its beauty

One should note that **ṣabābah** comes from the same root as *ṣabba*, encountered in line 1.

7	<i>tafdīh</i> sacrifices ransoms redeems it (the gazelle)	<i>muhjatī</i> my heart spirit anima life	<i>allatī</i> which	<i>talifat</i> was ruined destroyed exhausted	<i>wa-lā</i> and not
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<i>mannun</i>	‘ <i>alayhi</i>	<i>li-annahā</i>	<i>min</i>	<i>mālihi</i>
a favor	upon it	because it	is from	its property
gift		(my soul)	is part of	(the
blessing				gazelle’s)

My soul which was exhausted sacrifices itself to the gazelle
But it is not a gift, for my soul already belongs to it

Reading this line takes careful attention to the gender of the pronouns. The gazelle is referred to by the masculine *hu*, *hi*, while the poet’s soul is distinguished by the female markers *-at*, *hā*. The fact that gender plays such an important role in giving meaning to this section suggests that the relationship between the poet and his beloved can be mapped onto a gendered dynamic, in which the poet, typically male, has now taken on the role of the female, and vice-versa for the beloved.

8	<i>a-turá</i>	<i>dará</i>	<i>annī</i>	<i>aḥinnu</i>	<i>li-hajrihi</i>
	I wonder	he is aware	that I	yearn	his abandoning
	Is it that	he knows		long for	forsaking
					separation (from me)

<i>idh</i>	<i>kuntu</i>	<i>mushtāqan</i>	<i>la-hu</i>	<i>ka-wiṣālihi</i>
and	I was	longing	for him	as (I do for) union
then		desirous		being together with him
		yearning		

Does he know that I long for him to forsake me
as I was longing for union with him

9	<i>wa-abītu</i>	<i>sahrānan</i>	<i>umaththilu</i>	<i>ṭayfahu</i>
	and I sleep	awake	I picture	his image
	spend the night		portray	ghost
			form	spectre

<i>lil-ṭarfi</i>	<i>kay</i>	<i>alqá</i>	<i>khayāla</i>	<i>khayālihi</i>
to the vision	so that	it meets	the trace	(of) his trace
gaze		projects	fancy	fancy
sight		casts out	imagination	vision

And I spend the night awake, picturing/drawing his image before my gaze
so that it meets the image of his image

Sahrān is more than just being awake; it almost always implies staying up late into the night, unable to go to sleep. **Ṭayf** and **khayāl** are juxtaposed in this line, and while they are close to synonymous, the former tends to be associated with an independent substance (hence words like ‘ghost,’ ‘spectre,’ ‘phantom,’ ‘apparition,’) while the latter is closely tied to the imagination and irreality, with words like ‘shadow,’ ‘chimera,’ ‘fantasy,’ ‘reflection’ used to translated it. The repetition of *khayāl* in the second *misra*‘ may emphasize the tenuousness of the poet’s connection with his beloved at this point—only through the efforts of his own imagination can he detect the hint of the beloved’s trace.

10	<i>lā</i>	<i>dhuqtu</i>	<i>yawman</i>	<i>rāḥatan</i>	<i>min</i>	<i>‘ādhilīn</i>
	no	I tasted	a day	a respite	from	censurer
	not			repose		reprover
						moralist
	<i>in</i>	<i>kuntu</i>	<i>miltu</i>	<i>li-qālihi</i>	<i>wa-li-qālihi</i>	
	if	I was	inclined	for his ‘if’s	and his ‘but’s	
			heeded			
			partial to			

I did not taste a day of respite from the reprover
 If I were to heed his prattle

The **‘ādhil**, like the *lā’im* in *Nār Laylā*, is the real villain of the poem. While suffering for the absent beloved is painful, it is sublime, while it is the words of the nay-sayer that are truly insufferable. **Qāl wa-qīl** is a stock phrase, almost always pejorative, to mean idle talk, prittle-prattle, and general nonsense.

11	<i>fa-wa-ḥaqqi</i>	<i>ṭībī</i>	<i>riḍá</i>	<i>al-ḥabībī</i>	<i>wa-waṣlihi</i>
	and by the truth	(of the) sweetness	(of) pleasing	the beloved	and union
	value	perfume	satisfying		with him
	(oath)	goodness			
	<i>mā</i>	<i>malla</i>	<i>qalbī</i>	<i>ḥubbahu</i>	<i>li-malālihi</i>
	did not	tire	my heart	(with) his	for his tiredness
		become bored		love	vexation
		fed up			boredom

By the true value of the sweetness (spent) for pleasing the beloved and being
 with him
 My heart did not become tired of his love for (his? its?) boredom

This is a difficult verse for me, particularly the word **malālihi**. Does the pronoun *hi* refer back to the poet’s heart, or to the beloved? Does *li-* indicate the cause of the boredom, or something for the sake of it? L’Hopital translates this line as “Ce n’est pas parce qu’il s’est lassé de moi que mon coeur, lui, s’est lassé de l’aimer,” “It’s not because he grew weary of me that my heart grew weary of loving him.” Until I can shed some light on this, I’ll run with this translation.

12	<i>wāhan</i>	<i>ilá</i>	<i>māʾi</i>	<i>al-ʿudhaybi</i>	<i>wa-kayfa</i>	<i>lī</i>
	oh	for	the water	of ʿUdhayb	how	(is it) for me
	alas	to				to me
	<i>bi-ḥashāya</i>	<i>law</i>	<i>yutfá</i>	<i>bi-bardi</i>	<i>zulālihi</i>	
	in/with my insides	if	extinguish	with the coolness	of its clearness	
	bowels		quench		limpidity	
			(passive?)		transparency	

Oh, for the water of ʿUdhayb, how is it for me
for my insides to be quenched by the cold of its clarity

Kayfa lī: how could it be for me, i.e., how can I. **ʿUdhayb:** so far, nothing more specific than ‘a place that has water.’

13	<i>wa-la-qad</i>	<i>yajillu</i>	<i>ʿan</i>	<i>ishtiyāqi</i>	<i>māʾuhu</i>
	and surely	to be exalted	above	my longing	his water
		sublime	over		
		lofty			
	<i>sharafan</i>	<i>fa-wa-izāmʾī</i>	<i>li-lāmiʿi</i>	<i>ʾālihi</i>	
	in nobility	so make me thirsty	for the shine	of his image	
	rank		lustre	reflection	
	eminence		gleam	mirage	

And his/its water is surely exalted over my longing in its nobility
so make me thirst for the gleaming of his mirage

I read the *lām* in **la-qad** as emphatic. **Yajillu ʿan:** to be eminent, supreme, lofty over someone. **Izāmʾī** comes from *zamīʾa*, to be thirsty. While **ʾāl** typically means family or people, in poetry it usually comes with the meaning *sarāb*, ‘mirage.’ There is also the question of **māʾuhu**; does the *hu* refer to the water of ʿUdhayb, which seems more probable, or is it an implicit reference back to the beloved? Given that the most recent antecedent is the ʿUdhayb, that is probably the best reading, but there may be undertones of the second object, even if it is grammatically far-fetched.

Translation

Between the valley lote-tree and its shadows
love's captive strayed and found guidance in his wander

And in that crumbling Yemeni trail is a beloved
far beyond the cast of his aspire

This is the 'Aqíq, my friend, so stop by it
and be at a loss, if you're not truly bewildered

Look upon it for me, for my gaze is impeded
my eyes cannot cast but tears

Ask the gazelle in its hideaway if he's aware
about my heart, in its condition and desire

I suspect he doesn't know the ignominy of my longing
and remains amused by his beauty's grandeur

My ruined spirit sacrifices herself to him
and it's no blessing for him, for she is already of his treasure

Is he aware that I yearn for him to forsake me
as I was longing for him and I together

I spend the night sleepless, tracing his spirit before my gaze
so it could meet the shadows of his specter

I have not tasted a day of respite from the reprover
if I were so inclined to his 'nay's and 'never's

By the sweetness of pleasing the beloved and by his union
It was not that he grew weary of me that my heart tired of loving him

Oh, for the water of 'Udhayb, how could it be
for my insides to be quenched by the chill of its clarity

Its water is surely exalted over my longing in nobility
so make me thirsty for its mirage, so clear

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