Realms of Strangers:

Readers, Language, and Trickery in *Maqāmāt al-Ḥarīrī*

zur Erlangung des Doktorgrades Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.)
eingereicht am Fachbereich Geschichts- und Kulturwissenschaften
der Freien Universität Berlin
im Jahr 2023

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Date of Disputation: 20. 10. 2023

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Abstract

This thesis is about strangeness and strangers in the *Maqāmāt of Ḥarīrī;* an Arabic work of literary fiction from the 6th/12th century, featuring a lettered man pursuing a trickster in fifty episodic narratives to collect his rare words, sophisticated compositions, and curious accounts. A key element of the *maqāma* genre, as noted by Abū Isḥāq Ibrāhīm ibn ʿAlī al-Ḥuṣrī in the 5th/11th century, is its strangeness. Al-Ḥarīrī accentuates this element and employs it in two different aspects of his *maqāmāt*: the vocabulary, and the trickster's relationship to space. The first aspect of unusual vocabulary combines Bedouin terms, curses, argot, and jargon, which Arabic lexicography categorizes as *gharīb: "strange" or* "rare." The second manifests in the relationship of human experience with space, meaning the act of moving from one location to another, being in isolation or exile, away from home and familiarity, trading curiosities, collecting unusual anecdotes, and being a *gharīb*, a stranger. The *Ḥarīriyya* readers during the premodern period of Islām recognized the strangeness of al-Ḥarīrī's language and widely appreciated it. Their *Nahḍawī* (Arabic modernist) counterparts objected to the literary model this feature represented, along with the *Ḥarīriyya*'s immorality, ornate language, and repetitive plots. They sought to replace it with a literary style that was closer to European literature. This shift was a direct consequence of the influence of early modern European scholarship on Classical Arabic literature, especially al-Ḥarīrī. Against the grain of early Orientalist and modernist readings, I argue that the *Ḥarīriyya* makes more sense, from an aesthetic, intellectual, and literary standpoint, when it is read and appraised according to its own terms, particularly through the reception paradigm its first readers adopted. That paradigm has been neglected also in much of contemporary scholarship. Owing to the assumption that traveling and moving in space is a ''hollow frame'' in the *maqāma* genre, scholarship has until recently exhibited a lackluster engagement with the element of *gharīb* (the strange) in the *Ḥarīriyya*, especially spatial strangeness. I argue that linguistic *gharāba* (rare words and difficult expressions) and physical *ghurba* (being a stranger) are interdependent and strongly dependent on each other in the *Ḥarīriyya*. Only a stranger who comes from a distant land can fulfill the audience's obsessive desire for curiosities, wondrous accounts, and exotic vocabulary, which always exists elsewhere. The *Ḥarīriyya* makes liberal use of the double-entendre, and the interdependence of the two is also a double-entendre: only a *gharīb* (stranger) can provide the *gharīb* (rare vocabulary).

Abstrakt

Diese Dissertation handelt über Fremdheit und Fremde in den *Maqāmāt des al-Ḥarīrī*, einem Werk der arabischen literarischen Fiktion aus dem 6./12. Jahrhundert. In 50 episodischen Erzählungen treffen sich ein gelehrter Literat und ein Trickster, wobei der Erstere die seltenen Worte, geistreichen Kompositionen und seltsamen Begebenheiten des Letzteren aufzeichnet. Ein Schlüsselelement des *maqāma*-Genres ist, wie schon von Abū Isḥāq Ibrāhīm ibn ʿAlī al-Ḥuṣrī im 5./11. Jahrhundert beobachtet hat, ein Fokus auf das Fremde, Rare und Seltsame (*gharīb*). Al-Ḥarīrī gibt diesem Element Nachdruck und setzt ihn auf zweierlei Art und Weise in seinen *maqāmāt* ein: im Wortschatz und in der Beziehung des Tricksters mit Raum. Der seltene Wortschatzes vereint Ausdrücke der Beduinen, Beschimpfungen, Gaunersprache, und Jargon. Diese werden in der arabischen Lexikografie unter der Kategorie *gharīb*, „seltsam" oder „rar" zusammengefasst. Die Beziehung der Menschlichen Erfahrung mit Raum manifestiert sich im Akt der Bewegung von einem Ort zum anderen, im Zustand der Isolation und des Exils weit weg von Heim und gewohnter Umgebung, im Handel mit Kuriositäten, in der Sammlung seltsamer Anekdoten, und darin, ein *gharīb*, ein Fremder zu sein. Vormoderne Leser der *Ḥarīrīya* erkannten und schätzten die Fremdheit bzw. die Rarität der Sprache Ḥarīrīs. Ihre Erben in der arabischen Moderne (*Nahda*) lehnten dieses literarische Model ab, und wandten sich gegen den unmoralischen Inhalt, die ornamentierte Sprache und die schablonenhafte Handlung der *Ḥarīrīya*. Sie suchten einen literarische Stil zu entwickeln, der europäischen Literaturen näher stand. Dieser Wandel war eine direkte Folge des Einflusses der frühmodernen europäischen Forschung zur arabischen Literatur. Im Gegensatz zu den Prämissen der frühen orientalistischen und Modernistischen Rezeption argumentiere ich, dass wir die *Ḥarīrīya* ästhetisch, intellektuell und literarisch besser verstehen, wenn wir sie nach ihren eigenen Kriterien lesen und schätzen und das Rezeptionsparadigma ihrer frühen Leser übernehmen. Durch die Annahme, Reise und Bewegung im Raum seien ein „hohler Handlungsrahmen" im *maqāma*-Genre, hat die Forschung bis vor Kurzem das Element des *gharīb* und insbesondere das Fremdsein im Raum in der *Ḥarīrīya* nur im Vorbeigehen diskutiert. Ich argumentiere, dass sprachliche *gharāba* (seltene Wörter und seltsame Ausdrücke) und materielle *ghurba* (ein Fremder sein) in der *Ḥarīrīya* voneinander abhängen und aufeinander angewiesen sind. Nur ein Fremder, aus einem fremden Land kommend, kann das obsessive Verlangen des Publikums nach Kuriositäten, wundersamen Berichten und exotischem Wortschatz erfüllen, die immer nur anderswo existieren. Die *Ḥarīrīya* macht großzügigen Gebrauch vom Doppelsinn, und auch die gegenseitige Abhängigkeit der zwei

Aspekte ist ein Doppelsinn: nur ein *gharīb* (Fremder) kann *gharīb* (fremden Wortschatz) beschaffen.

To Tricksters and Strangers

“[T]rickster is a boundary-crosser. Every group has its edge, its sense of in and out, and tricksters are always there, at the gates of the city and the gates of life, making sure there is commerce. He also attends the internal boundaries by which groups articulate their social life. We constantly distinguish—right and wrong, sacred and profane, clean and dirty, male and female, young and old, living and dead—and in every case trickster will cross the line and confuse the distinction.” Lewis Hyde, *Trickster Makes this World: Mischief, Myth, and Art.*

“Listen, you! The stranger is he whose camels’ [guiding] sun has set, from whose lovers and foes he has become estranged, who makes strange his words and deeds, who goes far in his comings and goings, and whose shirt and rags he wears far too long. … Listen! Thou art the stranger in what you mean.” Abū Ḥayyān al-Tawḥīdī, *al-Ishārāt al-ilāhiyya*

Acknowledgments

In the first year of this project, I struggled quite a lot. Not understanding the ins and out of the German academic system, the reasons to leave were much more numerous than the reasons to stay and continue. During this period, I was lucky to have the guidance and supervision of Professors Beatrice Gruendler and Konrad Hirschler, the support of my BGSMCS cohort, and most importantly the unconditional care and friendship of two beautiful people, Ahmed Ibrahim and Mirjam Schnell. To you all, I am most grateful.

A turning point for this project came when Professor Gruendler introduced me to Professor Isabel Toral who invited me to her weekly seminar on authorship in premodern *adab*. This seminar sessions were moments of clarity that showed me my limited knowledge of the *turāth*. Isabel Toral understood my polemic positions, tolerated my unwavering opinions, and forgave my digressions and need to include every source from *adab*. When she saw my tendency to follow tangents, she used a great analogy that saved this project. She said: "Asmaa, you are like a child in a toy store. You have the money only for one toy, but you want to play with them all. Pick one toy and leave the store." Eventually, I followed her advice and picked the toy of *strangeness*, but only because it represented an endless world of possibilities and yielded many threads. That this dissertation is completed and submitted within schedule is owed primarily to Professor Toral's wisdom, encouraging words, and guidance; our monthly meetings kept me from straying in the labyrinth of *gharīb*.

Outside of academia, I am indebted most of all to my family back in Morocco, who encouraged and dreamt of the first Essakouti to hold a Ph.D. I am also indebted to my dear husband, Samuli Schielke who cooked many breakfasts, read many drafts, spent numerous weekends with me in the library, and distracted me from work with fishing trips and hikes. Had it not been for him, I would have finished at least 6 months ago. I am also grateful to the ultimate Stabi companion, and editor of this thesis, Oualid El Khattabi, who made the last months of this project, against all odds, quite enjoyable and lovely.

During the five years of this project, many beautiful people provided coffee, cake, walks, conversations, hugs, and care. These beautiful people are Albert Schlosser, Rustam Samadov, Iman Hamam, Philip Reichmuth, Mohammad Rabie, Katharina Kloss, all my friends in Boring Books. Of course, I extend my gratitude to the Doha gang: Ayman el-Dessouky, Ismail el-moutaki, Leena Awwad, Fajr (Eman) Ramodan, Majd Hamad, Abdel Wahab Ajroum, Mohmed Meska, Hamad al-Mulla, Muhsin Bleni, and Muhmamd Taytay, and Merouan al-Taiq.

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Abbreviations

EI2 The Encyclopaedia of Islam, new [second] edition

EI3 The Encyclopaedia of Islam, third edition

EAL Meisami and Starkey, Encyclopedia of Arabic Literature

M *maqāma*

Mt. *maqāmāt*

Notes

- For *Maqāmāt al-Hamadhānī*, I use Muḥammad ʿAbduh's edition from 1898. For the *maqāma* he omitted and the others whose parts he censored, I use the recent work by Orfali and Pomerantz, *The Maqāmāt of Badīʿ al-Zamān al-Hamadhānī: Authorship, Text, and Contexts*.
- If not indicated, all translations are my own. For the *Ḥarīriyya*, I use the translation by Chenery and Steingass, because it is a complete translation and is the most faithful to the original. Thomas Chenery translated and published 26 of al-Ḥarīrī's *maqāmāt* in 1867. He died in 1884 before he could translate the rest, for lack of funding. In 1898, Steingass took over the task and translated the remaining *maqāmāt*. The two translations are published in two volumes under the title *The Assemblies of al-Ḥarīrī*.
- Transliterations follow the conventions of the *International Journal of Middle East Studies* (*IJMES*).
- Islamic *hijrī* dates, alongside common era dates, are used only for the context of the premodern period of Islam.

Introduction

In the Beginning was the Maqāma

When I was 13 or 14 years old, I chanced upon my uncle's old schoolbooks. Among them, I found a Moroccan high school textbook from 1982. It was called *nuṣūṣ adabiyya*, or literary texts. The textbook was arranged in ascending order of difficulty, proceeding from easy to difficult texts. It opens with newspaper articles, then moves to letters, literary prose texts, and poetry, before concluding with examples from the *ḥadīth* tradition and the *maqāmāt*. All the words were familiar, except for one: *maqāma.* Checking the corresponding section, I found a text by Badīʿ al-Zamān al-Hamadhānī (d. 398/1008), entitled *al-Maqāma al-Dīnāriyya*. The plot was hilarious: a rich man called ʿĪsā ibn Hishām challenges two beggars to insult one another. The one that will cause the most offense will receive a dinar as a prize. The two beggars jump on the opportunity and compose long series of creative and witty insults, such as: "O dog in strife! O monkey on the carpet! O pumpkin with pulse! O less than nothing! O fumes of naphtha! O stench of the armpit! O tartar of teeth! Of filth of the ears!"[1] Astonished at their impudence and unable to choose the most insolent of them, ʿĪsā ibn Hishām throws the dinar between the two beggars and leaves. After reading the text, I came up with a tentative definition for the *maqāma*: it must be an old word to designate a humorous anecdote about beggars exchanging insults for money.

A few years later, in 2010, I encountered another *maqāma*, this time in my own high school curriculum. The main theme of the didactic unit was "Literary Prose from the Abbasid period." The selected *maqāma* was by Abū Muḥammad al-Qāsim ibn ʿAlī al-Ḥarīrī (d. 516/1122). I do not recall the title of this particular *maqāma* nor its plot. I remember, however, that it was preceded by an introductory note stating that it belonged to the period of decadence (*ʿaṣr al-inḥiṭāṭ*), in which the literati composed meaningless and ornate texts, focusing on form, *badīʿ* (figures of speech), and rhyme (*sajʿ*). Each time we inquired about the meaning of an ambiguous term, and they were many, the teacher would refer to this preface. Al-Ḥarīrī's *maqāma* was taught as a sample of old writing, and understanding it was only secondary, if not optional. To the classroom, al-Ḥarīrī was both linguistically and chronologically alien; an archaic figure that we hoped to never encounter in the exam.

[1] Badīʿ al-Zamān al-Hamadhānī, *al-Maqāmāt*, translated by W. J. Prendergast (Madras: S.P.C.K. Press, 1915), 166.

Reading al-Ḥarīrī's ambiguous episode, I started questioning my earlier understanding of the genre. Perhaps the *maqāmāt* were not only an exchange of funny insults but also of strange and learned terms. They were certainly not humorous, because humor was not supposed to be this hard! Perhaps they were indeed funny but al-Ḥarīrī did not know how to write humor. I retained my skepticism about the *maqāma* genre and my prejudices against al-Ḥarīrī for years, even starting to work on this dissertation believing that his work was incomprehensible, unintelligible, and untranslatable. Little did I know that I was simply joining a long line of scholars and intellectuals who since the 18th century had depicted al-Ḥarīrī as "flowery," "laborious," "stupid," and "decadent," and continued to do so in curricula and academic scholarship till the present time.[2]

It took me a while to realize that the problem was not al-Ḥarīrī's language nor his style, but rather the literary conventions that were first introduced by modern European scholars (Chapter 2) and then adopted by the first-generation intellectuals of the Arab Renaissance or *Nahḍa* (Chapter 3). These new conventions encouraged clarity, simplicity, and functionality for a pedagogical purpose, and had little interest in playfulness, belle-lettres, and ambiguity for their own sake. Works that possessed these attributes were categorized as part of the so-called *ʿaṣr al-inḥiṭāṭ*,[3] or age of decadence, referring to the centuries between the fall of Baghdad and the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, a period in which Arabic culture supposedly entered "fallen state"[4] (Chapter 3). The term *inḥiṭāṭ* appears for the first time in Buṭrus al-Bustānī's (1819-1893) *Khuṭba fī ādab al-ʿarab*" (A Speech on the Literature of the Arabs) in 1859.[5] Throughout the *Nahḍa* period, *inḥiṭāṭ* was a trending term that encompassed connotations of backwardness, irrationality, moral decline, obsolete style, which were all part of a past that was no longer welcomed. Consequently, as Thomas Bauer notes,

> toward the end of the nineteenth century … the standard theory of Arabic rhetoric vanished from school curricula. Poetry was no longer allowed to be playful and permeated by ambiguity, but was supposed to express "true feelings in an unaffected manner."

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[2] There are some notable exceptions, which I discuss below.

[3] For a thorough discussion on the narrative of decadence, its history and the various implications, see Reinhard Schulze, "Mass Culture Production in 19th century Middle East," in *Mass Culture, Popular Culture, and Social Life in the Middle East,* ed. Georg Stauth and Sami Zubaida (Frankfurt: Campus Verlag, 1987), 189–222; Syrinx Von Hees, ed., *Inḥiṭāṭ – The Decline Paradigm: Its Influence and Persistence in the Writing of Arab Cultural History,* ALEA (Würzburg: Ergon-Verlag, 2017).

[4] Josef Massad, *Desiring Arabs* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 8.

[5] Ibid.

> Arabs began to be ashamed of their own traditions. Even today, Arab intellectuals would like to erase from history a whole millennium (if not more than that) of Arabic literature.[6]

The changing reception of the *maqāma* genre is a good illustration of the effect this change of attitudes had, replacing the general acceptance of ambiguity, playfulness, and humor with clarity, seriousness, and functionality. The "shame" toward the literary past alienated literary production that spanned ten centuries and "erased" many figures that proved incompatible with the new era. The repercussions of this shift are still felt today. They are visible in schoolbooks that present scattered samples of premodern literature, showcasing them as intellectually and chronologically foreign. The negative sentiments toward literary production from the past are also visible in monographs that still reproduce the narrative of decadence and associate it with al-Ḥarīrī's name and those who emulated his aesthetics. Furthermore, these stereotypes around al-Ḥarīrī and his work have affected contemporary Western scholarship, in the sense it indirectly denies the literariness of al-Ḥarīrī's *Maqāmāt*, treating it as a mere display of rare lexical terms and lipograms or ignoring it altogether.[7] This is further exacerbated by the fact that scholarship favors al-Hamadhānī over al-Ḥarīrī, studying the former's founding *maqāmāt* extensively while reducing the latter to "ponderous obscurity"[8] (see below).

Examining the reception, rare vocabulary or *gharīb*, and the theme of strangerhood or *ghurba* in the *Maqāmāt al*-Ḥarīrī, a key book of pre-modern Arabic *adab* that is neglected today in its immediate context, this dissertation aims to approach the work from different perspectives, to question the impact of modernity on the current understanding of literary past, particularly al-Ḥarīrī. For this reason, I approach al-Ḥarīrī's work according to his own terms and those of its contemporary context, just as its first readers did. Engaging with the varied readership of the *Ḥarīriyya*,[9] its language, and accounts of trickery therein, I primarily argue

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[6] Thomas Bauer, *A Culture of Ambiguity: An Alternative History of Islam*, trans. Hinrich Biesterfeldt and Tricia Tunstall (New York: Columbia University, 2021), 28.

[7] The recent *EI3* contains no entry for the *maqāma* genre. In the four different entries on *adab*, al-Ḥarīrī's name is never mentioned. The *maqāma* genre is only mentioned in the entry, "Adab a) Arabic, early developments" by Hämeen-Anttila, yet he only refers to the *Maqāmāt* by al-Hamadhānī. Curiously, Hämeen-Anttila is the author of the entry "al-Ḥarīrī" in the same edition of *EI3*, which implies that he deliberately left him out while addressing the concept of *adab*.

[8] Brockelmann, C. and Pellat, Ch. "*Maḳāma*," in *EI2*.

[9] *Ḥarīriyya* refers to *Maqāmāt al-Ḥarīrī*. Similarly, *Hamadhāniyya* refers to *Maqāmāt al-Hamadhāni.*

that ornate language, ambiguity, strangeness, and elaborate forms of writing do not equal shallowness. On the contrary, they offer insight into al-Ḥarīrī's brilliant and playful understanding of strangerhood and estrangement, which the *Maqāmāt* depicts as an ambiguous and constitutive experience of being a sophisticated wordsmith, master of rhetoric, and witty orator encountering an audience preoccupied with rare and exotic material. The implications of this argument are to make peace with one thousand years of Arab literature and perhaps even recognize the timelessness of the ideas and lessons some of its representative works contain.

Strangeness as Key to the Maqāmāt

In the 4th/ 10th century, the Buyid scholar Badīʿ al-Zamān al-Hamadhānī invents the *maqāma* genre in which a fictional trickster with a silver tongue, who delivers sacred and secular speeches in exchange for money. According to one of his early readers, al-Hamadhānī improvised his episodes at the end of literary gatherings.[10] He experimented with different plots and protagonists and did not provide a clear definition of what a *maqāma* was. Readers and emulators would later notice recurrent patterns and form their own definitions.

The oldest definition of the *maqāma* belongs to the Tunisian scholar Abū Isḥāq Ibrāhīm ibn ʿAlī al-Ḥuṣrī (d. 413/1022), a contemporary of al-Hamadhānī who quotes twenty of his episodes in the literary anthology *Zahr al-ādāb.* Talking about Abū Bakr ibn Durayd (d. 321/933) and al-Hamadhānī, al-Ḥuṣrī introduces the origins of the then-fresh and unknown genre of *maqāmāt* as follows:

> When al-Hamadhānī observed that Abū Bakr Ibn Duraid the Azdite (A.H. 223-321) had composed forty strange accounts* on a variety of subjects expressed in strange sounding speech and obsolete and incongruous words, such as men's natures would shrink from and their ears be closed against, which he said he had produced from the springs of his breast, extracted from the mines of his thought and exposed to public view and perception, al-Hamadhānī met him with four hundred *maqāmāt* on mendacity.[11]

[10] "Al-Hamadhānī also fabricated [*zawwara*] highly ornamental *maqāmāt,* improvising [the stories] at the end of his literary sessions. He would ascribe them to a narrator who had told him the story and whom he called 'Īsā ibn Hishām." Ibn Sharaf al-Qayrawānī (d. 460/1067), *Aʿlām al-Kalām,* edited by ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz Amīn al-Khānijī (N.C.: al-Khānijī, 1922), 13-14.

[11] al-Ḥuṣrī quoted in Prendergast, "The Maqāmāt of Badīʿ al-Zamān al-Hamadhānī: Introduction," 16. [adapted] *I replaced Prendergast's "rare stories" with "strange accounts" to provide a more accurate translation of the sentence "*ʾaghraba bi-arbaʿīna ḥadīth*."

ولمّا رأى أبا بكر محمّد بن الحُسَين بن دُرَيْد الأَزْدِي أُغْرَبَ بِأَرْبَعِين حَدِيثًا، وذكر أنه اسْتَنْبَطَهَا من يَنَابِيع صَدْرِهِ واِسْتَنْخَبَهَا من مَعَادِن فِكْرِه وأَبْدَاهَا لِلْأَبْصَار والبَصَائِر، وأَهْدَها لِلْأَفْكَار والضّمَائِر فِي مَعَارِضٍ أَعْجَمِيّة وَأَلْفَاظٍ حُوشِيّة، فجاء أكثر ما أَظْهَر تَنْبُو عن قُبُولِه الطِّبَاع ولا تَرْفَع لَهُ حجبَها الأسماع وتَوسَّع فيه إذ صَرَّف ألفاظها ومعانيها في وجوه مختلفة وضُرُوبٍ مُتَصَرّفَة، عَارَضَها بأربعمائة مقامة في الكُدْيَة.[12]

This statement figures repeatedly in *maqāma* scholarship. However, not because it is one of the first instances of the genre's receptions, nor because of its constituent elements. Rather, it has become prominently present in the scholarship because it provides an account of the reasons that might have inspired al-Hamadhānī to invent the genre, which is a favorite theme of *maqāma* scholarship (see below). No contribution has discussed the implications of the key term in al-Ḥuṣrī's account, which is placed in the first sentence: *aghraba,* meaning to compose something strange. According to al-Ḥuṣrī, the crucial element that al-Hamadhānī "observed" in Ibn Durayd's accounts was their strangeness, which manifests in "incongruous" lexicon, "strange sounding speeches," and invented nature. These aspects, as al-Ḥuṣrī notes, drew little acclamation and caused only dismay to Ibn Durayd's readers.[13] Noticing this problem, al-Hamadhānī introduced *kudya*, "a term which includes not only begging but also the whole sphere of conman tricks, roguery, and everything picaresque,"[14] and places his philological material in the mouth of a fictional character, who either collects curious accounts and vocabulary or invents them to gain money. This solution creates the classic *maqāma*, a story of trickery or deception in which different forms of language are displayed to blend both entertainment and instruction. Consequently, as opposed to Ibn Durayd's work, al-Hamadhānī's did find approval with readers. This is how the *maqāma* became a genre with many practitioners.

The *maqāma,* as a story of trickery, through its variety and its different protagonists, is a device to entertain the readers and introduce them to different kinds of lexicons and odd speeches without causing them stress. This does not imply that the story is a mere pretext in

[12] Abū Isḥāq Ibrāhīm ibn ʿAlī al-Ḥuṣrī, *Zahr al-ādāb wa-thamar al-albāb*, edited by ʿAlī Muḥammad al-Bijāwī, Vol. I, First edition (Cairo: Dār Iḥyāʾ al-Kutub al-ʿArabiyya, 1953), 261.
[13] Ibid.
[14] Jaakko Hämeen-Anttila, *Maqāma: A History of a Genre* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2002), 82. See also: Ch. Pellat, "Mukaddī", in: *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Second Edition, edited by: P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, W.P. Heinrichs, accessed 07 November 2023 <http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_SIM_5452>

the *maqāma*, as many scholars have argued,[15] but rather that the classic *maqāma* is only possible because it brings storytelling and language together. The plot functions as a frame that contains and foregrounds strange language, which is the central element.

According to Kilito, a sophisticated literary work during the premodern period of Islam was one that resisted immediate comprehension, one that initiated discussion, interpretation, and commentary.[16] By amplifying language, the *maqāma* genre provoked its audience and produced a long tradition of commentaries, auditories, translations, and imitations. Premodern readers shared the *maqāmat*'s taste for complex and demanding language. Al-Ḥuṣrī's above statement is a case in point. The problem is that the taste for strangeness is not widely recognized in current *maqāma* scholarship. The one scholar, to my knowledge, who has noticed the function of strange language in al-Hamadhānī's *Maqāmāt* is Daniel Beaumont, who argues that the *maqāma* pushes language to an extreme form and uses it as "an instrument of aggression rather than communication,"[17] thus, transforming it to a "shell game which seeks to conceal and frustrate."[18]

In their search for stories and fiction, and in their lesser interest in philology, early modern and contemporary scholars ignored language as a central aspect of al-Hamadhānī's episodes, and read him with an emphasis on comical plots, "critical intentions,"[19] and relative simplicity.[20] As result, they praised him for being "the first who frankly admits that his stories are fictional"[21] in the context of Arabic literature, for "studying society"[22] in his episodes, and

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[15] Shawqī Ḍayf, for example, argues that *maqāmāt* "do not contain a plot," and that al-Hamadhānī included style and terms in a story form (*ṣūra qaṣaṣiyya*), with "limited conversation" to draw the attention of students. Shawqī Ḍayf, *al-Maqāma*, 3rd edition (Cairo: Dār al-Maʿārif, 1954), 8-9.

[16] ʿAbd al-Fattāḥ Kīlīṭū, *al-Adab wa-l-gharāba*, 4th ed., (Casablanca: Toubqal, 2007), 18.

[17] Daniel Beaumont, "A Mighty and Never-Ending Affair: Comic Anecdote and Story in Medieval Arabic Literature," *Journal of Arabic Literature* 24, (1993), 140.

[18] Ibid, 144.

[19] Yūsuf Nūr ʿAwaḍ, for instance, defines al-Hamadhānī's *maqāma* as "a short story, figuring a human picaro and a beggar, and expressing a certain kind of criticism, rebellion, or sarcasm." Yūsuf Nūr ʿAwaḍ, *Fann al-maqāmāt bayna al-mashriq wa-l-maghrib* (Beirut: Dār al-Qalam, 1979), 8. Similarly, Iḥsān ʿAbbās argues that al-Hamadhānī created a mask to critique "social and literary life in all their manifestations." Iḥsān ʿAbbās, *Malāmiḥ yūnāniyya fī al-adab al-ʿarabī*, 2nd ed. (Beirut: Arab Institute for Research & Publishing, 1993), 189.

[20] This form of praise for al-Hamadhānī's work started with modern European readers. See Chapter 2.

[21] A.F. L. Beeston, "The Genesis of the *Maqāmāt* Genre," in *Journal of Arabic Literature*, Vol. 2 (1971), 9.

[22] Fakhrī Abū al-Suʿūd, *"al-Qaṣaṣ bayna al-adabayn al-ʿarabī wa-l-injlīzī*," in *al-Risāla*, n. 198 (April 1937), 654.

for being "less shocking,"[23] and "less pompous"[24] than those who wrote the *maqāmāt* after him. In other words, they dismiss his taste for rare vocabulary, which he explicitly announces in *al-Maqāma al-Jāḥiẓiyya* (see Chapter 5) and in his correspondence with other writers,[25] and rebranded him as a storyteller and a social critic, which, in the case of modern European scholarship, fit the conventions of modernity that encouraged simplicity and fiction. This rebranding is of critical importance in this dissertation for two reasons. First, it demonstrates the difference between premodern readers (al-Ḥuṣrī) who accepted al-Hamadhānī according to his own terms, and modern European readers who altered the core of his work to fit their own conventions and tastes (see the conclusion of Chapter 3). Second, it shows that scholarship justified al-Hamadhānī's choices and permitted his work, something which other authors of the *maqāmāt*, especially al-Ḥarīrī, were denied.

One of the open questions, that the *maqāma* scholarship still has to answer is: Why the reception of the *maqāma* has so far not benefited from the aesthetics of the postmodern period which encourage estrangement and defamiliarization,[26] and why readings of the *maqāma* have until recently been constrained by conventions of modernity, which never captured its ambiguity nor its taste for strangeness? Were conventions and methodologies of approaching Classical Arabic literature to change, al-Ḥarīrī's book would definitely become the subject of serious study, which would examine the relationship between his language and storytelling, instead of propagating impressionistic criticism that reduces the *Ḥarīriyya* to its elaborate form, strange vocabulary, and "laborious" composition (see chapters 2 and 3). The dissertation aims to address this gap.

The Ḥarīriyya: Frame and Body

The *Maqāmāt* by al-Ḥarīrī consists of fifty episodes, completed in 504/1110. They were written as a collection, accompanied by a detailed preface declaring the author's intentions, corpus,

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[23] See Silvestre de Sacy's description of al-Hamadhānī in Chapter 2.

[24] Zakī Mubārak, *al-Nathr al-fannī fī al-qarn al-rābiʿ al-Hijrī* (Cairo: Hindawi, 2012), [First edition in French, *La Prose Arabe au IV e siècle de l'Hégire* (Paris: 1931)], 204.

[25] In one of his letters al-Hamadhānī boasts that he can "employ no less than four hundred artifices in writing and composition, such as the writing of a letter which, if read backwards, furnishes the required reply, or an epistle containing no dotted letters, or without using the letters *alif* or *lām*, or a letter which if read one way it constitutes a eulogy, and, if taken in another, it is a satire". W. J. Prendergast, "Introduction," in *The Maqāmāt of Badīʿ al-Zamān al-Hamadhānī*, 21.

[26] See for instance Jan Mukařovský's concept of "foregrounding" and Shklovsky's *ostranenie* or "making strange."

inspirations, and contribution.[27] They open with an introductory *maqāma* (M1), in which al-Ḥārith ibn Hammām, the collector of *adab*—in both its ethical and literary senses—and narrator of the *Maqāmāt*, meets the encyclopedic trickster and source of curiosities Abū Zayd al-Sarūjī for the first time. The work ends with a concluding episode (M50) in which the trickster repents, and the narrator ends his journey because there is no longer a curious figure and source of *adab* to pursue. The meeting and parting sequence repeats in almost every episode in the *Ḥarīriyya* and functions as a frame in which the narrator and the trickster express their feelings toward space, home, their journeys, family, and companionship. Inside this frame, between the two acts of arrival and departure, the two protagonists meet briefly, sometimes alone, at times in the company of others, to exchange words for money. The *maqāma* scholarship has so far focused mainly on the latter point, meaning the exchange of rare terms and curious anecdotes for reward, totally ignoring the frame in which *ghurba* (strangerhood), homesickness, and farewell are expressed. The premise, so far, has been that al-Ḥarīrī mainly focuses on ornate language and had little interest in anything else. This dissertation challenges this take by dedicating the third part (Chapters 7, 8, 9) to the long-ignored topic of strangerhood and to the trickster's relationship with space in the *Ḥarīriyya*.

Al-Ḥarīrī's Language and Storytelling

To surpass the father of the genre, al-Ḥarīrī amplifies strangeness in the *Maqāmāt* and displays all kinds of erudition, rare and transgressive lexicon, and *badīʿ* (figures of speech). In the preface of his work, he boastingly informs the readers that his episodes include "Arab proverbs and scholarly elegances, and grammatical riddles, and decisions dependent on the meaning of words, and original addresses, and ornate orations, and tear-moving exhortations, and amusing jests."[28] Although al-Ḥarīrī follows in al-Hamadhānī's steps and inserts the rich linguistic and literary material inside funny stories about mendacity and trickery, al-Ḥarīrī's storytelling was dismissed by readers in the modern period because they found it repetitive, hardly comical, and took "eloquence too seriously."[29]

Al-Hamadhānī supplies different plots in his *maqāmāt*. One, for instance, features a thief trying to rob a house and ending up sexually violated multiple times by the owner of the place

[27] Abū Muḥammad al-Qāsim ibn ʿAlī al-Ḥarīrī, "*Dībājat al-kitāb*," in *Kitāb Maqāmāt al-Ḥarīrī* (Cairo: al-Maṭbaʿa al-Ḥusayniyya, 1929), 2-10.
[28] al-Ḥarīrī, "Preface," in *The Assemblies of al-Ḥarīrī Vol I*, translated by Thomas Chenery (London: Williams and Norgate, 1867), 106-7.
[29] Hämeen-Anttila, *Maqama*, 169.

(*al-Maqāma al-Ruṣāfiyya*);[30] another tells of a brigand poet, or a suʿlūk, embarking on different adventures to win the heart of his cousin (*al-Maqāma al-Bishriyya*); and a third revolves around an erudite man taking revenge on fake companions by cutting their beards while they are sedated (*al-Maqāma al-Ṣaymariyya)*. Al-Ḥarīrī, in contrast, focuses on providing variety on a single plot, in which the trickster encounters the collector of curiosities (narrator) to exchange erudition for money. As a result, most of al-Ḥarīrī's episodes follow more or less the following chain of events: (1) Arrival of the narrator to a city. (2) Encountering the (disguised) trickster. (3) Discourse (hero's literary performance). (4) Reward (5) Recognition of the trickster's true identity. (6) Reproaches of the narrator. (7) Justification (8) Parting of the two. [31]The choice of this plotline has a twofold advantage. First, it provides the optimal context to display the literary and linguistic material on the trickster's tongue and narrator. Second, the repeated sequence of events allows the readers to focus their attention on the one thing that keeps changing: language.[32] This repetitive and systematic use of one single storyline may at first glance seem to imply that the main preoccupation of al-Ḥarīrī is merely to display his erudition in the different forms of the ʿ*arabiyya*. One must notice, however, that despite this methodical use of one plot, al-Ḥarīrī composes four episodes, M19, M39, M49, and M50, which break the usual exchange of money for *adab*, and show the trickster in a state of weakness, failure, and strangerhood (Chapter 9). Al-Ḥarīrī also creates a trickster who changes his vocabulary and discourse depending on his relationship with the addressees. In enmity, while confronting the elite, the trickster amplifies strangeness, uses all his rhetoric and rare lexicon, and demands considerable rewards. In affinity, with other beggars and picaros, he uses argot to accentuate the intimacy of the group and never mentions money. In neutrality, with commoners, he uses simple words and exhortations and only asks for a few coins (Chapter 6). The *Maqāmāt* by al-Ḥarīrī may lack flexibility and innovation, but its use of language and a repetitive plot is always purposeful and systematic.

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[30] Muḥammad ʿAbduh removes this story and keeps only keeping its opening, due to the sexual nature of its subject matter. For an account of ʿAbduh's censorship of al-Hamadhānī, see Bilal Orfali and Maurice Pomerantz*, The Maqāmāt of Badīʿ al-Zamān al-Hamadhānī: Authorship, Text, and Contexts* (Wiesbaden: Reichert, 2022), 158-161.

[31] Abd el-Fattah Kilito, "Le genre 'Séance': Une introduction," *Studia Islamica,* No. 43 (1976), 48.

[32] I develop this argument further in the context of discussing the framing device in al-Ḥarīrī's *Maqāmāt*. See Asmaa Essakouti, "(Un)veiling Language or Frames in Ḥarīrī's *Maqāmāt*," in *Living Handbook of Temporal Communities (LHTC)* (Berlin) (forthcoming).

This system beguiled premodern readers and made them praise al-Ḥarīrī's episodes as the optimal combination of frivolity and learnedness. Children were made to memorize them along with the *Qurʾān,*[33] scholars described them as commanding *iʿjāz* or inimitability, and disciples traveled from distant countries to copy them (Chapter 1). To modern readers, in contrast, al-Ḥarīrī's language sounded cryptic, laborious, and empty, and his stories seemed redundant, tedious, monotonous, and lacking imagination (Chapters 2 and 3). The latter reading is still strongly present today, and as a result, key aspects, such as chameleonism, mockery of the elite, the impact of language on the audience, intellectual fascination with the exotic and the transgressive, precarity, survival, existential angst, *ghurba*, and trickster's backstory, are still widely ignored. This dissertation tackles these missing points, by borrowing Thomas Bauer's notion of "cultural ambiguity," meaning that mutually exclusive norms may be valid at the same time,[34] and studies the *Ḥarīriyya* as part of a context that accepted the juxtaposition of different discourses, even when they directly contradicted one another. This tolerance and training in ambiguity, allowed various forms of discourse to "compete with, and at the same time coexist with, each other"[35] during the premodern period of Islam. In such a context, a trickster who deceives and suffers, drinks and prays, inflicts hardship and trades in the *gharīb* was acceptable and even admirable (see Chapter 1).

Creating an Ambivalent Trickster

Hämeen-Anttila lists more than 200 writers of *maqāmāt* between the 10th and the 20th century.[36] Al-Ḥarīrī is the 19th among them. Between him and al-Hamadhānī are more than a dozen authors who wrote a single *maqāma* or a few. The most remarkable among them is the Baghdadi scholar Ibn Nāqiyā (d. 485/1092), who wrote ten *maqāmāt* figuring one unique and insolent picaro. Al-Ḥarīrī does not mention al-Yashkurī nor his creator in his *Maqāmāt* and refers only to al-Hamadhānī and Abū al-Fatḥ al-Iskandarī. Ibn Nāqiyā (410/1020-485/1092), however, was contemporary with al-Ḥarīrī (446-1054-516/1122), and they both lived in Baghdad. It is highly likely then, that al-Ḥarīrī was aware of Ibn Nāqiyā's *maqāmāt* and that he even emulated some of their features. I would venture to say that al-Ḥarīrī's protagonist, Abū Zayd al-Sarūjī, is the synthesis of al-Iskandarī's cynicism and al-Yashkurī impudence and rejection. From the former, al-Ḥarīrī borrows the rootless roving, the chameleon character, the charming tongue,

[33] Brockelmann and Pellat, "*Maḳāma*."
[34] Bauer, *A Culture of Ambiguity*, 11.
[35] Ibid, 21.
[36] Hämeen-Anttila, *Maqama*, 368-411.

and the comic ruses. From the latter, he adopts transgressive actions, despicable presence, rejection, and failure. These two tricksters, in their relationship with language and space, are one of the many tools to understand al-Sarūjī's ambiguity: his blending of trickery and sympathy, eloquence and failure, rootlessness and longing.

Abū al-Fatḥ al-Iskandarī is portrayed in the *Hamadhāniyya* as a rootless stranger, without affinities or social ties. His identities are temporary, his masks are numerous, and his words are beguiling and deceiving. He is eloquent, comic, and free. He does not call for empathy, but for money. He cynically boasts of his outsiderness and detachment. He is, in his own words, "the spinning top of time (*khudhrūfat al-zamān*)" and "the everlasting inhabitant of the road" (*ʿammārat al-ṭuruq*).[37] The one time he is portrayed as an empathic character with a sad backstory is when he introduces himself in *al-Maqāma al-Jurjāniyya,* saying*:* "I am a citizen of Alexandria of the Umayyad frontiers."[38] The trickster does not mean here the city of Alexandria in Egypt, but rather the city occupied by the Byzantines back then, today known as Iskenderun and in the past as Alexandretta.[39] He is, therefore, a refugee who cannot return home. This narrative, however, is a mere ruse that tricksters use to collect charity. It is even cited in Abū Dulaf al-Khazrajī's (d. after 365/975) ode, *al-Qaṣīda al-Sāsāniyya*, about the deceits of beggars[40] (see Chapters 5, 7, 9). Abū al-Fatḥ Iskandarī is thus a comic protagonist whose one moment of tragedy is a ruse to collect money (Chapter 8).

Ibn Nāqiyā's trickster, al-Yashkurī, is always insolent, rarely eloquent, and never charming. He is an extreme picaro who robs graves (M2), appears naked in mosques[41] (M3), and acts as an impudent drunk (Mt. 6, 9). Despite his eloquence and knowledge of rare vocabulary,[42] his words get him nowhere. No door opens to his pleas (M4), no one is charmed by his answers

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[37] *Maqāmāt al-Hamadhānī*, trans. Prendergast, 52.
[38] Ibid, 53.
[39] Devin Stewart, "Parody, Reverence, and Anti-Parody in the Maqāmāt Genre," (Lecture, Freie Universität, Berlin, December 01, 2022).
[40] In al-*Qaṣīda Sāsāniyya,* which enlists all the different ruses practiced by *mukaddīs*, Abū Dulaf al-Khazrajī refers to a specific type of tricksters called *al-maysarānī* "who begs, alleging that he has come from the frontier region." Abū Dulaf al-Khazrajī, al-*Qaṣīda Sāsāniyya,* edited and translated by Clifford E. Bosworth, *The Medieval Islamic Underworld: The Banū Sāsān in Arabic Society and Literature*, Vol II, (Leiden: Brill, 1976), 194.
[41] The narrator describes him as "naked, without clothes or shame; he has removed his rags, spread his cloth, and extended his right and left hands." See Ibn Nāqiyā al-Baghdādī, "*Maqāmāt*," in *Maqāmāt al-Ḥanafī wa-ibn Nāqiyā wa-ghayrihimā*, ed. Oskar Rescher (Istanbul: Maṭbaʿat Aḥmad Kāmil,1914), 129.
[42] In the fourth *maqāma*, he is described as speaking "in the tongue of Bedouins (*yanṭiq bilisān al-aʿrāb*) and relies on rare vocabulary" (*yaʿtamid gharīb al-lafẓ*). Ibid, 132.

(M8), and he is even manipulated by other tricksters (M9). The act of speaking, which usually astonishes, beguiles, and charms al-Iskandarī's audience, is merely an occasion for failure for al-Yashkurī. He is therefore, in every possible sense, a failure, a rejected speaker, and an object of ridicule. The one occasion in which al-Yashkurī does not fail is when he follows the model of Abū al-Fatḥ al-Iskandarī and claims to be a refugee in exile. This occurs in the third *maqāma* by Ibn Nāqiyā in which al-Yashkurī laments strangerhood and yearns for home. The anonymous narrator recounts:

> He began shedding tears, showing anguish, and lamenting strangerhood. He said: 'O how I always miss you. O how far I would go for a gulp of the water of Baradā' … then he yearned the yearning of a she-camel and described his longing for home's sunsets and the promised return to its watering places.[43]

وجعل يُفِيضُ عبرَته ويُبْدي لَوعَته ويَنْدُب غُرْبَتَه، ويقول"وَا شوْقا إليكم أبدًا، ووا حَسرَةً على شَربَة من ماء بَرْدَا" (...) ثم أَرْزَمَ إِرْزَامَ أُم حَايِل ووصَف حَنِين الأَصَائِل والتّعلُّل بِوُرُود المَنَاهِل.

Hearing these words and the eloquent mix of poetry and pleas, some people in the audience invite al-Yashkurī to eat with them and promise him a seat in their caravan. Once he greedily consumes both his and their share of food, he disappears. Leaving his hosts hungry and deceived. *Ghurba* and exile are thus valuable ruses to otherwise failed tricksters who may resort to persuasion when eloquence proves insufficient.

Similar to al-Iskandarī and al-Yashkurī, Abū Zayd al-Sarūjī relies on the motif of *ghurba* to soften the hearts of his interlocutors, with a significant addition: he laments his spiritual alienation even when he does not need money (M19), even when he is alone (M50), and even when the audience cannot understand his words (M39).[44] Al-Sarūjī's *ghurba* is not a secondary motif that emerges in special circumstances but a permanent feeling that is expressed in long poems and speeches. His strangerhood is not limited to exile but also felt in places of residency which are always associated with weakness, sickness, and fear of death. Unlike other tricksters in the *maqāma* genre, Abū Zayd al-Sarūjī does return to his homeland after it gains independence, but even there he does not find peace, and he remains anxious and afraid of the next home: the grave (Chapter 9).

Abū Zayd al-Sarūjī is thus an ambivalent character who inspires both empathy and annoyance. He is a superb orator who always wins the argument, yet also a banished figure who

[43] Ibn Nāqiyā, "*Maqāmāt*," 129-130.
[44] I refer here to *al-Maqāma al-ʿUmāniyya* in which al-Sarūjī addresses a fetus, telling it not to be born, because life has only tears and pain to provide (See Chapter 9).

must prove his eloquence before he gains admission (Chapter 8). He is a rootless traveler who refuses to settle down, and also a refugee who cannot return to the occupied homeland. He is a liar and a charlatan with strangers, yet also a wise leader and a model to his people (Chapters 6 and 9). He is a cynical trickster who refuses companionship and good deeds, yet also a fragile being who is afraid of life, death, and existence (see Chapters 8 and 9).

One main problem in current *maqāma* scholarship is that scholars have paid much attention to the language and trickery of Abū Zayd al-Sarūjī and little to the impact of his backstory on his conduct as a trickster. It is sufficient to notice, for instance, the correlation between the trickster's repentance and the independence of his homeland in the last *maqāma* (M50), which insinuates that trickery, ambiguity, and crime only happen elsewhere, away from home, whereas homecoming equals a return to balance, both for the city that regains its independence and for the hero who finds his way back to God. Current *maqāma* scholarship has also yet to pay attention to the few occasions in which the trickster stops performing, accepts weakness (M19) and failure (M39 and M50), and expresses his true fears and feelings. To grasp the nuances of Abū Zayd al-Sarūjī, readers must go beyond modernity's categories which equate ornate language with shallowness, and instead train themselves to gain a "tolerance for ambiguity." Such tolerance, as outlined by Thomas Bauer, allows different registers, such as seriousness and playfulness, embellishment and depth, trickery and strangerhood, to exist side by side, even if they may seem mutually exclusive.

Categorical and Ambiguous Readers

In 2022, the journal *Intellectual History of the Islamicate World* published a special issue dedicated to the *maqāma* genre. The introduction to the issue gives the impression of committing a strange act that may surprise and annoy the readers. Anticipating critique from their audience, the editors address them as follows:

> The topic of this special issue may seem surprising to some readers. Should this subject not belong *more properly* to one of the many journals that deal with *Middle Eastern Literatures* past and present? How is the travel of a literary form such as the *maqāma worthy of interest* within the larger frame of intellectual history? What is "intellectual" about a phenomenon that appears to be so intimately tied up with what might first be

> dismissed as *the narrow concerns of belles-lettres and aesthetics*? What might intellectual historians *gain* from studying the *formal* features of texts?[45] [emphasis added]

These questions imply that the potential readers of this issue are familiar with the *maqāma* genre yet are prone to consider it of little serious value outside of its *proper place,* meaning the literary and cultural aspects of the Middle East. According to these readers—whom the editors assume to exist, according to their knowledge of the field, or perhaps they encountered as anonymous peer reviewers—the *maqāma* is "Middle Eastern," old, ornate, and lacking intellectual worth. This characterization is not new. In fact, it is easily traceable to the 18th and the 19th century when modern European scholars and the first generation of *Nahḍawīs* began to question the usefulness of the *maqāma* and to deny its serious connotations, interdisciplinary functions, and even fictional and literary attributes, especially the *Maqāmāt* by al-Ḥarīrī and those who emulated it (see Part I).

The expectations of readers and their understanding of a text or a genre reflect the available scholarship and circulating ideas. A reader studying Arabic or Islamic Studies at a Western university, trying to understand the term *adab*, a complex concept that encompasses "high quality of soul, good upbringing, urbanity, and courtesy,"[46] may consult its entry in the second edition of the *Encyclopaedia of Islam,* and encounter this statement:

> The concept *adab* ended by losing the wide humanistic acceptation that it had during the golden age of the caliphate and became restricted to a narrower, and more rhetorical sphere of "belles-lettres": poetry, artistic prose, paremiography, and anecdotal writing. This was the kind of *adab* at which al-Ḥarīrī was an adept, with his verbal virtuosity and his entirely formal and purist interests.[47]

A reader in search of the meaning of fiction in Arabic, may check the entry "fiction, modern" in the *Encyclopaedia of Arabic Literature*, and find the following:

> Between the thirteenth century and the beginning of the literary and cultural revival (*Nahḍa*) in the nineteenth century there appears to have been little development in traditional Arabic narrative forms. During this transitional period, forms such as the *maqāma* and *risāla* had continued to survive, and the *maqāma* in particular found many practitioners; many examples, however, are characterized by verbosity, stock imagery

[45] Maurice Pomerantz und Jonathan Decter, "The *Maqāma* Genre and the History of an Islamicate Literary Form", in *Intellectual History of the Islamicate World*, 10, 2022, 1.
[46] F. Gabrieli, "*Adab*," in *EI2*.
[47] Ibid.

> and an emphasis on demonstrating mastery of traditional rhetorical devices, especially *saj*ʿ.[48]

These two statements are good examples of how introductory references, which are supposed to summarize information, awaken curiosity, and incite engaged research, repeat a series of prejudices, introduce them as facts, and end the conversation before it even starts. That said, there is a growing number of scholars who engage critically with the *maqāmāt* and examine them with numerous approaches and from different perspectives, the above-cited special issue being a good example.

Most available research on the *maqāmāt* either introduces less known *maqāmāt* or focuses on al-Hamadhānī's work, seeking to answer one of three recurring questions. The first is: what constitutes a *maqāma*? The answer is usually its form—rhymed prose (*sajʿ*), in particular—and fiction.[49] Second, which origins inspired it? The answer typically foregrounds one of the following sources: Ibn Durayd's *Aḥādīth*,[50] al-Jāḥiẓ's Account of Khālid ibn Yazīd (see Chapter 9),[51] al-Tanūkhī's *Ḥāʾik al-kalām* (Weaver of Words)[52], and Ibn Fāris's *Qasas al-nahār wa-asmār al-layl*.[53] Third, what influence did it have on other literary practices, such as the picaresque novel and modern stories?[54] All these questions are either elementary, discussing definitions and dwelling on fiction and rhymed prose, or external, searching for inspirations and influences. Al-Hamadhānī's book is the most studied in *maqāma* scholarship since the 19th century. However, scholarship is still uncovering new aspects of this work's reception history.

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[48] Walid Hamarneh, "fiction, modern," *EAL*, Vol. I, 230.

[49] Kilito, "Le genre 'Séance'," 25-51; Devin Stewart, "The *Maqāma,"* in *Arabic Literature in the Post-Classical Period*, ed. Roger Allen and D. S. Richards (New York: Cambridge, 2006), pp. 145-158.

[50] See, for instance, Zakī Mubārak and Muṣṭafā Ṣādiq al-Rifāʿī's debate in al-*Muqtaṭaf*, discussing whether or not Ibn Durayd influenced the *maqāma* genre. "*Iṣlāḥ khataʾ qadīm marrat ʿalayhī qurūn fī nashʾat al-maqāmāt*," in *Muqtaṭaf*, Vol. 76 (April 1930), 418-420; Zakī Mubārak, "*Aḥādīth Ibn Durayd*," in *Muqtaṭaf*, Vol. 76 (May 1930), 561-564; Muṣṭafā Ṣādiq al-Rifāʿī, "*Khaṭaʾ fī iṣlāḥī khaṭaʾ*," Vol. 76 (May 1930), 588-590.

[51] Fedwa Malti-Douglas, "*Maqāmāt* and *Adab*: *Al-Maqāma al-Maḍīriyya* of al-Hamadhānī," in *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, Vol. 105, No. 2 (Apr. - Jun. 1985), 247-258.

[52] Beeston, "The Genesis of the *Maqāmāt* Genre," 1-12.

[53] Orfali and Pomerantz*, The Maqāmāt of Badīʿ al-Zamān al-Hamadhānī,* 13-28.

[54] See, for instance, Fakhrī Abū al-Suʿūd, *"al- Qaṣaṣ bayna al-adabayn al-ʿarabī wa-l-injlīzī*," 651-654; Muḥammad Rushdī Ḥasan, *Athar al-maqāma fī nashʾat al-qiṣṣa al-miṣriyya al-ḥadītha* Cairo: al-Hayʾa al-Miṣriyya, 1974); Hämeen-Anttila, "The Novel and the *Maqāma*," in *The Arab Handbook of Arab Novelistic Traditions*. Ed. Wail Hassan (New York: Oxford Press, 2017), 89-102.

In 2022, a critical edition containing the episodes that were censored in 1898 for moral reasons, was published by Bilal Orfali and Maurice Pomerantz.

If this is the case with al-Hamadhānī who is appraised and studied for his compatibility with modern conventions, what would be the state of al-Ḥarīrī whose name is attached to "verbosity," "stock imagery," and belle-lettres? The few academic articles and monographs that address al-Ḥarīrī, mostly do so for his former fame which produced around his work illustrations,[55] manuscripts,[56] commentaries[57], translations,[58] and readership.[59] The *Maqāmāt* by al-Ḥarīrī are studied mainly for the reception and fame they once enjoyed during the premodern period of Islam. A notable exception, Sulaiman Alagunfon's recent dissertation, which demonstrates the ongoing and contemporary interest in the *Maqāmāt* in Nigeria, where they are studied, discussed, and imitated by students of traditional Arabic schools, and where owning a physical copy of the book equals prestige and advanced scholarly position, because they are regarded as the highest degree of eloquence and mastery of Arabic.[60]

Academic studies on al-Ḥarīrī that primarily address his literary text rather than his readership, are few and far in between. Katia Zakharia studies al-Ḥarīrī's trickster Abū Zayd al-Sarūjī from a psychological perspective, arguing that every instance of the *Maqāmāt* is building and preparing for the final moment of repentance.[61] Her reading emphasizes the trickster's psyche and turns the *Ḥarīriyya* into a bildungsroman, which is indeed interesting. The problem

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[55] Kīlīṭū, "*Intiqām al-ṣūra*," in *Lisān Adām*, translated into Arabic by ʿAbd al-Kabīr al-Sharqāwī (Casablanca: Toubqal,1995), 77-80.

[56] Pierre A. MacKay, "Certificates of Transmission on a Manuscript of the *Maqāmāt* of Ḥarīrī (MS. Cairo, Adab 105)," in *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society*, New Series, Vol. 61, No. 4 (1971), 1-81.

[57] M. Keegan, *Commentarial Acts and Hermeneutical Dramas: The Ethics of Reading al-Ḥarīrī's Maqāmāt*, PhD diss. (New York University: Department of Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies, 2017).

[58] Masha Itzhaki, "The *Maqāma* - Circulation of a Genre: d'al-Ḥarīrī à al-Ḥarīzī, from the Arab to the Hebrew, from the East to the West," *Arabica*, Vol. 56 (2009), 170-178.

[59] After examining at length al-Hamadhānī's episodes and their intersections and similitudes with other premodern works, Kīlīṭū devotes the last sixty pages of his book to al-Ḥarīrī's readership, ignoring all the other aspects of his work. See Kīlīṭū, *Al-Maqāmāt: al-sard wa-l-ansāq al-thaqāfiyya*, translation into Arabic by ʿAbd al-Kabīr al-Sharqāwī, 2nd ed. (Casablanca: Toubqal, 2001), 145-217 [first published in French in 1983].

[60] Sulaiman Adewale Alagunfon, "Introduction," in *Texts, Contexts, and Scholars: The Classical Arabic Maqāma in Yorubaland, Nigeria.* PhD Diss. (Free University of Berlin, 2022), 1-29.

[61] Katia Zakharia, Abū Zayd al-Sarūjī, *Imposture et Mystique: Relire les* Maqāmāt *d'al-Ḥarīrī*, (Damas: Institut Français, 2000).

with this reading, however, is that it imposes a sense of homogeneity and oneness on his personality that is incompatible with al-Sarūjī's chameleonism and ambiguity.

Other readers who are more attentive to the work's ambiguity focalize other elements. Philip Kennedy avoids the over-studied *sajʿ* and *badīʿ*, and examines instead the scene of recognition in al-Ḥarīrī's fifth *maqāma*, to demonstrate the genre's ambivalent ability "to articulate at once the most persuasive visions of harmony and truth and the most insidious simulacra of that truth."[62] Kilito close reads al-Ḥarīrī's *al-Maqāma Kūfiyya*, examining its images, language, and literary references, to trace the duality of truth and deceit and show how they blend together in the chameleon trickster who changes his faces and identities, and moves between human and animal states, acting as a snake and barking as a dog.[63]

The most remarkable contemporary reader of al-Ḥarīrī, ambiguity-wise, is Michael Cooperson who not only emphasizes Abū Zayd al-Sarūjī's chameleonism but benefits from it in his adaptation of the *Ḥarīriyya*. Instead of objecting to the ornate language, constrained writing, and "untranslatable" wordplay (see the objections of modern translators in Chapter 2), Cooperson decides to emulate the diversity of the trickster's tools and reproduce them using different idioms of English. Cooperson explains his artistic adaptation of al-Ḥarīrī, in which every episode is reproduced in a different register of English as follows:

> *The Maqāmāt of Ḥarīrī* resisted translation for long, due to features such as *sajʿ*, assonance, alliteration, and allusion, but then their silver-tongued and eloquent hero provided me with the clue: to use varieties of styles to imitate how he alters his speech and appearance to suit the occasion."[64]

Umberto Eco defines the text as the strategy that regulates its interpretations or readings.[65] The *Maqāmāt* employs ambiguity, chameleonism, and playfulness as a strategy. Consequently, the most compatible rendering in another language is the one that follows the work's acrobatic language and appreciates its chameleon hero. Recognizing this, Cooperson emulates the trickster's multiple styles, vocabularies, and rhetorical devices by adopting three kinds of idiom:

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[62] Philip F. Kennedy, *Recognition in the Arabic Narrative Tradition* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University, 2016), 248.

[63] ʿAbd al-Fattāḥ Kīlīṭū, *al-Ghāʾib*: *Dirasa fī maqāma li-l-Ḥarīrī*, 3rd edition, (Casablanca: Toubqal, 2007).

[64] Michael Cooperson, in *Ḥafl takrīm al-fāʾizīn bijāʾizat al-Shaykh Zāyid lil-kitāb - al-dawrah al-khāmisah ʿashrah 2021*, *Zayed Book Awards*, YouTube in *Sheikh Zayed Book Award 2021*, 22:53s-23:53, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o-JQkdFeTbk.

[65] "Un texte n'est pas autre chose que la stratégie qui constitue l'univers de ses interprétations – sinon légitimes – du moins légitimables." Umberto Eco, *Lector in Fabula : Le Role de Lecteur* (Paris : Éditions Grasset & Fasquelle, 1985), 61.

"the first consists of imitations of particular authors, for example Chaucer, Frederick Douglass, and Margery Kempe. The second consists of global varieties of English, including the Singaporean creole Singlish, Scots, and Indian. And the third consists of specialized jargons, such as management speak, legalese, and thieves' cant."[66] By adopting this remarkable method, Cooperson becomes the first contemporary reader to engage with al-Ḥarīrī's language in its own terms. His chameleon adaptation opens the door for a new engagement with the *Ḥarīriyya*, one that does not disregard strangeness and playfulness but amplifies them.

Cooperson's adaptation of the *Ḥarīriyya* is part of a wider literary and theoretical movement to reread the Arabic literary tradition from new perspectives, critiquing the decadence narrative, foregrounding ambiguity and playfulness, addressing *adab* according to its own terms, and studying long-ignored eras, such as the Mamluk times. Together they illustrate a shift in *turāth* scholarship that engages more critically and actively with the part of a literary heritage that has long been dismissed. This dissertation is part of this movement. It understands the concept of strangeness as a tool to study the *maqāma* genre from the perspectives of its premodern readers who shared al-Ḥarīrī's taste for wordplay and ambiguity.

Studying Strangeness

Strangeness, as al-Ḥuṣrī revealed in the 5th/11th century, is the main key to understanding the classical *maqāma* according to its own terms. This dissertation addresses two different types of strangeness. The first manifests itself in the *Ḥarīriyya*'s unusual lexicon, which combines Bedouin terms, curses, argot, and jargon, which Arabic lexicography categorizes as *gharīb:* "strange" or "rare." The second manifests itself in the relationship of human experience with space, meaning the act of moving from one location to another, being in isolation or in exile, away from home and from familiarity (in order to trade curiosities, collect unusual anecdotes), and being a *gharīb*: a stranger. The strangeness of language is widely recognized by the readers of the *Ḥarīriyya*. The strangeness of space, in contrast, has been ignored in contemporary criticism and scholarship due to the widespread assumption that traveling and moving in space is a "hollow frame"[67] in the *maqāma* genre. These two types of strangeness are strongly dependent on each other in the *Ḥarīriyya*, because only a stranger who comes from a distant land can

[66] Michael Cooperson, "Note on translation," in *Impostures* (New York: New York University, 2021), xlvi.
[67] Hämeen-Anttila, *Maqama*, 54.

fulfill the audience's obsessive desire for curiosities, wondrous accounts, and exotic vocabulary, which always exists elsewhere. The *Ḥarīriyya* makes liberal use of the double-entendre, and the interdependence of the two is also a double-entendre: only a *gharīb* (stranger) can provide the *gharīb* (rare vocabulary).

The *Ḥarīriyya* is a work that is highly aware of its readers. In this sense, I argue that al-Ḥarīrī wrote his *maqāmāt* and packed them with all kinds of oddities not only to follow the recipe of al-Hamadhānī but also to mock the collectors of far-fetched (both literally and figuratively), rare vocabulary, and strange accounts (see chapter 5). Interestingly, these mocked collectors were the main audience of the *Ḥarīriyya*. They understood its learnedness and needed its corpus. In a way, al-Ḥarīrī's oeuvre is a work that attacks and fulfills the taste of its literary audience. The fact that the readers of this work enjoyed reading their own fictional ridicule at the hands of the trickster attests to their ability to accommodate playfulness and their "training in ambiguity." The *Maqāmāt* by al-Ḥarīrī is the organic product of a premodern culture of letters that admired strangeness, but it is also a critique of it. The critique is most obvious in the other works by al-Ḥarīrī, in which he teaches and corrects the literati usage of language (Chapter 5), and in the continuous ridicule and abuse to which the trickster subjects the educated audience (see Chapter 6).

The critique of the literati, the outsiderness of the trickster, and the strangeness of the vocabulary are central issues that I raise in this dissertation, first because they have not been studied so far, and second because of modern conventions that kept them in the shadows for very long. Building on the most recent critical scholarship on premodern Arabic *adab*, this dissertation addresses three different, yet connected aspects of al-Ḥarīrī's *Maqāmāt*. The first aspect is the readership of the *Ḥarīriyya*, which changed in the 18th and 19th centuries and transformed the *maqāmāt*'s former fame to shame, as it were. The second is the rare vocabulary and rhetorical devices that fill the *Ḥarīriyya*'s language with ornamentation and make it strange. The third is the motif of strangerhood (*ghurba*), which draws attention to the psyche of the trickster and the subjective side of the work.

The main argument that brings all three together is that the *Ḥarīriyya*, contrary to the assumptions of mainstream scholarship, has many lessons to offer us in the present moment. Its premodern readership provides a key model for how to engage with the Arabic literary tradition playfully and productively. Its rare vocabulary and rhetorical devices demonstrate the timeless human fascination with the curious and the rare, and teach many resourceful ways to use strangeness for one's own ends. As for the chameleon trickster, he shows how ambivalence, masks, strange language, and deception are practical means to survive in a harsh reality. Every

aspect of the *Ḥarīriyya*, in other words, is a practical and useful lesson/trick to make the most of life's inescapable ambiguity.

To develop my reading, I employ two methods that support each other. The first is to study the *Ḥarīriyya* from the inside, by examining its literary motifs, structure, and narratological features. The second is to study it from the outside by examining its reception across the centuries, comparing it to the work of al-Hamadhānī, and highlighting the context that gave birth to its outline, motifs, and vocabulary. To conduct such a comprehensive study, I have collected a wide corpus of Arabic, English, and French material on the *Ḥarīriyya* and premodern adab. The corpus represents a variety of genres including philology, rhetoric, premodern anthologies, poetry, prose, lexicons, biographical dictionaries, critical studies, and newspapers. To understand their significance, I have made use of different methodological tools and theories, such as literary and historical criticism, reception theory, discourse analysis, close reading, narratology, structuralism, and cultural studies.

Each part of the dissertation dictated specific sources and methods. I examine the *Ḥarīriyya* readership through a historical overview, relying on reception theory and discourse analysis, to interpret the sources. The premodern readers of the *Ḥarīriyya* directed me to study commentaries, literary discussions, and biographical dictionaries. Due to the constraints of time and funding, I have limited myself to published works, although I am aware of the resourceful information hidden in commentaries that are still in manuscript form. Mathew Keegan's PhD dissertation and recent publications on the *Ḥarīriyya*'s premodern commentaries supplied great material. Modern European reception of al-Ḥarīrī introduced me to various discussions and studies on Orientalism and the theory of translation. It also led me to a large body of Orientalist literary journals which translated several *maqāmāt* and accompanied them with introductions that offer valuable insight into translators' attitudes toward and perceptions of al-Ḥarīrī's work. I have focused mostly on French and English translations because those are the languages I command. Regrettably, my German is not sufficient to read Rückert's *Nachdichtung* of the work more closely. However, I believe him to be one of the few modern translators who captured al-Ḥarīrī's playfulness and noticed his humor. As for Nahḍawī readers writing in Arabic, their opinions and statements were scattered in a wide range of newspapers, magazines, articles, and monographs. Luckily, a significant part of this material is digitalized. I collected these notes, then categorized them according to which literary movements their authors belonged: romantics, neo-classists, socialists, and vernacular writers. Understanding their backgrounds and positionality was very enlightening when it came to contextualizing their acceptance or rejection of al-Ḥarīrī's strangeness and ambiguity.

Contrary to the common assumptions among modern readers, al-Ḥarīrī was not unique in his use of rare vocabulary. Before him, philologists, poets, and literati used it widely, and patrons paid for it generously. To understand this continuous desire for curious vocabulary and demonstrate the scope of *gharīb* market during al-Ḥarīrī's period, I have examined the different uses of *gharīb* which poets and literati stated and discussed before the time of al-Ḥarīrī and also studied two historical phases of collecting rare terms. First, the serious act of pursuing Bedouins and assembling their supposed pure and rare Arabic lexicon. Second, the mocking parody produced by frivolous poets who recorded argot and insults from commoners and beggars. My main source of the first quest is Ramzi Baalbaki's encyclopedic work *The Arabic Lexicographical Tradition,* which directed me to remarkable primary sources in the form of dictionaries and anecdotal narratives. My most important sources for the playful and transgressive lexicon are Abū al-Faraj al-Iṣbahānī's *Kitāb al-Aghānī* and Tawḥīdī's *Mathālib al-Wazīrayn*. After foregrounding this literary background, which contextualizes both the *Ḥarīriyya*'s vocabulary and storytelling, I move on to a narratological and structural analysis of the text. I categorize the *maqāmāt* into three different categories, based on which audience the trickster is addressing, elite, commoners, or beggars. I then examine the vocabulary and rhetorical devices he uses with each group. Through this lexical and rhetorical analysis, I realized that the trickster's language and tools change depending on his relationship with the audience. For example, his enmity toward the elite incites the highest degree of strangeness, which is displayed in rare vocabulary, deceptive figures of speech, riddles, and lipograms, while his neutrality toward commoners produces simple and clear exhortations.

Due to the common assumption that the journey of the narrator and the trickster is "hollow" and that their location does not impact the plot, the experience of strangerhood or *ghurba* is strikingly ignored by *maqāma* scholarship. The available material and academic notes on this topic are correspondingly scarce. To resolve this problem, I start from the lexicon and study the different connotations associated with the term in Arabic. I then connect each of these associations to literary material that was produced between the pre-Islamic period and the 12th century, in order to assess how the concept of *ghurba* was perceived and expressed in premodern Arabic culture before al-Ḥarīrī wrote his episodes. This literary-historical examination provides access to several key concepts to study *ghurba* in al-Ḥarīrī's *Maqāmāt,* such as recognition, isolation, and wonder. After establishing this cultural background, drawing on cultural studies, I compare al-Hamadhānī's and al-Ḥarīrī's protagonists/strangers and structurally study their relationship to space, language, and to one another. To this end, Todorov's study of relationships between fictional characters in "Les catégories du récit littéraire" is an important

source. In the last chapter, I closely read four episodes of al-Ḥarīrī's *maqāmāt* in which the trickster acts out of character and accepts residency instead of running away.

Outline

To emulate al-Ḥarīrī's symmetrical use of storytelling, language, and episodes, this dissertation is divided into three parts, consisting of three chapters each. To facilitate the reading, each part opens with a brief preface that summarizes the arguments and main points of the three chapters.

Part I studies the reception of *Maqāmāt al*-Ḥarīrī from their inception until the 20th century. The first chapter features the premodern period of Islam, in which readers were trained in ambiguity and appreciative of acrobatic language, riddles, fiction, and chameleonism. Evidently, not all premodern readers were alike. Some were less appreciative of ambiguity than others and criticized al-Ḥarīrī's work for lacking realism and morality. All of them, admirers and objectors alike, however, acknowledged the fame and remarkable qualities of the work. The second chapter addresses a different group of readers, one that appeared in the 18th and 19th centuries and who had different literary tastes and conventions: i.e., modern European readers who perceived the *Ḥarīriyya* as a perplexing work. Among these readers, the objections against al-Ḥarīrī outweighed praise, and the morality and language of the *Maqāmāt* became the center of attention, mainly because they were seen to represent the Orient's "bad taste." The third chapter focuses on Nahḍa Arab readers during the 19th and early 20th centuries, whose modernist agenda was influenced by European readers. They mostly condemned al-Ḥarīrī and associated him with decadence and lack of imagination. At the same time, some exceptionally playful intellectuals of this period wrote their own *maqāmāt*. Another important feature of the Nahḍa period is its rediscovery of al-Hamadhānī, and the censorship and modification of his episodes to fit the conventions of the new era.

Part II examines rare vocabulary in the *Maqāmāt*. Chapter 4 clarifies the different connotations of *gharīb* and enumerates the many cognitive, psychological, and financial perks of using and collecting *gharīb* vocabulary and expressions. It argues that al-Ḥarīrī's trickster character represents the fascination with rare vocabulary in his times. Chapter 5 traces the development of *gharīb* lexicon from the data-collection period until it becomes part of the *Ḥarīriyya*. I follow two quests collecting linguistic material in this chapter: the first is serious and seeks the Bedouin as an authentic source, while the second is playful and seeks transgressive material. Both materials already figure in the *maqāmāt* of al-Hamadhānī. The addition that al-Ḥarīrī makes is that he employs this material as a tool to critique the literati of his time and to ridicule them. Chapter 6 concentrates on the *Ḥarīriyya* itself and examines closely how the trickster

changes his use of vocabulary and rhetoric depending on the audience he is addressing. The main argument that these three chapters collaborate to make is that *gharīb* is not used as a decorative element in the *maqāmāt* but as a systematic device that fulfills clear functions.

Part three focuses on the theme of strangerhood and argues that the *Maqāmāt* offers a cultural theory of estranged subjectivity that was common in its time and relatable and relevant also today. Chapter 7 opens with a lexical analysis of the term *gharīb* meaning being a stranger. Based on the connotations of this term, which revolve around recognition, isolation, banishment, and punishment, I engage with different premodern literary sources and infer that strangerhood or *ghurba* during the premodern period of Islam was an ambiguous experience that brought pain yet also provided curiosities and financial gain. In Chapter 8, I study the backstories of Abū Zayd al-Sarūjī, al-Ḥarīrī's picaro, and Abū al-Fatḥ al-Iskandarī, al-Hamadhānī's trickster, and argue that the former is an ambiguous stranger who combines all the different nuances of *ghurba*, positive and negative, while the latter is rootless and cynical, and shows little depth. Chapter 9 focuses on the character of Abū Zayd al-Sarūjī, and closely reads four *maqāmāt* (Mt. 19, 39, 49, 50) in which al-Sarūjī does not flee, but remains in place to express and experience failure, weakness, and isolation. I read these four episodes as possible closures which al-Ḥarīrī scatters in his work to accentuate their ambiguity and to amplify the strangeness and strangerhood of his trickster.

Part I:

Ḥarīriyya Readership

"I have provided the explanation to the secrets of each riddle underneath it and have not made the unveiling of [the solution] far to fetch on those who read [the explanation]. There remain a few words contained in this *maqāma* that may cause confusion to some who come across them. I, therefore, want to clarify them to them, to save them the confusion [that comes with] uncertainty, the labor of pondering, and the disgrace of searching and inquiry." al-Ḥarīrī commenting on the riddles of al-*Maqāma al-Shataw-iyya*.

Preface

> "I have never seen among the books of Arabic and *adab,* nor amongst the volumes of Persians and Arabs, a book better written, more strangely composed, more comprehensive of linguistic marvels (a*l-ʿajā'ib al-ʿarabiyya*), more inclusive of literary rarities (*al-gharāʾib al-adabiyya*) … than the *Maqāmāt* written by the master, the elegance of the age, and the perfection of his era, Abū Muḥammad al-Qāsim b. ʿAlī al-Ḥarīrī." al-Muṭarrizī (d.1213).[1]

> "Badīʿ al-Zamān al-Hamadhānī appeared on the [literary] scene at the 4th century; in his hands, Arabic prose transformed into sorcery [*shaʿwadha*]. Not only did al-Hamadhānī use pretentious rhyme [*al-sajʿ al-mutakallaf*] and stylistic/rhetorical figures [*muḥassināt badīʿiyya*], he also added *ighrāb* [remoteness or strangeness]. When one reads excerpts of his work, one senses that he wishes to show the most skill in fashioning strange, ambiguous speech, as if he were a clown." ʿAlī al-Wardī (d.1995).[2]

Almost seven centuries separate ʿAlī al-Wardī (d. 1995), the Iraqi social historian, from the philologist and commentator, al-Muṭarrizī (d. 610/1213). Discussing the *maqāma*, both emphasize the *gharīb* (the remote, strange, peculiar) as a key feature of the genre. However, their conclusions are different. Did the genre change over time? Or did its more recent audience develop a new taste? How did "strange composition," "linguistic marvels," and "literary rarities" change from being a sign of innovation and originality to the marker of being a "clown"?

To answer these questions, I examine the *Ḥarīriyya*'s reception history, epitomized by three groups of readers who shaped its history and contributed to its fame and infamy. The first group belongs to the premodern period of Islam. They admired ambiguity and engaged positively with strangeness and multiplicity of meaning. They praised al-Ḥarīrī's *Maqāmāt* and described it as inimitable (Chapter 1). The second group features modern Orientalists of the 18th and 19th centuries, who studied al-Ḥarīrī's *Maqāmāt* with a mixture of admiration and perplexity. Those who admired it, such as Friedrich Rückert who translated most of al-Ḥarīrī's episodes into German in rhyming prose, were fewer than those who criticized its mannerisms,

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[1] al-Muṭarrizī, *al-Īḍāḥ fī sharḥ maqāmāt al-Ḥarīrī,* edited by Khurshīd Ḥasan, PhD diss. (Lahore: University of the Punjab, 2005), 32. Translation adapted from Matthew L. Keegan in "Throwing the Reins to the Reader: Hierarchy, Jurjānian Poetics, and al-Muṭarrizī's Commentary on the *Maqāmāt*," *Journal of Abbasid Studies,* 5 (2018), 105-145.

[2] ʿAlī al-Wardī, *Ustūrat al-adab al-rafīʿ*, Second edition (London: Dār Kūfān, 1994), 215.

immorality, and bad taste (Chapter 2). The narrative espoused by the second group circulated widely and found its way to a third group of readers, the *Nahḍawīs* of the 19th century and early 20th century. Preoccupied with modern, pragmatic conventions of clarity, seriousness, and functionality, most scholars from the *Nahḍa* period condemned al-Ḥarīrī's *Maqāmāt* and advocated for a new literature that disinherits and breaks away from the literary products of "the age of decadence." A few *Nahḍawīs*, however, were attuned to the utility of the genre and used it to channel their sense of humor a playful spirit, producing *maqāmāt* that address the concerns of their time (Chapter 3).

All three groups had objections against the *Maqāmāt,* even during the premodern era, in which this collection of episodes enjoyed its highest fame and recognition. During this period, several individuals criticized al-Ḥarīrī's plagiarism, acrobatic wordplay, realism, and his tendency to favor the trickster over the scholar. Objections were usually brief and mostly by commentators who were trying to understand the *Ḥarīriyya*, or by other *maqāma* writers who wanted to contrast their work to al-Ḥarīrī's. Other literati also criticized al-Ḥarīrī for being too ambiguous (e.g., Ibn al-Ṭiqṭaqā) or for being unable to compose in any other genre (e.g., Ibn al-Athīr). However, they could not deny his fame and his mastery of language. Conversely, in the modern period, and owing to a novel paradigm of reception of the *Ḥarīriyya*, by European readers with different tastes and literary conventions, criticism against al-Ḥarīrī's *Maqāmāt* became more elaborate and even harsher. Influenced by Christian and Victorian conventions of morality, Orientalists criticized the *Ḥarīriyya*'s immoral trickster and treated him not as a fictitious character but as a representative of all Muslims. When the *Ḥarīriyya*'s wordplay and constrained writing resisted translation, Orientalists stigmatized the work as pompous, opaque, and untranslatable. As for the majority of the *Nahḍawīs*, al-Ḥarīrī's *Maqāmāt* became a representative of a corrupt past that they must forget and erase. In order not to dismiss the *maqāma* genre altogether, however, they would revive the better and less shocking model of al-Hamadhānī, yet with many adjustments and omissions.

Chapter 1

The *Ḥarīriyya* as a Miraculous Work for the Premodern Reader

This chapter is an overview of the *Ḥarīriyya*'s reception among its first readers: the premodern literati. It examines the reasons behind the *Ḥarīriyya*'s fame and the few objections that were raised against it, from its moment of composition until the end of the pre-modern period. Owing to their "training in ambiguity,"[1] one that allows for different discourses to exist side by side, premodern readers admired al-Ḥarīrī's *Maqāmāt* and held it to be inimitable (*iʿjāz*) and marvelous (*ʿajība*). Their testimonies emphasize three features that explain the work's success: its chameleonism, meaning its ability to declaim a subject both positively and negatively; its elaborate examples of wordplay; and its funny stories. Al-Ḥarīrī's *Maqāmāt* also incurred some criticism, which addressed moral issues, complex language, and fictionality. Nevertheless, these reservations always came alongside admiration, even from the harshest of critics, who held the work in high esteem. This chapter argues that al-Ḥarīrī and his premodern readers shared a taste for ambiguity and complex language.

I. Between *ʿAjz* (incapability) and *Iʿjāz* (inimitability)

ʿAjz means to be helpless and incapable. *Aʿjaza,* on the other hand, means to cause *ʿajz*, to incapacitate. From the latter, premodern linguists derived the term *iʿjāz*, to argue for the superiority of the Qurʾān and describe its central miraculous feature, which incapacitates those who try to emulate it or exhaust its meanings. The discussion on *iʿjāz* is always, in one way or another, a discussion on failure and incompetence. It involves those who failed to comprehend the aesthetic superiority of the Qurʾān, those who could not attain its degree of eloquence, those who tried to imitate its style and failed, and those whom God turned away or incapacitated (*ṣarafa*) from producing something similar to it.

Iʿjāz is attributed to the Qurʾān because it represents the word of God and originates from a divine, extraordinary source.[2] Despite its literary nature and human attributes, the *Ḥarīriyya* earned the same qualification of *iʿjāz,* during the premodern period, thanks to its enthusiastic admirers and readers (see below).

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[1] This expression is used by Bauer in *A Culture of Ambiguity*. See Introduction.

[2] For further discussions on *iʿjāz,* see Richard C. Martin, "Inimitability," in *Encyclopaedia of the Qurʾān*, vol. II, (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2002), 526-535; Lara Harb, "Naẓm, Wonder, and the Inimitability of the Qurʾān," in *Arabic Poetics: Aesthetic Experience in Classical Arabic Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022), 203-251.

This exceptional status did not shield al-Ḥarīrī from his share of accusations of incapability and failure. For instance, Ḍiyāʾ al-Dīn ibn al-Athīr (d.637/1239) claims that Ibn al-Khashshāb (d. 567/ 1172) called al-Ḥarīrī "a man of *maqāmāt*" or "*rajul maqāmāt*," indicating that, of all types of prose, he was only capable of writing the *maqāmāt* (*lam yuḥsin min al-kalām al-manthūr siwāhā*).[3] Those acquainted with al-Ḥarīrī's oeuvre know that he also wrote epistles, a didactic poem on grammar called *Mulḥat al-iʿrāb*, and a collection of critical notes on the incorrect usage of certain expressions, which he named *Durrat al-ghawwāṣ fī awhām al-khawāṣṣ* (see Chapter 5). Ibn al-Athīr dismisses all these works, adding that "when he does write something other [than the *maqāma*], he says nothing (*wa-in atā bi-ghayrihā lā yaqūl shayʾā*)."[4]

Ḍiyāʾ al-Dīn ibn al-Athīr was obviously not an admirer of al-Ḥarīrī, but so were many other readers. Some even attacked the *Ḥarīriyya* immediately after it started circulating. The famous geographer and biographer Yāqūt al-Ḥamawī (d. 626/1229) reports that when al-Ḥarīrī wrote forty *maqāmāt*, he brought them from Basra to Baghdad. They found immediate success among the people, and they adored them. Shortly afterward, however, al-Ḥarīrī was accused of plagiarism, because the style of the *maqāmāt* hardly resembled his earlier writings. To defend his integrity, al-Ḥarīrī promised to write another episode. He stayed in his house in Baghdad for forty days yet failed to put two words together. Ashamed and defamed, al-Ḥarīrī returned to Baṣra, where he managed to write ten additional episodes in place of one, thus silencing his critics permanently.[5]

The genuineness of the anecdote cannot be proven, but it qualifies as a dramatic story. It includes defeat, suspense, and a happy ending. Most importantly, it brings to mind an earlier challenge raised by God in the Qurʾān. In the *āyāt al-taḥaddī* or challenge verses, God dares the nonbelievers to compose ten (or even one) chapters of comparable quality and eloquence to those of the Qurʾān,[6] which they of course fail to do, owing to the inimitability of the Qurʾān. Al-Ḥarīrī from the anecdote above does not fail. He is challenged to write only one additional

[3] Ḍiyāʾ al-Dīn ibn al-Athīr, *al-Mathal al-sāʾir fī adab al-kātib wa-l-shāʿir*, edited by Aḥmed al-Ḥūfī and Badawī Ṭabāna, vol. I (Cairo: Nahḍat Miṣr, N.D), 40.
[4] Ibid.
[5] Yāqūt al-Ḥamawī, *Irshād al-arīb ilā maʿrifat al-adīb*, vol. V, edited by Iḥsān ʿAbbās (Beirut: Dār al-Gharb al-Islāmī, 1993), 2203-2204.
[6] Hūd, verse 13: "Or do they say, 'He has forged it'? Say: 'Then bring you ten suras the like of it, forged; and call upon whom you are able, apart from God, if you speak truly." Arthur J. Arberry, *The Koran Interpreted* (London: Oxford University, 1964), 212.

maqāma, but he writes ten. As the Prophet had done, al-Ḥarīrī proved the superiority of his skill and silenced his challengers.

After this unfavorable reception, the *Maqāmāt* begins a new era of indisputable success characterized by *iʿjāz*. According to Yāqūt, al-Ḥarīrī authorized 700 copies of his *Maqāmāt*, between 504/1110, the year of the work's completion, and 516/1122, the year of his death. The striking number of these copies can be explained by the *samāʿāt* or auditions. Al-Ḥarīrī recited the episodes to several recipients at the same time, some were even children,[7] and they all received his *ijāza* (a certificate of transmission). According to Pierre A. MacKay, "the system of oral transmission through *samāʿāt* was at first intended purely for legal texts and other serious writings, but during the fifth century of Islam it came to be applied even to works of imaginative literature."[8] The shift from using *samāʿāt* (audition certificates) to authenticate legal and serious documents to authenticating fictitious and what many believed to be frivolous anecdotes of a trickster attests to the *Ḥarīriyya*'s developing aesthetic value among its first readers. One of the earliest *samāʿāt* of al-Ḥarīrī's *Maqāmāt* is recorded in MS. Cairo 105, dated 504/1110. Besides being the oldest available manuscript of the *Ḥarīriyya* today, it contains four folios of audition certificates, given between 504/1110 and 683/1284. The first folio contains the certificate of Abū al-Muʿammar al-Mubārak al-Anṣārī (d. 549/1154), who attended al-Ḥarīrī's auditory and copied the episodes. The first folio also includes the names of the thirty-eight scholars who attended the same auditory and had their copies signed. According to the marginal notes, this auditory lasted more than a month, between around the first of Rajab until the seventh of Shaʿbān.[9]

Besides the *Ḥarīriyya*'s success among copyists and transmitters, it continued to gain the praise of eminent scholars centuries later. The theologian al-Zamakhsharī (d. 538/1144), for instance, writes on his own copy of the *Maqāmāt* the following testimonial:

I swear by God and His marvels,
By the pilgrims' rite and their shrine
al-Ḥarīrī's Assemblies are worthy

[7] Hämeen-Anttila says that ''even minors were brought to the readings of the *Ḥarīriyya* to receive the *ijāza*. Abū Ṭāhir al-Khushūʿī (d. 598/1201), for example, was, at the age of two, present at a reading in 512/1118 and received an *ijāza* for the *maqāma*s and another for *Durrat al-ghawwāṣ.''* Hämeen-Anttila, "al-Ḥarīrī," in *EI3*.
[8] MacKay, "Certificates of Transmission," 6.
[9] For further details on MS Cairo 105, see Pierre A. MacKay, "Certificates of Transmission," 1-81.

To be written in gold each line[10]
A miracle that renders all mankind obsolete
Even when they follow the light of his lamp[11]

أُقسِم بالله وآيَاتِه
ومشعَر الحجّ ومِيقاتِه
أن الحريري حَرِيٌّ بأن
تُكتب بالتِبْر مقاماته
مُعجزة تُعجِز كل الورَى
ولَو سَروا في ضوء مِشْكاتِه

Al-Zamakhsharī situates al-Ḥarīrī between two literary references. The first is explicit and concerns future emulators who will try to follow al-Ḥarīrī's steps in vain. The second alludes to the pre-Islamic poets whose *Muʿallaqāt*[12] were allegedly written in gold. To assert al-Ḥarīrī's worth, al-Zamakhsharī reproduces the logic of *iʿjāz.* That is, the superiority of al-Ḥarīrī's work is measured by the powerlessness and incapability it engenders in future emulators. Nevertheless, this did not discourage al-Zamakhsharī from writing his own collection of *maqāmāt.*

Similarly, while recoding al-Ḥarīrī's lengthy biography, Yāqūt describes the *Ḥarīriyya* as follows:

> With his *maqāmāt*, Ḥarīrī surpassed the predecessors, and inflicted *ʿajz* [incapability] on the successors … The book of *Maqāmāt* gained a prosperity and luck that no other book ever had. It combined genuine quality and oratory, [showcased] an abundant number of terms… [It] selected the pearls of words and brought them together. If al-Ḥarīrī

[10] Al-Zamakhsharī, quoted in ʿAbd al-Qādir ibn ʿUmar al-Baghdādī, *Khizānat al-adab wa-lubb lubāb lisān al-ʿarab*, edited by Abd al-Salām Hārūn, 3rd edition (Cairo: al-Khānjī, 1997), 46, trans. Reynold A. Nicholson, *A Literary History of the Arabs* [First published in 1907] (NY & London: Routledge, 2014).
[11] Al-Zamakhsharī, quoted in Muḥammad Rashīd Riḍā (d.1935), *Tafsīr al-Qurʾān al-ḥakīm*, vol. XII (N.C: al-Hayʾa al-Maṣriyya al-ʿĀmma li-l-Kitāb, 1990), 38.
[12] The *Muʿallaqāt*: "a collection of pre-Islamic Arabic poems, generally numbered at seven. The tradition of poetical anthologies is old and has left traces in every aspect of later poetic criticism. … Among the proposed etymologies, the oldest, and probably the one most to be regarded with caution, claims that the universal admiration for these poems led the ancients to write them on cloth in letters of gold (whence the other appellation of *mudhahhabāt*." See G. Lecomte, "*al-Muʿallaḳāt*," in n: Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition, edited by: P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, W.P. Heinrichs, accessed accessed June 20, 2023, http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_SIM_5269

> would have claimed *iʿjāz* with his *maqāmāt*, no one would have dared to contradict, doubt, or challenge him.[13]

While al-Zamakhsharī assigns *ʿajz* or incapacity to future emulators, Yāqūt emphasizes al-Ḥarīrī's superiority to both predecessors and successors. To Yāqūt, Ḥarīrī is the pinnacle of *adab*, whom no one can surmount, and his *maqāmāt* are only compared to the most superior book in the Arabic language. R. A. Nicholson notes that the *Ḥarīriyya* has kept this esteemed rank next to the Qurʾān for eight centuries, and they both constituted "the chief treasure of the Arabic tongue."[14] In Yāqūt's words, however, the *Maqāmāt al-Ḥarīrī* is not placed *next* to the Qurʾān, but rather above it. The sentence "if he would have claimed *iʿjāz*" refers to the challenge verses. In the case of the Qurʾān, nonbelievers "dared" to contradict, doubt, and challenge both the Prophet Mohamed and God, but in the case of al-Ḥarīrī's *Maqāmāt*, questioning and challenging were not even an option.

To assert al-Ḥarīrī's superiority, readers compared his book to iconic works such as Qurʾān and *Muʿallaqāt*, and also to earlier *maqāmāt,* especially to those of the father of the genre Badīʿ al-Zamān al-Hamadhānī. Al-Qalqashandī (d.821/ 1418), for instance, describes the prominence of the *Ḥarīriyya's* saying:

> Then al-Ḥarīrī followed him [al-Hamadhānī] and composed his fifty famous *maqāmāt*. They were of absolute beauty and enjoyed the best fortune. They appealed to the elite and to the common people, sending Badīʿ's *maqāmāt* into oblivion and all but caused them to be rejected."[15] (*ḥattā ansat maqāmāt al-Badīʿ wa-ṣayyarathā ka-l-marfūḍa*).

One may argue that unlike his readers al-Ḥarīrī did pay homage to al-Hamadhānī in the opening if his *Maqāmāt* and referred to him as "a mighty passer of goals, a worker of wonders."[16] This praise, however, as the Andalusian commentator al-Sharīshī (d. 619/ 1223) notices later is nothing but a ruse. al-Sharīshī clarifies true intentions behind Ḥarīrī's seemingly praising words as follows:

> Al-Ḥarīrī acknowledges al-Badīʿ's deeds and his preeminent excellence, which testifies to his [al-Ḥarīrī's] courtesy and politeness. ... However, he secretly alludes to something else. Specifically, when he argues that Badīʿ's merit is due to his antecedence

[13] Yāqūt, *Irshād*, vol. V, 2202-2205.
[14] Nicholson, *A Literary History of the Arabs*, 329.
[15] Al-Qalqashandī, *Ṣubḥ al-aʿshā fī kitābat al-inshā,* vol. 14 (Cairo: Dār al-Kutub al-Maṣriyya, 1922), 110.
[16] al-Ḥarīrī, *The Assemblies of al-Ḥarīrī, Vol. I*, translated by Thomas Chenery (London: Williams and Norgate, 1867), 106.

> [*sabq*] … he is insinuating—to those who are clever enough to understand him—that Badīʿ's claim to merit is due to his precedence in time (*innamā faḍluhu bi-taqaddum al-zamān*). … He pretends to drop the whole matter, yet toward the end of the book, in the 47th *maqāma*, he announces his partiality to successors over predecessors, and his preference of himself over Badīʿ. Thus, [on the tongue of al-Sarūjī], he declares: "If al-Iskandarī has been before me, the dew precedes the shower, but the shower excels the dew in fructifying bounty." Had al-Ḥarīrī followed the conduct of impolite scholars, declared the pre-eminence of his *maqāmāt* over al-Badīʿ's, insulted the latter and undermined his worth, his attack would have turned on him. … However, since al-Ḥarīrī praised al-Badīʿ and paid him his due merit and acknowledged his superiority in full, while only glancing at himself quickly and secretly—an act that only a few could decipher—God shielded him (*satara Allah ʿalayh*) and gratified him with fame.[17]

As an enthusiastic admirer of al-Ḥarīrī, al-Sharīshī does not condemn his misleading words. He praises them as an act of courtesy, politeness, and respect. First, because they save al-Ḥarīrī from a reputation of arrogance. Second, they pay al-Hamadhānī his due respect. Finally, and most importantly, they provide the commentator with hidden clues that "only few readers" can decipher to solve the riddle. By noticing the hidden message behind the word *sabq* (antecedence), al-Sharīshī invokes the ability of the narrator of the *Maqāmāt* to reveal the trickster's true identity and intentions. In this case, al-Ḥarīrī becomes the trickster himself. The thrill of noticing the coded attack and the exclusive claim to solving it are placed above moral judgment. Consequently, instead of addressing al-Ḥarīrī's ungratefulness to the father of the genre, al-Sharīshī enjoys being part of the *Ḥarīriyya*'s playfulness.[18] It is no wonder, therefore, that *Ḥarīriyya* readers praised its ambiguity and complex language: it allowed them to be part of its game.

One last example of a *Ḥarīriyya* enthusiast is the philologist and *adīb*, al-Ṣafadī (d. 764/ 1363). His admiration for the *Maqāmāt* made him collect six audition certificates from different

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[17] Al-Sharīshī, *Sharḥ maqāmāt al-Ḥarīrī*, edited by Ibrahim Shams al-Dīn, vol I (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 1998), 27-8. Al-Sharīshī's words are my translation; as for al-Ḥarīrī's prose, the translation is F. Steingass' in al-Ḥarīrī, *The Assemblies of Hariri, Vol. II*, translated by Francis Joseph Steingass (London, 1898), 162.

[18] Centuries later, this playfulness will be replaced by grave seriousness, such as Nādir Kāẓim's claim that "al-Ḥarīrī's praise of Badīʿ al-Zamān was the first verse in the eulogy of Hamadhānī's *maqāmāt*." See Nādir Kāẓim, *al-Maqāmāt wa-l-talaqqī; baḥth fī anmāṭ al-talaqqī li-maqāmāt al-Hamadhānī fī al-naqd al-ʿarabī al-ḥadīth*, (Beirut: al-Muʾassasa al-ʿArabiyya, 2003), 85.

teachers and sources, in order to obtain the shortest chain of transmission to al-Ḥarīrī.[19] The earliest and last certificates are more than thirty years apart, which means that al-Ṣafadī spent half his life trying to get closer to al-Ḥarīrī's original text. al-Ṣafadī's enthusiasm for the *Ḥarīriyya* was not limited to collecting its authorities. He also defended it against its critics. Responding to Ḍiyāʾ al-Dīn ibn Athīr, al-Ṣafadī writes:

> [The *Maqāmāt* is] a famous book, an example to follow, and one of the pillars of *adab*. Its words and meanings are an authoritative source. Its copies are as numerous as its letters (*ḥurūf*) … People have composed lengthy commentaries on the *Maqāmāt*, including al-Masʿūdī, who wrote two commentaries on it, al-Muṭarrizī, Ibn al-Anbārī, and Abū al-Baqāʾ, among other. Some, I have seen, have claimed that the *Maqāmāt* are chemical codes … As for me, whenever I read or remember this episode [M14], I feel as if intoxicated by wine and happier than someone travelling at night with sunrise.[20]

كِتاب اِشتُهِر وضُرِب به المثَل وأصبح إحدى الأَثَافِي في عِلْم الأدَب وأصبَحَت ألفاظُه ومَعانِيه حُجَّة، ونُقِلَتْ بِه النُسَخ عدد حُرُوفِها (...) وقد وَضَعَ النَاس الشُرُوح المَبْسُوطة على المقامات مثل المسعودي فإن له عليها شَرْحَين، والمُطرّزي وابن الأنباري وأبي البقاء وغيرهم، ولقد رأيتُ بعضهم يَزْعَم أنها رُموزٌ في الكيمياء (...) وأمّا أنا فكُلّما قرأتُ هذا الفصل [مقامة 14] وذَكرتُهُ، أَجِدُ له نَشْوة كنشوة الرَاح، وبهجة ولا بهجةَ الساري بِطَلْعة الصَباح.

Al-Ṣafadī does not use *ʿajz* (incapability), *muʿjiza* (miracle), nor *iʿjāz* (inimitability) in his defense of the *Ḥarīriyya*. He highlights the wide reception of the work, more specifically, the reception of the strangeness of the language (i.e., "chemical codes"). Moreover, he observes that the inability of readers to emulate and understand the *Ḥarīriyya* did not exclude them but made them even more engaged. Thus, they opted for another mode of literary engagement: collecting authorities, citing the *Ḥarīriyya,* copying it, and writing commentaries about its "coded" language. Al-Ḥarīrī might have rendered his successors incapable of emulating or surpassing him, but he did provide them with entertainment and riddles to solve.

The audition certificates, Yāqūt's description, al-Zamakhsharī's appraisal, al-Sharīshī's and al-Safadī's defense attest to the high-status al-Ḥarīrī enjoyed during the premodern period of Islam. It also attests to his readers' aptitude for ambiguity and riddles. The *Ḥarīriyya*'s com-

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[19] For more details, see Benedikt Reier, *Documents in Books: Archival Practices in Medieval Arabic Biographical Dictionaries,* PhD Diss., Free University of Berlin, March 2022, 66-71.

[20] al-Ṣafadī, *Nuṣrat al-thāʾir ʿalā al-mathal al-sāʾir,* edited by Muḥammad ʿAlī Sulṭānī (Damascus: Majmaʿ al-lugha al-ʿarabiyya, 1971), 59-61.

plex language and opaque meanings did not discourage them but rather provoked them to examine the work more closely and discuss it. Their "training in ambiguity" permitted them to use purely theological terminology—which was originally coined to describe God's unique book—to celebrate the language of a work about deception and trickery.

Later in the 19th century, when this tolerance for ambiguity had faded, the use of *iʿjāz* to describe the *Ḥarīriyya* was strongly contested. Examining al-Zamakhsharī's verses above, Muḥammad Rashīd Riḍā (d.1865/1935) writes:

> The *iʿjāz* claimed to be contained [in the *Maqāmāt*] is rather an exaggeration emphasizing its merit within its genre. It is a saying common to all times and places, and to any work whose language is unique. [The *Maqāmāt*] is not a miracle in itself. Everything it contains has been matched and surpassed. It is distinct from the *iʿjāz* of the Qurʾān.[21]

هذا النَوْع المُدَّعى من الإعْجَاز فِيهِ إنّما هو لِلْمُبالغة فِي اِسْتِحْسَانِهِ فِي بَابِه، وَهُو يُقال فِي كل زمان ومكان في كل كَلَام لَهُ مَزِيَّة، ومَا هُو بِمُعْجِز فِي نَفْسِه، وقد عُورِضَ كُل ما يَأْوِيه لَه بِمِثْلِه وبما يَفُوقُه، وهو في مكانٍ بعيدٍ من إعجاز القُرآن.

This statement illustrates the obvious difference between the pre-modern and modern periods of Islam; namely, modernity's focus on clear-cut categories and clarity versus premodernity's playfulness and thrill for codes and riddles.[22]This explains how the *Ḥarīriyya* shared the quality of *iʿjāz* with the Qurʾān during that period, and why chameleonism, wordplay, *tawriya*, and humor constituted its most praised features.

II. The *Ḥarīriyya*'s Acclaimed Qualities[23]

1. The Ability to Contradict Oneself, or Chameleonism

Shortly after al-Ḥarīrī composed his *Maqāmāt*, Ibn al-Ṣayrafī (d. 542/1147) included him in his literary anthology *al-Afḍaliyyāt.*[24]Admiring him, he said:

> Now this al-Qāsim [al-Ḥarīrī] is extremely excellent. He has a superb natural talent. He is abundantly learned in *adab*, and full of good stories. The best proof of his cleverness

[21] Muḥammad Rashīd Riḍā, *Tafsīr al-Qurʾān al-ḥakīm*, 38.
[22] This difference will be clarified further in the second and third chapters.
[23] In this section I address the different qualities of the *Ḥarīriyya* and skip the praise of its strange vocabulary. This point is studied at length in Part II.
[24] This book was written when al-Ḥarīrī was still alive, judging by its dedication to the vizier al-Afḍal ibn Badr al-Jamālī (d. 515/1121).

> and creativity is his ability to praise something fully, then blame it and unveil its ugliness.[25]

Ibn al-Ṣayrafī's introductory sentence "now this al-Qāsim" illustrates, as Hämeen-Anttila notes, that he did not think his audience was familiar with al-Ḥarīrī or knew him yet.[26] Despite the novelty of the *Maqāmāt* and the unpopularity of their author, al-Ṣayrafī notes al-Ḥarīrī's erudition and creativity, and his ability to criticize and praise the same subject. The latter skill is a good example of the appetite of pre-modern practitioners of *adab* for linguistic playfulness. Al-Ḥarīrī was not the first one to elaborate on contradictions and present opposing positions in one text. There had preceded him other playful literary genres such as *taḥsīn al-qabīḥ wa-taqbīḥ al-ḥasan* [beautifying the ugly and uglifying the beautiful][27] and *al-maḥāsin wa-l-masāwī* (merits and faults), which "developed in the course of the first centuries of the Islamic period, having originated within the Arabo-Muslim heritage."[28]

Al-Sharīshī dedicates a section of his commentary to "*Madḥ al-shayʾ wa-dhammuh*" (Praising a Matter and Dispraising It). He argues that the *Ḥarīriyya*'s chameleonism and ability to contradict its own words were not new, but rather an old literary practice that was carried by highly appraised figures including prophets (Jesus) and Caliphs (Yazid b. Muʿāwiya), and addressed by several literary scholars. Amongst others, al-Sharīshī cites two contradictory explanations of the practice. First, al-Jāḥiẓ (d. 255/ 868) understands it as a tactic to appease oneself and make sense of the turns of time, that is, to praise what one has and attack what one cannot own (*al-ʿarabiy yaʿāfu al-shayʾ wa-yahjū bi-hi ghayrah, fa-in ubtuliya bi-hi fakhura bi-h*).[29] Second, Ibn Rashīq (d. 456/1063–4 or 463/1071) interprets it as a sign of hypocrisy that is commonly used in panegyrics and satire.[30] While citing these contradictory explanations, al-Sharīshī favors neither. He merely cites both opposing sides and lets his audience decide and judge for themselves. In this, he follows in the footsteps of the practitioners of the merits and faults genre, and the *Ḥarīriyya*'s trickster.

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[25] Ibn al-Ṣayrafī (d.1147*), al-Afḍaliyyāt,* edited by Walīd Qaṣṣāb and ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz al-Mānīʿ (Damascus: Majmaʿ al-lugha al-ʿArabiyya,1982), 270.
[26] Hämeen-Anttila, *Maqama*, 175.
[27] See: Geert Jan van Gelder, "Beautifying the Ugly and Uglifying the Beautiful," in *Journal of Semitic Studies*, 48 (2003), 321-351.
[28] Gériès, "*al-maḥāsin wa l-masāwī,*" in *EI2*.
[29] al-Jāḥiẓ, al-*Ḥayawān,* ed. ʿAbd al-Salām Muḥ. Hārūn, vol. V, (Cairo: Maktabat Muṣṭafā al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī, 1943), 174.
[30] al-Sharīshī, *Sharḥ*, 154.

A century later, al-Ṣafadī argues that al-Ḥarīrī's ability to bring opposites together is a sign of true "*balāgha*", he says:

> This is [true] eloquence: to describe something then criticize it, or to criticize it then praise it. As he [al-Ḥarīrī] did in *al-Maqāma al-Dīnāriyya*, in which he compared being a chancery scribe and being an accountant, and where he mentions virgins and non-virgins, marriage and celibacy, and other matters.[31]

هذا هو البَلَاغَة أن تصِفَ الشَيء ثم تَذُمّه، أو بِذَمٍ ثم تَمْدَحَه، كما فَعَل في مقامة الدينار، والتي فَاضَل فيها بين كِتابَة الإنشَاء والحِساب، والتي ذَكَر فيها البِكْر والثَيِّب والزواج والعُزْبَة وغير ذلك.

These three testaments, Ibn al-Ṣayrafī's, Sharīshī's, and al-Ṣafadī's, attest that the *Ḥarīriyya*'s skillful combination of contradictions and association of opposites is a quality that premodern readers held high for centuries. This is mainly owed to their acceptance and understanding of playful language and taste for wordplay and ambivalence. In such a context, the *Ḥarīriyya*'s trickster, Abū Zayd al-Sarūjī, who spends part of the day as a preacher and the other part drunk, achieved the highest degrees of admiration. Al-Sarūjī, however, was not only a multifaceted character but also possessed extremely clever linguistic aptitude. Owing to his mastery of wordplay, rhetoric, and vocabulary, he could compose variations on the same meaning over and over, never repeating the same expression twice.

2. Wordplay

Chameleonism and the ability to move between opposites is one of the *Ḥarīriyya*'s many linguistic games, which include riddles, metaphors, constrained writing, and metonymies. These aspects of wordplay require a deep knowledge of Arabic and a high command of grammar, syntax, and orthography. Al-Ḥarīrī spent nine years (495-504/ 1101-1110)[32] writing his *maqāmāt*, so they could encompass all sorts of literary and linguistic games. In the exordium, he describes his corpus as follows:

> [I] composed … fifty *maqāmāt,* comprising what is serious in language and lively, what is delicate in expression and dignified; the brilliances of eloquence and its pearls, the beauties of scholarship and its rarities: Besides what I have adorned them with of verses of the Quran and goodly metonymies, and studded them with of Arab proverbs.[33]

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[31] al-Ṣafadī, *Nuṣrat al-thāʾir,* 61.
[32] Yāqūt, *Irshād*, vol. V, 2212.
[33] al-Ḥarīrī, *Assemblies I,* 106-7.

Al-Ḥarīrī's literary and rhetorical efforts were not wasted on his premodern readers, who examined and studied them at length. A case in point is al-Muṭarrizī (d. 610/1213), one of the twenty commentators of the *Ḥarīriyya*,[34] who insisted that one cannot understand al-Ḥarīrī's *Maqāmāt* nor capture their "linguistic wonders and literary peculiarities"[35] (*al-ʿajāʾib al-ʿarabiyya wa-l-gharāʾib al-adabiyya*) without mastering the different branches of rhetoric.[36] In a long introduction, al-Muṭarrizī lists and defines the different rhetorical devices al-Ḥarīrī used, including *al-talmīḥ*, which consists in implicitly alluding to a famous story or exemplum; *al-muʿamma* (lit. the blinded), which is to mention the name of the beloved using a play on words, so only few would know the person in question; *al-khayfāʾ*, that is to alternate between dotted and non-dotted words; *al-raqṭāʾ*, which is to alternate between dotted and non-dotted letters; and *al-ḥadhf*, meaning to intentionally omit a letter from the entire text[37] (see Part II).

Besides these examples of wordplay, al-Muṭarrizī highlights a central rhetorical technique in the *Ḥarīriyya*; namely, *al-īhām* (make believe), which he defines as follows:

> *Al-īhām*, also called *takhyīl*, means using terms with double meanings. For example, one is near [*qarīb*] and the other is remote [*gharīb*]. When someone hears the term, his attention goes to the first. However, the speaker is actually intending the latter. This is the case in the eighth *maqāma*, concerning the needle.[38]

Al-Īhām, also called *tawriya* or double entendre, is not merely a figure of speech among many, or a wordplay technique that figures in some of the *maqāmāt* and disappears from others. It is, as Kilito argues, a central tactic that all the *Ḥarīriyya*'s trickeries and games share.[39] All Abū Zayd al-Sarūjī's tricks depend on the element of duality inherent to this technique: the surface-level meaning deceives the audience while the true intentions are only revealed at the end of the episode. Moreover, the trickster himself employs *tawriya*. He uses his different guises and the literary performances he delivers as an illusory cover, which constitute acts of *īhām* that conceal his true identity until it is discovered by the narrator. In this sense, the *Ḥarīriyya* involves the interpretative process of transcending the first, surface-level meaning (i.e, the performance) to arrive at the secondary, more important meaning (i.e., al-Sarūjī's identity). In all

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[34] This is at least the number of *Ḥarīriyya* commentaries mentioned in the entry on al-Ḥarīrī in *EI2*.
[35] al-Muṭarrizī, *al-Īḍāḥ fī sharḥ maqāmāt al-Ḥarīrī*, edited by: Khurshīd Ḥasan, Doctorate dissertation (Lahore: University of the Punjab, 2005), 32.
[36] Matthew Keegan, "Throwing the Reins to the Reader," 105-145.
[37] al-Muṭarrizī, *al-Īḍāḥ,* 66-69.
[38] Ibid, 66.
[39] Kilito, "Le Genre 'Séance': Une Introduction," 33.

his games of disguise, Abū Zayd al-Sarūjī is merely imitating a figure of speech and making use of the possibilities of language.[40]

These playful and ambiguous instances of wordplay were not unanimously admired. One of the most recurrent subjects in premodern literary criticism was the old (*qadīm*) vs. the modern (*muḥdath*) poetic conventions, and the natural vs. the artificial. Al-Ḥarīrī's linguistic games belonged to the second duality. Correspondingly, al-Muṭarrizī concludes the introduction to his commentary on the *Ḥarīriyya* with the following defense:

> These last types rarely occur in the natural speech of the precursors. They are rather artifices that were invented by [our] contemporaries. Although they are not part of the chosen [conduct], still they do illustrate the intelligence of their creators and the cleverness of their makers.

هذِه الأنواعُ الأخِيرَة قلّمَا تُوجَد في كلام المَطْبوعِين من المُتَقَدّمين، وإنّمَا هي صِناعاتٌ أَحْدَثَها العَصْريون على أنها وإن كانت لا تَنْخَرِطُ في [سِلْكِ] الاختيار فقد تدُل [على] فِطْنَة من اِبْتَدَعَها وذكاء من اِخْتَرَعَها.[41]

Al-Muṭarrizī admits the superiority of natural disposition, yet his admiration of al-Ḥarīrī's playful composition drives him to justify the latter as a sign of creativity and intelligence. In any case, even those who did not like or understand al-Ḥarīrī's acrobatic word games could still read and enjoy his collection. Next to the ambiguous instances of *tawriya* and elaborate instances of wordplay, which target those who master the ʿ*arabiyya* and all sorts of rhetorical devices, there were also funny and humorous stories exceeding what had been possible in the Arabic language.

3. Funny Stories

Defending *Maqāmāt al-Ḥarīrī* against its critics, al-Ṣafadī cites the following anecdote:

> We asked Abū ʿAmīra, the scribe of Andalusia, why don't you write episodes similar to the *Maqāmāt*? He replied: I do not lack the words, as for those lies that the *Maqāmāt* fabricates, I do not think I am *good* enough to match them.

[40] I elaborate this argument further in the following essay: Asmaa Essakouti, "The Thin Line between Lying and Using Linguistic Possibilities: *Tawriyah* or Double-Entendre in al-Ḥarīrī's *Maqāmāt*," *Arabic and World Literature,* London, June 2022, 1-16.
[41] al-Muṭarrizī, *al-Īḍāḥ,* 69-70.

قُلنا لأبي عَمِيرَة كاتب الأندلس: لأي شيء ما تَصْنَعُ مِثْل المَقَامات؟ فقال: أمّا الألْفَاظ فَمَا أَغْلَبُ عنها، وأما تِلْك الأكَاذِيب التي تَكْذِبُها فما أُحِسِنُ أن أضَع مِثْلَهَا.[42]

The *Kātib* of Andalusia, though possessing the vocabulary to match al-Ḥarīrī's, lacks the skill to recreate a trickster of Abū Zayd al-Sarūjī's caliber. The *Ḥarīriyya*'s superiority is affirmed once again through the others' failure to emulate it, or more accurately, the partial inability to emulate its stories. Initially, the word *akādhīb*, or lies, brings to mind a moral judgment against the *Ḥarīriyya* or against fiction.[43] However, the expression "*lā uḥsin*" and the context of the anecdote indicate that al-Ḥarīrī possessed an inimitable skill to compose stories.

Before citing the conversation with Abū ʿAmīra, al-Ṣafadī elaborates on the *Ḥarīriyya*'s reception outside of the Arabic-speaking world and dwells on the reasons behind such a global fame. He says:

> The Franks read them [the *maqāmāt*] to their kings in their own language. They also illustrate them and discuss them while drinking. This is mainly thanks to their humorous stories [*al-ḥikāyāt al-muḍḥikāt*], their intriguing events, which incite curiosity and a desire to hear more and to end of the story, their abundant parables and insights which resemble *Kalīla wa-Dimna*, and, finally, the varieties of *adab*, arts and styles they contain.[44]

From the 19th century onward, the *Ḥarīriyya*'s plots and anecdotes are described as weak, unimaginative, and of little taste (see Chapters 2 and 3). However, in al-Ṣafadī's time, the stories of the *maqāmāt* were entertaining, capturing, and contained an exceptional variety of *adab*. As a result, they reached a bigger and broader audience, particularly those who did not necessarily speak Arabic (through translation) and those who perhaps did not know how to read (through illustrations). In this sense, *Maqāmāt al-Ḥarīrī* enjoyed global fame during the premodern era, owing to its entertaining anecdotes and captivating language. They triggered the public's curiosity and fulfilled its expectations and literary sensibilities.

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[42] Ibid, 59-60.

[43] While arguing for premoderns' disapproval of fiction, Bonebakker translates the above account differently, and cites it as follows: "When Ibn ʿAmīra was encouraged to engage in the genre, he replied that he did not have the command of language necessary and did not wish to engage in "those lies one finds in the *maqāmāt*." Bonebakker changes the first part of the account and omits the verb *uḥsinu* from it to make his point. To compare, see al-Ṣafadī, *Nuṣrat al-thāʾir,* 59-60 and Seeger A. Bonebakker, "Some Medieval Views on Fantastic Stories," in *Quaderni di Studi Arabi*, vol. 10, 1992, 32.

[44] Al-Ṣafadī, *Nuṣrat al-thāʾir,* 59.

In short, when asked about the defining aspects of al-Ḥarīrī's *Maqāmāt,* premodern readers named many qualities. First, there is chameleonism, or the ability to assume different positions while addressing the same subject. Second, there is wordplay, which demands a highly educated reader who is in good command of the *ʿarabiyya*. Finally, there are the entertaining stories, which transcend the limits of language, through translation and illustration. The premodern reception of the *Ḥarīriyya* was comprehensive and well-rounded. It addressed the qualities of the *Ḥarīriyya* semantically, linguistically, and from a narratological standpoint, too. Later readings of al-Ḥarīrī's *Maqāmāt* lack this very quality. Readers, more specifically, European readers, studied it in fragments, focusing mainly on the issues of immorality and mannerism, and used it to illustrate an already formed opinion against the East, which was exemplified in the narrative of decadence (Chapter 2), one that Readers from the *Nahḍa* period repeated (Chapter 3). The thoroughness of the premodern reception and the readers' ''training in ambiguity,'' does not mean that all scholars during that period were in favor of the *Ḥarīriyya.* Some of them did express objections to its humor and mannerisms.

III. Premodern Objections to the *Ḥarīriyya*

1. Morals and Humor

The *Ḥarīriyya*'s core challenge to morality is that deceit and trickery can defeat good and virtue, when equipped with an eloquent and frivolous tongue. Premodern readers paid attention to this challenge and engaged with it in different ways. Al-Sharīshī, for instance, compares al-Ḥarīrī's *Maqāmāt* to *Kalīla wa-Dimna* and argues that they both share a double structure: a misleading surface and a hidden lesson. He concludes:

> So is the *maqāmāt*, although their surface is lies (*kadhiban),* their purpose is to train (*tamrīn*), refine (*tahdhīb*) and sharpen (*tadhkiyat*) the student's awareness. From al-Sarūjī's *ḥikāyāt*, the student can learn to be alerted to mishaps and ruses. Thus, his brain will be immune to inadvertence and impostures (*fa-tuʾman ʿalā ʿaqlih al-ghafla wa-l-khadīʿa*).[45]

Reading the *Ḥarīriyya* is a way to identify deceit and to protect the students from the trickery and deception that happen in the real world. Al-Sharīshī communicates to his readers that instead of fearing the impact of Abū Zayd al-Sarūjī, who is only a fictitious character, they should learn from the portrayal of dishonesty, to fend it off in the real world. Besides reality versus

[45] Al-Sharīshī, *Sharḥ*, 34.

fiction, al-Sharīshī raises the dichotomy of *ẓāhir* (external) versus *bāṭin* (internal or esoteric), which dominates the *Ḥarīriyya.* The trickster, his words, and his deceits are always double. They may seem fake and deceptive on the surface, but they contain a lesson to learn and detect underneath.

Unlike al-Sharīshī, al-Ḥanafī (d. late sixth/twelfth century) does not hide his discomfort toward the two founders of the *maqāma* genre, al-Hamadhānī and al-Ḥarīrī, who favor the trickster over the narrator, and allow him to escape after his trickeries have been rewarded and gone unpunished. To correct this bias, al-Ḥanafī rearranges the *maqāmāt* according to a new order:

> I write the *maqāmāt* … as you see, [placing] seriousness after frivolity, and base language before the eloquent [variety]. I have not preferred Abū ʿAmr's words to those of Ibn Bassām, as they [al-Hamadhānī and al-Ḥarīrī] did, nor have I placed the Mosque of Dissent before the Sacred Mosque.[46]

غَيْر أَنّي أوْرِد المقامات... كما ترى الجِد بعد الهَزْل، والكَلام النَازِل قبل الجَزل، ولَمْ أُفَضِّل كلام أبي عمرو على ابن بسّام كما فَعَلُوا ولا أُقَدِّم مسجد الضِّرَار عَلَى المَسْجِد الحَرَام.

Despite his disapproval of the *Ḥarīriyya*'s and the *Hamadhāniyya*'s favoritism of certain themes and linguistic registers, al-Ḥanafī does not omit any of their components. He keeps both the trickster and the educated narrator, the humor and seriousness, and the base and the eloquent linguistic registers. The only change he introduces is the new order. He places trickery, frivolity, and base language in the beginning of the *maqāma*, so that seriousness and eloquence would have the last word. This arrangement is another manifestation of a training in ambiguity, which allowed individuals to circumvent elements that contradicted their beliefs. Nevertheless, while accepting the juxtaposition of trickery and seriousness, the narrative had to end on the note of the latter. Curiously, al-Ḥanafī was not the first *maqāma* author who gave seriousness the last word. Al-Ḥarīrī, himself, concludes his collection with the trickster repenting from trickery and deception (see M50 and Chapter 9).

While al-Sharīshī highlights the *Ḥarīriyya*'s hidden serious lessons, and al-Ḥanafī rearranges the humor and seriousness of his *maqāmāt*, al-Qalqashandī follows a different strategy. He eliminates the *hazl*, or humor, from the *maqāmāt* entirely. In his multi-volume anthology

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[46] Aḥmad al-Rāzī al-Ḥanafī, *Maqāmāt al-Ḥanafī wa-ibn Nāqiyā wa-ghayrihimā*, edited by Oskar Rescher (Istanbul: Maṭbaʿat Aḥmad Kāmil,1914), 5. Adapted from the translation in D. J. Stewart, "The *Maqāmāt* of Aḥmad b. Abī Bakr b. Aḥmad al-Rāzī al-Hanafī and the Ideology of the Counter-Crusade in Twelfth-century Syria,'' in *Middle Eastern Literatures*, Vol. 11, n. 2 (August 2008), 211-232.

Ṣubḥ al-aʿshā fī kitābat al-inshā, al-Qalqashandī studies artistic prose or *inshā'* by dividing it into two categories: *jiddiyyāt*, or serious writings, and *hazliyyāt*, or frivolous writings. The first part covers hundreds of pages, while the second is hardly six pages and cites only the example of Abū Isḥāq al-Ṣābī's *ʿAhd al-taṭaffful* (the Chairman of Party-crashers). Al-Qalqashandī quotes fragments from al-Ṣābī's work without commenting on them. The one note on *hazliyyāt* which al-Qalqashandī offers is the following:

> Know that kings might show interest in writings of this kind and suggest to their writers to compose something humorous. [Writers] would then have [to write] them according to the request of each king, as happened with Muʿīn al-Dawla ibn Buwayh al-Daylamī when he suggested Abū Isḥāq al-Ṣābī to write a *Chairman of Party-crashers* about one of his subjects, who was called ʿAlīkā.[47]

Scribes ought to always avoid humorous writing, unless they are ordered or forced to do otherwise. They must dedicate their talent to compose in the different categories of serious writing (*jiddiyyāt*), which al-Qalqashandī elaborates in the following hierarchal form:[48]

I. *Maqāmāt* (starting with his own *maqāma*)
II. Epistles:
    1- Kings' epistles
        i. Epistles of war (*rasāʾil al-ghazw*)
        ii. Epistles of hunting (*rasāʾil al-ṣayd*)
    2- Panegyrical epistles: al-Jāḥiẓ, then al-Tanūkhī, and then Qalqashandī's own epistles.
    3- Vainglorious epistles (*al-fakhr*)
III. *Qidmāt* [pl. *qidma*] al-*Bunduq*: epistles describing shooting birds with crossbows.
IV. al-Ṣaduqāt: matrimonial epistles
V. Writings about scholars and men of letters

The *maqāmāt* has nothing in common with the other forms of serious writing. They are not addressed to kings, nor written to preserve the memory of special occasions, or of esteemed men. They are fictitious accounts of a trickster who is only equipped with a tongue capable of spinning trickeries. To solve this dissonance, al-Qalqashandī omits from the *maqāmāt* all aspects that disturb his categorization, that is to say, trickery and fiction. Then he includes his own *maqāma* which discusses different kinds of prose. Curiously, although the section on

[47] Al-Qalqashandī, *Ṣubḥ*, 360.
[48] Ibid, 110-359.

maqāmāt opens with an homage to al-Hamadhānī and al-Ḥarīrī,[49] al-Qalqashandī does not cite any of their episodes, because they obviously disturb the so-called "seriousness" of the genre.

In short, the question of *Ḥarīriyya*'s morality provoked three different attitudes during the pre-modern period of Islam: seeking a hidden lesson to make sense of the deceiving surface (al-Sharīshī); rearranging protagonists by giving the serious narrator more power than the witty trickster (al-Ḥanafī); and omitting humor and trickery, leaving only seriousness (al-Qalqashandī). These three attitudes agree that humor is not an end in itself. For al-Sharīshī, it is an amusing cover for real lessons. For al-Ḥanafī it is an admissible opening, perhaps to catch the reader's attention. For al-Qalqashandī, it is a low kind of discourse, which must be limited to exceptional and "forced" contexts. None of these three scholars accepts the *Ḥarīriyya* as it is. But none of them condemn it, either. They all acknowledge the aesthetic value of the *Ḥarīriyya* and then adjust its components to fit their own needs and ends.

2. Complex Language

Ibn al-Ṭiqṭaqā (d. 709/1310) opens his book *al-Fakhrī fī al-ādāb al-sulṭāniyya wa-l-duwal al-islāmiyya* with an attack on mannerism, ambiguity, and the *Maqāmāt*. To him, all three share the same fault: they entertain instead of instruct. Choosing education and morality, he decides to write his book differently. He explains his method as follows:

> I have committed myself to two rules [in this book]. First, to remain on the side of the truth and only articulate justice. … Second, to express meaning in clear, accessible expressions, so everyone could benefit from them, keeping clear of difficult syntax, which aims to exhibit eloquence and rhetorical [skill]. Many times, have I seen authors get taken over with the impulse of showing fluency and rhetorical [skill] that their intention was disguised, and their meanings became undecipherable. … My book is also more beneficial than the *Maqāmāt*, to which people hold firmly and desire to memorize. These *maqāmāt* are only good to practice writing artistic prose (*inshāʾ*) and to learn the styles of poetry and prose. True, they contain wisdom sayings (*ḥikam*), ruses (*ḥiyal*), and [accounts of] experiences (*tajārib*). But they weaken resolve, as they are founded on begging, mendicancy and vile deception for the sake of attaining trivial gains. For though they do benefit one aspect, they harm another.[50]

[49] Ibid, 110-111.
[50] Ibn al-Ṭiqṭaqā, *al-Fakhrī fī al-ādāb al-sulṭāniyya wa-l-duwal al-islāmiyya*, (Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, N.D.), 14-15.

Ibn al-Ṭiqṭaqā addresses an audience who does not share his opinion of the *maqāmāt,* as they "hold firmly" to them and "desire to memorize" them. Accordingly, he tries to emphasize the superiority of his work compared to the *Ḥarīriyya*'s elaborate style, language, and dishonest stories. Ibn al-Ṭiqṭaqā criticizes al-Ḥarīrī, but he also refers to him as a successful model. Despite his objections, he does admit that the latter's work contains *ḥikam* and constitutes a good source for practicing artistic prose. Despite his disapproval of the *Maqāmāt*'s literary status, Ibn al-Ṭiqṭaqā does not deny that it is a desirable and resourceful work. One may argue that Ibn al-Ṭiqṭaqā's criticism of the *Ḥarīriyya* is actually a marketing ploy: he attacks a celebrated book to establish fame for his. To do so, he had to select a famous literary work that is cherished and sought by everyone. In any case, whether he intended it or not, the passage above emphasizes the high status of al-Ḥarīrī during Ibn al-Ṭiqṭaqā's time much more than it discredits his complicated language.

3. Fiction vs. Reality

Shortly after the *Maqāmāt* had started to circulate, the Baghdadī polymath and avid collector of books, Ibn al-Khashshāb, wrote a commentary to highlight three critical points in the *Ḥarīriyya*. The first, al-Ḥarīrī's *sariqāt* or instances of plagiarism, which demonstrate, according to Ibn al-Khashshāb, al-Ḥarīrī's sharp skill of finding great sources from which he can steal (*laqad khaṭafahā min mawāqiʿ yadull tahaddīh ilayhā ʿalā faḍl bāriʾ*).[51] The second, which occupies the largest part of the commentary, is al-Ḥarīrī's linguistic and semantic errors in the *maqāmāt*. And the last is al-Ḥarīrī's violation of the line separating the real and the imaginary, assigning speech to an imaginary character, who was ordinarily human, meaning involved in no fantastic or extraordinary events, and easily confused with reality. Though this issue is briefly discussed by Ibn al-Khashshāb, it is the chief reason for which this commentary is cited in contemporary scholarship, which argues that fiction was not tolerable during the premodern period of Islam, and that al-Ḥarīrī had to "apologize" for writing fiction.[52]

[51] Ibn al-Khashshāb, *Risāla li-l-imām Abī Muḥammad ʿAbdallāh ibn Aḥmad al-maʿrūf bi-Ibn al-Khashshāb al-Baghdādī fī al-iʿtirāḍ ʿalā al-Ḥarīrī maʿa intiṣār Ibn Barrī li-l-Ḥarīrī,* in *Kitāb Maqāmāt al-Ḥarīrī,* (Cairo: al-Maṭbaʿa al-Ḥusayniyya, 1929), 2.

[52] Mathew Keegan responds thoroughly to these claims. See M. Keegan, "The Poetics of Virtual Experience and the Semiotic Theory of Fiction," in *Commentarial Acts and Hermeneutical Dramas,* 231-302.

Ibn al-Khashshāb elaborates the third point of his commentary by comparing the *Ḥarīriyya* to two earlier literary works, *Sindibād*[53] and *Kalīla wa-Dimna*. He develops this comparison as follows:

> The way al-Ḥarīrī presents his discourse in this section is either an error or it is sophistry because the invented stories (*al-mawḍūʿāt*) placed on the tongues of beasts (*al-ʿajmāwāt*) and inanimate objects (*al-jamādāt*) that he adduces in it do not resemble his account of al-Ḥārith b. Hammām and Abū Zayd al-Sarūjī. What is mentioned in the book called *Kalīla wa-Dimna* or the story of Sindibād is invented (*mawḍūʿa*) in order to put forth exempla (*amthāl*), which benefit prudence (*ḥazm*) and awareness (*taya-qquẓ*) and serve as a prudent warning against possible errors in judgment so that it might prevent carelessness and to give experience (*tajriba*) to those in power. For that reason, exempla (*amthāl*) were composed. … As for *Kalīla and Dimna* and what is like it, it is only for [gaining] experience, and the truth (*ṣidq*) is not obscured by the lie (*kidhb*) in it. That is because [what is false] departs from the familiar (*al-maʾlūf*). It is undoubtedly known to everyone that a lion does not address a fox in a true sense (*ʿalā al-ḥaqīqa*). ... Since a signal (*mukhbir*) informs [the reader] of it, [the untrue aspect] does not obscure the truth. The intended meaning is known intuitively (*badīhatan*). Something like the stories from al-Ḥārith b. Hammām and Abū Zayd al-Sarūjī could exist but did not. Thus, it is necessarily a lie that obscures the truth. Thus, it is not impossible that in everyday life (*fī al-ʿurf wa-l-ʿāda*) there might be a cunning man named Abū Zayd who is from Sarūj, who has rhetoric and eloquence, and who is capable of myriad ruses (*abwāb al-ḥiyal*). ... This resembles truth in one sense and is possible, so it is a lie because its author (*wāḍiʿ*) does not assert its reality (*lā yaddaʿī ṣiḥḥatahu*).[54]

This passage contains two main ideas: first, the *Ḥarīriyya* is ought not to be compared to *Sindibād* and *Kalīla*, because it lacks the educational element of *mathal,* which involves teaching by good example and warning against bad judgment. Second, *Kalīla*'s stories are equipped with signals that function as reminders of its untrustworthy aspects, unlike al-Ḥarīrī's *maqāmāt,* which resemble reality. To Ibn al-Khashshāb, al-Ḥarīrī commits two errors by comparing his work to the tradition of invented stories: first, al-Ḥarīrī substitutes the didactic purpose of those stories (e.g., warning, advocating for prudence, and teaching by example) with a

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[53] See "The Story of the Prince and the Seven Viziers," in *A Hundred and One Nights,* edited and translated by Bruce Fudge (New York: NY University, 2016), 216-279.
[54] Ibn al-Khashshāb, *Risāla,* 4-5 [Keegan's translation].

trivial one (e.g., entertainment and *hazl*); second, he makes the difference between truth and lies obscure (*multabisa*), by narrating stories that can easily be misconstrued as reality.

Ibn al-Khashshāb's point on the difference between reality and fiction demands a close examination of the two works to which he compares the *Ḥarīriyya*: namely, *Kalīla wa-Dimna* and *Sindibād*. All three works revolve around characters who use trickery to deceive an audience, or to rescue their lives. However, when it comes to their "realism," they are indeed different. *Kalīla*'s talking animals have no possible comparable existence in reality. Abū Zayd al-Sarūjī, however, resembles a common man, his eloquence notwithstanding. As for Sindibād, he is a human being and a wise teacher, which makes him a realistic character who "could exist but did not." Nevertheless, the sub-stories which are embedded in his frame-story are less credible and contain several "signals" and fantastic elements, such as the *jinni* who covers the man's body with penises,[55] the talking animals in the story of "The Lion and the Thief,"[56] and the enchanted spring which changes the gender of those who drink from it.[57] The three works represent figures who only exist on paper yet their degree of realism is different. By comparing these three, Ibn al-Khashshāb is drawing a wide spectrum for realism. At one end, stands the totally impossible and fantastic example of *Kalīla,* the least ambivalent of the three works. On the opposite end, stands Abū Zayd who is "obscured" by reality and demands a great deal of examination and a "suspension of belief."[58] As for Sindibād, he stands between the two, half-human (as his features and occupation suggest) and half fiction (as his fantastic tales illustrate), which makes him in the commentator's logic a half-truth/half-lie. Consequently, Ibn al-Khashshāb's problem with the *Ḥarīriyya* is not its fictionality,[59] but rather its "realism": its anecdotes and characters were too plausible. Ibn al-Khashshāb was not against the "lie," but rather against the semblance of truth. Had al-Ḥarīrī's characters flown high in the sky or met giants, Ibn al-Khashshāb would have admired them deeply, but they were too normal, to the point of resembling everyone else.

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[55] "The Three wishes," in *A Hundred and One Nights*, 271.
[56] "The lion and the Thief," in *A Hundred and One Nights*, 263.
[57] "The Enchanted Spring," in *A Hundred and One Nights*, 245.
[58] Coleridge coins the expression "suspension of disbelief" in 1817, while discussing the appropriate ideal mode of reading fantastic stories. The reader is asked to intentionally stop his critical thinking and approach the fantastic tale according to its own terms, without questioning the implausibility of talking animals or flying witches. Above, Ibn al-Khashshāb is requesting for the opposite: enhancing critical thinking and always remembering that each *maqāma* is just a story, a lie. On the contrary to Coleridge, Ibn al-Khashshāb argues for the "suspension of belief."
[59] To note, the notion as such did not exist during Ibn al-Khashshāb's time.

Most of the *Ḥarīriyya* readers during the premodern period of Islam did not have a problem with the plausibility of characters. In contrast to Ibn al-Khashshāb, they treated Abū Zayd al-Sarūjī as a historical character with two different backstories,[60] and their narrator as a representation of the author himself. For instance, the biographer al-Dhahabī (d.693/1293) notes some sources, al-Masʿūdī (d. 584/1188) and ʿAlī ibn Yūsuf al-Qifṭī (d.646/1248), as saying that Abū Zayd is a real person whom al-Ḥarīrī met.[61] Moreover, al-Dhahabī claims that

> the reason that [al-Ḥarīrī] names the narrator al-Ḥārith ibn Hammām was to refer to himself, thereby applying the [words of the] Ḥadīth "You are all a *ḥārith*, you are all a *hammām*. The *ḥārith* is the one who earns his bread [*kāsib*] and the hammām is the one who truly persists in attaining his goals [*kathīr al-ihtimām*]. He, therefore, meant [the two words] as adjectives not as proper nouns.[62]

Unlike al-Dhahabī who treated the trickster as a real person, al-Sharīshī invented a more creative interpretation, in which both the trickster and the narrator represent al-Ḥarīrī's experience. The commentator draws a complex allegory where the narrator represents the author, and the trickster stands for time (*dahr*), or more accurately, the vicissitudes of time [*ṣurūf al-dahr*]. Al-Sharīshī clarifies:

> It has been reported by linguists that [his name] is a nickname for old age (*kunyat al-kibar*). ... Ibn al-Aʿrābī said: 'An old shaykh is called Abū Zayd or Abū Saʿīd.' He usually (*fī alghālib*) describes al-Sarūjī as being marked by old age and decrepitude ... By al-Ḥārith b. Hammām, [al-Ḥarīrī] meant himself because he cultivates and has cares (*yaḥrith wa-yahumm*). For that reason, he had [al-Ḥārith] come from Basra, which is al-Ḥarīrī's town. He made Abū Zayd as a nickname for fickle time (*kunyat al-dahr*) because [al-Ḥarīrī] describes [Abū Zayd] in ways that are only appropriate for Time, which explains why he [al-Ḥārith] learns from Abū Zayd, as a metaphor for the knowledge that al-Ḥarīrī gained in his experiences with the turns of Time.[63]

The interest in the protagonists' names, their biographies, and whom they represent demonstrates that Ibn al-Khashshāb's reading of realism is one among many that were produced in

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[60] In one narrative, Abū Zayd is a trickster whom al-Ḥarīrī met in person and was inspired by his trick to write *al-Maqāma al-Ḥarāmiyya* (see Chapter 8). In another narrative, he is a student of al-Ḥarīrī, and his full name is Abū Zayd al-Muṭahhar b. Sāllār. See Keegan, "The Commentators on the named characters," 294-301.

[61] al-Dhahabī, *Siyar aʿlām al-nubalāʾ*, edited by Muḥammad Ayman al-Shabrāwī (Cairo: Dār al-Ḥadīth, 2006), 338-9.

[62] Ibid, 339.

[63] al-Sharīshī, *Sharḥ*, vol. I, 37-38 [Adapted from Keegan's translation].

the premodern period of Islam. The novelty of invented characters made the readers produce different interpretations to make sense of the *Ḥarīriyya*. The discussion on fictionality is similar to the one on morality and wordplay. None of these objections actually discredits *Maqāmāt al-Ḥarīrī*. There is always room for compromise and admiration. Even Ibn al-Ṭiqṭaqā, who criticized the *Ḥarīriyya*'s language and morals, could not deny its fame and status. Ibn al-Khashshāb himself, who called al-Ḥarīrī "a man of *maqāmāt*" opens his commentary on the *Ḥarīriyya* by admiring al-Ḥarīrī's aptitude for finding remarkable sources and stealing from them. In other words, all the objections against al-Ḥarīrī's *Maqāmāt* during the pre-modern period of Islam were nuanced. They praised the work as innovative and unique because they shared its author's "tolerance for ambiguity" and ability to juxtapose seriousness and humor, wisdom and trickery, fiction and reality. Consequently, it is no wonder that the *Ḥarīriyya*'s remote vocabulary and strange trickster were appreciated and praised during this era (see Chapters 4 & 5).

Conclusion

To conclude, scholars and readers who engaged with al-Ḥarīrī's *Maqāmāt* during the premodern period are too many to include in one chapter. I have limited myself to the most famous readers among them. These readers approached the *Ḥarīriyya* in different ways. Some were as prone to chameleonism as the *Maqāmāt* and its trickster. They were prepared to defend all sorts of acrobatics and instances of wordplay (al-Sharīshī, al-Ṣafadī, Ibn Ṣayrafī), and to compare the *Ḥarīriyya* to the best book they knew of, the Qurʾān. Others, who had less aptitude for ambiguity, omitted humor from their own *maqāmāt* (al-Qalqashandī), placed *hazl* in the opening so that seriousness can have the last word (al-Ḥanafī), criticized the *Ḥarīriyya*'s complex language (Ibn Ṭiqṭaqā), and demanded a clear separation between reality and fiction (Ibn al-Khashshāb). A third group of readers, those with an adventurous spirit, such as al-Muṭarrizī, appreciated the opaqueness and strangeness of the *Ḥarīriyya* and compared reading it to embarking on a perilous mission in the middle of the sea (*ʿabartu bi-safīnat al-tawfīq ilā sāḥil baḥrih*) and to losing oneself in an infinite labyrinth (*usahhila masālik shiʿābih*).[64] From the 18th century onward, the reception of the *Ḥarīriyya* changes. Gradually, we move from premodern readers, who appreciated complex language, remote vocabulary, riddles, and chameleonism, and encounter readers with different literary conventions; namely, an appreciation for

[64] al-Muṭarrizī, *al-Īḍāḥ,* 32-33.

clarity, and simplicity. In this context, *Maqāmāt al-Ḥarīrī*, which was once compared to the Qurʾān, loses its fame and gradually disappear from the literary scene.

Chapter 2

The *Ḥarīriyya* as a Perplexing Work for Modern European Readers

> "It was only when al-Ḥarīrī arrived in Europe that he became untranslatable. But this verdict was not issued immediately. … Early-modern European scholars hoped to find in the Impostures 'an ideal text with which to practice and teach the Arabic language.'" Cooperson, *Impostures*.[1]

In the previous chapter, *Ḥarīriyya* readers were mainly commentators, copyists, students, and scholars. In this chapter, they are European translators. In *Impostures*, the most recent adaptation of al-Ḥarīrī's *Maqāmāt*, Michael Cooperson provides a historical overview of the collection's numerous translations from the premodern period of Islam to the present day. During the premodern period, the *Maqāmāt* were translated into Hebrew and Persian, and none of their translators thought of them as "untranslatable." Of course, these translators were not always successful when faced with constrained writing, especially lipogrammatic *maqāmāt*,[2] but they managed to find a way around them.[3] This aligns perfectly with al-Ṣafadī's claim, discussed in the previous chapter, that despite the *Ḥarīriyya*'s complex language, it was nevertheless translated, appreciated, recited in boon gatherings, and its episodes were depicted in illustrations. The *Maqāmāt* did not intimidate premodern translators, although they were unable to match al-Ḥarīrī's linguistic games in their language. However, once the *Ḥarīriyya* enters its European phase of reception, the conversation changes. What was once inimitable and unique becomes "perplexing" and "problematic."

In this chapter, I examine several early modern texts which were written mostly by the *Ḥarīriyya*'s European translators, who sought to introduce it to European readers. I argue that, in this new context, the *Maqāmāt* lost its previous claim to aesthetic superiority and linguistic

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[1] Cooperson, "A Note on Translation," in *Impostures*, xxxvi.

[2] For instance, episodes that use no dotted letters, only dotted letters, or which can read the same way from end to beginning as they would the other way around. See Chapter 6.

[3] Cooperson provides two examples. First, al-Ḥamīdī (d. 556/1164), who argues that "the best way to convey the experience of reading al-Hamadhānī and al-Ḥarīrī was not to translate but rather to compose original *maqāmāt* in Persian." Second, al-Ḥarīzī (d. 622/1225), who translates the *Maqāmāt* fully into Hebrew and reproduced most of its palindromes, excepting a few occasions where al-Ḥarīzī admits his inability to "reproduce this particular feature in the Holy Tongue." See Cooperson, *Impostures*, 28-30.

charm, becoming in effect a problem: the *maqāmāt* were difficult to read, impossible to translate, and made little sense for the modern taste. Those who had overcome their linguistic and literary hindrances, such as Friedrich Rückert, were criticized by their fellow scholars (see below).

In the 18th and 19th centuries, those who failed to access the *Ḥarīriyya*'s "codes"[4] and those who did appreciate its poetic and linguistic aspects faced two issues; namely, the legitimacy of al-Ḥarīrī's work for their literary context and its utility. The *Ḥarīriyya*'s problematic status in this context was due to the influence of two aspect. First, there was the influence of the philosophy of modernity which Gerald L. Bruns summarizes as follows:

> The historic task of modernity, starting in the seventeenth century and continuing to this day, has been to develop a theory of *rationality* adequate to a universe of randomness—and not only a theory but a *program of strategic operations* capable of entering into the *heterogeneity* of things and bringing it *under control*. One could say that with modernity the task of reason was no longer to interpret the world but rather to *overcome* it—to *reduce it conceptually*, to *grasp* and *contain* it within an order of *general laws* and technological *systems*.[5] [emphasis added]

Modernity is a program, a strategy, and a system that disables all kinds of ambiguities, playfulness, and strangeness. It discouraged heterogeneous and multifaceted works that had demanded commentaries and interpretations and sought to replace them with clear, simple, and accessible works that articulated their meaning from the first reading. This explains why mannerism and favoring form over content were one of the main objections held against al-Ḥarīrī's *Maqāmāt* (see below). Second, there was the influence of the methods of Orientalism, which Edward Said explains as follows:

> Orientalism … is not an airy European fantasy about the Orient, but a created body of theory and practice, … Continued investment made Orientalism, as a system of knowledge about the Orient, an accepted grid for filtering through the Orient into Western consciousness.[6]

On top of controlling the *Ḥarīriyya*'s meanings and eliminating its complexity, following the dictates of modernity, al-Ḥarīrī's *Maqāmāt* was treated, in the context of Orientalism, as a

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[4] See the previous chapter for the discussion on al-Ṣafadī comparing the *Ḥarīriyya's* language to chemical codes.

[5] Gerald L. Bruns, "Toward a Random Theory of Prose," in *Theory of Prose by* Viktor Shklovsky, translated by Benjamin Sher (Illinois: Dalkey Archive Press, 1991), ix.

[6] Edward Said, *Orientalism* (London: Penguin, 2003) [first published 1978], 6.

byproduct of an act of "filtering," an "object of study," and as an "illustration" of the Orient's "poor taste" and "immorality." The latter was emphasized relentlessly by Orientalist readers who judged Abū Zayd's morality according to Christian and Victorian morals, deeming it corrupt (see Preston and Renan's positions below).

To demonstrate the early modern Orientalist engagement with the *Ḥarīriyya*, this chapter first addresses the mechanisms of Orientalism as elaborated by Edward Said. Second, it addresses the objections that modern Orientalists expressed against the *Ḥarīriyya*; namely, its display of ambiguity, use of mannerisms, and immorality. Finally, the chapter discusses the apologies which the French and British translators of the *Maqāmāt* supplied to guarantee interest in their work. These apologies take two different forms. The first is addressed from the translator to the European reader who is not accustomed to such *strange* compositions. The second is on behalf of the *Ḥarīriyya*, for it is merely a product of a "decadent" culture and society.

I. Edward Said and the Mechanisms of Orientalism

Edward Said defines Orientalism as a hegemonic system of knowledge that filters the Orient's practices, beliefs, and culture to reduce it into an "imaginary space" that is immoral, exotic, and regressive.[7] The goal of such a narrative was to display the East as a mute object, devoid of agency, and in need of Europe's *mission civilisatrice*. The applicability of Said's notion of Orientalism will prove valid in different ways in this chapter. First, I note two objections to it.

Said falls into the trap of Western hegemony when he limits his study to works and figures that fascinated Europeans, such as the Arabian Nights, the Sphinx, Cleopatra, and Babylon, and leaves others that were more significant for people in the Arab world. The *Ḥarīriyya* and its trickster Abū Zayd are a case in point: though dominating the Arabic literary scene for eight centuries, being second only to the *Qurʾān* (see previous chapter), the work and its trickster do not figure in his account of Orientalism. Said reproduces the Orientalist system he was trying to deconstruct, mainly, because he chooses the West as the main interlocutor.[8] Moreover,

[7] Ibid, 7.

[8] Dabashi criticizes Edward Said and argues for the importance of "changing the interlocutor." He says: "The principle [sic] problem I see in both Said and Spivak is that they take (against their own better judgment) the idea of "the West" altogether too seriously and write and react to it as the principle [sic] interlocutor of their own critical judgment." Hamid Dabashi, *Post-Orientalism: Knowledge and Power in Time of Terror*, (New Brunswick & New Jersey: Transaction Publishers, 2009), 272.

Said focuses mainly on French and British manifestations of Orientalism,[9] selecting them for their blatant imperialist agenda.[10] Limiting himself to Franco-British Orientalism, Said creates a simple, one-sided narrative: villains vs. victims, and oppressors vs. the oppressed. Consequently, he does not engage with other kinds of Orientalism: German Orientalism, for example, which had little "imperialist envies" and was more interested in the Orient for theological, philological, and romantic reasons.[11] Despite these objections, Said's notion of Orientalism provides an analytical framework that helps in the case of French and British translators of the *Maqāmāt* discussed below. It is of little use, however, in the case of Friedrich Rückert (d. 1866) who translates the *Maqāmāt* into German in rhyme. For the purpose of this chapter, Said's analytic framework will help uncover the Franco-British Orientalist discourse in the reception of works from the "orient," such as the *Ḥarīriyya*, through employing discursive mechanisms, such as comparativism, exteriority, fragmentation, representation, and textualization.

Comparativism, according to Said, is contrasting the modern European embodied in 'us' to its Oriental opposite, 'them.' This strategy dehumanizes the Orient and provides the West with a sense of superiority. Said explains, "It is enough for "us" to set up these boundaries in our own minds; "they" become "they" accordingly, and both their territory and their mentality are designated as different from "ours." To a certain extent modern and primitive societies seem thus to derive a sense of their identities negatively."[12] The distance created between "us" and "them" stresses the difference between the two, othering the Orient, muting it, and declaring the superiority of the West. The inferiority of the Orient excludes "them" from the conversation and allows the Orientalist scholar to work in "a circle sealing off him and his audience from the world at large."[13] The intimacy between the Orientalist and his interlocutors places the Orient at the exterior, at a distance from the closed "circle."

The second mechanism is therefore exteriority. According to Said:

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[9] "The French and the British have had a long tradition of what I shall be calling *Orientalism,* a way of coming to terms with the Orient that is based on the Orient's special place in European Western experience. … To speak of Orientalism therefore is to speak mainly, although not exclusively, of a British and French cultural enterprise." Said, *Orientalism,* 1-4.

[10] "The Orient is not only adjacent to Europe; it is also the place of Europe's greatest and richest and oldest colonies.'' Ibid, 1.

[11] For an elaborate discussion on the German way and reasons for studying the Orient, see "The Peculiarities of German Orientalism" (28-37) and "The Lonely Arabists" (118-123) in Suzanne L. Marchand, *German Orientalism in the Age of Empire: Religion, Race and Scholarship,* (New York: Cambridge University press, 2009).

[12] Said, *Orientalism,* 54.

[13] Ibid, 124.

> Orientalism is premised upon exteriority, that is, on the fact that the Orientalist, poet or scholar, makes the Orient speak, describes the Orient, renders its mysteries plain for and to the West. He is never concerned with the Orient except as the first cause of what he says. What he says and writes, by virtue of the fact that it is said or written, is meant to indicate that the Orientalist is outside the Orient, both as an existential and as a moral fact. … The exteriority of the representation is always governed by some version of the truism that if the Orient could represent itself, it would; since it cannot, the representation does the job, for the West, and *faute de mieux,* for the poor Orient.[14]

Oriental subjects are thus passive and mute. Unlike the Orientalist, who describes, decodes, and speaks, the Orient functions to illustrate and display what the Orientalist already presumes. Lacking both agency and voice, the Orient cannot form its discourse, and the Orientalist must therefore intervene, take the word, and "represent" it. The intervention does not occur in the Orient itself but in Europe, in the context of "sealed circles" of discussion between Orientalists, and in the form of "World Exhibitions," which bring people from "the Orient" to display them praying, belly-dancing, and riding donkeys.[15] Unable to be present "there," the Orientalist builds a replica, a "stage," that "represents" the Orient's "unfamiliar" figures. Said does not address material 'representations,' which included bringing actual people and donkeys to Europe to be exhibited, but rather focuses on figurative representation. He says:

> The Orient is the stage on which the whole East is confined. On this stage will appear figures whose role it is to *represent* the larger whole from which they emanate. The Orient then seems to be, not an unlimited extension beyond the familiar European world, but rather a closed field, a *theatrical stage affixed to Europe.* … [On] this Oriental stage stands a *prodigious cultural repertoire* whose individual items evoke a fabulously rich world: The Sphinx, Cleopatra, Eden, Troy, … settings, in some cases names only, half-imagined, half-known; monsters, devils, heroes; terrors, pleasures, desires.[16] [emphasis added]

Muted and represented, the Orient turns into a theatrical stage, and a spectacle. Heroism blends with monstrosity, and pleasure mixes with terror. It is an object of entertainment and fantasy. The authenticity of the show is not required, as it would disturb the pleasure of the narrative and spoil the fantasies built around it.

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[14] Ibid, 20-1.
[15] Timothy Mitchell, "The World as Exhibition," in *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Vol. 31, No. 2 (April 1989), 217-236.
[16] Said, *Orientalism*, 63.

The Orient's dependency and the Orientalist guardianship was further perpetuated through textualization and fragmentation. Said explains the first as follows, saying, "[t]he Orient studied was a textual universe by and large; the impact of the Orient was made through books and manuscripts. ... Even the rapport between an Orientalist and the Orient was textual."[17] Accordingly, one can easily write about the Orient without ever seeing it.[18] Especially, since this othered, muted, and represented Orient does not figure on a map. It is an 'imaginary space' created by the Orientalist's imagination. In this sense, the choice of studying the Orient through manuscripts becomes a significant one. Manuscripts represent the past, and the study of which distances the Orient further, geographically, and chronologically, which equates the Orient with the old, or archaic even. Through this process, moreover, the West becomes synonymous with the spirit of the modern, the present, and progression.

A complete text, as Said argues, may provoke a sense of completeness and cohesion which may contradict the "Orient's inability to speak." As a result, Orientalists published their works as select extracts and fragments, which brings us to the last mechanism, fragmentation. Said elaborates:

> Not only are Oriental literary productions essentially alien to the European; they also do not contain a sustained enough interest, nor are they written with enough "taste and critical spirit," to merit publication except as extracts. … Therefore, the Orientalist is required to *present* the Orient by a series of representative fragments, fragments republished, explicated, annotated, and surrounded with still more fragments.[19]

When the Orient is not muted, it speaks in select textual fragments. To bring these pieces together, Orientalists must comment, present, introduce, and explain. The fragments disappear under a mass of para-textual elements, which represent the perceptions and positions of those who study the manuscript rather than that of the work itself. In this form, the fragments are hardly visible. They are merely a pretext to show the abilities of the scholars, who undertake the "tasks of modernity," of rationalizing, ordering, and "controlling meaning."

In short, Orientalists used comparativism, exteriority, representation, textualization, and fragmentation as discursive mechanisms, amongst others, to control the Orient and to turn it into an imaginary space that stands for everything that is not European or modern. Selections

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[17] Ibid, 52.
[18] Karl May's novels are a good example of that. See Tassilo Schneider, "Finding a new Heimat in the Wild West: Karl May and the German Western of the 1960s." *Journal of Film and Video* (1995), 55-60.
[19] Said, *Orientalism*,128-9.

by Oriental figures depicted the heroic, exotic, monstrous, obscene, and romantic (the Sphinx, Cleopatra, Eden, etc.). As will be shown below, "Oriental" texts helped with learning Arabic and demonstrating the intellectual superiority of the Orientalist, who could critically and rationally study them and "their people." It is in this context that al-Ḥarīrī's *Maqāmāt* were translated into European languages starting in the 17th century, first into Latin by Jacob Golius in 1656,[20] then into other European languages in the 18th and 19th centuries. Most of these translators treated the *Ḥarīriyya* as a document that reflects the Oriental mind. The European taste preferred the 'exotic Orient'[21] that figures in the Arabian Nights to al-Ḥarīrī's complicated wordplay, immoral language, and monotonous stories (see Introduction). Consequently, the prefaces of the *Maqāmāt*'s translations usually emphasize the translators' objections to the *Ḥarīriyya* and list their apologies and justifications for being interested in them.

II. Objections against al-Ḥarīrī's *Maqāmāt*

1. Veiled Language

In the premodern period of Islam, difficult language, rare terms (*gharīb*), and constrained writing (e.g., lipograms) spoke to the *Ḥarīriyya*'s inimitability and uniqueness. For most of the modern European translators, however, these features were nothing but problems hindering their task. The common complaint to the *maqāmāt* was their cryptic language.

Louis-Mathieu Langlès, a French translator and philologist, introduces the translation of the M45 in 1795 by describing the *Ḥarīriyya* as academic speeches that "deals with various moral subjects and sometimes with erotic ones, covered with a veil so ingeniously woven that one cannot penetrate without being deeply versed in the Arabic language."[22] Langlès does not object to the "impenetrable veil," but he portrays it as a component that could hinder comprehension for a reader who does not have mastery over the Arabic language. That Langlès managed to translate the episodes attests to his own knowledge of the language. Consequently, the veil's function is twofold: it keeps away readers who are not well-versed in Arabic and demonstrates the knowledge of those who can read the *Maqāmāt*. The *Ḥarīriyya*'s language is thus a test, which the translator has passed, allowing him to mediate between the text and those who

[20] "al-Ḥarīrī," in *EI2*.
[21] Roger Allen, "Arabic and Translation: Key Moments in Trans-Cultural Connection," in *A Companion to Translation Studies*, ed. Sandra Bermann and Catherine Porter (New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons, 2014), 200.
[22] L. Langlès, "Notices sur la Vie et Ouvrages du Ḥarīrī," in *Magazin Encyclopédiques ou Journal des Sciences, des Lettres et des Art*s, Tome seconde (Paris 1795), 276.

do not know enough Arabic to penetrate it. In this sense, Langlès echoes the position of al-Sharīshī, who was proud to be part of the few readers who could detect al-Ḥarīrī's real intentions (see Chapter 1).

This positive attitude toward the *Ḥarīriyya*'s "veil" does not last for long, which is logical in the context of modernity, which sought to "strategically control heterogeneity" and "reduce interpretation" (see Bruns' definition above). In 1809, the Polish explorer and poet, Comte Wacław Seweryn Rzewuski, describes al-Ḥarīrī's language as follows:

> The extreme difficulty of grasping their meaning perfectly is undoubtedly the main cause which has *prevented* the publication of the whole work until now. … The extreme conciseness of Arabic, and sometimes the *necessity of veiling expressions* that are too free for European readers, have made us prefer a less exact translation, but one that nevertheless conveys the meaning, to a literal translation, which would often have been *obscure*, and sometimes indecent*."*[23]

Rzewuski's statement raises two crucial points. First, al-Ḥarīrī's language is responsible for the *Ḥarīriyya*'s fragmented and inaccurate translations. The translator allows himself the freedom of changing the original work, to accommodate the needs of his European readers, both linguistically and morally, deciding in the latter case for "the necessity of veiling expressions" that would not agree with European sensibilities of the time. Second, what Langlès refers to as "a creative woven veil," Rzewuski describes as being of "extreme difficulty" and "extreme conciseness." He, therefore, does not criticize al-Ḥarīrī alone, but the entire Arabic language, which is too concise. This statement announces the beginning of a critical turn in the *Ḥarīriyya*'s reception, from an admired literary work to a "representative" of the complexities of the Arabic language.

To prove his command of Arabic, and to spare his readers obscure and indecent language, Rzewuski translates *al-Maqāma al-Maʿarriyya* freely. Silvestre De Sacy (1758-1838), "the Father of Orientalism,"[24] decided to reach for the same goal, without translating al-Ḥarīrī's

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[23] Comte Wacław Seweryn Rzewuski, "*Maqāmāt* al-Ḥarīrī," in *Mines de l'Orient* (1809), 22.

[24] This description is by Said, who dedicates a chapter of *Orientalism* to Sacy's literary work and political agenda. To quote him in part: "When the French occupied Algiers in 1830, it was Sacy who translated the proclamation to the Algerians; he was regularly consulted on all diplomatic matters relating to the Orient by the foreign minister, and on occasion by the minister of war. At the age of seventy-five he replaced Dacier as secretary of the Académie des Inscriptions, and also became curator of Oriental manuscripts at the Bibliothèque royal. ... Sacy's name is associated with the beginning of modern Orientalism, … because his work virtually put before the profession an entire systematic body of texts, a pedagogic practice, a scholarly

work. Instead, in 1822 he composed a selected commentary in Arabic on the *Maqāmāt*, which he prefaces with the following:

> One may ask why I did not include a French or Latin translation of the text of the Sessions. However, I find it difficult to persuade myself that such a question could be asked by those who know this work other than through selected pieces. Suffice it to say that the reading of the Sessions [i.e., *maqāmāt*] should above all be considered as a means of acquiring a deep knowledge of the Arabic language. Besides, the merit of these compositions is much less in the subjects that are treated than in the forms in which the author expressed them. The goal that I have proposed to myself is much better served by a commentary than by a translation.[25]

Sacy's goal is clear, which is to acquire and prove "a deep knowledge of Arabic." This he can achieve in the Arabic language itself without recourse to translation. Moreover, al-Ḥarīrī's work prioritizes form over content. Its "merit" is thus limited to its linguistic medium and has little value in the European context of modernity, especially because "the taste is more often shocked in al-Ḥarīrī's work … by a kind of ornament that can hardly be better designed than by Martial's *difficiles habere nugas*."[26] Sacy refers here to Martial's verse "*Turpe est difficiles habere nugas, Et stultus labor est ineptiarum*," which translates as "It is absurd to make one's amusements difficult; and labour expended on follies is [stupid]."[27] Sacy is not against ambiguity, but rather against the effort that was invested in a work that is only supposed to entertain and amuse. Humor is acceptable so long as it is accessible, intelligible, and proportional to the labor of producing it. The opposite is simply ''stupid.'' In a different context, while introducing a *maqāma* by al-Hamadhānī, Sacy reflects once again on al-Ḥarīrī's work, saying:

> There is the greatest relationship between al-Hamadhānī and al-Ḥarīrī, either for the choice of subjects and thoughts, or for the manner of expressing them; but al-Hamadhānī's Sessions are much shorter than those of al-Ḥarīrī, and by that very fact

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tradition, and an important link between Oriental scholarship and public policy. *Orientalism*, 124.

[25] Silvestre de Sacy, *Les Séances de Ḥarīrī, Publiées en Arabe avec un Commentaire Choisi* (Paris: Imprimerie Royale, 1822), v-ix.

[26] Ibid, v.

[27] Martial, Epigrams, Book II, 86, trans. Walter C. A. Ker, (London: Heinemann/ New York: Putnam's Sons, N.D.), 157-8. Ker renders *stultus* as childish, but that is inaccurate. I am indebted to Prof. van Gelder for this observation.

> perhaps they deserve some preference: one feels there less the assignment to employ all the richness of the language and all the resources of the rhetoric at once.[28]

During the premodern era of Islam, al-Ḥarīrī managed to completely eclipse his predecessor, al-Hamadhānī, and overshadow his name (see chapter 1). The literary conventions were different, and al-Ḥarīrī's elaborate episodes were considered better than al-Hamadhānī's "short" and less complicated *maqāmāt*. In modern Europe, however, tastes are different: short and funny constituted the better literature, not the "ornamented" and "*difficile*." Consequently, Sacy's favoring of al-Hamadhānī becomes a rule,[29] not only for Orientalists, but later for *Nahḍa* scholars as well (see Chapter 3), and for contemporary scholarship (see Introduction). From this point on, al-Ḥarīrī's veiled language will lose its previous value and become a sort of forced, "laborious," and "stupid" feature that places form above content.

2. Form over Content

The issue of form over content is a recurrent theme in the prefaces of the *Maqāmāt*'s translations during the period of modernity. It is sufficient to cite two of these, to comprehend the translators' displeasure with the *Ḥarīriyya*. In 1845, for instance, the French Orientalist Auguste Cherbonneau (d. 1882) introduces M30 with the following words:

> In most literary productions, the content is everything and the form has no value unless it is an exact and complete expression of it. It is quite different here. The subject is almost nothing. It is an occasion and a canvas on which come to intertwine embroideries of any kind. … He [al-Ḥarīrī] could be *condemned* for having pushed the luxury to the point of using a purely artificial style from one end of his book to the other. As a result, the strongest attention could not, without *fatigue,* sustain the reading of it beyond twenty pages. … He does not limit himself exclusively to versifying mosaics of vowels and consonants for the pleasure of the eyes; from time to time, he gives in to the *demon* which inspires him.[30] [emphasis added]

To Cherbonneau, true literature expresses an idea and articulates an opinion. The work's form must serve its meaning. His position is serious and functional and has little tolerance for playfulness and ornamentation. The embroideries and mosaics in the *Ḥarīriyya* are condemnable

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[28] Silvestre de Sacy, "Extrait du Recueil des Séances d'Abu al-Fadl Aḥmad Hamadhānī," in *Chrestomathie Arabe,* Second edition (N.C.: Imprimerie Royale,1827), 261.
[29] See the conclusion to Chapter 3, "The Rise (of al-Hamadhānī) and Fall (of al-Ḥarīrī)."
[30] M. A. Cherbonneau, "XXXe Séance de Ḥarīrī," in *Journal Asiatique,* Quatrième Série, Tome VI (1845), 242-243.

and should be used wisely and scarcely, because they cause fatigue and annoyance to the reader. Consequently, the translator decides that modern readers of the *Maqāmāt* should not read more than twenty pages. This is not a random number. It is exactly the length of his translation of the *Maqāmāt,* including the final explanatory notes. Cherbonneau, therefore, agrees with Sacy, in the sense that he appreciates shortness, for the longer they get the more "demonic" they get. This exasperation with the *Ḥarīriyya*'s length and "purely artificial style" stands in opposition to the position of premodern readers who were thrilled to decipher its codes and enjoy its funny stories. The modern European context stands, therefore, in complete opposition to that of the premodern period of Islam. As the literary conventions differed, so did the reception of the *Ḥarīriyya*.

In contrast to Cherbonneau, Theodore Preston (d. 1882), a fellow of Trinity College who translated twenty of al-Ḥarīrī's *maqāmāt* in 1850, describes the *Ḥarīriyya*'s form as follows*:*

> In elaborate execution and ornateness of style the *Maqāmāt* are perhaps unrivalled; they have always been regarded in the East as models of accuracy; and the design with which they were written was purely literary, namely, to display the vast resources of the Arabic language, to exemplify the most difficult methods of composition, and to embody in a series of rhythmical and metrical anecdotes all the refinements of grammar, rhetoric, poetry, history, and tradition, that the author's extensive learning could supply. To this design the subject-matter of the work is entirely subordinate, the characters and incidents being selected not for their intrinsic interest or value, but merely as forming a suitable occasion and groundwork for the exhibition of recondite learning and rhetorical skill.[31]

Unlike Cherbonneau, Preston seems to understand the *Ḥarīriyya*'s "refinement" and "ornateness" according to the work's original context, instead of his own. He refers to the *maqāmāt* as "models of accuracy" in the East and as reflections of "the author's extensive learning." Curiously, this positive attitude is limited to the introduction. In the translation, Preston adopts a different attitude. He translates the *maqāmāt* that are compatible with the taste of his era, which was defined by the standards of modernity and Victorian and Christian morals, and omits the rest. The censured *maqāmāt* are summarized at the end of the translation in an appendix which he introduces as "an appendix, containing an epitome of the rest of the *Maqāmāt* with the reasons which have induced the Editor to abandon the attempt to translate them in the same

[31] Theodore Preston, "Introduction," in *Makamat, or Rhetorical Anecdotes of al-Ḥarīrī of Basra* (Cambridge: University Press, 1850), vii.

style as the preceding."[32] [emphasis added] The reasons for "abandoning" more than half the episodes were sometimes moral (see below), and mostly linguistic. Preston, for example, omits M8 due to "the impossibility of conveying in translation the double-entendres," M17 because "it is useless to attempt to imitate its ingenious artifice," and M19 because it "would necessarily seem strange and far-fetched to the English reader." Preston, however, admits that M23 is "a very remarkable one, but in several respects, baffles imitation or translation."[33] Preston's introduction and appendix represent a remarkable case of reception for the *Ḥarīriyya*. The translator admires the work, yet he is incapable of reproducing its nuances in his own language. As a result, he selects, summarizes, and fragments the work. Though Preston's inability to reproduce all the episodes of al-Ḥarīrī is owed to modern standards of language and the changes in literary conventions, it is most likely because Preston's translation received funding from the state, more accurately, from The Oriental Translation Fund, which was headed by Queen Victoria herself.[34] A work that is produced in such an official context would pragmatically limit itself to clear, understandable, and acceptable episodes from al-Ḥarīrī's collection, and only point to the playful and immoral ones in a summary. Therefore, the appendix represents those unamendable parts of the *Maqāmāt* that the new conventions of modernity admitted neither linguistically nor morally.

3. Immorality

Most of the early modern European translators of al-Ḥarīrī's *Maqāmāt* note that some episodes are "erotic" and "indecent." Faced these *maqāmāt* in the Victorian context, Preston was forced to leave them untranslated, as they contain allusions to homosexuality,[35] erotic descriptions, and "cant-phrases." After summarizing the plot of *al-Maqāma al-Tabrīziyya,* in which the trickster's wife complains to the judge about her husband's breach of conjugal duties, using "intemperate language,"[36] Preston comments: "This *Maqāma* is omitted for obvious reasons;

[32] Preston, "Appendix," in *Maqāmāt*, 479.
[33] Ibid, 479-496.
[34] John Shepherd, "Proceedings of the Twenty-Seventh Anniversary Meeting of the Society, Held on the 11th of May 1850," in *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain & Ireland*, Volume 12 (May 1850), xi.
[35] The translator even refuses to refer to homosexuality. Instead, he says "This *Maqāma* [number 10] in which Abū Zayd accuses his son of murder before the qadi of Rahabah, merely to draw the attention of the latter to the boy, *is omitted for an obvious reason*." [Emphasis added], Preston, "Appendix," 482.
[36] Ibid, 492.

though the vituperative metaphors introduced in it are very curious and elaborate."[37] This statement reveals a conflict between "the curious and elaborated metaphors," which the translator wants to render in the target language, and the immoral language which is intolerable in his context. Perhaps even if he did translate it, the funding committee would not have agreed to publish the translation. It was a fight between the translator and the moralist within, who is too in line with the dictates of modernity to accept the juxtaposition of both sides, unlike premodern readers (see Chapter 1). It was perhaps also a conflict between the individual's curiosity and social demands.

Ernest Renan (d. 1893),[38] the French Orientalist, wrote an essay on al-Ḥarīrī's *Maqāmāt* and included it in his book *Essais de Morale et de Critique.* In the preface of this work, Renan states that the chapters do not have an obvious link, yet they are all the product of one belief that he holds above all, which is that ''morality is the most serious and true thing.'' [39]Unlike Ibn al-Ḥanafī and al-Sharīshī, who found a way around the immorality of the *Ḥarīriyya*'s trickster (Chapter 1), Renan's words do not convey the faintest hint of flexibility. To him, morality is a purely serious and even solemn subject. It is no wonder, accordingly, that he takes the trickeries of Abū Zayd so gravely. He says, "though modern society, unfortunately, has more than one Abū Zayd, we must agree that such a character for us is inconceivable from an artistic consideration. The contemporary world is too complicated, too entangled in good and evil, to be represented fully by a rascal, or by an honest man.[40] Renan dismisses Abū Zayd on the grounds of being one-dimensional and purely evil, and that he cannot reflect the complexity of the contemporary world. However, the *Ḥarīriyya*'s trickster is nothing but simple. He is not only a "rascal," but he is also an exile, a scholar, a father, a trickster, and an anxious man who fears death and solitude.[41] In every episode, he is a new person, with a different psyche, agenda,

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[37] Ibid, 492-3.

[38] Comparing Sacy to Renan, Edward Said says: "Renan's accomplishment: to have associated the Orient with the most recent comparative disciplines, of which philology was one of the most eminent. The difference between Sacy and Renan is the difference between inauguration and continuity. Sacy is the originator, whose work represents the field's emergence and its status as a nineteenth-century discipline with roots in revolutionary Romanticism. Renan derives from Orientalism's second generation: it was his task to solidify the official discourse of Orientalism, to systematize its insights, and to establish its intellectual and worldly institutions." *Orientalism,* 130.

[39] E. Renan, *Essais de Morale et de Critique*, Fourth edition (Paris: Ancienne Maison Michel Levy Frères, 1889) [first published 1859], 1.

[40] Ibid, 294.

[41] On Abū Zayd al-Sarūjī's linguistic personas, see Chapter 6. On his more human and familial personalities, see chapter 8 and 9.

and personality. He ambiguously blends rootlessness and homesickness (Chapters 8 & 9), cynicism and tragedy (Chapter 8), and most importantly, seriousness and humor. Renan, in contrast, is only and simply a moralist. He adds:

> The idea of a shameless funny man, equally trained in grammatical finesse and in swindling, using his literary knowledge only to extort a dinner or some alms, may for a moment make us smile, but would in the long run only inspire us with disgust. For the Arabs, on the contrary, Abū Zayd is by no means a despicable being. Al-Ḥarīrī does not have a serious word of criticism for him; he makes him die an honest man; he gives him at times very delicate feelings, among others a tender memory of his homeland which inspires him with charming verses.[42]

This passage is a typical example of what Said calls "comparativism." The "us" smiles briefly at al-Sarūjī's anecdotes, then feels "disgust" by their display of moral depravity. Meanwhile, "them," the Arabs, accept immoral behavior without judgment or criticism. Unlike "us," those that embody "them" lack a moral compass to tell right from wrong, and the critical faculties to convict the "rascal." The most condemnable person in this portrait is not Abū Zayd nor "the Arabs," but rather al-Ḥarīrī who gives his protagonist a pious end and allows him to repent. The problem in this last point, however, is that it contradicts Renan's above statement on the *maqāmāt* lacking complexity and not possessing the ability to mix good and evil. Is not Abū Zayd's repentance in the last *maqāma* proof of his ability to be more than just a bad man? Renan continues:

> In the East, man does not fight against the fate that wants to degrade him. It is written that he will be noble or ignoble … The beggar has only one excuse: "Sarūj is taken; my goods and my family are in the hands of infidels. I see that fortune never remains in the same state, and I try to imitate it." This ignoble resignation to the vices of his century, this way of encouraging himself to infamy by the example of fortune, is all Muslim. Never has the East understood the inner pride which raises man above fate and places, his morality outside the whims of destiny ... With us, intellectual culture is a kind of nobility, which obliges. In the East, the type of the begging and swindling scholar is by no means a fiction. In al-Ḥarīrī's time, there were plenty of these nomadic grammarians,

[42] Renan, *Essais de Morale et de Critique* (Paris: Ancienne Maison Michel Levy Frères, 1889), 294-5.

> making pedantic rhapsodies, well hardened to baseness, and paying their fee in good words and in pieces of verse.[43]

Continuing his comparativism of the East to the modern European 'Us,' Renan assigns "pride," "intellectual culture," and nobility to his group. To 'them,' meaning Muslims, people from the East, and the Arabs, he assigns fatalism, vice, resignation, infamy, and baseness. Renan also employs the mechanism of 'representation.' He denies al-Sarūjī's fictionality, treating him as a figure that stands for real grammarians in al-Ḥarīrī's time, and all Muslims in the modern period. During the premodern period, scholars such as al-Dhahbī denied the fictionality of Abū Zayd al-Sarūjī and furnished him with a biography. Others, such as al-Sharīshī, treated him as a symbol of Time (Chapter 1). None of them, however, treats him as a "representation" of base character, or of the "other." Renan's Orientalist reading denies the *Ḥarīriyya* its literariness and fictionality, choosing instead to treat it as a historical document that proves the East's urgent need for European morality, to save it from moral corruption.

In short, the language, form, and morality of al-Ḥarīrī's *Maqāmāt* become more problematic in early modern Europe. Premodern scholars found a way around Abū Zayd al-Sarūjī's trickeries because they wanted to read more of his playful words, riddles, metaphors funny stories, and humor. Modern, European readers of the *Maqāmāt*, in contrast, struggled with every aspect of it: its length (Sacy), opaqueness (Comte Rzewuski), language (Cherbonneau), and morality (Preston, Renan). Now and then, the paradigm of reception by European readers exhibited admiration toward the *Ḥarīriyya* (Langlès, Preston). In general, however, they had little reason to like it, since it challenged their literary taste and their moral system.

These challenges and objections, therefore, beg the following question: if *Maqāmāt al-Ḥarīrī* is strange and foreign, to the extent exhibited by the European readers discussed above, why was it translated (albeit partially) and discussed? Was it only to study the *Maqāmāt* as a "representative sample" of the corrupt Orient (Renan)? Was it to learn the Arabic language, as the epigraph by Cooperson above indicates? Or was there more to the story? The optimal way to answer these questions is to examine the justifications and apologies that the translators offered for reproducing the *Ḥarīriyya* in their own languages.

III. Apologies to the Readers, or Why Engage with the *Ḥarīriyya*?

To announce the *Ḥarīriyya*'s forthcoming translation in 1850, The Oriental Translation Fund published the following announcement:

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[43] Ibid, 296.

> The Committee have consented to assist the publication of an English translation by the Rev. Theodore Preston Fellow of Trinity College Cambridge of the celebrated Arabic work the *Maqāmāt al-Ḥarīrī* by Abū Muhammad al-Kasim of Basra. The merits of this work which with another is regarded by the Arabs as second only to the *Qurʾān* in power and beauty of expression have been confessed by all Orientalists. No Eastern composition has caused at once so much *admiration* and *perplexity* as this collection of *public tales,* or *addresses,* or *adventures* in which the crafty agent ever intervenes, deceives and gains his object by infinitively varied stratagems and affecting speeches in prose and verse. Mr. Preston the translator has resided in the East and has there pursued his Arabic researches. The work is already in the Press and it is hoped will appear in a few months.[44] [emphasis added]

This announcement figures in the *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain & Ireland* among several of its kind for other translations from Arabic, Turkish, and Persian. *Maqāmāt al-Ḥarīrī,* which is taken here to be "second only to the *Qurʾān*," became one among many works that were selected and translated to "textually represent" the Orient. The "perplexity" toward the work is already noticeable in the announcement's definition of the *maqāmāt*. They are either "public tales," "addresses," or "adventures." Due to this ambiguous literary nature, the text switches the focus to the protagonist who employs all means of deception, be they in verse or prose. *Maqāmāt al-Ḥarīrī* was not translated because it was interesting, but rather because it was admired by the Arabs and the Orientalists. Only someone who lived in the East and studied its language, and perhaps even possessed a comprehensive understanding of its people, can explain the merits of such a work. Translating the *Ḥarīriyya* in this context is thus a means to learn about the social and historical context of the work, meaning the Orient, its people, and their taste, rather than the work itself.

In the hope of articulating these aims to the readers, translators explained their motivations in the form of justifying their choice and apologizing for it. For instance, the German-born French Orientalist, Salmon Munk (1803–1867) introduces his translation to the *Maqāma of Ṣanʿā* as follows:

> I do not hide from myself all that such an attempt has of *recklessness* and *presumptuousness*; because the forms with which this poet covered his spiritual compositions, and which have so much charm: in the original language, are only *too strange* to the habits

[44] Shepherd, "Proceedings," xi.

> of *our taste*. Accordingly, I need to *claim the indulgence of the reader* for this oriental flower *transplanted* on the European ground.[45] [emphasis added]

Translating the *Ḥarīriyya* is a risky task for two reasons. First, no translation can capture its charms in the original language. Second, even the most successful endeavor in this regard remains "too strange" for European tastes. *Maqāmāt al-Ḥarīrī* is not just hard to translate, but also makes little sense in translation. Consequently, an apology is due to the European reader and to the Europe that must "indulge" a strange "Oriental flower." A few years later, Theodore Preston writes a similar apology to his readers, saying: "Occasionally he [the translator] has ventured to imitate the alliterations of Ḥarīrī, and would apologize to the reader for having thus adopted a species of verbal artifice which is *condemned by the more correct taste of modern Europe*, though always admired and practiced by Orientals."[46] [emphasis added] Comparativism here functions in two ways. It places the European against the Oriental, and verbal artifices against the modern taste. By staying closer to al-Ḥarīrī's language, the translator is deviating away from "the more correct taste." "Occasionally," he adopts a language that is criticized and condemned by his context, to stay closer to the style of the original text. For that, he apologizes to the audience. He never apologizes, however, for departing away from the original work most of the time, and for reducing it to half its size, to accommodate the "correct" taste. Such an attitude attests to the Eurocentricity of the discussion, and to Preston's understanding of the translation process, i.e., as an act that accommodates the targeted language and ignores the original one.

These two apologies recall the mechanism of exteriority. The translators deal with the *Ḥarīriyya* as a "strange" work that comes from far away and does not belong to the "European ground." Any attempt to respect the original logic of the text must be excused as an act of "indulgence." The *Ḥarīriyya* is not to be studied from the perspective of the people of the Orient who produced it, but rather from a modern perspective that condemns the work based on what it perceives as the correct taste. The apology is "a sealed circle" that includes only the translators and their readers. As the circle encloses a European context, an apology to the "Orient" for fragmenting the *Ḥarīriyya* and adjusting it to the modern taste was deemed necessary.

One exception stands out in this context, that of the poet Friedrich Rückert who in 1826 translated forty-three of al-Ḥarīrī's episodes[47] to German, verse for verse, rhyme for rhyme,

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[45] M. S. Munk, "Essai," in *Journal Asiatique*, Tome XIV (1834), 540.
[46] Theodore Preston, *Maqāmāt*, 3.
[47] For linguistic reasons, Rückert leaves six *maqāmāt* untranslated, and he does not translate M20 on moral grounds. See Cooperson, "Note on Translation," 33.

and pun for pun, to use Renan's expression.[48] The German translator admits the untranslatability[49] of the episodes, yet nevertheless decides to recast (*Nachbildung*) them in his own language because he believed them to be humorous and entertaining. He says:

> Al-Ḥarīrī's expression is over-artistic [*überkünstlich*], full of puns and allusions, exaggerated, adventurous, extravagant. ... Al-Ḥarīrī, however, is humorous and stands freely above what he depicts. … Of this humor or, if you will, irony in al-Ḥarīrī was not known in Europe before this German adaptation; and one might ask whether both of these [humor, irony] actually reside in the Arab poet, or whether it was introduced into him only through his German reproduction. … Humor must have been originally present, even though perhaps only more unconsciously and only through the transmission brought to consciousness; now may the readers be delighted by it![50]

Rückert admits the "over-artistic" quality of the *Ḥarīriyya*, yet to him, that quality comes second to its humor. The need to apologize and justify is therefore absent. Instead, Rückert substitutes that with an enthusiastic promise to the reader who will certainly feel "delighted." In this sense, Rückert echoes the thrill of premodern readers, who felt while reading the *Ḥarīriyya* "as if intoxicated by wine and happier than one enjoying a walk in the early morning."[51] While his contemporaries were too occupied with criticizing and apologizing for the *Ḥarīriyya*'s refinement and language, Rückert engaged in a conversation that highlighted one of the three pillars[52] of the *Ḥarīriyya*'s former charm during the premodern period of Islam, meaning its humor. Not everyone welcomed this, however.

At the end of his moral critique of the *Ḥarīriyya*, Renan addresses the efforts of his fellow Orientalists who engaged with *Maqāmāt al-Ḥarīrī*, such as Sacy and Rückert in particular. In the case of Sacy, Renan describes his commentary as follows:

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[48] Renan, "Les Séances de Ḥarīrī," 300.

[49] "Ich denke, er [Ḥarīrī] wird immer, wie jetzt, unübersetzbar bleiben, nicht wegen der Schwierigkeiten der Form, zu deren Überwindung eben hier ein Anfang gemacht ist, noch auch wegen mancher Einzelheit des Inhalts, die, vom jetzigen Bearbeiter unterdrückt oder verändert, gar wohl einmal einem zugewöhnteren Publikum ohne Anstoß würde geboten werden können, sondern weil der Kern selbst, der Mittelpunkt vieler seiner Makamen etwas ist, das an der Originalsprache haftet und mit dieser wegfällt." Friedrich Rückert, "An die Leser," *Die Makamen des Hariri: Die Verwandlungen des Abū Seid von Serug*, (Verlag von Otto Hendel, 1826; Projekt Gutenberg, 2003), https://www.projekt-gutenberg.org/rueckert/makamen/maka001.html, n.p.

[50] Ibid.

[51] al-Ṣafadī, *Nuṣrat,* 59-61.

[52] I mean chameleonism, wordplay, and funny stories. See Chapter 1, II: "The *Ḥarīriyya*'s Acclaimed Features."

> One of the principal services which M. De Sacy rendered to Arabic studies is, by the admission of all Orientalists, the edition which he gave in 1822, with a commentary, of the famous work known under the name of *Maqāmāt* or Sessions of al-Ḥarīrī. Many objections, both before and after the publication, were raised against the *appropriateness* of this great task. The main reason, was undoubtedly the *little interest* that a book whose substance is apparently *insignificant* seems to offer, and whose form, although appreciated according to our European ideas, exceeds all that it is allowed to imagine in fact of *bad taste*.[53] [emphasis added]

As mentioned before, Sacy was not an admirer of al-Ḥarīrī's *Maqāmāt*. As he himself explains, he only composed his commentary as a way to further the utility of the work as a source for learning Arabic, which demonstrates his command of the language. His opinion was clear: the *Ḥarīriyya* has little substance; it displays a foolish style and is nothing but a laborious assignment. Sacy did not try to reproduce the *Maqāmāt* in the European context and only put together a commentary of select portions. Still, he was criticized for engaging with a work that represents the highest degrees of "bad taste." Comparativism is once again put to use. Renan communicates the position of the "our" to which European ideas belong, ideas that appreciate various literary forms yet refuse bad taste. Renan also speaks on behalf of Orientalists who appreciate each other's work yet demand utility and seriousness. These objections to Sacy's work clearly revolve around limits. They draw a limit between "us" and "them," and between "appreciating" the Orient and actively engaging with it. Renan does express some reservations of his own, exemplified in the characterization of the *Maqāmāt* as "insignificant" and an epitome of "bad taste." Nevertheless, finds utility in Sacy's "great task" and justifies the usefulness inherent in studying the *Ḥarīriyya*. He says:

> Mr. de Sacy's spirit, so upright and so firm, saw beyond these narrow judgments, the true value of al-Ḥarīrī's work. In his eyes, moreover, one consideration dominated all the others: *it is the immense role that this book has played and still plays in the East*. One can say indeed that it is hardly possible to *penetrate* well in the subtleties of the Arabic language without the thorough study of these *bizarre compositions*.[54] [emphasis added]

Renan, therefore, defends the choice of Sacy and reveals the real aim behind Sacy's work: al-Ḥarīrī's work is a tool to "penetrate" the Arabic language and understand the Arab readers who

[53] Renan, "Les Séances de Ḥarīrī," 287-8.
[54] Ibid, 288.

appreciated it for a long time. In this sense, the *Ḥarīriyya* is no longer a literary work but a useful tool to access the language and the mindset of those who appreciate al-Ḥarīrī's "bizarre" composition. By writing his commentary, Sacy is explaining and clarifying a language that is otherwise "impenetrable."

In addition to acknowledging the usefulness of Sacy's commentary, deeming it useful, Renan notes the merits of the translation in verse by Rückert, whom contemporary scholarship regards as a "great translator" and "the first after al-Ḥarīzī to venture beyond plodding literalism."[55] Renan regarded him in the same light, but he did not deem his translation to be imitable in kind in the French language. To Renan, an endeavor similar to his would only inspire a smile. He says:

> To add to al-Ḥarīrī's honor, his Sessions, translated rhyme for rhyme, and pun for pun, by one of the most celebrated poets of Germany, Mr. Friedrich Rückert, are read with interest and eagerness beyond the Rhine. Our [French] language is too serious for such an attempt to be received here other than with a smile.[56]

We have thus far seen that the technique of comparativism was employed to emphasize the contrast between the Orient and Europe. In the passage above, "our language" refers to the "serious" French language, as opposed to the German tongue that reproduced and read the *Ḥarīriyya*, which indicates that Renan understood the limits of scholarly engagement with the *Ḥarīriyya*: anyone who supports the less serious aspect of scholarly engagement, even if they were European, would be dismissed with a smile. Renan's comments about Sacy and Rückert shed light on the controversy surrounding al-Ḥarīrī's *Maqāmāt* in modern Europe and demonstrate that the translators of this work did not exaggerate when they framed their translations in apologies. In this context, the *Ḥarīriyya* lost its "original charms" and the *iʿjāz* it had enjoyed in the pre-modern context. Addressing a different audience, the *Ḥarīriyya* had to satisfy their utilitarian demands, which included learning Arabic, penetrating bizarre compositions, examining the mentality of the original audience, and ultimately, understanding the Orient. Translations were admissible so long as they kept these aims and limits in mind. Once translators ventured into emulating the linguistic games of the *maqāmāt* or argued for the admissibility of the humor, they had to justify their choices, bear criticism, and apologize. These apologies were either directed at the readers of the translations or made on behalf of the decadent age that produced the *Ḥarīriyya*, as the following will show.

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[55] Cooperson, "A Note," xxxix.
[56] Renan, "Les Séances de Ḥarīrī," 300.

IV. Apologies on Behalf of the *Ḥarīriyya*

The mechanism of representation involves two steps: first, selecting fragmented pieces to represent a land, a culture, or a people; second, speaking on behalf of the people, after claiming that they are incapable of doing so themselves. The second step explains why modern Europeans tried to justify al-Ḥarīrī's "bad taste," "lack of imagination," and the East's appreciation of his work. Tentatively, Orientalists pointed to the influence of Islam, that of the *Qurʾān* in particular, on creativity and literary composition, and to the lack of creative aptitude of Arab culture before Islam.

In his introduction to one of al-Ḥarīrī's episodes, L. Langlès portrays the *Maqāmāt* as a work that was criticized and condemned by readers during the premodern period of Islam, he says:

> This work exposed him [al-Ḥarīrī] to other inconveniences; devoted Muslims saw in it the unholy purpose of proving that it was possible to write with an elegance equal to that which distinguishes the *Qurʾān*, and there is every appearance that they were, as devotees of all times and all countries, dangerous enemies.[57]

Langlès describes al-Ḥarīrī's immediate readers as "devoted Muslims" who did not accept a work that sought to match the eloquence of the holy book. The previous chapter includes several counterexamples which attest to the weakness of this generalization. Pertinent examples include the theologian al-Zamakhsharī, who wrote exclusively pious and serious *maqāmāt*, yet had no problem describing al-Ḥarīrī's *Maqāmāt* as a *muʿjiza*, and al-Ḥanafī, who refuses to give the trickster the final say, so he changed the order of humor and seriousness in his *maqāmāt*, instead of omitting trickery altogether. These two premodern readers had a "training in ambiguity" that allowed them to go beyond the "unholy" aspect of the *Ḥarīriyya*, to the point of describing al-Ḥarīrī's work with *iʿjāz,* a term that was originally coined to emphasize the uniqueness of the *Qurʾān* and its superiority over all human writings. Langlès' opinion, however, does make sense in the Orientalist context within which he was speaking, a context that studies the Orient to argue for its backwardness and need for liberation, a context, furthermore, in which Islam, as Suzanne L. Marchand notes, inspires little attention or respect:

> Being a late-arriving religion, with respect to Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, and Christianity, Islam never really attracted the same sort of respect- and in fact the accusation that it was merely derivative robbed it of some of the appeal it might otherwise

[57] Langlès, "Notices," 278.

> have had … Islam was not old enough to have contributed to Christianity, and Arab cultures and languages were not linked to European ones by way of William Jone's linguistic tree.[58]

Some early Orientalists were simply uninterested in Islam, while others took a more critical and opposing stand against it. For instance, in his public lecture in 1883, Renan argues that Muslims are incapable of critical thinking or producing science. He says:

> This science is not Arab. Is it at least Muslim? Has Islam offered these rational discourses some protected assistance? In no way whatsoever! This beautiful movement of study is entirely the work of Persians, Christians, Jews, Ḥarrānians, Ismāʿīlīs, and Muslims internally rebelling against their own religion. From orthodox Muslims it received nothing but curses.[59]

The "devoted" and the "orthodox" Muslims were inferior to the other groups, whom they occupied, influenced, controlled, and from whose dominance these groups rebel. From a transtemporal consideration, moreover, Renan's argument implies that European scientific advancements owed nothing to Islam or the Arabs.

Salmon Munk expresses the same attitude almost fifty years earlier in his introduction to one of al-Ḥarīrī's episodes, in which he argues that Arabs, even before the impact of Islam which ''kills genius,''[60] did not have a tradition of heroes, love, mythology, or aesthetic sensitivity. He says:

> The religion of the ancient Arabs, Sabeism, was too little polytheistic to provide a rich mythology; it was too pagan to inspire the lofty sentiments we admire so much in the psalms. The Arabs, before Mohammed, never played a great part in history; no tradition of a hero, or of any memorable event of antiquity has been preserved … How would one create poetry without religion, without love, without mythology, without history?[61]

Arabs, who became too "orthodox" after Islam, had been "too pagan" before it. The acquired orthodoxy prevents them from producing "rational science" and from developing a "rich imagination," and their history in paganism denies them sentiments and mythology, important elements for the development of a literary tradition, according to the above. Furthermore, Arabs

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[58] Suzanne L. Marchand, *German Orientalism*, 118.
[59] Ernest Renan, "Islam and Science," Lecture presented in La Sorbonne, 29 March 1883, 2nd ed., trans. Sally P. Ragep with Faith Wallis, 2011, accessed June 05, 2023, 15.
[60] Munk, "Essai," 546.
[61] Ibid, 542.

played no significant role in history. According to Munk, even when Muslim scholars did contribute to history, by translating Greek works, for instance, they did so for "material need, and not taste."[62] The overall portrait Munk draws oscillates, therefore, between portraying Arabs as ignorant and lacking in culture before Islam, and as restricted and materialists after it.

Nevertheless, Munk translates one of al-Ḥarīrī's *maqāmāt* for the simple reason that al-Ḥarīrī is "the man who was the greatest in the only kind of poetry in which Arabs have excelled,"[63] meaning rhymed prose. Incapable of composing love poetry and mythology, Arabs elaborated language, grammar, and "tasteless comments."[64] Within this framework, al-Ḥarīrī excelled and made *maqāmāt* that "have merit only in form."[65] In other words, al-Ḥarīrī is praiseworthy for going against the grain, in a context that produced mediocrity.

While Munk criticizes the influence of Islam on the *Ḥarīrīyya*'s form, A. Cherbonneau addresses the specific influence of the *Qurʾān*'s "random" order on the internal order of the *Maqāmāt*. He says:

> As a literary composition, al-Ḥarīrī's work lacks unity. One does not find in it that connection, that sequence, that visible totality, which even the most capricious books of our West cannot do without. On the contrary, it is a variety without limits, with all the freedom, or, if one wishes, all the *oriental license*. It is a long series of scenes without resemblance, without necessary link and only juxtaposed. One should not look for a dramatic fabric, a plot, a denouement ... Whatever order one wants to assign to these pictures, it is almost as *arbitrary* as that which Othman imposed on the *suras* of the *Qurʾān* by organizing them according to their length.[66] [emphasis added]

Interesting in Cherbonneau's engagement with the *maqāmāt*'s form is the characterization of the liberties they exhibit as "*oriental license*," which explains to him the arbitrariness, lack of unity, and absence of logic in which the Orient self-indulges, epitomized here by al-Ḥarīrī. According to Cherbenneau's argument, moreover, the arbitrariness inherent in this so-called "license" is akin to the arbitrary organization assigned to the chapters of *Qurʾān*. However, was the arrangement of the *maqāmāt* indeed arbitrary, lacking in unity, and monotonous? An attentive reading of the *Ḥarīriyya* reveals that it is based on "a discernible thematic and rhetorical structure, consisting of five series of ten *maqāmāt* each, that the first episode in each cycle

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[62] Ibid, 547.
[63] Ibid, 554.
[64] Ibid.
[65] Ibid, 450.
[66] Cherbonneau, "XXXe Séance," 238-239.

is exhortatory (*Waʿẓiyya*), the sixth literary (*adabiyyah*), the fifth and tenth whimsical (*hazliyyah*)."[67] Moreover, the first episode of the book marks a clear beginning, in which the two protagonists meet for the first time, while the last *maqāma* demonstrates their final and last separation. The order of these two episodes is reflected in almost all the other episodes which open with an encounter and conclude with departure. Therefore, the work's order as a whole and that of the episodes as separate units share the same cyclic nature, moving from meeting to farewell, ignorance to recognition, and pretense to truth.[68] Both orders demonstrate that al-Ḥarīrī conceived of a coherent system of organization that speaks to the unity of the work.

Besides blaming Islam and the *Qurʾān* for the *Ḥarīriyya*'s style and "lack of totality," the taste of al-Ḥarīrī's first audience was criticized, too. Preston, for instance, justifies al-Ḥarīrī's writing style as follows:

> They [Orientals] regard it as the highest proof of genius in an author, that he should be able to unite so difficult a performance with refinement of expression and elegance and appositeness of meaning and seem to imagine that the merit of a composition increases in proportion to the manifest indications of labour bestowed upon it. An Eastern poet who should neglect to assume the elaborate ornaments of style prescribed by established custom, would at once *be condemned unheard*, on the score of indolence or incapacity. For such negligence no excellence of ideas could atone in the eyes of his countrymen.[69] [emphasis added]

Here, Preston implies that al-Ḥarīrī had no choice but to accept and cooperate with the spirit of his audience, the Orientals. If he would have opted for ideas instead of refinement, and for straightforwardness instead of laborious ornamentation, the result would have been condemnation and a charge of incapacity. In this sense, Preston approaches the cultural and literary context of al-Ḥarīrī's time anachronistically, judging it by the conventions of modernity, condemning that entire context as an instigator for al-Ḥarīrī's choices. But even if al-Ḥarīrī sought to appease the general taste of his time by writing in a refined and difficult style, why did he work to "excel" in this kind of writing instead of just following its conventions? Preston does not seem bothered by this question, perhaps because solving it would have changed the conversation from a critique of the Orient's tastes to a critique of al-Ḥarīrī's formal choices, who, in Preston's argument, functions as a mere "representation" of a general trend.

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[67] Kīlīṭū, "Forward: In Praise of Pretense,'' in *Impostures*, xiv.
[68] I examine the first and last meeting of the two protagonists separately in a forthcoming contribution. Essakouti, *''*(Un)veiling Language or Frames in Ḥarīrī's *Maqāmāt.*"
[69] Preston, *Makamat*, 3-4.

In short, the above statements about the role of the *Qurʾān*, Islam, the Arabs, and al-Ḥarīrī's audience in shaping the *Ḥarīriyya* demonstrate that the context within which the work was studied in Europe during the early modern period, was unsympathetic and condemnatory. According to this, *Maqāmāt al-Ḥarīrī* was a convenient example that "represented" everything that was supposedly wrong about the Orient, ethically, culturally, socially, and in literary terms. In this context, al-Ḥarīrī is rarely criticized but rather excused. This is for two reasons: first, for making the most of an already "bad" system, and second for providing illustrative material that legitimized the Orientalist's already formed opinion about the East. That the *Ḥarīriyya* is a fictitious work was not a consideration in the conversation. Instead, it was studied as a document demonstrating the impact of Islam on imagination and the decadence of society's taste.

Conclusion

In the modern European context, the *Ḥarīriyya* lost both its aesthetic superiority and literariness. It became a document that represented "fatalism," "immorality," "lack of unity," "absence of imagination," "stupid labor," and "bad taste." It became, moreover, an example of that which Orientalists perceived to be wrong about the "Orient" and of the unbridgeable gap between "us" and "them." Compared to premodern readers, al-Ḥarīrī's European audience pays little attention to the *Ḥarīriyya*'s humor and plot, emphasizing instead its disapproval of the work's mannerisms and immorality. In most of the texts considered above, these readers exhibit a perplexed attitude about the *Ḥarīriyya*'s language, ethos, "laborious" humor, and most importantly, the general taste that produced, reproduced, and praised it. Nevertheless, they hesitantly admire al-Ḥarīrī, who opposes their modern conventions, yet affirms their presumptions about the Orient. And though modern European readers of the *Ḥarīriyya* did not share the same attitude, as some were more open to its humor, wordplay, and ambiguity, they all agreed, however, that the *Maqāmāt* illustrates a different taste that is incompatible with modernity's philosophy. To use Preston's words:

> In matters of taste, the opinions of the East and the West can never coincide, because they are respectively swayed, if not dictated, by two opposite principles, the love of artificial beauty, and the love of utility; nor can the quaint imagery and wild extravagance of Oriental style be justly tried before the limitary tribunal of rigorous Occidental criticism.[70]

[70] Theodore Preston, "Preface," in *Makamat*, xv.

In their quest for modernity, the *Nahḍawīs*, the third group of the *Ḥarīriyya* readers took the differing "tastes" between the West and the East as a challenge. The perceived inferiority of the latter was completed to seek to be among the ranks of the former. Joining modernity, therefore, became conditioned upon giving up the old "extravagance" and adopting a new straightforward and serious style. One of the immediate results of this turn was the condemnation *Maqāmāt al-Ḥarīrī* suffered at the hands of *Nahḍa* scholars, who deemed it a relic of a decadent age.

Chapter 3

The *Ḥarīriyya* as a Condemned Work by *Nahḍa* Readers

In the first chapter, I described the positive reception the *Ḥarīriyya* enjoyed during the pre-modern period of Islam. It was considered a miracle that everyone aspired to read, copy, emulate, and learn by heart. In the second chapter, I showed how Orientalists received the *Ḥarīriyya* differently in the modern European context. The *Maqāmāt* was not recognized as having any aesthetic distinction, becoming instead a perplexing work that "represented" the Orient's mannerisms, immorality, and bad taste. In this chapter, I argue that the status of al-Ḥarīrī's *Maqāmāt* in the Arab world during the *Nahḍa* period, that is between the second half of the 19th century and the first half of the 20th century, was a continuation of the Orientalist reading. The *Nahḍawīs,* excepting a few, reproduced the Orientalist "fall and rise" narrative and reiterated the claim that race determined nations' mindsets and influenced their literary productions. Reading the *Ḥarīriyya*, *Nahḍa* scholars reproduced the objections of modern Europeans, criticizing the work's refined style, mannerisms, lack of unity, and structure.

While early Orientalists found few justifications to accept the *Ḥarīriyya* and justify al-Ḥarīrī's merit, as the previous chapter has shown, most of the *Nahḍawīs* did not have a reason to tolerate a work that clearly opposed their novel aspirations for change and desire to reproduce European models. To them, al-Ḥarīrī and those who followed his example were a source of shame, one they had to forget and erase. This attitude did not dominate immediately in the 19th century, as there was still some room to engage with the *Ḥarīriyya* in a positive light. Nāṣīf al-Yāzijī (d. 1871), for instance, followed the steps of al-Ḥarīrī. He composed "chronogrammatic poems where each letter of the alphabet has a numerical value and, if counted together, refer to the date of a particular occasion."[1] He also wrote sixty *maqāmāt* which he collected in a book entitled *Majmaʿ al-baḥrayn* (*The Confluence of the Two Seas*) in 1856. Several episodes in this work are titled after al-Ḥarīrī's *maqāmāt,*[2] and almost all of them demonstrate a similar desire for displaying strange and rare vocabulary.[3]

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[1] Christian Junge, "Nāṣīf al-Yāzijī (1871-1800)," *Encyclopaedia of Modernism* (Taylor and Francis, 2016), accessed April 11, 2023, https://www.rem.routledge.com/articles/al-yaziji-nasif-1800-1871.

[2] It suffices to read the titles of al-Yāzijī's episodes, such as *al-Sarūjiyya, al-furātiyya, al-Baṣriyya, al-Ramliyya*, to infer that he had al-Ḥarīrī's work in mind while composing his own *maqāmāt*.

[3] Nāṣīf al-Yāzijī, *Majmaʿ al-baḥrayn,* Fourth edition (Beirut: al-Maṭbaʿa al-Adabiyya, 1885), 2.

In the beginning of the 20th century, however, the *maqāmāt,* especially those of al-Ḥarīrī, were examined in harsher terms. In the wake of the European criticims,[4] *Nahḍa* scholars exhibited agendas and sensibilities that were different from those of their pre-modern counterparts. According to these, Arab scholars of the period condemned the *Ḥarīriyya* for being episodic, simple, overly playful, and incapable of portraying emotions. Nevertheless, these negative sentiments did not put an end to the genre, as various authors continued to compose *maqāmāt*. Some of these authors, such as Aḥmed Fāris al-Shidyāq and Bayram al-Tūnsī, employed the genre as a tool to question the status quo and address the concerns of modern times (see section II and III below).

This chapter consists of three sections. The first discusses the age of decadence (*ʿaṣr al-inḥiṭāṭ*) narrative *Nahḍa* scholarship adopted and to which the *Ḥarīriyya* supposedly belonged and demonstrates how the creation of this period was vital to the *Nahḍawīs*. The second examines two opposing examples of approaching the *maqāma* genre during the 19th century: Aḥmad Fāris al-Shidyāq whose language is as playful and strange as al-Ḥarīrī's, and Buṭrus al-Bustānī, the serious lexicographer who discredited premodern Arabic literature for lacking structure and purpose. The third section discusses further examples of engaging with the *Ḥarīriyya* during the 20s and the 30s of the last century, including that of the romantic poet al-Shābbī, the literary historian Zakī Mubārak, the social critic Salāma Mūsā, and the folk writer Bayram al-Tūnsī. The purpose behind including these authors is to emphasize the seriousness that prevailed during the *Nahḍa* period. With a few exceptions of frivolous literati who wrote *maqāmāt* themselves (al-Shidyāq and al-Tūnsī), most of the *Nahḍawīs* regarded the genre and al-Ḥarīrī as an unwelcome token from the age of decadence. Consequently, al-Ḥarīrī's name gradually faded from the literary scene and was replaced by that of the father of the *maqāma* genre, al-Hamadhānī, who was rediscovered in the Arab world after the Orientalists portrayed him as "less shocking to modern taste'' than al-Ḥarīrī (see Sacy's description of al-Hamadhānī in the previous chapter).

I. *Nahḍa* and Age of Decadence

The term *Nahḍa*, which translates to awakening, revival, or renaissance, implies a preceding period of inactivity and lifelessness in which *Nahḍa* scholars believed, according to Bauer, that "scholarship degenerated into a mindless repetition of old texts, the sciences were forbidden and died away, literature deteriorated into senseless wordplay, and emperors were cruel tyrants

[4] Hamarneh, "fiction, modern," 230-233.

who brutally and sadistically tortured and exploited a submissive crowd of subjects."[5] After a millennium of so-called *inḥiṭāṭ* or decadence, *Nahḍa* scholars joined the intellectual project of reviving,[6] energizing, and creating a better literary model to break once for all from that of the inferior past. The narrative of death and "decadence," as Schulz argues, was vital for the *Nahḍawīs*, because it legitimized their cultural productions and portrayed them as saviors and liberators who could bring enlightenment and modernity to the Arabic intellectual and political scenes.[7]

The moment of awakening supposedly began with the alleged, to use Samah Selim's words, "dramatic encounter with Europe."[8] This encounter resulted in three movements: one camp sought to break off from the past and follow the Western model; a second camp went back to the golden age of Islam to learn from *al-salaf al-ṣāliḥ* (the pious predecessors); a third camp, saw utility in combining traditional conventions of the golden age with Europe's modernity.[9] Despite the differences, these three movements shared a Eurocenteric narrative: all three camps reproduced the Orientalist "rise and fall" historical thesis,[10] and identified[11] with Western periodization, in the sense that the *Nahḍa* is a necessary successor period to *ʿaṣr al-inḥiṭāṭ*, just as the Enlightenment replaced the medieval Dark Ages.

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[5] Bauer, *Culture of Ambiguity*, 203.

[6] One of the clearest illustrations of this narrative is al-Mūwayliḥī's (d. 1930) serialized narrative (between 1898 and 1902), *Ḥadīth ʿĪsā ibn Hishām*, which opens with a dead pasha coming back to life and witnessing a modern Cairo that it is different from the Cairo he lived in. See Cooperson's reading of this work in light of the theme of time travel: Michael Cooperson, "*Safar* The Early History of Time Travel Literature: al-Mūwayliḥī's *Ḥadīth ʿĪsā B. Hishām* and its Antecedents," *Classical Arabic Humanities in Their Own Terms*, ed. Beatrice Gruendler and Michael Cooperson (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2008), 419-446.

[7] Schulze, "Mass Culture," 191.

[8] Samah Selim, *Popular Fiction, Translation and the Nahda in Egypt* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University, 2019), 2.

[9] Scholarship on the different movements during the *Nahḍa* include, for instance, Mārūn ʿAbbūd, *Ruwwād al-nahḍa al-ḥadītha* (Beirut: Dār al-ʿilm li-l-malāyīn, 1952); Ghālī Shukrī, *al-Nahḍa wa-l-suqūṭ fī al-fikr al-maṣrī al-ḥadīth*, Second Edition (Beirut: Dār al-Ṭalīʿa, 1982); Hannah Scott Deuchar, "'Nahḍa': Mapping a Keyword in Cultural Discourse." *Alif: Journal of Comparative Poetics*, No. 37 (2017), 50-84.

[10] Deuchar, "'Nahḍa': Mapping a Keyword," 56.

[11] In psychological terms, identification is a process through which the individual assimilates an aspect, property, or attribute of the other and is transformed, wholly or partially, by that which he assimilates from the other.

Nahḍa scholars criticized decadence in different domains, including economy, politics,[12] literature, and language use. In the context of literature, decadence was synonymous with mannerism, opaqueness, refined language, and the absence of utility. In other words, these objections echoed those of Orientalist scholarship cited in their reception of the *Ḥarīriyya*, as the previous chapter has shown. To break from the age of decadence, the *Nahḍawīs* decided to disregard this era's literary productions, which were marked, according to them, by rhetorical excess, playful language, and ambiguity.[13] In a 1926 article, Salāma Mūsā (d. 1958), a journalist and political theorist, calls for the mandatory disassociation from the heritage of al-Ḥarīrī and the "class of comedians (*ṭabaqa min-al-muharrijīn*) who use language as swindlers and clowns would, to amuse their audience and make them laugh."[14] As a substitute, he advocates for the European model, in which intellectuals have

> the qualities of princes: they do not crawl on their hands and feet, nor shame themselves to entertain. Instead, they teach their readers valuable lessons about the world. Their words may hurt, yet their audience can always find pleasure in the pain, because it opens their perception and expands the universe before their eyes.[15]

This call again reproduces the Orientalist mechanism of comparativism. This time, however, the "we" is far inferior to the "they." The first entertains and produces senseless frivolities, while the second educates and teaches "valuable lessons." The harsher the writings, the more serious, noble, and purposeful they are. Though at the time when Mūsā published this article Egypt was under British occupation, it did not hinder him from advocating for Europe's stylistic and literary model, deciding to overlook the imperialist and exploitative aspects of the Europe he sought to emulate. Mūsā willingly disregards this aspect for the sake of joining the West's progress and "enlightenment." In this sense, Mūsā views everything as permissible, so long as the endeavor to break away from the past and its ways is guaranteed success (see section III below).

Overall, the *Nahḍa* period was mostly dominated by serious scholars who had high political, social, and intellectual aspirations. They sought to move fast, reach Europe's industrial revolution, break away from the dying Ottoman Empire, reform their educational system, and legitimize their own role (See Schulz above). Understandably, the *Ḥarīriyya*'s frivolity and

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[12] For instance, ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Kawākibī (d. 1902), *Ṭabāʾiʿ al-istibdād wa-maṣāriʿ al-istiʿbād* (Cairo: Maṭbaʿat al-Maʿārif, N.d.).
[13] Bauer, *A Culture of Ambiguity*, 28.
[14] Salāma Mūsā, "*al-Adīb: amīr am ʿabd*?" *al-Hilāl* (Cairo: November 1926), 46.
[15] Ibid.

wordplays did not inspire much respect or interest in this context, except, perhaps, the few *Nahḍawīs*, who approached the genre from a nuanced perspective, such as Aḥmad Fāris al-Shidyāq.

II. The *Ḥarīriyya* during the 19th century

Aḥmad Fāris Al-Shidyāq was a scholar, writer, traveler, and journalist who grew up in present-day Lebanon. He was the first person to use the word *Nahḍa* to designate the intellectual movement that was active during this period.[16] He traveled between several Arab and European countries, had numerous patrons, and changed his religious affiliations several times.[17] His complex and multifaceted personality, which shows in the humor and unusual vocabulary he employed in *Al-Sāq ʿalā al-sāq fī mā huwa al-Fāriyāq* (*Leg over Leg, Concerning the Nature of the Fariyaq*), is reminiscent of the personality of the trickster in the *Ḥarīriyya*.

The opening of *Leg over Leg* reveals a peculiar and ambiguous combination of both traditional and modern conventions. Starting with a dedication that follows "the costume of Frankish authors,"[18] Al-Shidyāq follows it with an "Author's Notice" in which he states his two-fold aim: to "give prominence to the oddities of the language, including its rare words,"[19] and to address "the blameworthy and praiseworthy qualities of women." While the first is a premodern preoccupation that is condemned in the age of *Nahḍa*, the second is a modern concern that would later guarantee him the title of "*naṣīr al-marʾa*"[20] (women's advocate). Interesting here is al-Shidyāq's interest in premodern conventions, which his linguistic abundance illustrates throughout *Leg over Leg*, but becomes more evident in his four *maqāmāt*. Al-Shidyāq attributes the four episodes to a fictional narrator named al-Hāris ibn Hithām. The first part of the name, al-Hāris, is a parody of al-Ḥarīrī's narrator's name, al-Ḥārith, whereas the second part, ibn Hithām, parodies the second part of the name of al-Hamadhānī's narrator, ibn Hishām. Al-Shidyāq gives his narrator a name that makes no sense without its original references, to indicate that his *maqāmāt* cannot be understood outside the tradition to which they belong. Al-

[16] Deuchar, "'Nahḍa': Mapping a Keyword," 61.
[17] Al-Shidyāq was first a Maronite before converting to Protestantism, and then later to Islam. According to Cheikho he converted back to Christianity before his death, but there is little evidence to support this claim. See A. G. Karam, "Fāris al-Shidyāḳ," in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed., ed. P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, W.P. Heinrichs, accessed April 12, 2023, http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_SIM_2289.
[18] al-Shidyāq Aḥmad Fāris, *Leg Over Leg*, vol. I, ed. and trans. by Humphrey Davies (New York and London: New York University Press, 2013), 6.
[19] Ibid, 7.
[20] Mārūn ʿAbbūd, *Ruwwād al-Nahḍa*, 157.

Shidyāq's interest in premodern conventions extends to his mounting a defense for them against those who refused them.

Following the first *maqāma*, which opens with a nostalgic and ironic note on the old style,[21] al-Shidyāq addresses his readers in Chapter 14, saying:

> Ahahahah! Ahahahah! Thank God! Thank God I'm done with the composition of that *maqāma*, and with its number too, for it was weighing on my mind. Now all that remains for me to do is to urge the reader to read it. Though more coarsely woven than the finely knit rhymed prose of al-Ḥarīrī and despite its prosodic irregularities, it may, for all that, be worn, and commended for its beneficial verities. I believe the second will be better than it was, the third better than the second, the fourth better than the third, and the fiftieth better than the forty-ninth. (Don't panic! Don't panic at these attempts to shock and scare! There are in fact, as promised, only four.) Now I have to squeeze my sconce to extract some more nice thoughts, figures, and choice words, at the same time avoiding chatter, a process that scholars refer to, I believe, as "voiding verbiage." But hang on a moment, and I'll ask them! what do you call words that are so bursting with meaning that they drench the reader, so that I can fetch them for you?[22]

The tone of this passage is ironic. Al-Shidyāq, seemingly concerned about composing a kind of prose that agrees with the scholars' condemnation of "void verbiage," is scornful toward these scholars, ironically proposing to enlist their help, to identify words that "drench the reader" with meaning. Pretending to agree with the taste and conventions of mainstream scholars, while ridiculing their words, is not new to the *maqāma*. Al-Ḥarīrī already does so in the 6th/12th century, by representing the interests of the educated class in his time through fictionalized characters whom the trickster deceives and abuses over and over (see Chapter 5). Al-Shidyāq's mockery notwithstanding, he only allows himself to compose four *maqāmāt*. He places them as the 13th chapter of each volume, to emphasize, one may argue, the misfortunate reception with which the *maqāma* genre was associated in his day, the kind of reception that compels him to urge the reader to read the *maqāma*. Al-Shidyāq is ambivalent, however, about the genre al-Ḥarīrī represented: for though he finds al-Ḥarīrī to have written "finely knit

[21] "A while has passed now since I tasked myself with writing in rhymed prose and patterned period, and I think I've forgotten how to do so." AL-Shidyāq, *Leg Over Leg*, vol. I, 191.
[22] Ibid, 203.

rhymed prose," which he seeks to imitate, al-Shidyāq, nevertheless, associates the task with a great amount of labor,[23] which made the *maqāma* weigh on his mind.

Al-Shidyāq's criticism of the literary taste of his age, directed at his contemporary audience and literary scholars, recalls on the surface the apologies Orientalist translators composed for the European reader, particularly al-Shidyāq's active decision to limit the number of the *maqāmāt* to four. His emphasis that he will not include more, recalls Auguste Cherbonneau's apology, who limits his translation of al-Ḥarīrī's work to twenty pages because anything more than that will only exhaust his readers (see Chapter 2). Al-Shidyāq's reorientation to brevity in this self-imposed limitation is also reminiscent of Sacy's favoring of the *Hamadhāniyya* because it is briefer and less ornate and scholastic than the *Ḥarīriyya*. In this sense, al-Shidyāq, recognizing a general unease during his time with al-Ḥarīrī's work and the genre he worked in, which were both deemed not to belong in the age of the *Nahḍa*, conforms with the demands of the general taste. Interestingly, al-Shidyāq employs that conformity as a pretext to criticize these demands that only accepted the *maqāma* genre in small doses. Though sharing al-Ḥarīrī's passion for rare words and humor, al-Shidyāq could not, in the context of the *Nahḍa*, justify a sizable presence of the genre al-Ḥarīrī excelled at, one that, for instance, would be comparable to the size of *Maqāmāt*. At the same time, al-Shidyāq did not stop short of expressing his disapproval at the status quo.

The lexicographer and translator Buṭrus al-Bustānī (d. 1883) illustrates the general unease toward al-Ḥarīrī's work during the *Nahḍa*. In 1859, he published "*Khuṭba fī ādāb al-ʿarab*" (An Oration on the Literature of the Arabs) in which he denounces the old stylistic conventions, abuse of refinement, and pointlessness and argues that language is merely "a medium and a gate to the sciences," that one should not "waste his entire life in front of the entrance, contemplating the gate's exterior engravings and ornaments."[24] Al-Bustānī was a great admirer of the Arabic language and dedicated most of his life to its vocabulary. Nevertheless, he was not keen on collecting rare expressions and examples of refined style. His main concern was to clarify the Arabic language and make it accessible. In the introduction to his dictionary

[23] Cf. the characterization, discussed in Chapter 2, of al-Ḥarīrī's prose as "laborious" by Orientalists.

[24] Buṭrus al-Bustānī, "*Khuṭba fī ādāb al-ʿarab*" (Beirut, 15 February 1859), reproduced in Mājid Fakhrī, *Al-Ḥarakāt al-fikriyya wa-ruwwāduha al-lubnāniyyūn fī ʿaṣr al-nahḍa 1800 – 1922* (Beirut: Dār al-Nahār, 1992), 167.

Muḥīṭ al-muḥīṭ, he emphasizes that his goal is "to see the children of his nation achieve progress in *adāb*, knowledge, and civilization, through their own honorable language."[25]

Al-Bustānī's intentions to make the language accessible and of immediate utility to his compatriots made him criticize his predecessors who used the Arabic language for less pragmatic ends. In this sense, he dedicates a section of his historical and literary overview of Abbasid scholars to examine "the status of al-Ḥarīrī" (*manzilat al- Ḥarīrī*). He says:

> His [al-Ḥarīrī's] composition is blatantly artificial and explicitly mannerist. He intentionally overuses *gharīb* (strange vocabulary) and supplies metaphors and ornamentation abundantly, [so much so] that his language turns stern and dry … Reading him one cannot avoid boredom and ennui … Al-Ḥarīrī's status does not rest on the appeal of the stories in his *maqāmāt*, nor on any artistry in [pursuing] their themes; rather, it rests on the pompous composition [of these *maqāmāt*] and their linguistic codes … Al-Ḥarīrī did not care for the art of storytelling … His stories are similar in content, limited in imagination, yet rich in all kinds of rhetorical and stylistic figures... Affected composition was the highest style in rank at the time. Thus, [al-Ḥarīrī] enchanted his contemporaries with his writing.[26]

Admitting that he was a respected belletrist for centuries, does not negate that he is simply uninteresting and tedious to the modern reader. Al-Bustānī projects the literary conventions of his time on al-Ḥarīrī's work, whose riddles, artificiality, and oddities al-Bustānī dismisses, following the modern measure that allots storytelling and originality of imagination more importance than linguistic artificiality. Consequently, al-Bustānī deems al-Ḥarīrī's style obsolete, because riddles and linguistic games are no longer a measure of excellence, but rather an aptitude for storytelling and an inventive imagination that is. Al-Bustānī's statement clearly echoes the Orientalist objections against the *Ḥarīriyya*, similarly highlighting its affected style, ambiguity, and taste for oddities. The Orientalists objected to riddles and the linguistically complicated nature of the *maqāmāt*, because they made them "untranslatable" and complicated the study of Arabic. al-Bustānī's contention, however, was not as particular as that of the Orientalist, since he was not expected to translate the *Ḥarīriyya*, nor worry about the "ennui" or "boredom" Arab readers experienced. As a matter of fact, al-Bustānī directed his criticism, not

[25] Buṭrus al-Bustānī, "Fātiḥat al-kitāb," in *Muḥīṭ al-muḥīṭ,* vol. I, (Beirut: Maktabat Lubnān, 1987), n.p.
[26] Buṭrus Bustānī, *Udabāʾ al-ʿarab fī al-aʿṣur al-ʿabbāsiyya* (Cairo: Hindawi, 2014), 338-41.

at al-Ḥarīrī's *maqāmāt* per se, but at the Arabic literary tradition, to which they belong. After examining different premodern narrative works, al-Bustānī concludes:

> Most of the stories the Arabs composed are short. Those that are long lack coherence in ideas and a unifying theme. For instance, ʿAntara's biography, which is the longest of Arabic stories, does not exhibit solid interconnections between its parts. One can drop many of its reports (*akhbār*) without causing it any fault. This is because its events are not well connected or linear and because its conclusions do not follow its premises, as is the case for Western sophisticated stories (*al-qiṣaṣ al-gharbiyya al-rāqiya*) … We do not suspect [the aptitude of] the Arab's imagination (*mukhayyilat al-ʿarabī*) because of this lack. For when one reads *ʿAntara* or *Alf layla wa-layla,* one encounters a strong flow of the imagination and remarkable imagery and variety. Nevertheless, their authors tread clumsily; they are easily bored, restless, confused, and impatient; they grow tired of plans as soon as they put them … For these reasons, we did not receive an artistically sophisticated story from the Arabs. Instead, we received *maqāmāt, nawādir,* and *aḥādith*.[27]

Once again, the mechanism of comparativism is applied. On the one hand, there are the "sophisticated," coherent, and developed Western stories. On the other, there are the short, digressive, and incomplete Arabic stories. Al-Bustānī's presentation reproduces the Orientalist position, specifically that of Cherbonneau who claims that al-Ḥarīrī's *Maqāmāt* "lacks unity," and "visible totality"[28] (see Chapter 2). In either case, the Arabic literary tradition is not judged according to its own terms, but in its capacity as being *different* from modern, European models.

Notably, al-Bustānī mixes criticism with appreciation: indeed, old works lack unity and artistic merit, but their claim to imagery persists. Al-Bustānī raises a problem, therefore, with the formal aspect of these work; namely, with the absence of a structure and a coherent logic, one that generates long, discursive stories. Al-Bustānī approaches the works of premodern Arabic literature he cites in the same manner, as if the argument could be applied to them interchangeably. Moreover, he does not reflect on the oral context in which the tales of *ʿAntara* and *Alf layla wa-layla* circulated, which, in addition to the anonymous status of their authors, underwent numerous changes that contributed to their "fragmented" structure, if any. Furthermore, al-Bustānī equates them to the *maqāmāt,* whose form has been a standard one since al-

[27] Ibid, 315.
[28] Cherbonneau, "XXXe Séance," 238.

Ḥarīrī's, and the identities of whose authors has been known since al-Hamadhānī's time. For him, all these works of literature are one and the same, because they reproduce a general trend that falls short of meeting the standard the modern Western tradition of storytelling requires. In this sense, the fundamental differences between the genres (i.e., known vs. anonymous authors; oral vs. written transmission; elite vs. popular audience) are secondary to the one issue that really matters to al-Bustānī, which is the lack of structural unity and the artistic sophistication the Western model exemplifies and for which the *maqāma* genre, among others, represents the antithesis.

Al-Shidyāq and al-Bustānī adopt opposing approaches toward the *Ḥarīriyya*. While the former emulates its playfulness and quest for rare words and trickery, the latter examines on a more serious note its utility, clarity, and resemblance to European models of literary production. Their conclusions, however, were similar: al-Ḥarīrī was indeed respectful and admired in the past, but to the modern reader he was useless, exhausting, and a cause of panic. Al-Shidyāq, it will be remembered, though recognizing this, expressed disapproval of this kind of reception in an ironical tone unique to him. The main trend of this reception carried over to the 20th century. Despite their different agendas, which varied between neo-classism, romanticism, and social criticism, the *Nahḍawīs* of the 20th century reiterate the same arguments, epitomized in the above by al-Bustānī, and impose obsolescence on the *Ḥarīriyya*.

III. The *Ḥarīriyya* during the 20th Century: Various Voices

In the beginning of the 20th century, *nahḍawī* voices become more diverse and numerous, representing different facets of knowledge work. These voices reproduced two Orientalist narratives. The first was the "rise and fall" narrative which implies concepts such as golden age and decadence (see above). The second is the narrative associated with racial determinism which argues that race defines human behavior and intellect.[29] As a result, scholars tried to understand which attributes of the "Arab mind" functioned as conditioners for its backwardness and blocked it, in the context of literature, from composing long and artistically sophisticated narratives.

[29] For an illustration of such racial study of the Arab and Mulsim mind, see Renan, Ernest. "Islam and Science." For a historical overview of how racial approach developed in academia, see Nicholas Hudson, "'Nation' to 'Race': The Origin of Racial Classification in Eighteenth-Century Thought," in *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, Spring, 1996, Vol. 29, No. 3 (Spring, 1996), pp. 247-264.

To this end, the Tunisian poet Abū al-Qāsim al-Shābbī (1909-1934) called, in *al-Khayāl al-shiʿrī ʿinda al-ʿarab* (The Poetic Imagination of the Arabs), for a new kind of literature that breaks with the limited nature of the literary past. To this end, he asks:

> Was Arabic storytelling of the kind that criticizes, examines, broaches, and investigates? The answer is that Arabic storytelling was not of this kind, but rather one of three kinds: storytelling that has the intention of giving pleasure and entertainment, such as the poetry of Ibn Abī Rabīʿa and his likes that contained those flirtatious love accounts; storytelling that is used to convey wisdom and offer instruction through parables and, which *Kalīla wa-Dimna* represents …; or storytelling that produces literary jokes and linguistic rarities, which is the genre of the *maqāmāt*.[30]

Al-Shābbī depicts two different models: the first can reflect on the human condition, in addition to other aspects of life, and investigate various intricacies of living, a model that is evidently European and modern; the second seeks to produce entertainment using romantic stories and frivolous humor, a model that is inferior to the first and whose practitioners were the Arabs from the premodern period. Though al-Shābbī grants the presence of a branch of the second model that focuses on cultivating good conduct in its readers/listeners, he is unmoved, since he nevertheless aspires to the first, because it promises the attainment of truth and the development of critical faculties. Al-Shābbī, furthermore, strives to put an end to the second model, because it is superficial and a sign of decadence. The categories of *adab* al-Shābbī cites imply different literary and aesthetic concerns. For him, however, they are identical, because they all use storytelling as a pretext to display linguistic ornamentation and didactic discourse, which stands in contrasts to the Western way that uses storytelling to penetrate the inner self and reveal its concerns.

Al-Shābbī adds that true storytelling, which the Arabic context his time desperately needs, is one that completely breaks with the ways of al-Ḥarīrī's *maqāmāt*, which are "assorted words he boasts of organizing and introducing variety to them as children do with shiny pebbles."[31] Al-Ḥarīrī's name is now associated with childish games and is depicted as the epitome of decadence. Al-Shābbī, however, does not mention al-Ḥarīrī's immediate audience or the taste of his age. In this sense, breaking with the traditional model does not necessitate any accommodations for justifications or excuses. To al-Shābbī, al-Ḥarīrī and his *maqāmāt* are not the product of proper "poetic imagination," but rather of fancy. He says:

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[30] Abū al-Qāsim al-Shābbī, *al-Khayāl al-shiʿrī ʿinda al-ʿarab* (Doha: Hindawi, 2013), 65-6.
[31] Ibid, 65.

> Had Arabic storytelling a share of the poetic imagination we are investigating? I would say no; because poetic imagination is only [deemed] necessary by those who dare to risk venturing into the dark recesses of life and its tunnels and by those who aspire to discover the images and qualities that reside deeply within the soul. For poetic imagination is life's magic lamp (*al-fānūs al-siḥrī*), without which life's paths cannot be taken. Arabic storytelling did not make itself suffer by taking this obscure, meandering path; but rather took the smooth, clear road that neither leads to confusion nor to the abyss but leads to a flattened desert that which the eye exhausts in one look—that open, naked road that the myths of the Arab their literature followed.[32]

The Arabic imagination is thus limited, superficial, and inherently incapable of diving into the dark and meandering paths of the inner self. Instead, it favors literary products that are "flat" and linear, such as the *maqāmāt*. Al-Shābbī, of course, was not the first to raise this point, as seventy years earlier, the Orientalist Salmon Munk had argued the same. In his "*Essai*," Munk argues that "Arabic poetry is often of a monotonous simplicity like the sands of the desert" and that "one almost never encounters in it those elevated ideas which exalt the soul."[33] The simile and the conclusion that follows it are identical to al-Shābbī's argument. There remains, however, a difference between Munk and al-Shābbī, in that, in employing this argument, they served different ends: the former weaves this narrative to justify the *mission civilisatrice,* while the latter reproduces it to meet an intellectual demand; namely, to break from the "shameful" past and join modernity. In the case of the *maqāma*, breaking with its ways meant breaking with al-Ḥarīrī as a model.

Zakī Mubārak (d.1952), an Egyptian academic, devotes a section of his historical overview of 4th/10th Arabic prose, *al-Nathr al-fannī fī al-qarn al-rābiʿ*, to the *maqāma* genre. Mubārak explains the artificiality and mannerism of the genre by pointing to al-Ḥarīrī's influence, who did not emulate al-Hamadhānī's language, which was natural and "unabusive"[34] (*khāliya min al-takalluf wa-l-iʿtisāf*). Mubārak also argues that all the premodern Arabic authors, who composed texts containing wordplay and empty artifices were al-Ḥarīrī's students, not al-Hamadhānī's. The main implication of Mubārak's argument is that the *maqāma* genre, as such, is not the one to blame, but rather al-Ḥarīrī's style and subsequent influence. Several scholars

[32] Ibid, 66.
[33] Munk, "Essai," 541.
[34] Zakī Mubārak, *al-Nathr al-fannī,* 204.

have adopted and reproduced this opinion.[35] Most recently, Hämeen-Anttila has argued that the reappearance of al-Hamadhānī's *maqāmāt* at the end of the 19th century, "brought the genre back to its origins,"[36] i.e., back to the funny plots and "refreshingly simple and straightforward"[37] languages of al-Hamadhānī.

Mubārak raises a similar question which the Orientalists' position begged before (see Chapter 2); namely, and more specifically to the context of the *Ḥarīriyya*'s Arabic reception, if *Maqāmāt al-Ḥarīrī* is strange and foreign, why did the work enjoy wide fame for many centuries? Mubārak provides an answer by addressing the role of the Arabic "*salīqa*," or natural disposition. He says:

> The widespread of this genre [of the *maqāmāt*] is the result of its compatibility with the Arab natural disposition, which prefers short storytelling and refined composition … Indeed, due to their nature, Arabs were not disposed to complex storytelling, which is abundantly available in extant old Greek [texts], and which spread to the English, the Russians, the French, and the Germans. There is no fault in the Arabs' [literary] tradition lacking in long storytelling because true art is the one that is based on natural predisposition, and the Arabs were not predisposed to [compose] stories that could be read over days or weeks.[38]

This passage shares similarities with al-Shābbī's statement discussed before. Mubārak presumes a static and predetermined state of mind that conditions a people's ability to engage in storytelling, which the Arabs did not possess. Mubārak completely disregards any considerations of personal taste or outside environmental factors of influence, accepting "natural disposition" as the measuring stick by which Mubārak determines that the Arabs were forced to prefer one kind of storytelling, epitomized by the *maqāmāt*, a kind that is short, fragmented, and linguistically ornate, as opposed to the other, long and complex, in which all other nations partook: beginning with the Greeks, many other nations opted for this kind of storytelling, here presumed to be the better one, and continued to write examples of this kind of storytelling up until the modern period. Mubārak borrows the "rise and fall" narrative from orientalist critics of the *maqāma* genre and projects it on the Arabic context, thereby reproducing the claim of

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[35] Cf., for instance, how Buṭrus al-Bustānī, Shawqī Ḍayf, and Iḥsān ʿAbbās wrote about al-Hamadhānī to how they portrayed al-Ḥarīrī in the following works: al-Bustānī, *Udabāʾ al-ʿarab fī al-aʿṣur al-ʿabbāsiyya;* Ḍayf, *al-Maqāma*; ʿAbbās, *Malāmiḥ.*

[36] Hämeen-Anttila, "The Novel and the *Maqāma*," 93.

[37] Hämeen-Anttila, *Maqama*, 52.

[38] Mubārak, *al-Nathr al-fannī,* 204.

the existence of an age of decadence, this time from an indigenous perspective as opposed to that of Orientalists.

In contrast to al-Shābbī and Mubārak, who argued that modern, European models of literature, which have their origin in Old Greece, was the way to liberate the Arabic mind from the influence of classical Arabic literary models, the socialist thinker Salāma Mūsā held the view that the fate of the Arabic nation can only be changed if the Arabs adopted industry instead of agriculture, and science instead of literature.[39] Consequently, Mūsā condemned al-Ḥarīrī,[40] the *maqāmāt*, premodern *adab* in general, and his fellow contemporary scholars who were too preoccupied with language and literature. To him, a *Nahḍa* that dwells on words instead of acting and creating something useful is a failed *Nahḍa*. In *al-Dunyā baʿda thalāthīna ʿām*, he says:

> The scientific atmosphere remains remote from the masses, as it hardly has any presence in newspapers and schools. All the attention is still dedicated to these collections of stories, tales, sermons, fables, and poems, which they call *adab*. This is the preoccupation of the indolent who are attached to anecdotes, jokes, and gossiping. … Our ongoing *Nahḍa* in Egypt, I mean the cultural *Nahḍa*, is a literature-oriented, decadent *Nahḍa*, founded on empty discourse about poetasters in classical *adab*. It is in the nature of literature [to cause one] to look back; and it is in the nature of science [to cause one] to look forward, meaning to the future.[41]

Mūsā's position is clear and determined, be it in this article or other ones: the East must follow in the footsteps of the West's industrial and scientific revolution,[42] and whatever hinders this goal, be it language or literature, must be removed from the way. Mūsā intentionally overlooks the differences between anecdotes, jokes, and the various genres that constitute *adab*, reducing them to mere gossiping. Mūsā portrayed himself as a pragmatic intellectual, to whom functionality and proaction were far more imperative than mere storytelling.

During the early period of the 20th century, opinions varied: while al-Shābbī was calling for a new kind of literature, Mubārak discussed the shortcomings of premodern adab, and Mūsā

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[39] For instance, he says: "The civilization of today is industrial. The culture of industry is science, while the culture of agriculture relies on *adab*, religion, and philosophy." Salāma Mūsā, "*al-Sharq sharq wa-l-gharb gharb*" in *al-Majalla al-Jadīda* (May 1930), 885.

[40] On Salāma Mūsā's views on al-Ḥarīrī see his articles: "'*Amīr am ʿabd*?" and "*al-Inḥiṭāṭ wa-l-umma al-munḥaṭṭa*," *al-Majalla al-Jadīda* (March 1934).

[41] Salāma Mūsā, *al-Dunyā baʿda thalāthīna ʿām*, second edition (Cairo: Maṭbaʿat al-Nahḍa, N.D.) [first published in 1936].

[42] See Mūsā's article "*al-Sharq sharq*," 882-888.

criticized both attitudes. These positions, however, converged in a single point that saw classical Arabic literary models as being outdated and incompatible with modern needs. In the same period, the Tunisian-Egyptian writer Bayram al-Tūnsī (1893-1961) was writing and publishing his *maqāmāt* in different newspapers, unconcerned by the objections that were being raised to the genre. Al-Tūnsī's style of writing was first conventional and standard, but he soon broke from mainstream literary trends and started composing colloquial poetry, frivolous *maqāmāt,* and even emulating the *Qurʾān*.[43] Neo-classists were obviously not fond of him. A frequent statement that is usually cited in al-Tūnsī's biographies is attributed to the Egyptian poet Aḥmad Shawqī (d. 1932), who said: "The tyranny of no one, the tyranny of nothing, lead me to fear for Arabic poetry, except that of Bayram and his folk literature [*adab shaʿbī*]."[44]

Unlike the other *maqāma* writers from the *Nahḍa* period, who focalize the "privileged strata,"[45] al-Tūnsī followed the example of al-Hamadhānī and al-Ḥarīrī, creating unconventional characters. His protagonists belong to the tribe of Banū Sāsān, and other characters of his *maqāmāt* were *mujāwirīn*, meaning students residing in the Azhar, who instead of acting as guardians of the faith cared only for profit and deception. In his episodes, al-Tūnsī follows the classical *maqāma* structure, a standard one in Arabic, and emulates the *Ḥarīriyya*'s style and riddles. He uses colloquial Egyptian, loanwords from French, and playful coded language. In *al-Maqāma al-Nisāʾiyya*, for example, the reader encounters a blind *muqriʾ* [*Qurʾān* reciter] who creates a secret language to communicate with other blind colleagues. He introduces his new language, saying:

> We have replaced the language of commoners with a secret code (*sīm*) that only expert philologists can understand; that is, one should omit the first letter of every word … then replace it with whatever other letter. Accordingly, if you want the word "*nurīd*" [we want] you say "*thābit farīd*" or "*thālith jarīd*"; and if you want the word "*samīn*" [fat] you say "*sāmim amīn*" or "*sāq thamīn*." Thus, confusing the most alert of readers, even if they were the *imāms* of the biggest mosques.''[46]

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[43] I owe this point to Dr. Walid el-Khachab who introduced me to al-Tūnsī's emulations of the Qurʾān. In al-Tūnsī's *al-Maqāma al-Intikhābiyya,* the protagonist sends a threatening letter to a parliamentary candidate emulating the Quranic sentence "O you who believe" and composes "O you who vote avoid the parliament when you are not clean". Bayram al-Tūnsī, *al-Maqāmāt,* (*al-Aʿmāl al-kāmila*), vol. I (Cairo: Madbūlī, 2002), 790.

[44] Quoted in Marilyn Booth, *Bayram al-Tunsi's Egypt: Social Criticism and Narrative Strategies,* (Exeter: Ithaca press, 1990), 5.

[45] Ibid, 351.

[46] Bayram al-Tūnsī, *al-Maqāmāt,* 876.

Al-Tūnsī also employs irony and humor, to address pressing topics of his time, including class differences, technology, women's rights, and politics. *Maqāmāt al-Mujāwirīn*, as Booth calls them, turn al-Hamadhānī's genre and al-Ḥarīrī's games into critical literary tools that preserve the frivolity and the playfulness that are characteristic of premodern Arabic authors. Al-Tūnsī employs these to articulate the needs of modern society. His approach was, therefore, similar to that of al-Shidyāq (See Section II above). Nevertheless, al-Tūnsī's *maqāmāt* remained scattered in different newspapers for more than 40 years before they were collected in book form.[47]

The first three intellectuals discussed in this section illustrate that the critical encounter with literary production, in the context of the *Nahḍa*, particularly during the first thirty years of the 20th centruy, was dominated by the pragmatist Orientalist narratives from the century before. Al-Ḥarīrī's model was heavily criticized, causing it to fade into the background of the literary scene and lose its original appeal. Nevertheless, the *maqāma* genre continued to be present, albeit in a less accepted form than before. To most *Nahḍawīs*, the *maqāma* was a deficient genre, which produced only unsatisfactory, short, simple, and useless texts. To the few amongst them, however, that is to say, the authors who possessed a sense of humor and the understanding of the utility of playful, such as al-Tūnsī, the *maqāma* genre was a handy tool to articulate modern concerns and to challenge the seriousness of the time.

Conclusion: The Rise (of al-Hamadhānī) and Fall (of al-Ḥarīrī)

Nahḍawīs promoted themselves as saviors who could liberate and rescue the "Arab mind" from a former state of decadence and replace it with a superior one, comparable to that of the Europeans. Their narrative, which spoke of pressing need for an awakening and the adoption of European modernity, drove them to fabricate the existence of an age of decadence and designate the *Ḥarīriyya* as a notable example of it. Consequently, serious, clear, and committed literature started to dominate over the playful and humorous kind. Writers such as al-Shidyāq and Bayram al-Tūnsī numbered in the few, keeping the *maqāma* genre alive, despite the changing tastes and conventions and scathing attacks on the genre from contemporary scholarship.[48]

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[47] Booth, *Bayram al-Tunsi's Egypt*, 438-444.

[48] According to Hämeen-Anttila, thirty-one authors wrote *maqāmāt* during the 20th century. Hämeen-Anttila, "The Novel and the *Maqāma*," 92. In the 21st century, one still encounters several *maqāma* collections here and there. The Tunisian author ʿAlī al-Aḥmar for instance, wrote thirty-six *maqāmāt* on the Arab Spring which he attributed to a narrator called Hishām ibn ʿĪsā and a trickster named Abū al-Sukr al-Ifḥandarī. See: ʿAlī al-Aḥmar, *al-Maqāmāt al-Intiqāliyya* (Tunis: Dār Afaq-Perspective, 2016). Similarly, ʿImād al-Zuwwārī (also from Tunisia) invents a fictional trickster who gives *fatwas* on Facebook and introduces his anecdotes

The survival of the genre is owed primarily, however, to the rediscovery of al-Hamadhānī at the end of the 19th century, whom the Orientalists held in high regard. They argued that the *Hamadhāniyya* was funnier, clearer, and that "the taste," i.e., the European taste, was "more often shocked in al-Ḥarīrī's work than in al-Hamadhānī's."[49] Consequently, the father of the *maqāma* genre gained a new life in the Arab world. Several annotations of the *Hamadhāniyya* were produced.[50] Muḥammad al-Muwayliḥī (d.1930) used the narrator from the *Hamadhāniyya* in serialized novel, *Ḥadīth ʿĪsā ibn Hishām,* and studies on al-Hamadhānī's *maqāmāt* became more and more common. The tolerance and praise that al-Ḥarīrī was denied was channeled to his predecessor. Considered a miracle during the premodern period of Islam, al-Ḥarīrī moved from being condemned to being forgotten. As for al-Hamadhānī, whom premodern Arabic readers neglected and hardly read,[51] he became a model of simplicity and humor. It would suffice to browse through current scholarship on the *maqāmāt* to understand the extent to which al-Hamadhānī's name prevailed over that of his successor, al-Ḥarīrī (see Introduction).[52]

That the *maqāma* genre was frowned upon during the *Nahḍa* presupposes that both al-Ḥarīrī and al-Hamadhānī were equally condemnable. Nevertheless, al-Hamadhānī's work was branded as a classic and praised. This adoption, however, was not unconditioned, as the *Hamadhāniyya* had to fulfill the conventions of modernity; that is, it had to become clearer, functional, more in line with a moral worldview, and more serious. Muḥammad ʿAbduh (d.

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as ''a collection of short stories following the model of the *maqāmāt*'' [*majmūʿa qaṣaṣiyya ʿalā ṭarīqat al-maqāmāt*]. See ʿImād al-Zuwwārī, Fatāwā al-Sheikh Rahdān (Tunis: Dār al-Thaqāfiyya, 2021). Moreover, although the *maqāma* genre occupies a marginal role today, this does not hold true for specific regions, such as Nigeria. See Sulaiman Adewale Alagunfon, *Texts, Contexts, and Scholars: The Classical Arabic Maqāma in Yorubaland.*

[49] Sacy, *Les Séances de Ḥarīrī,* v.

[50] ʿAbduh's edition of al-Hamadhānī's *Maqāmāt* was not the first edition to be published. The collection was also published in Tehran and India in 1879, in Bulāq in 1874, in Istanbul in 1881, and in Cairo in 1886.

[51] In most premodern anthologies and biographical dictionaries, al-Hamadhānī is given short treatment. See, for instance, Ibn Khallikān, *Wafayāt al-aʿyān wa-anbāʾ abnāʾ al-zamān*, vol. I, Edited by Iḥsān ʿAbbās, (Beirut: Dār al-Ṣādir, 1994), 127-129; Al-Dhahabī, *Siyar aʿlām al-nubalāʾ,* vol.12, 159. These authors summarize al-Thaʿālibī's long praise in *Yatīmat al-Dahr* without elaboration or further investigation. They also cite al-Hamadhānī's epistles and virtually overlook his *maqāmāt*, referring to him, regarding this matter, as having inspired al-Ḥarīrī. One obvious exception in this context, is al-Kalāʿī (d.588/1192) who praises al-Hamadhānī generously, cites his *maqāmāt*, and ignores al-Ḥarīrī. See: al-Kalāʿī (d.588/1192), *Iḥkām Ṣanʿat al-Kalām*, ed. Muḥammad Riḍwān al-Dāya (Beirut: Dār al-Thaqāfa, 1966), 192-206.

[52] Perhaps Cooperson's recent adaptation of al-Ḥarīrī's *Maqāmāt* can "revive" the *Ḥarīriyya* and inspire more scholarship.

1905) carried the first reconstruction of al-Hamadhānī's episodes according to these precepts, publishing an annotated edition in 1898 from which he omitted[53] all the episodes and sentences that may bother the readers of his time. He justifies his act of censorship as follows:

> In this work, meaning *Maqāmāt al-Badīʿ*, blessed be his soul, one encounters artfulness in various manners of expression, many of which may cause abashment to the reader and bashfulness in me to comment on them, and which are inappropriate for the gullible (*al-sudhdhaj*) to recognise their connotations or for their minds to wander about in their meanings. God forbid me from throwing any blame on the author of the *maqāmāt* which would disrespect his value, or pointing to any fault that would debase his endeavor. But to each time its appropriate discourse, and to each imagination its place to wander. This is my excuse for omitting *al-Maqāma al-Shāmiyya*, not including some expressions in al-*Maqāma al-Ruṣāfiyya*, and removing some words from another *maqāma*, which I indicate accordingly.[54]

ʿAbdu's censorship was only the beginning of a process of reconstructing al-Hamadhānī. Various studies projected all kinds of roles on al-Hamadhānī, treating him as an artist, an educator, a social critic, and even as a rebellious figure (see Introduction). As part of this process, which followed a paradigm of integration into modernity, al-Hamadhānī lost most of his playfulness and humor. In light of this conditional acceptance of al-Hamadhānī, one may argue that his *maqāmāt* suffered equally to or perhaps more gravely than al-Ḥarīrī's. Indeed, the latter was ignored and branded as obsolete, yet his oeuvre, at least, kept its ambiguity and *gharīb*, and remained uncensored.

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[53] The recent study by Bilal Orfali and Maurice Pomerantz highlights all ʿAbdu's omissions. See Bilal Orfali and Maurice Pomerantz*, The Maqāmāt of Badīʿ al-Zamān.*

[54] Muḥammad ʿAbdu, "Introduction," in *Maqāmāt al-Hamadhānī*, edited by Muḥammad ʿAbduh, 3rd edition, (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 2005), 4-5.

Part II

Trading *Gharīb* in the *Ḥarīriyya*

"People talk the most incomprehensibly when their language is meant to serve nothing but to make themselves comprehensible." Karl Kraus, *Beim Wort Genommen*[1]

[1] Quoted in Bauer, *A Culture of Ambiguity*, 151.

Preface

It should go without saying that language in general and rare or *gharīb* vocabulary, in particular, are crucial elements in *Maqāmāt al-Ḥarīrī*, as the author himself declares in the exordium (see Introduction) and play a specific function. Nevertheless, as Chapters 2 and 3 have shown, the *Ḥarīriyya*'s style and language were condemned by several European and Arab readers in the modern period. They found it to be strange, cryptic, pointless, laborious, and stupid. In the following three chapters, I focus on al-Ḥarīrī's use of *gharīb* vocabulary, meaning argot, jargon, and the Bedouin's vocabulary, to illustrate the function these specific linguistic forms of language have in the *Ḥarīriyya*.

The central argument in Part II is that the *Ḥarīriyya*'s plot, i.e., al-Ḥārith obsession with the trickster, seeking him wherever, is a commentary on literati's fascination with strange language in al-Ḥarīrī's time. This reflects the obsession with the Bedouin's tongue in the period of data-collection, the abundance of vocabulary which followed its collection, and the need to display vocabulary in playful and original ways. To this end, I structure the current part as follows.

Chapter 4 defines *gharīb* and its different perks as cited by poets and literati during premodernity and introduces the trickster as a personification of rare vocabulary. In this context, I argue that al-Ḥarīrī's interest in ambiguity and refinement, to which modern readers objected, was compatible with his immediate audience's taste and their understanding of what artistic prose entails. Some modern readers indeed addressed this aspect (see Chapters 2 and 3), in the form of the apologies and justifications that accompanied their translations or editions. In the context of Part II, I address this aspect to demonstrate that al-Ḥarīrī did not write his *Maqāmāt* in a vacuum, but rather in a linguistic and literary context that encouraged the use of *gharīb* and associated it with many perks.

Chapter 5 addresses the function of al-Ḥarīrī's employment of *gharīb* in his work, which I argue is to criticize the educated elite of his time: i.e., their obsession with rare vocabulary, constrained writing (lipograms), and transgressive language. The *Ḥarīriyya*'s linguistic ornamentations are, therefore, not pursued for their own sake, but are a tool al-Ḥarīrī employs to carry out this very criticism. This criticism is explicit in al-Sarūjī's unfriendliness toward the educated class and in his behavior toward them: he robs, deceives, lies and even punishes them at times.

Chapter 6 demonstrates how the trickster adjusts and changes his vocabulary and tools to meet the needs of his audience or reinforce his relationship with them. The abundance of

gharīb language in the *Ḥarīriyya* does not mean that it is randomly employed in the *maqāmāt*. Rather, it is regulated and distributed proportionally in every episode, depending on the audience the trickster addresses. Addressing the elite, al-Sarūjī uses an enormous amount of *gharīb,* literary and linguistic jargon, in addition to riddles, lipograms, and *badīʿ*. Al-Sarūjī employs all the means available to him to humiliate the educated class and rob them of their material possessions. Addressing the uneducated masses in open places, he uses as little *gharīb* as possible, because any rewards he can gain from them are meagre. Addressing his tribe, the Banū Sāsān, al-Sarūjī altogether abandons his linguistic apparatus and relies on secret argot to emphasize the intimacy of his relationship with the tribe. In other words, the trickster adapts his vocabulary and register depending on what he is set to gain from his audience and his relationship to it, be it enmity or fraternity.

In the *Ḥarīriyya*, *gharīb* plays a threefold function: it ornates the language and gives it an air of erudition, it critiques the intellectual obsession with vocabulary and ridicules its agents, and finally, it emphasizes the trickster's role as the trader of the exotic and the strange.

Chapter 4

Gharīb and the *Ḥarīriyya*'s Trickster

Whenever Abū Zayd al-Sarūjī, the *Ḥarīriyya*'s trickster, addresses the educated elite, he employs strange and ambiguous vocabulary[1]—the *gharīb* (see Chapter 6). In this chapter, I offer a general introduction to *gharīb* vocabulary, defining its various connotations and citing the various uses and perks, as it were, that premodern philologists, poets, and literary critics attributed to it. My aim is twofold: first, to highlight the value of *gharīb and* rare vocabulary in al-Ḥarīrī's context; and second, to lay the ground for my main argument, namely, that Abū Zayd al-Sarūjī is the incarnation of *gharīb* vocabulary: he shares in its appeal, ambiguity, remoteness, inaccessibility, and untameable nature. Encountering the trickster in the *Maqāmāt* evokes in the narrator the same emotions that *gharīb* users and collectors experience in the early premodern period of Islam, which is to say, thrill, curiosity, and agony.

To this end, this chapter proceeds through three sections. Section I clarifies the different connotations of *gharīb* and sources that could provide it. Section II cites different figures from premodern *adab* culture, whose name was attached to *gharīb*, including Abū ʿUbayd, Abū Tammām, Abū al-ʿIbar, and addresses their motivations for collecting *gharīb,* be they material, intellectual, or affective. Section III builds on the two previous sections to analyze how the *Ḥarīriyya*'s narrator, al-Ḥārith ibn Hammām leads an everlasting pursuit of a trickster who is hard to catch, identify, or comprehend. Recognizing the identity of al-Sarūjī at the end of each episode equals the cognitive effort of finally deciphering the meaning of *gharīb* vocabulary. This effort, however, is brief and fleeting, as it has to be repeated in every episode: the trickster runs away and the narrator has to follow him to the next *maqāma,* capture him temporarily, before he runs once again, and so on and so forth.

I. Interest in the *Gharīb* and its Meaning

Bonebakker defines *gharīb* in the second edition of the *Encyclopedia of Islam* as follows:

> *Gharīb*, literally: "strange," "uncommon," a technical term in philology and in the science of tradition. As a term in philology, it means: "rare, unfamiliar (and consequently obscure) expressions" …, and frequently occurs in the titles of books, mostly such as deal with unfamiliar expressions in the Qurʾān and in the Tradition (books carrying the

[1] In Part III, I discuss the meaning of *gharīb* as a stranger in space. In this chapter, I discuss *gharīb* from a linguistic standpoint.

> titles *Gharīb al-Qur'an* and *Gharīb al-Ḥadīth* seem to have existed as early as the second century). The term also occurs in works on literary theory (where it may also have the non-technical, laudatory sense of "uncommon," "original").[2]

Bonebakker rightfully notes the association of *gharīb* with the efforts of uncovering meaning in the *Qurʾān* and the *ḥadīth* tradition.[3] However, he overlooks the literary and playful aspects of engaging with *gharīb* vocabulary and expressions, which can only be inferred from the last sentence of the passage quoted above. Such limited elaboration on this word conditions the scholarly engagement with the genre, which would limit it, not without reason, to the implications of *gharīb* for the *Qurʾān* and the *ḥadīth* tradition. In his recent survey, *The Arabic Lexicographical Tradition: From 2nd/8th to the 12th/18th Century*, Ramzi Baalbki notes that the association of *gharīb* with a religiously pragmatic agenda of clarifying the meaning of the *Qurʾān* and the *ḥadīth* tradition can be traced back to the early sources.[4] In this regard, he cites an anecdote from the 1st/ 7th century, in which people are reported to have blocked the road leading to the house of the Prophet's Companion, Ibn ʿAbbās',[5] which made him ask

> his attendant to admit first those who wanted to ask him about the *Qurʾān* and its *ḥurūf* (words, or possibly modes of reading), followed respectively by those who sought answers to questions related to the interpretation of the *Qurʾān*, the lawful and the forbidden (*al-ḥalāl wa-l-ḥarām*), jurisprudence (*fiqh*), religious obligations (*farāʾiḍ*), and finally *ʿarabiyya*, poetry and *gharīb*.[6]

Understanding the implications of God's word in all its manifestations and implications is followed immediately by a need to understand the linguistic medium through which God chose to communicate (*ʿarabiyya*), the material that would help properly decipher that medium (poetry), and any uncommon vocabulary (*gharīb*). Though third in line here, the scholarly efforts of the premodern period soon develop an interest in *gharīb* that transcends its utility for *Qurʾān* or *ḥadīth* exegesis. Besides religious motivations, therefore, scholarly interest in *gharīb* was of

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[2] Seeger Adrianus Bonebakker, "*Gharīb*," in *EI2*.
[3] "The first scholarly activities in Islam concentrated on the text of the *Qurʾān*, which had to be transmitted and explained." See Kees Versteegh, "Arabic in the Pre-Islamic Period," in *The Arabic Language*, second edition (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University press, 2001), 60.
[4] Ramzi Baalbaki, *The Arabic Lexicographical Tradition: From 2nd/8th to the 12th/18th Century*, (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 39.
[5] Ibn ʿAbbās: (ca. 619—687/688), a Companion of the prophet Muḥammad, one of the eminent scholars of early Islām, and the first exegete of the *Qurʾān*.
[6] Baalbaki, *The Arabic Lexicographical Tradition*, 39.

a secular nature, too. Pursuing *gharīb* increased in the following centuries, and numerous scholars and literati employed it, at times to the point of absolute ambiguity, such as Abū Tammām whose case is discussed below.

Gharīb, therefore, exerted on people a special fascination during the premodern period of Islam. It was desired, sought, studied, and categorized. The approach to defining *gharīb* differed from one scholar to the other. The philologist and scholar Abū Sulaymān al-Khaṭṭābī al-Bustī (d.388/988),[7] for instance, provides the following explanation:

> *Gharīb* in speech is that which is ambiguous and too obscure (lit. remote) to be comprehended, just as a stranger is remote from the homeland and cut off from the family. … *Gharīb* in speech, moreover, is of two kinds: the first denotes the obscure and ambiguous, which comprehension grasps from a distance and at [at the expense of] great mental effort; the second denotes the speech of remote, isolated Arab tribes who were in isolation. When we hear their words, they strike us as strange, whereas they are those people's language and eloquence.[8]

الغَريبُ مِن الكَلام إنّمَا هو الغامِض البَعيد مِن الفَهْم كالغَريب من الناس، إنّما هو البعيد عن الوطن المُنْقَطِع عن الأهل (...) ثم إن الغريب من الكلام يُقال بِه على وَجْهَين: أحدهما أن يُراد به بَعِيد المعنى غَامِضُه، لا يَتَناولُه الفَهْم إلا عن بُعْد ومُعَانَاة فِكْر، والوجه الثاني أن يُراد به كَلَامُ مَنْ بَعُدَت به الدار ونأى به المَحَل مِن شُواذِ قَبائِل العَرَب، فإذا وَقَعتْ إلينا الكلمة من لُغاتِهم اِسْتَغْرَبْنَاها، وإنّما هي كلام القَوم وبَيَانُهُم.

al-Khaṭṭābī defines *gharīb* using three points of reference. First, al-Khaṭṭābī associates *gharīb* vocabulary with space, defining its specimens with respect to their point of origin, one that is distant in space. Second, al-Khaṭṭābī associates *gharīb* with a cognitive process, one by which the experience of first learning about *gharīb* words and later comprehending them entails a mental effort, which involves pondering them and dwelling on them for some time before understanding them; the time spent on this constitutes a temporal distance. Third, al-Khaṭṭābī notes the role of situational or linguistic context, that is to say, words that are part of the daily vocabulary of remote tribes are not strange to them but only to those outside of the tribe. In other words, *gharīb* is not simply the "strange" and "uncommon," but rather an elaborate category of vocabulary that is associated with mental exertion, spatial and temporal alienation,

[7] Al-Khaṭṭābī's literary works are addressed in Chapter 7.
[8] Abū Sulaymān al-Khaṭṭābī al-Bustī, *Gharīb al-ḥadīth*, edited by A. Al-ʿAzbāwī, Vol. I, (Damascus: Dār al-Fikr, 1982), 70-1.

and context. In this sense, *gharīb* resists immediate comprehension, integration, and appropriation. By referring to the stranger who is distant from home and family, al-Khaṭṭābī argues that *gharīb* cannot fully be part of the new tongue. It remains strange, ambiguous, and "eccentric" (*shādhdh*). No matter how long the pondering lasts, the meaning is only understood relatively and "from a distance," and only its original users, the remote, isolated tribes, can use it naturally and normally.

The complexity of *gharīb* and its strangeness is also obvious in al-Suyūṭī's (d. 911/1505) enumerations of words, including the plural form of *gharīb*, that approximate each other in meaning, which constitutes a semantic field designating the uncommon. This is a different approach to defining *gharīb*. The words al-Suyūṭī includes are

> *al-ḥūshī* (unfamiliar, barbarous), *al-gharāʾib* (strange), *al-shawādhdh* (anomalous), and *al-nawādir* (rare), which "are close in meaning (*mutaqāriba*) and are antonyms of *faṣīḥ* (clear or eloquent).[9] Al-Suyūtī adds that "Ibn Rashīq indicates in *al-ʿUmda* that *waḥshī* terms sound detestable to the ear (*nafara ʿan al-samʿ*). … However, when terms are beautiful (*ḥasana)* and strange, known only to eminent scholars and pure Bedouins, then they are *waḥshī* terms.[10]

The categorization al-Suyūṭī puts forth illustrates the different levels of *gharīb* and the different conditions of accepting or discarding it. In his treatment of the issues, al-Suyūṭī cites various opinions on the matter. Following Ibn Rashīq, this could be done according to how the word's sound (either pleasant or unpleasant to the ear), according to its source (used by Bedouins and scholars or others), and according to the extent to which a word is rare.

Based on the above, *gharīb* is inaccessible vocabulary, both semantically and spatially, that is only made accessible through traveling, careful study, or direct immediate connections to its place of origin. When tamed and used widely, *gharīb* loses its value and strangeness. Untamed, however, *gharīb* is experienced as detestable to the ear and "anomalous." Using *gharīb* is akin to playing with fire, threatening peril at any moment. Al-Suyūṭī's survey of opinions skillfully juxtaposes opposites inherent in the *gharīb*, i.e., the learnedness of scholars and the illiteracy of Bedouins.[11] and the *waḥshī* nature of words that, though making ugly sounds, represent pure Arabic. Al-Suyūṭī's survey also foregrounds the most important element

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[9] al-Suyūṭī, *al-Muzhir fī ʿulūm al-lugha wa-anwāʿihā*, Vol. I, 3rd ed. (Cairo: Dār al-Turāth, N.D), 233.
[10] Ibid, 233.
[11] One of the main conditions of a trustworthy informer of vocabulary is to be illiterate (see Chapter 5).

of *gharīb*: its source and those who desired to use it. The problematic and exclusive nature of *gharīb* made it famous and encouraged more collectors, scholars, and literati to use it extensively. They understood its aesthetic charms and ability to provoke curiosity, thrill, reward, and even pain. Incidentally, if rare and *gharīb* vocabulary was used and collected arbitrarily, it would have no value or authority. Hence, collectors chose Bedouins, or "isolated tribes," according to various conditions (see Chapter 5). The stricter the conditions were, the more likely they resulted in more examples of rare, strange, and valuable *gharīb*. This, however, only lasted for a period of time, before other sources with even stranger vocabulary attracted the attention of the literati.[12]

II. Reasons to Use *Gharīb*

Abū ʿUbayd al-Qāsim ibn Sallām (d. 224/838), the scholar who spent decades collecting strange vocabulary to compose *al-Gharīb al-muṣannaf*, describes the experience of hearing a new word from the *gharīb* kind as follows: "I spent forty years composing this book [*al-Gharīb al-muṣannaf*], and sometimes when I hear a new word from a man's tongue and add it to my book, I remain awake all night unable to sleep from happiness."[13] The excitement conveyed here demonstrates the value *gharīb* vocabulary had for individuals during the premodern period of Islam. The scholars' preoccupation with it was not simply a matter of taste or curiosity but was also associated with aspirations for material gain and rewards. Abū al-Ṭayyib al-Lughawī (d. 351/962) notes, for instance, that whenever Abū ʿUbayd composed a new collection of *gharīb* vocabulary, he would immediately rush to the doors of kings who would reward him for his work (*kāna Abū ʿUbayd yasbiq bi-muṣannafātih ilā al-mulūk fa-yujīzunah ʿalayhā*).[14] This implies that scholars were not the only ones who sought the strange. Collecting *gharīb* vocabulary was a desire shared across the board, notably by patrons who rewarded the productions of their beneficiaries.

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[12] In the 3rd/ 9th century, after collecting the terms of the Bedouin, the attention shifted to a different vocabulary, that was even stranger, but in a different way: namely, the transgressive, vulgar, and obscene vocabulary, the kind of vocabulary that is associated with prostitutes, commoners, and Banū Sāsān (see Chapter 5).

[13] Abū ʿUbayd, quoted by: Abū Mūsā al-Madīnī (d. 581/1185), *al-Majmūʿ al-mughīth fī gharībay al-qurʾān wa-l-ḥadīth*, edited by ʿAbd al-Karīm al-ʿAzbāwī, Vol. I (Jaddah: Dār al-Madanī, 1986), 8.

[14] Abū al-Ṭayyib al-Lughawī, *Marātib al-naḥwiyyīn*, edited by Muḥammad Abū al-Faḍl Ibrāhīm (Cairo: Nahḍat Miṣr, 1955), 94.

Besides collectors and patrons, *gharīb* was a marker of distinction among poets. In the pre-Islamic period, the famous poet al-Aʿshā al-Kabīr (d. 7/629)[15] describes his ode as follows:

A strange [ode] that reaches the kings wise.
I composed it, so they would ask who did[16]

وغَرِيبَة تأتي المُلُوك حكِيمَة
قدْ قُلتُها لِيُقال مَن قدْ قالَها؟

Al-Aʿshā's verse highlights a different motivation to use the *gharīb*. The main utility here is to highlight the creativity of the composer, shifting the focus of the conversation from the art to the artist.[17] A good ode might inspire appreciation and bring rewards, but a strange one provokes curiosity, too, and channels attention to the genius of the poet and his remarkable aptitude to employ strange vocabulary. The reception of *gharīb* through poetry, however, was not always positive. The Abbasid poet Abū Tammām (d. 231/845 or 232/846), for instance, provoked negative recreations in his audience, owing to his peculiar compositions. Hearing Abū Tammām poetry, the linguist Ibn al-Aʿrābī (d. 231/846) declares sarcastically: "If this is poetry, then what the Arabs have composed is worthless."[18] Comparing him to his contemporary al-Buḥturī, al-Āmidī describes Abū Tammām's style as "extremely mannerist, artificial, and makes one hate [*yastakrihu*] his words and meanings."[19] Beatrice Gruendler describes Abū Tammām's style and reception as follows:

> He created logical twists, paradoxes, and antitheses, and specialized in the personification of abstract concepts. But he merged these with an archaic Bedouin lexicon and older poetic motifs. As a result, his poetry sounded very different from what had come before. It echoed the tradition but gave it a new feel, so much so that it shocked. It quickly became both wildly controversial and wildly popular.[20]

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[15] Al-Aʿshā was a pre-Islāmic poet whose ode Abū ʿUbaydah (d. 825) includes among the celebrated *Muʿallaqāt*. Al-Aʿshā is considered the first Arab poet to have made a living from his profession. This assumption is supported both by the sheer quantity of his poetry and by the predominance of panegyric in his *dīwān*. Jockers, Barbara, "al-Aʿshā," in *EI3*.

[16] Maymūn Ibn Qays al-Aʿshā al-Kabīr, *Diwan*, edited by Muḥammad Ḥusayn (Cairo: Maktabat al-adāb, 1950), 27.

[17] In a way, this statement brings to mind that of Ibn al-Khashshāb who opens his commentary of the *Ḥarīriyya* by listing its *sariqāt* and al-Ḥarīrī's genius for finding sources to steal from (see Chapter 1).

[18] Abū Bakr Muḥammad ibn Yaḥyā al-Ṣūlī, *The Life and Times of Abū Tammām,* ed. & trans. Beatrice Gruendler (New York & London: New York Press, 2015), 279.

[19] Al-Āmidī, *al-Muwāzana bayna shiʿr Abī Tammām wa-l-Buḥturī*, edited by Sayyid Aḥmad Ṣaqr, vol. I, 4th ed. (Cairo: Dār al-Maʿārif, n.d), 4-5.

[20] Beatrice Gruendler, "Introduction," in *The Life and Times,* xv.

Abū Tammām was thus unique among his contemporaries. Moreover, he was divisive, instigating controversy and provoking an ambiguous response from his audience. Abū Tammām never apologized or justified his aesthetic choices. Addressing those who called him cryptic, he blames them for not being able to understand him[21] and even compares them to cattle. He says:

No crowd of theirs, however great, shall grieve you,
for most of them, nay, all of them, are cattle.[22]

لا يدْهَمَنّك مِن دهمائِهم عدَد
فإنّ أكثَرَهم أو كُلَهُم بَقَر

Despite his indecipherable style and his word choice, which his contemporaries disapproved of, Abū Tammām monopolized the literary market: poets were unable to make a living competing against him.[23]

The strangeness and ambiguity Abū Tammām expressed in his poetry was exceeded in various respects of tomfoolery *(taḥammuq),* absurdity, and insanity of Abū al-ʿIbar (d.252/866), a contemporary of Abū Tammām, who employed the *gharīb* in his compositions following an unusually original approach that was unique to him. Realizing that his poetry, "despite its average quality, would not sell well" compared to the poetry of the famous poets of the time, such as Abū Tammām and al-Buḥturī (d.284/897),[24] at fifty years of age, Abū al-ʿIbar switched from composing serious to composing frivolous poetry. Abū al-ʿIbar embodied the attributes of *ḥumq* (foolishness) and *raqāʿa* (shamelessness) to demonstrate his distinction and earn material favors.[25] In doing so, Abū al-ʿIbar attained his want by writing absurd poems that were replete with *gharīb*. This was epitomized in his method of composition.

Abū al-ʿIbar would head to a bridge and "record everything he heard from passers-by; then he would tear the scroll into two halves and stick one on the back of the other; as a result of this he had a composition that which "nothing in the world was more foolish."[26] Abū al-ʿIbar sourced his *gharīb* differently[27] than Abū Tammām, for instance, but he employed the

[21] "Abū Tammām, why don't you compose poetry that can be understood?' 'And you,' Abū Tammām retorted, 'why can't you understand the poetry that is composed?' reducing him to silence." Ṣūlī, *The Life and Times,* 81.
[22] Ibid, 113.
[23] "No poet could earn a single dirham in the days of Abū Tammām. On his death, the poets each took a share of what he used to earn." Ibid, 117.
[24] Abū al-Faraj al-Iṣbahānī, *al-Aghānī*, vol. XXIII, (Beirut: Dār Iḥyāʾ al-Turāth, 1994), 144.
[25] Ibid.
[26] S. Moreh, "Abū al-ʿIbar," *EAL,* vol. I, 37.
[27] Abū al-ʿIbar's method and vocabulary are discussed further in the next chapter.

final product to the same end: gain money, establish his distinction, and beguile his audience. Using a different source for his words and expression, Abū al-ʿIbar joined the new literary taste of the 3rd/9th century which favored obscenity and shock (see Chapter 5). Abū al-ʿIbar's vocabulary, odd performances,[28] and strange garments[29] demonstrate that distinction and admiration could be achieved through humor and shock just as they are achievable through learnedness and exclusive knowledge. Though *Gharīb* was to many "detestable," ambiguous, eccentric, anomalous, and foolish, its impact on the speaker and listener could surpass that of beautiful and commonly used words.

Abū al-ʿIbar's fame can be understood in light of a hypothetical situation al-Jāḥiẓ cites in the course of discussing *balāgha*, or eloquence. According to Sahl ibn Hārūn, if two men debate one another and both exhibit an equal degree of *balāgha*, and one was dressed elegantly while the other was dressed in ugly rags, the audience would declare the latter the winner, because unlike the former, he had the element of surprise. The audience, not suspecting him to have any merit, have their feelings transformed after listening to him: first into amazement (*taʿajjub*) and then into admiration (*iʿjāb*). Similarly, what proves Abū alʿIbar's merit is the element of surprise that he derives from the perceived non-compatibility between his outward appearance and claim to excellence.

Interestingly, this hypothetical puts al-Hamadhānī's motivations for choosing as his protagonist a raggedly-dressed trickster instead of an elegant, respected, and educated person in perspective. The negative impressions of the audience are the trickster's best assets, which work against the audience to surprise them and obtain the reward from them. The utility in this lies in the remoteness of the expectation: that Abū al-ʿIbar's or the trickster's claim to eloquence is far-fetched. In this sense, Sahl ibn Hārūn says that people

> are pre-disposed to glorify the strange and [find] the remote amusing. They do not express the same opinion or exhibit the same fancy for what is immediate, current, and under their command as they do that which is abnormal and in the possession of others. … It is in this manner that [people] fancy that which comes to them and leave for that which departs from them.

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[28] On Abū al-ʿIbar's strange performances, see Geert Jan van Gelder**,** "Fools and Rogues in Discourse and Disguise: Two Studies," in *Sensibilities of the Islamic Mediterranean,* edited by Robin Ostle (London: I.B. Tauris,2008), 27-58.

[29] Abū al-ʿIbar acted as a clown, dressing up in peculiar ways, such as wearing a fur hat midsummer, or appearing at court with a slipper on his head, two hoods on his feet, a shirt wearing a shirt as trousers and trousers as a shirt. Ibid, 34.

والناس مَوْكُلُون بِتَعْظِيم الغَرِيب واِسْتِطْرَاف البَعيد، وَليس لهُم في المَوجُود الرَاهِن وفِيمَا تَحْتَ قُدْرَتِهِم من الرَأْي والهَوَى، مِثْل الذي لَهُم فِي الشَاذ وكُلِ ما كَان في مِلْك غيرهم... وعلى هذ السَبِيل يَسْتَطْرِفُون القَادم عَلَيْهِم ويَرْحَلُون إلى النَازِحِ عَنْهُم.[30]

The valuable quality of *gharīb* lies in its unexpectedness, uniqueness, and unattainability. It is found, fundamentally, in human nature, which gravitates towards the strange, the remote, and the farfetched, i.e., the *gharīb*. In addition to the aforementioned motivations of engaging with the *gharīb*, that is to say, an intellectual motivation that satisfies curiosity and a material one that highlights distinction and brings money and fame, Sahl ibn Hārūn's explanation highlights the psychological implications of people's motivations to engage with, or in this case gravitate toward, the *gharīb*. Sahl ibn Hārūn links it to an innate fascination with that which one cannot have, or that which one did not expect to receive. The more remote and rarer the object is, the greater the curiosity and desire it provokes. It is no wonder, therefore, that some poets went out of their way to fill their verses with *gharīb* vocabulary, to the point of putting the people responsible for its transmission in a lamenting state, as the Umayyad poet Ruqayʿ al-Wālibī[31] boasted. He says:

In my life, some Odes worn and others lasted
Their remoteness costed reciters ransoms and tears[32]

وأبْلَت وأبقَت من حياتي قَصائِدًا
يفدِّي ويستَبكي الرُّواة غريبها

To the reciters, who are supposed to learn the poem by heart, recite it in public and annual fairs, transmit it to future generations, and also "correct, polish up or even embellish the verses of their masters,"[33] *gharīb* is a liability if not a punishment. To the poet, in contrast, strange vocabulary constitutes a tool to provoke and stimulate reaction. Ruqayʿ al-Wālibī is not concerned with the fate of his verses and does not seem to care if they are forgotten or remembered. What

[30] Al-Jāḥiẓ, *al-Bayān wa al-tabyīn*, edited by ʿAbd al-Salam Muḥammad Hārūn, vol. 1, 8th ed. (Cairo: al-Khānjī, 1998), 89-90.
[31] Ruqayʿ al-Wālibī is an unknown poet from the Umayyad period, who is said to have lived during Muʿāwiya's reign (41-60/661-680). It seems he was living away from the city and remained close to his tribe, *Asad*. See Ḥammūdī al-Qaysī, "*Ruqayʿ al-Wālibī: Ḥayātuh wa-mā tabaqqā min shiʿrih,*" in *al-Majmaʿ al-ʿIlmī al-ʿIrāqī*, n. 3 (September 1985), 143-167.
[32] "Ruqayʿ" in Abū Ghālib Muḥammad ibn al-Mubārak ibn Maymūn al-Baghdādī, *Muntahā al-ṭalab min ashʿār al-ʿArab (Akbar mustadrak ʿalā dawāwīn al-shiʿr al-qadīma)*, ed. Muḥammad Muṣṭafā Maḥmūd Zahrān, (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmīyah, 2008), 832.
[33] Jacobi, Renate, "Rāwī," in *EI2*.

matters to him is that those that are remembered bring tears to the eyes of the people responsible for keeping them alive, no matter how cryptic the verses are made by the *gharīb*.

Similar to Abū Tammām and Ruqayʿ al-Wālibī, al-Ḥarīrī composed numerous cryptic *maqāmāt* that caused readers to experience dire labor for the purpose of deciphering them. Al-Sharīshī, for instance, at the end of his commentary on a lipogram-based *maqāma* in which undotted and dotted letters alternate (M26), addresses the reader with the following words:

> Now that we have finished the commentary on this epistle, despite its difficulty, we would like to apologize to those who will consult its commentary for the difficulty therein. … There is no doubt that the commentator on such an epistle endures as much hardship as its composer, in that he dives deep to reach for those remote metaphors, and he seeks to show the meaning in the utmost clarity, while the majority of words are employed in a fashion indeed obscure, which is an obstacle. He, therefore, does not arrive at a mediating expression that is connected to the meaning and not so remote from the form [of the original] only after some effort. This is my excuse regarding this epistle, *al-Raqṭāʾ*, and the two before, *al-Qahqariyya* and *al-Khayfāʾ*. I am not aware of anyone who commented on them or made it far into them as I have done. How amazing is its author! He could only compose it after mastering all fields of language.

> وإذا قد فَرَغْنا من شرح هذه الرسالة على صُعُوبتِها، فإنّا نَعْتَذِر إلى من وقف على شرحِنَا لَها من صُعُوبة هذا المَقَام (...) ولا شَكّ أن الشَارِح لِمِثْل هذه الرسالة يُقَارِب تَعَب مُنْشِئها في أنه يَغوصُ على تلك الاستِعارات البعيدة، فَيُرِيد أن يُبرِز المعنى في غاية البَيان، واللفْظ في أغلبِها موضوع على غَاية الإبْهَام، فوقع التَمَانُع، فلا يصِل إلى عبارة مُتَوسِّطة تَتَعلق بالمعنى ولا تَبْعُد عن اللفظ إلا بعد جُهد، فهذا عُذْرُنَا في هذه الرسالة الرَقْطَاء والقَهْقَرية والخَيفَاء المُتَقَدِّمَتَين، وما عَلِمتُ أَحدًا شَرَحَها شرحَنا ولَا بلَغ منها مَبْلَغَنا، ولله مُنشِئُها من عَالِم بارِع. فما اِتفَق له إنْشَاؤُهَا إلا بعد التَبَحّر في علوم اللغات.[34]

Al-Sharīshī, though acknowledging the difficulty of the task, puts forth a remarkable testimony. Apologizing for the difficulty of his commentary, al-Sharīshī notes the little control he has over what could go in the commentary, owing to the virtual impossibility of sounding the depths of the original. He is, nonetheless, in awe of the *maqāmāt*'s author and his ability to compose texts that are rich in *gharīb*. In this case, *gharīb* serves both the author and the reader. On the one hand, it demonstrates al-Ḥarīrī's superior talent, mastery of language, and the ability to instigate ambiguity in interpretation and cause feelings of powerlessness in his readers. On

[34] Al-Sharīshī, *Sharḥ*, Vol. II, 306-7.

the other, it asserts the commentator's unique intellectual prowess and unmatched ability to decipher codes and explain complicated compositions. In this sense, *gharīb* enhances the status of the commentator and makes his "mediating expressions" as important as those of the original author.

The forgoing has highlighted the utility of using *gharīb* vocabulary for the artist (i.e., he seeks reward, distinction, and fame he can obtain from using *gharīb* vocabulary) and the effect of that on the audience/reader (i.e., he offers reward, and appreciates the novelty, or enters a state of lamenting). Conversely, al-Sharīshī's words highlight the perspective of the reader/commentator as a mediator between the author and his reader audience. His statement is proof that the addressees of texts in which the *gharīb* imposes ambiguity are indeed thrilled to take part in the intellectual labor, even if that causes them distress and helplessness. The more ambiguous and rarer the vocabulary is, the more thrill and gain the reader extracts, which the commentator is then able to furnish as proof, to win praise, for only a master in language can understand another.

The *maqāma* genre, to a certain extent through the *Hamadhāniyya* and more evidently through the *Ḥarīriyya*, demonstrates a paradigm of cooperation between the receiver of ambiguity and its composer. By putting the trickster, who composes ambiguity, together with the narrator, who stands for the receiving end and is a mediator for the reader, al-Ḥarīrī constructs them as cooperating agents, who appreciate the *gharīb* and the ambiguity, just as al-Sharīshī does. To the narrator, they provide a riddle to solve, an opportunity to shine, learn, and discover the identity of the trickster, all aspects that provide the reader with entertainment. To the trickster, they are a tool to escape punishment, make money, and teach the literati a lesson.

III. Abū Zayd al-Sarūjī as the Incarnation of *Gharīb* Lexicon

Al-Ḥārith ibn Hammām, the narrator of the *Ḥarīriyya*, usually begins each episode by stating the motivations behind his travels and the goal he wants to reach. The opening takes different forms, employing language differently each time. Underneath this variety, however, the motivations of each converge at one point: meeting the source of linguistic curiosities, Abū Zayd al-Sarūjī. Ibn Hammām starts *al-Maqāma al-Marwiyya,* for instance, as follows:

> It had become dear to me ever since my foot moved and my pen sputtered, to take literary learning for my roadway and the kindling of my torch thereat for my pursuit. Accordingly, I furrowed out its doctors and the treasures of its mysteries, and when I had found of them [such as are] the desire of the seeker, and the burning log to light one's fire from, I clutched with my hand his stirrup, and beseeched him for a dole from

> out his hoard. Withal I met none that equaled the Serûji in the abundant shower of his clouds … save that he used to wander abroad faster than the proverb, and swifter than the moon in her changes, wherefore from longing to encounter him, and from my delight in joining his assemblies, I was eager for peregrination, and found enjoyment in travel which is part of the [infernal] torment.[35]

> حُبّب إليّ مُذ سعت قدمي ونفث قلمي أن أتّخِذ الأدب شِرعة والاقتباس منه نُجعَة. فكُنتُ أنَقِّب عن أخْبَاره وخَزَنة أسْرَارِه. فإذا أَلْفَيتُ منهم بُغية المُلتمِس وجَذْوَة المُقتبِس سَدَدْتُ يدِي بغَرزِه واستَنْزَلتُ منه زكاة كنزِه. على أني لم أَلْق كالسَّرُوجي في غَزَارة السُّحُب ووضع الهِناء مواضِع النُّقْب إلّا أنّه كان أسيَرَ من المثَل وأسرَع من القمر في النَقَل وكنتُ لِهَوى مُلاقاتِه واِستِحسان مقاماته أرغَب في الاغتِراب وأستعذِب السفر الذي هُو قِطعَة من العذَاب.[36]

These words echo those of al-Khaṭṭābī, Abū ʿUbayd, Sahl ibn Hārūn, and al-Sharīshī. The narrator is fascinated with the bird of passage, Abū Zayd al-Sarūjī, and seeks to find him. This is to decrease the distance between them and experience al-Sarūjī's trickeries first-hand. To reach al-Sarūjī's *gharīb* (strange), ibn Hammām becomes a *gharīb* (a stranger). This recalls the quest of philologists to seek *gharīb* vocabulary in remote areas. The trickster is comparably remote and unreachable. He is desirable and a source of agony for the narrator. Throughout the *Ḥarīriyya,* al-Sarūjī abandons, deceives, and hurts the narrator, yet the latter continues to pursue him obsessively, to have access to his knowledge of vocabulary and his compositions (see Chapter 8).

In the preface of his recent adaptation of the *Maqāmāt,* Michael Cooperson attempts to clarify the narrator's obsessive pursuit of the trickster as follows:

> The narrator, al-Ḥārith ibn Hammām, begins many of the routines by telling us that he went to one town or another in search of some inspiring oratory. This quest appears insufficiently motivated unless we read it as a thwarted reflex of a spiritual search. In late antique Egypt, Christians would journey into the desert in search of holy men, and when they found them, would say, "Give me a word," meaning a memorable summation of some spiritual precept. This is the sort of word al-Ḥārith is looking for, even if he calls it *adab*… Naturally enough, he is drawn to the shabby, hermit-like figure he

[35] Al-Ḥarīrī, *Assemblies II,* 90.
[36] Abū Muḥammad al-Qāsim ibn Alī al-Ḥarīrī, *Kitāb Maqāmāt al*-Ḥarīrī (Cairo: al-Maṭbaʿa al-Ḥusayniyya, 1929), 416-417.

> sees haranguing crowds all over the world. And indeed, Abū Zayd is always up to the task of saying whatever needs to be said as eloquently as possible.[37]

Interpreting al-Ḥārith ibn Hammām's pursuit of al-Sarūjī as a quest for "the word" is indeed valid. In his encounters with the trickster, the narrator learns vocabulary, speeches, verses, and, generally speaking, *adab*. Even when he is quite miserable and hungry, Ibn Hammām insists on having words and ignores his basic needs. In *al-Maqāma al-Raqṭāʾ*, for instance, al-Sarūjī asks the starving narrator, "Which is more pleasing to thee, that I should share with thee of the gift, or present thee with the spotted address?" Ibn Hammām answers, "The dictation of the address will be more pleasing to me."[38] Not only does the preoccupation with words in the *Ḥarīriyya* supersede any physical needs, it supersedes spiritual needs, too. The moment al-Sarūjī decides to repent and find the path to God, the narrator immediately loses his interest in him and stops pursuing him. As al-Sarūjī starts to pursue what has hitherto been strange to him, i.e., God, he renders his feature as a *gharīb* to the narrator obsolete.

Therefore, the disinterest the narrator develops in al-Sarūjī in the fiftieth *maqāma* is not directly due to al-Sarūjī's spiritual choice, but rather to his abandoning of ambiguity and strangeness. Once he repents, al-Sarūjī stops his journey and returns to his homeland. He stops being remote, chameleon-like, and uncatchable, limiting his movements to a predictable, repeating journey between the mosque and his house. Al-Sarūjī also abandons all the different kinds of tricks, styles, masks, and compositions and limits himself to one single literary genre: *waʿẓ* or exhortation. In other words, al-Sarūjī abandons *adab* and strangeness and substitutes them with the true and singular word of God. Had al-Ḥārith ibn Hammām been interested in the "word," in its spiritual sense, he would have stayed with al-Sarūjī at the end of the *Ḥarīriyya*. The fact that he is only interested in the *gharīb* and the novelty that al-Sarūjī brings, in the linguistic sense, drives him away, because his motivation to pursue that which is remote, farfetched, *gharīb* no longer exists.

The implication here is that al-Sarūjī's name is synonymous with strangeness in the *Ḥarīriyya*. Ibn Hammām's encounter with a group of travelers, immediately before traveling to Sarūj as part of his quest to find the trickster illustrates this link. Ibn Hammām asks:

> "Is there any strange news?" Quoth they: "Indeed, we have news stranger than the ʿAnkā and more marvellous than the sight of Zarkā." So I asked them for explanation of what they said… Then they told me that they had made a halt at Sarūj, after the wild

[37] Cooperson, "Introduction," in *Impostures*, xxvii.
[38] al-Ḥarīrī, *Assemblies I,* 264.

asses[39] had left it, and had seen there its renowned Abū Zayd, who had donned the wool cloth, and was leading the rows of the praying."[40]

"هل من مُغَرِّبَة خَبَر؟" فقالوا إنّ عِندَنا لَخَبرًا أَغْرَب مِن العَنْقَاء وأَعْجَب مِن نَظَر الزَرْقَاء. فَسَألْتُهُم إيضَاح مَا قَالوا... فَحَكُوا أنّهَم أَلَمُّوا بِسَرُوج بعد أن فَارَقَهَا العُلُوج فَرَأوا أبَا زَيدَها المَعْرُوف قد لَبِس الصُوف.[41]

A remarkable coincidence indeed. It is enough to ask in the most general terms about "strange news," to learn of the one thing for which the narrator is searching: the trickster. Out of all the possible strange news and anecdotes circulating and being exchanged between random travelers, al-Sarūjī's repentance is the first one to arise. Whether Ibn Hammām asks about news of al-Sarūjī specifically, or strange news in general, the answer will be the same, because there is no *gharīb* but al-Sarūjī in the *maqāmāt*. When he stops being a *gharīb*, linguistically and spatially (see Part III), and abandons his strangeness and strangerhood, the narrative stops.

Conclusion

Al-Ḥarīrī wrote his *Maqāmāt* in a context that admired and cherished strangeness and ambiguity. In his episodes, he develops the character of the trickster, whom al-Hamadhānī created a century before, and makes him the personification of (1) *gharīb* vocabulary and (2) the power it exerted and the appeal it had for the literati during his time. As for the narrator, his journeys and adventures prove to him, as a lettered man, the absurdity of his pursuit. In *al-Maqāma al-Bakriyya*, al-Sarūjī concisely summarizes the message of the *Ḥarīriyya* as follows: "Know that adorned speeches satisfy not him who is a-hunger"[42] (*innā al-asjāʿ lā tushbiʿ man jāʿ*).[43]

Al-Hamadhānī's trickster is less ambiguous and less cruel than his successor. He entertains more than he creates riddles, uses *gharīb* moderately (as Chapter 5 will show), and never deceives his companion. Compared to him, al-Sarūjī is a problematic figure: he is constantly moving, changing, deceiving, and shows no empathy for the narrator. Al-Sarūjī adopts the vocabulary of the Bedouins, the jargon of scholars, and the vulgar words of beggars, forcing his audience to rise to his level of linguistic erudition, to understand his words and tricks. Al-

[39] According to Preston, the word *ʿilj* is constantly applied to the enemies of Islam; (probably in its sense 'a wild ass'), as a term of abuse. It also means 'a religious proselyte'." Preston, *Makamat,* 468.
[40] al-Ḥarīrī, *Assemblies II,* 181-182.
[41] al-Ḥarīrī, *Maqāmāt,* 594.
[42] al-Ḥarīrī, *Assemblies II,* 131.
[43] al-Ḥarīrī, *Maqāmāt,* 494.

Sarūjī's challenge is similar to that Abū Tammām raised,[44] in that he asks, "Why can't you understand the words that I compose?" Indeed, the narrator fails more often than not to understand the trickster. When he does, he does so only at the expense of great mental effort.

[44] al-Ṣūlī, *The Life and Times,* 81.

Chapter 5

The Making of the *Ḥarīriyya's* Language

In the previous chapter, I argued that Abū Zayd al-Sarūjī personifies rare vocabulary and that pursuing him and seeking his linguistic knowledge is comparable to the quest for *gharīb* that scholars carried out in the early premodern period. This chapter attempts to trace the origins of the *Ḥarīriyya*'s lexical and literary choices, meaning the narrator's relentless pursuit of rare and *gharīb* words and the trickster's role as a representative of this strange vocabulary. Reading the use of *gharīb* in *Ḥarīriyya* against the backdrop of the history of *gharīb* collection in the Arabic literary context, and comparing it to the *maqāma* genre as was established by al-Hamadhānī, I argue that *gharīb* vocabulary in the *Ḥarīriyya* partly reflects the genre's preoccupations as established by its first creator, and partly expresses al-Ḥarīrī's criticism of his literary context and the educated class, particularly in their incessant quest to collect the *gharīb*.

To foreground this argument, I discuss two lexical quests that preceded the *maqāma* genre and informed its themes. First, there is the effort of collecting the Bedouin's vocabulary during the period of "data collection"[1] (2nd/8th to 3rd/ 9th century), then seeking the secret words of the Banū Sāsān which began in the 3rd/9th century. Second, I examine several *maqāmāt* by al-Hamadhānī and the reception of his first readers to demonstrate that rare vocabulary and strange language were a crucial part of the *maqāma* genre since its first appearance. Finally, I refer to al-Ḥarīrī's three works which all exhibit the same tendency to critique the educated class, to show that he builds on the legacy of al-Hamadhānī and his use of strangeness to condemn the literati of his time.

I. The Pursuit of the Pure Informant

1. Why?

The period between the second/eighth century and the first half of the third/ninth century was a data-collection period, referred to in Arabic as *ʿaṣr al-tadwīn* or *jamʿ al-lugha*. During this time, scholars headed to distant and secluded deserts to gather words, expressions, and poetry directly from the mouths of reliable and "pure" informants. As a consequence of this quest,

[1] This is how Ramzi Baalbaki refers to the period of collecting linguistic and literary material from Bedouins in 2nd/8th and 3rd/ 9th centuries (see below).

classical poetry,[2] *amthāl* (idioms), *gharīb*, homonyms, synonyms, contronyms, and thematic lexicons were collected,[3] giving birth to several disciplines, including lexicography, grammar, history, and literary criticism. The motivations for this quest are disputed. Some argue that the search was conducted for sacred reasons, meaning to understand and clarify the word of God and his prophet.[4] Kees Versteegh, for instance, argues that "the first scholarly activities in Islam concentrated on the text of the *Qurʾān*, which had to be transmitted and explained."[5] Ramzi Baalbaki similarly claims that "it is virtually impossible in the period which precedes the writing of linguistic treatises to separate between philological activity and interest in studying the Qurʾānic text."[6] The number of books on rare vocabulary in the Qurʾān and the *ḥadīth* tradition, usually entitled *gharīb al-ḥadīth* and *gharīb al-Qurʾān*, attest to the validity of this opinion.

Thomas Bauer challenges this opinion and attributes it to the contemporary academic tendency for "Islamizing Islam,"[7] meaning understanding premodern Arabic literature, poetry, and language in religious terms, without trying to separate the worldly from the spiritual, and the sacred from the secular. Arguing for the latter motivations, Bauer enumerates the following reasons for collecting language:

1. an *antiquarian* interest directed at the conservation of knowledge on the material culture of ancient Arabia.
2. a *literary* interest that strives for the right understanding of ancient Arabic literature, first of all poetry.
3. a *language-cultivating* interest that is concerned with the formation and implementation of a standardized, homogeneous, and efficient language of administration and scholarship.
4. a *playful* interest fuelled by a fascination with the structure of the lexicon, which leads to investigating the relations between words and meanings in ever new forms.[8]

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[2] According to Beatrice Gruendler, "What we now term 'classical' meant either pre-Islamic or early Islamic verse composed until the end of the Umayyad period in 750." Beatrice Gruendler, *The Rise of the Arabic Book* (Cambridge & London: Harvard Press, 2020), 37.
[3] Baalbaki, Ramzi, "Lexicography, Arabic," in *EI3.*
[4] Juynboll, G.H.A., "Tadwīn," in *EI2.*
[5] Kees Versteegh, *The Arabic Language*, 53.
[6] Baalbaki, *The Arabic Lexicographical Tradition*, 1.
[7] Bauer, "Islamization of Islam," in *A Culture of Ambiguity*, 129-150.
[8] Ibid, 159.

These reasons were indeed valid and important, yet they do not contradict that religious motivations were also a factor. Insisting on the secular alone, Bauer undermines his argument concerning "premoderns' training in ambiguity," which implies the coexistence of sacred, antiquarian, and playful reasons.

Curiosity, playfulness, reward, and the need to understand religious discourse indeed coexisted. An account about Ibn Shihāb al-Zuhrī[9] (d. 124/742), one of the pioneers of *ḥadīth* collection, goes as follows:

> ʿAbd al-Raḥmān, son of Abū Zinād, reports from his father, "I used to travel with Ibn Shihāb al-Zuhrī while he is carrying wooden slates and paper." He said, "we [*ḥadīth* collectors] used to laugh at him." In another account, he says, "we used to write *ḥalāl* and *ḥarām*, while Ibn Shihāb wrote everything he heard. When it was needed, I knew he was the most knowledgeable among people.[10]

روى عبد الرحمن بن أبي الزِناد عن أبيه: كنتُ أطوف أنا وابن شِهاب الزُهري، ومع ابن شِهاب الألواح والصُحُف. قال: وكُنا نضحكُ عليه. وفي رواية قال: كُنا نكتبُ الحلال والحرام، وكان ابن شهاب يكتب كُل ما سمِع، فلما أُحتِيج إليه، علِمت أنه أَعلَم الناس.

This testimony compares a scholar who stays within the limits of his research as a *ḥadīth* collector (*ḥalāl* and *ḥarām*) and another who records everything available out of curiosity and foresight for its future utility. The acuity of Ibn Shihāb's foresight is here proven because the intellectual and cultural "need" was indeed larger than the need for preserving the religion and its book. The expression "*lammā uḥtīja ilayh*" (when he was needed) demonstrates that the permissible (*ḥalāl*) and the forbidden (*ḥarām*) were required alone in the beginning then followed by a wider need for other material. The nature and scope of the quest changed, therefore, outgrowing its initial motivation during Abū Zinād's lifetime (d. 130/748), meaning that the wider need for language, poetry, and *gharīb* emerged, if not immediately,[11] shortly afterward.

Similar to Ibn Shihāb, Abū ʿUbayd al-Qāsim ibn Sallām (d. 248) composed one of the first lexicons on *Gharīb al-ḥadīth* and spent thirty years of his life collecting vocabulary on madness, cowardness, trickery, human body parts, family trees, and short people,[12] all under

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[9] On this remarkable figure, see Michael Lecker, "Biographical notes on Ibn Shihāb al-Zuhrī," in *Journal of Semitic Studies*, 41 (1996), 21-63.

[10] Quoted by Ṣabāḥ ʿAlī al-Bayyātī, *al-Ṣaḥwa: Riḥlatī ilā al-thaqalayn*, (N.C.: Ahl al-Bayt World Assembly, N.D.), 320.

[11] See ʿAbbās's anecdote in the previous chapter.

[12] See the table of content in Abū ʿUbayd al-Qāsim ibn Sallām, *al-Gharīb al-muṣannaf,* edited by Ramaḍān ʿAbd al-Tawwāb, (Port Said: ath-Thaqāfiyya al-Dīniyya,1989), 399-400.

the patronage of kings and wealthy men (see previous chapter). Both the secular and the sacred quest were rewarded handsomely, driving more and more scholars to faraway deserts to find informants who had not yet been influenced by the demographic changes of the city, which were affecting the day-to-day language people used.

2. Who?

To qualify as a reliable informant, the Bedouins had to (1) have lived in secluded places, far away from non-Arabs, and their "corrupting" presence on "correct usage";[13] (2) they had to rely on *salīqa* (natural disposition), meaning to be illiterate and ignorant of any jargon; (3) they had to have insisted on using their dialect and have rejected to alter it, even if they had been asked to; (4) they had to be using an elevated form of Arabic, characterized by a high degree of precision in word choice, an astounding ability to generate rhymes, and an overwhelming disposition to use *gharīb* (strange) vocabulary, which other speakers hardly ever used.[14]

To remain "pure," the Bedouin informants had to conceal their familiarity with the written word, to ensure his trustworthiness from the accusation of literacy "*innaka lataktub!"* (You do know how to write!). Dhū al-Rumma (d. 117/735), for instance, pleaded with Ḥammād al-Rāwiya (d. 155/772) to conceal his secret (*uktum ʿalayya*) and reassured his interlocutor that although he liked those letters and they stuck to his memory, he never wrote them with his own hand (*thabatat fī qalbī wa-lam takhuṭṭaha yadī*).[15] The reliable informant had, therefore, to keep the opposite profile of that of the educated urban scholar who was following him; he had to demonstrate that his natural predisposition (*ṭabʿ*) is unobscured by education or disruptive language.

The fascination with collecting *gharīb* vocabulary spread among patrons (see the previous chapter), philologists, and Bedouins. Seeing opportunity in this market, Bedouins forged terms to increase their price, regulating their production of vocabulary to the purchasing power of the collectors,[16] taking a counter-journey to settle in the city (e.g., Baghdad, Basra, Kūfa),[17]

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[13] For a thorough assessment of which tribes were chosen for data collection, see Kees Versteegh, "Arabic in the Pre-Islamic Period," in *The Arabic Language*, 2nd ed. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University press, 2001), 37-53.
[14] Baalbaki, *The Arabic*, 7-16.
[15] See al-Ṣūlī, *Adab al-kātib*, edited by Muḥammad Bahja al-Atharī & Maḥmūd Shukrī al-Ālūsī, (Cairo: al-Maṭbaʿa al-Salafiyya, 1922).
[16] Régis Blachère, "Les savants Iraqiens et leurs informateurs bédouins aux IIe-IVe siècles de l'Hégire," in *Analecta*, (Damas: L'Ifpo, 1975), 60-2.
[17] According to Baalbaki tens or hundreds of Bedouins settled in the city to be accessible to philologists. See Baalbaki, *The Arabic Lexicography*, 18.

and even becoming philologists and scholars themselves.[18] As for philologists, they spent decades in the desert recording words[19] and experiencing all sorts of discomforts and strangerhood to achieve their goal. Ibn Qutayba (d. 276/889) disapprovingly describes the quest for vocabulary as follows:

> How many enquiring [scholars] have met only labor, with the reward of many traversing the earth being the return! They wander through nations and benefit the enemy, severing kinship bonds, and losing their children. They endure harsh strangerhood, lengthy bachelorhood, crude food, and slovenliness. They retire to mosques [at night] and use the moon as a lamp. They eat sparsely and their night rest is treacherous. Their concern is to collect but not to comprehend, preferring orders over [foundational] texts, oddities over norms, and abundantly accumulating [famous] names. They then return as they left, having gained nothing but a heap of treatises that burden their backs but teach them nothing.[20]

فَكَمْ من طالب حَظُهُ العَناء، وضارِبٍ في الأرض غَنِيمَته الإياب، يجوبُ البِلاد ويُغْني التِلاد، ويقطعُ الرَّحِم، ويُضيّع الِعيال، صابِرًا على جَفَا الغُربة وطولِ العُزبة، وخُشونَة المَطْعم ورَثاثِة الهيئة، مَبِيتُه المساجد ومِصباحه القَمر، وطعامُه قِفَار وهُجُوعُه غِرَار، وهمُّه الجَمْع دُون التَّفَقُّه فيه، والطُرُق دون المُتُون، والغرائِب دون السُنَن والاستِكْثار مِن أسماء الرِّجال، حتى يعود كما بَدأ لم يَحُل مِمّا طلب إلا بأسفار حَمَلها ولم يَنفَعهُ عِلمُها...

Ibn Qutayba's characterization might be an exaggeration, aiming at highlighting the contradiction between abundantly collecting vocabulary and the lack of order and careful study of the material, which is counterproductive. This miserable portrait of the collector and his journey, in other words, legitimize Ibn Qutayba's composition of yet another book on *gharīb*, and provides him with a crucial role: that of the one who is going to bring order and sense to a randomly collected material. It is a typical attitude with premodern authors to clarify in their exordiums the importance and necessity of yet another book in any genre, which only they can write, and to emphasize the need that produces it.[21] Ibn Qutayba's aims and intentions aside, his words

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[18] Baalbaki mentions a certain Abū al-Baydāʾ al-Riyāḥī, who moved to Basra and taught boys for a fee. Ibid, 21.

[19] I mean here Naḍr ibn Shumayl who spent forty years in the desert. See al-Anbārī, *Nuzhat al-alibbāʾ fī ṭabaqāt al-udabāʾ*, edited by Ibrahim al-Samarrāʾī, 3rd ed. (Zarqa: al-Manār, 1985), 73.

[20] Ibn Qutayba, *Gharīb al-ḥadīth,* edited by. ʿAbdallāh al-Jabbūrī (Baghdad: Maktabat al-ʿĀnī, 1977), 147-8.

[21] Kīlīṭū compares different premodern prologues and focalises through the ways authors emphasize the general urgent need for their books. A similar example to Ibn Qutayba's above

do capture the fascination during his time with linguistic novelty and oddity, and the obvious discrepancy between the pains of collecting linguistic material and the thrill of discovering the unfamiliar. Realizing this discrepancy is perhaps the reason behind Abū ʿAmr ibn al-ʿAlāʾ's (d. c. 154–6/770–2) burning of all the fascicles of information he obtained from the Bedouins, which were said to have filled an entire room in his house.[22]

The search, however, was not always as miserable and painful as Ibn Qutayba describes. Next to sleepless nights and laborious journeys, there was also an entertaining aspect to encounters between the collector and his informant. The palpable difference between the scholar and the Bedouin was that the first belonged to an urban sphere, and was educated, curious, and privileged, whereas the second belonged to a rural sphere, was illiterate, and accustomed to harsh conditions. Nevertheless, this resulted in a large corpus of anecdotes that blend miscommunication and humor. For instance, a Bedouin listening to a gathering of grammarians and linguists feels "confused and skeptical" (*ḥāra wa-ʿajaba, wa-aṭraqa wa-waswasa*) of the metalanguage. Accordingly, he interrupts them saying, "I see that you are addressing our language in our language, with a language that is not ours" (*arākum tatakallamūn bi-kalāminā fī kalāminā bi-mā laysa fī kalāminā*).[23] The gap between these two languages and two figures is dramatized later in the *maqāma* genre, through the narrator whose sole motive in the journey is to pursue *adab*, and through the trickster whose only capital is his words. The material of the latter, however, is not limited to she-camels, horses, and deserts, for he belongs to the Banū Sāsān tribe, which makes him a connoisseur, by genealogy, of a transgressive and obscene language.

II. The Pursuit of the Transgressive Informant

In the same century (3rd/9th) interest in the Bedouin's vocabulary started to fade, but another vocabulary started to attract the attention of the educated literati. The new vocabulary was neither rare, pure, nor eloquent. On the contrary, it represented the base and the obscene, which a section of the population used on a day-to-day basis. The source of this lexicon was the low classes, the uneducated masses, and the tribe of the Banū Sāsān.

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statement is that in Ibn Manẓūr's preface of *Lisān al-ʿArab,* in which he describes his dictionary as the arc of Noah that can save all humans from drowning in linguistic mistakes. See Kīlīṭū, "Namūdhaj," in *al-Adab wa-l-irtiyāb* (Casablanca: Toubqal, 2007), 5-16.

[22] Asmaa Afsaruddin, "Abū ʿAmr b. al-ʿAlāʾ," in *EI3.*

[23] Al-Qifṭī, *Inbāh al-ruwāh ʿalā anbāh al-nuḥāh*, edited by Muḥammad Abū al-Faḍl Ibrāhīm, Vol. II (Cairo: Dār al-Fikr, 1982), 42.

1. Collecting Daily Words and Curses

Several playful and humorist figures in premodern *adab* adopted transgressive vocabulary and collected all kinds of odd and rare lexicons. The Abbasid poet Abū al-ʿIbar, for instance, compiled *Kitāb Jāmiʿ al-ḥamāqāt wa-ḥāwī al-raqaʿāt* (Compendium of Foolishnesses and Container of Sillinesses).[24] He describes his peculiar way of collecting material as follows:

> I wake up early and sit at the bridge with pen and paper, and I write all that I hear from the speech of those who come and go, the boatmen and the watercarriers until I fill both sides of the paper. Then I cut it in half and paste it the other way and get speech that is unparalleled in its folly."[25]

Abū al-ʿIbar's morning routine can be interpreted as a parody of the methods of the data-collection period. Instead of heading to the distant desert, he goes to the bridge where water meets land. His "informants" are not secluded or foreign, but rather near, common, and constantly on the move. Their vocabulary is not rare or learned, but hurried, vulgar, and quotidian. Instead of recording the words authentically, Abū al-ʿIbar shuffles them to erase meaning and reduce them to random sounds. Parodying the philologists, Abū al-ʿIbar embarks on a journey to contradict them: he seeks informants, records *laḥn* (solecism) and common vocabulary, and rearranges his corpus to sound "foolish" and incongruous.

A century later, specifically in the Buyid era (320-454/ 932-1062), "the prophet of *sukhf*"[26] and the "Imam of libertinism" (*fī al-mujūn imām*),[27] Ibn al-Ḥajjāj (d. 391/1001) follows the same method, with some adjustments, to collect his material. He narrates:

> What facilitated my method was that my father sold plots [of land] adjacent to his houses to people who demolished them and turned them into lodges that housed beggars, base strangers, handicapped mendicants, menial workers, servants, and lackadaisical people. During summer nights, I listened to men and women among them cursing back and forth on the roofs. Equipped with blank paper and writing utensils, I recorded

[24] Yāqūt is the only biographer who mentions this book in Abū al-'Ibar's biographical entry. See Yāqūt, *Irshād,* vol. V, 2298.

[25] Quoted by al-Iṣbahānī, *al-Aghānī*, Vol. XXIII, 146 [Antoon's translation]. For an interesting reading of Abū al-ʿIbar's writing rituals, see Kīlīṭū, "*Abū al-ʿIbar wa-l-samaka*," in *al-Ḥikāya wa-l-taʾwīl*, (Casablanca: Toubqal, 1988), 45-58.

[26] "[I am] a man who claims prophethood in *sukhf* …Who dares to doubt prophets? (*rajul yaddaʿī al-nubuwwa fī al-sukhf... wa-man dhā yashukku fī al-anbiyāʾ*). See al-Thaʿālibī, *Yatīmat al-dahr,* 37 [S. Antoon's translation].

[27] Al-Ṣafadī, *al-Wāfī bi-l-wafayāt*, edited by Aḥmad al-Arnaʾūṭ and Turkī Muṣṭafā, vol XII, (Beirut: Dār Iḥyāʾ al-Turāth, 2000), 205.

what I heard. When I came across something that I did not understand, I transcribed it the way I heard it, then summoned the following day the person from whom I had heard it—I knew their voices, they were my neighbors—to request the explanation and record it. I remained the Aṣmaʿī of that region for a while.

أعانَنِي على مَذْهَبي أَن أبي كَانَ أَبَاع مُسْتَغَلّات لَهُ مُتَّصِلَة بِدُورِه فابْتاعَها قومٌ نَقَضُوها وبَنُوها خَانَاتٍ أَسْكَنُوها الشّحَاذِين والغُرباء السُّفَل وَذَوي العاهَات المُكَدِيين وكُل دَلوك وقِطَعي مِن الْخُلد والرَبيدية فَكنتُ أسمعُ فِي ليَالِي الصَّيف خَاصَّة مُشاتَمات رِجَالهم وَنِسَائِهِم فَوق السُطُوح وَمَعِي دواةٌ وبياضٌ أثْبِت مَا أسمعُهُ فَإِذا مرّ بِي مَا لَا أفهمهُ أثْبَتُه على لَفظِه واِستدعَيت من غدٍ مَنْ قد سَمِعتُ مِنْهُ ذَلِك وَأَنا عَارِف بِلُغَاتِهِم لِأَنّهُم جِيراني فأَسْأَلُه عَن التَّفْسِير وأَكْتُبُه وَلمْ أَزَل أصمَعي تِلْكَ الْبَادِيَة مُدَّة.[28]

Unlike Abū al-ʿIbar who recorded random words from passers-by, Ibn al-Ḥajjāj was far more attentive, choosing to engage with his material and informants. He focused on foul language, took note of every voice's identity, and enlisted the help of the people to clarify obscure meaning. In contrast to Abū al-ʿIbar, who chose morning time to record his words, Ibn al-Ḥajjāj chose summer nights, because curses and transgressive language are more likely to occur among people that chose to be active at night. Abū al-ʿIbar sought noises, his informants were in transit; Ibn al-Ḥajjāj longed for intimate insults that were exchanged inside the homes of beggars, base strangers, etc., and in night gatherings.

Contrary to the philologist who went to the far desert, and Abū al-ʿIbar who went every day to the bridge, Ibn al-Ḥajjāj remained in the comfort of his house and the words came to his ears. His informants were vulgar and loud and all he had to do was eavesdrop. Facing incomprehensible terms, Ibn al-Ḥajjāj does not move to seek clarification but "summons" the informant to his place. The hierarchy is clear and inflexible. The interest in the base and vulgar does not entail movement in space nor requires mingling with low classes.[29] Despite the absence of the journey and the change of the vocabulary, Ibn al-Ḥajjāj describes his corpus as an extension of the data-collection period, putting himself as the successor of the eminent lexicographer al-Aṣmaʿī (d. 213/ 828). The veracity of this account cannot be ascertained, but it highlights the

[28] al-Ṣafadī, *al-Wāfī,* vol. XII, 206.

[29] Despite this obvious hierarchy, Ibn al-Ḥajjāj was praised by both the elite and the commoners. The first saw in his poetry an occasion to "take a peek and mock the inability of these nameless characters," and the second found it fascinating to hear their own expressions, curses, and sense of humour in the poetry of the elite". Sinan Antoon, *The Poetics of the Obscene in Premodern Arabic Poetry Ibn al-Ḥajjāj and Sukhf* (New York: Palgrave and Macmillan, 2014), 132.

engagement of certain individuals with aspects of the original quest for language, repurposing them for the sake of parody.

2. Collecting Argot

The informants whom Ibn al-Ḥajjāj describes as "beggars, base strangers, handicapped mendicants, menial workers, servants, and lackadaisical people," shared a designation that brought them all together: the sons of Sāsān or *Banū Sāsān*. Two different accounts explain this appellation:

> One states that Sāsān was the son of the ancient Persian ruler Bahman b. Esfandīār, but, being displaced from the succession, took to a wandering life and gathered round him other vagabonds, thus forming the "sons of Sāsān." Another explanation says that the Persian nation as a whole took to begging and vagabondage after the Arab conquest of the 1st/7th century and excited pity by claiming to be descendants of the dispossessed Sasanian house.[30]

Banū Sāsān were a multi-ethnic group who made up a social group that did not rely on kinship or tribal ties. This group united people who practiced all sorts of menial crafts, such as entertainers, drummers, *Qurʾān*-reciting beggars, fortune-tellers, monkey trainers, magicians, land surveyors, mosque supervisors, and dues collectors.[31] They were outlaws, marginalized group whose main income depended on their ability to perform. According to al-Aḥnaf al-ʿUkbarī (d. 385/995), they were the new *ṣaʿālīk* (brigand poets), who used anecdotes and *adab* instead of weapons (*hum al-ṣaʿālīk illā annahum ʿadalū ʿan al-silāḥ ilā al-akhbār wa-l-nutaf*).[32]

The language of Banū Sāsān was "a mixed language that they called *Sīn* and that outsiders called "the language of the Strangers."[33] Evidence for a fascination with their language is attested throughout the premodern era, in works such as al-Jawbarī's (fl. 13/1216–17 and 646/1248) remarkable guide to trickery, *Kashf al-asrār wa-hatk al-astār* (*The Book of Charlatans*), composed in the 7th/13th century, Ṣafī al-Dīn al-Ḥillī's (d. 749/1349) *al-Qaṣīda al-Sāsāniyya*, composed during the 8th/ 14th century, and Ibn Dāniyāl's (d. 710/1310) shadow play

[30] Bosworth, *The Medieval Islamic*, 22-24.
[31] Kristina Richardson, *Roma in the Medieval Islamic World* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2022), 15-17.
[32] al-Aḥnaf al-ʿUkbarī, quoted by Aḥmad al-Ḥusīn, "*al-Aḥnaf al-ʿUkbarī: Shāʿir al-mukaddīn wa-l-mutasawwilīn,"* in *al-Turāth al-ʿArabī*, n. 96 (December 2004), 219.
[33] Kristina L. Richardson, "Invisible Strangers or Romani History Reconsidered," in *History of the Present,* n.10 (October 2020), 188.

ʿAjīb wa-Gharīb (*The Amazing Preacher and the Stranger*), in which the main character identifies as one of the Banū Sāsān who was forced into exile. Ibn Dāniyāl's language is so specific to Banū Sāsān to the point of being described as the only writer who challenged al-Ḥarīrī's position as "the most artistic and difficult Arabic writer."[34]

The oldest interest in the vocabulary of Banū Sāsān figures in al-Jāḥiẓ's *al-Bukhalāʾ,* specifically in the account of Khālid ibn Yazīd (see Chapter 9). The preoccupation with their vocabulary reaches its climax during the time of al-Ṣāḥib Ibn ʿAbbād (d. 385/995).[35] Unlike the collectors mentioned above, Ibn ʿAbbād did not travel to his informants nor eavesdrop on them. He hired people from the tribe of Banū Sāsān to record their slang argot and teach it to him. Al-Thaʿālibī recounts that al-Ṣāḥib used to proudly recite al-Aḥnaf al-ʿUkbarī's *Munākāt Banī Sāsān*,[36] and that he commissioned Abū Dulaf al-Khazrajī (d. end of 4th/10th century) to emulate the *Munākāt* and compose a similar ode containing more of Banū Sāsān's argot (see chapter 9).

In *al-Qaṣīda al-Sāsāniyya*,[37] as al-Thaʿālibī describes it, Abū Dulaf "mentiones the baggers, and makes people aware of their different subdivisions and their various practices."[38] Besides the opening (1-24) and concluding (161-196) verses which address the theme of strangerhood or *ghurba*,[39] all the other verses (135 out of 196) enumerate the different kinds of beggars and their tricks. The display opens as follows:

We are the beggars' brotherhood, and no one denies us our lofty pride.

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[34] "If al-Ḥarīrī until then had been considered as the most artistic and difficult Arabic writer, Ibn Dāniyāl challenges him for this position. It needs far greater effort to understand him as we have no commentaries on him and the rare words, he uses have not found their way into the lexicons". Paul Kahle, "Introduction," in *Three Shadow Plays by Muḥammad ibn Dāniyāl*, (Cambridge: Gibb Memorial Trust, 1992), 1.

[35] Montgomery describes the influence of Ibn ʿAbbād on the literary scene as follows: "It is with the Būyids and with al-Ṣāḥib Ibn ʿAbbād and Ibn al-Ḥajjāj, in particular, that *sukhf* meaning "obscenity" became a slogan of the age, characterised by a fascination with the more sordid aspects of life and society which centred around, and was fuelled by, the interests of Ibn ʿAbbād. His patronage and predilections gave such a fillip to the taste for the obscene that it became a literary vogue and a social accomplishment." Montgomery, J.E., "*Sukhf*," in *EI2*.

[36] al-Thaʿālibī, *Yatīmat al-dahr,* Vol. III, 414. Bosworth argues that *munākāt* is just a misspelling of the word *munāghāt*, meaning jargon. See Bosworth, *The Mediaeval Islamic Underworld,* Vol. I, 158.

[37] Bosworth, *The Mediaeval Islamic,* 181-290.

[38] al-Thaʿālibī, *Yatīmat al-dahr,* Vol. III, 414.

[39] The structure of the ode, opening and concluding with *ghurba*, might have inspired the structure of the *maqāmāt*, which likewise open and conclude with the same motif. Abū Dulaf was a contemporary of al-Hamadhān, and two of his verses are recited by Abū al-Fatḥ al-Iskandarī. See Section III.

They are a diverse group; if you ask me about them, a knowledgeable and experienced one can give you full information.

Our company includes every person avid for copulation, for vulvas and anuses indifferently …

And of our number is the feigned madman and madwoman, with metal charms.[40]

The poem is similar in tone to the obscene and transgressive language Ibn al-Ḥajjāj collected. It explicitly refers to the reproductive organs and uses sexual references as a tool to shock and impress. Al-Thaʿālibī informs us that "the Ṣāḥib became very animated and was delighted with it. He learned it all by heart and rewarded him [Abū Dulaf] generously for it."[41] Though al-Ṣāḥib sometime used the promise of reward to entice poets, at times he used force.

Al-Tawḥīdī (d. 414/1023), for example, who left the court resentful and empty-handed[42] adopts a different attitude than the one above. He recounts the stories of other informants, who were not so pleased to work with Ibn ʿAbbād. Among these informants was Abū al-Faraj al-Ṣūfī al-Baghdādī, who apologizes for complying with Ibn ʿAbbād's *raqāʿa* (silliness) and acting as a fool (*fa-aḥmaqu lahu sāʿa*) while teaching him the secrets of "those who burn themselves (*aṣḥāb al-ḥurq*) and those who wear rags (*arbāb al-khiraq*)," justifying his actions by the need to feed his numerous children (*thaqīl al-ẓahr bi-l-ʿiyāl*).[43] Al-Tawḥīdī also recounts the story of al-Aqṭaʿ al-Kūfī from whom Ibn ʿAbbād was learning

> the speech of beggars, the jargon of the persistent mendicants, the expressions of the gamblers and of those who rattle together the two dices, are reduced to a wretched condition, act in a blasphemous manner, and go around making snorting noises, tearing up their loincloth and spitting into the air.[44]

كان يتعلّم مِنه كلام المُكَدِّين، ومُناغاة الشحّاذين، وعِبارة المُقامِرين ومن يصرّ في اللّعب بالكَعْبَين، ويضجَر ويكفَر وينخُر ويشُقّ المِئزر، ويبزُق في الجوّ.

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[40] Abu Dulaf al-Khazrajī, al-*Qaṣīda al-Sāsāniyya, in Medieval Underworld*, Vol. II, 192.

[41] al-Thaʿālibī, *Yatīmat al-dahr,* Vol. III, 414.

[42] Al-Tawḥīdī was quite resentful when he left al-Ṣāḥib's court. He says: "If Ibn ʿAbbād has stopped me from taking his ephemeral money, he cannot stop me from his lasting reputation. Even if I have left empty-handed, my tongue and pen are [forever] dedicated to bringing him shame, disgrace, and defamation."

"ولِئنْ كان مَنَعَني ماله الذي لم يبق له، فما حظر علي عِرضَه الذي بقي بعده،و لِئنْ كنتُ انصرفتُ عنه بِخُفيّ حُنين لقد لصَق به لساني وقلمي كل عار شَنار وشِين."

See al-Tawḥīdī, *Mathālib al-wazīrayn,* edited by Ibrāhīm Kaylānī (Damascus: Dār al-Fikr, 1961), 60.

[43] Ibid, 188.

[44] Ibid, 127-128 [Bosworth's translation].

Just as Ibn al-Ḥajjāj sent for his informants to come to his house, Ibn ʿAbbād summons al-Aqṭaʿ al-Kūfī, keeps him in his place, and does not permit him to go to his family. The informant narrates:

> If there is no other proof of this man's [Ibn 'Abbad's] madness, his weak faith and feeble mind, except for his fondness of me, it would be sufficient. For I am a man who had one of his hands imputed for brigandage, so what do you have to say about a thief and a gambler? I am a pimp, a sodomite and a fornicator. … I have strangled people; I have slit purses; I have bored into houses to steal from them … There is not one reprehensible action in the whole world which I have not committed, and no foulness which I have not perpetrated. Despite all of this, he tempts, exhausts, hurts, and forebodes me from going back home to my wife.[45]

Even if this account is fabricated and composed for the sake of defaming and seeking revenge, it demonstrates the fascination with untameable figures in society and shows that the value of argot lies in its strangeness, rarity, and also in the profile of the informant. Instead of the spatial and linguistic conditions that gave value to the language of Bedouin (see previous section), the value of argot lies in the parasitic, transgressive, and obscene nature of its original user. The ruder and weirder the source was, the more valuable his vocabulary was, and the further the collector could go in extracting and accumulating material.

There is little difference between Abū al-ʿIbar's, Ibn al-Ḥajjāj's, and al-Ṣāḥib Ibn ʿAbbād's methods. Whether they eavesdropped on curses, collected random words, arrested informants, or forced them to act like fools, they all parodied the period of data-collection and shared an obsession with strange and rare vocabulary. Interestingly, the journey to the source became remarkably short, and the conditions of a reliable informant transformed. However, the strangeness and exotic nature of the "other," whether he was a Bedouin or a beggar, remained the same. The *maqāma* genre dramatizes the quest for both vocabularies, *gharīb* and transgressive, by creating two characters: the narrator who resembles all the above collectors of *gharīb* and argot, and the trickster who is as eloquent as the Bedouin and as ferocious as a son of Sāsān.

[45] Ibid, 127.

III. Al-Hamadhānī's Lexicon

While al-Ḥarīrī spent nine years (495-504/ 1101-1110) composing his *Maqāmāt*, al-Hamadhānī only spent two (382-383/ 992-993).[46] The period of writing aligns perfectly with the current claims in the scholarship (see Introduction) that al-Hamadhānī's language is "refreshingly simple and straightforward in comparison to al-Ḥarīrī's."[47] Al-Hamadhānī's *maqāmāt* and his first readers prove otherwise. Just like his successor, al-Hamadhānī employs argot, bedouin vocabulary, riddles, lipograms, and *badīʿ*, meaning that as al-Hamadhānī's work stands, it does not agree with its characterization as "simple" or "straightforward," and that what qualifies al-Harīrī's language as difficult and ambiguous can be traced to inception of *maqāma* genre a century earlier with al-Hamadhānī.

1. Al-Hamadhānī's *Maqāmāt*

In *al-Maqāma al-Jāḥiẓiyya*, al-Hamadhānī criticizes the eminent scholar al-Jāḥiẓ through his trickster Abū al-Fatḥ al-Iskandarī as follows:

> 'Now the eloquent man is he whose poetry does not detract from his prose and whose prose is not ashamed of his verse. Tell me, do you know of a single fine poem of Jáḥiz [sic]?' We said: 'No!' He said: 'Come, let us consider his prose. It consists of far-fetched allusions, a paucity of metaphors and simple expressions. He is tied down to the simple language he uses and avoids and shirks difficult words. Have you ever heard of a rhetorical expression of his or of any recondite words?[48]

The trickster claims that al-Jāḥiẓ does not use rare vocabulary, yet that is not the case in the account of Khālid ibn Yazīd in the Book of Misers, the oldest text that records the "recondite words" of Banū Sāsān. Al-Hamadhānī was aware of this text because he emulates it in *al-Maqāmā al-Waṣiyya*.[49] The trickster's statement is thus an intentional oversight that suggests several interpretations. Perhaps al-Hamadhānī needed to criticize a classical model to provoke his readers and assert his eminence through controversy. Perhaps, al-Jāḥiẓ is inserted in this

[46] Prendergast, "Introduction," 4.
[47] Ibid.
[48] al-Hamadhānī, *Maqāmāt Badīʿ al-Zamān*, 72.
[49] Both texts, Khālid ibn Yazīd's account and M. *al-Waṣiyya,* display two tricksters praising stinginess to their sons. The most evident proof of the emulation is the repetition of vocative case "O son of the vile woman" (*ya ibn al-khabītha*) and "O son of the unlucky woman" (*afahimthā ya ibn al-mashʾūma?*) in the *Hamadhāniyya*, which matches Khālid ibn Yazīd's repetitive use of *ya ibn al-khabītha.*

maqāma as a representative of an old style of writing, in which the words are simple and meanings are accessible, as opposed to the novel styles which employed *badīʿ*, metaphors, rhyme (*sajʿ*), and *gharīb*. Or perhaps, al-Hamadhānī refers to al-Jāḥiẓ as a counterexample to highlight the essence of the *maqāma*. In other words, unlike al-Jāḥiẓ who did not compose poetry, use adorned language, or rare vocabulary, the *maqāma* combines prose and poetry, employs complex metaphors, *badīʿ*, strange expressions, and strange vocabulary. Critiquing al-Jāḥiẓ, al-Hamadhānī introduces the basic components of his style: *prosimetrum*, beautification of style, and rare lexicon.

2. Al-Hamadhānī's Literary Models

Just as Ibn al-Ḥajjāj and Abū Dulaf al-Khazrajī, al-Hamadhānī was a contemporary of al-Ṣāḥib ibn ʿAbbād and shared his age's preoccupation with argot and obscene language. It is no wonder, therefore, that he borrows the verses of Abū Dulaf and assigns them to his fictitious trickster Abū al-Fatḥ al-Iskandarī:

> Sirrah the times are false,
> Let not deception beguile thee.
> Cleave not to one character, but,
> As the nights change, do thou change too[50]

ويحَكَ هذا الزمان زُور
فلا يَغُرّنَك الغرور
لا تلتَزم حالةً ولكن
دُرْ مع الليالي كما تدور

These verses, featured in *al-Maqāma al-Qarīḍiyya*, summarize the trickster's reasoning throughout the *Maqāmāt*. Whenever he is reproached for his dishonesty and immoral conduct, Abū al-Fatḥ al-Iskandarī reproduces the same answer in different forms and styles, "Don't blame me. Blame time! Blame the turns of Time!"

In his *al-Qaṣīda al-Sāsāniyya*, Abū Dulaf al-Khazrajī displays the different kinds of Banū Sāsān in 135 verses. Al-Hamadhānī imitates the intellectual interest in their vocabulary and transgressive acts in *al-Maqāma al-Sāsāniyya* and also in al-*Maqāma al-Ruṣāfiyya*. In the latter, the narrator stops at a mosque to take refuge from the hot sun and meets a group of people

[50] al-Thaʿālibī, *Yatīmat al-dahr,* vol. III, 415-6. [Prendergast's translation]

who have decided to discuss the different types of thieves. ʿĪsā ibn Hishām narrates the following: "They mentioned among the thieves, forgers of seals, the light-fingered, and palmers, him who gives short weight, him who robs in the ranks, him who throttles by the sudden attack" (*dhakarū aṣḥāb al-fuṣūṣ min al-luṣūṣ, wa-ahl al-laff wa-l-qaff, wa-man yaʿmal bi-l-ṭaff, wa-man yaḥtāl fī al-ṣaff, wa-man yakhnuq bi-l-daff*).[51] These tricks may seem understandable in translation, but they certainly were not in the original. This explains why al-Hamadhānī, as Orfali and Pomerantz have recently noted, provides a detailed commentary on *al-Maqāma al-Ruṣāfiyya*, to clarify its lexicon to the readers who were certainly unfamiliar with it.[52]

Besides Abū Dulaf al-Khazrajī whose presence is implicit in the *Maqāmāt*, al-Hamadhānī explicitly fictionalizes an avid collector who studied different unconventional groups in al-*Maqāma al-Ṣaymariyya.* This episode is based on Abū al-ʿAnbas al-Ṣaymarī (d. 275/888), [53]a famous humorist at the ʿAbbāsid court, and the author of thirty treatises on the most obscene and ridiculous subjects, including *Kitāb ṭiwāl al-liḥā* (*The Book of the Long Bearded*), *Kitāb masāwiʾ al-ʿawāmm wa-akhbār al-sifla wa-l-aghtām* (*The Book of Commoners' Defaults and Accounts of the Hooligans and the Lowly*), *Kitāb al-khaḍkhaḍa fī jald ʿumayra* (*The Book of Masturbation*), *Nawādir al-quwwād* (*Anecdotes about Pimps*), and *Kitāb al-Saḥḥāqāt wa-l-baghghāʾin* (*Book of Tribadists and Fornicators*).[54] None of these treatises survive, and all we know about Abū al-ʿAnbas comes from his technical and astrological works,[55] and from al-Hamadhānī's *al-Maqāma al-Ṣaymariyya* which focuses on the theme of collecting obscene corpora of words.

The *maqāma* tells the story of how al-Ṣaymarī first lost his friends after he used all his money, and how he traveled and collected all kinds of anecdotes and peculiar accounts to finally return home wealthy and take revenge on his fake companions. The *maqāma* ends with

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[51] al-Hamadhānī, *Maqāmāt Badīʿ al-Zamān*, 123.
[52] Orfali and Pomerantz*, The Maqāmāt,* 162-3.
[53] Al-Ṣaymarī lived in the same time as Abū al-ʿIbar. *Al-Aghānī* records a conversation between the two. Al-Ṣaymarī narrates: "I said to Abū al-ʿIbar when we were at al-Mutawakkil's house: Woe unto you! What compels you to [utter] all this *sukhf* with which you have filled the earth with your poetry and speeches when you are an elegant man of letters [who has] good poetry. He said: You cuckold! Do you want me to be out of demand [so] you can profit? Moreover, you have the gall to speak [thus] when you [yourself] abandoned knowledge and composed in *raqāʿa* thirty books and then some? I would like you to tell me if raison (*ʿaql*) was profitable would you have been favoured over al-Buhturī when he said of the caliph yesterday." Al-Iṣbahānī, *al-Aghānī*, vol. XXIII, 145, trans. Antoon, *The Poetics of the Obscene*, 42.
[54] For a full list of his books, see Ibn al-Nadīm, *al-Fihrist* (Beirut: Dār al-Maʿrifa, N.D.), 216-217. See also Pellat, "Abu al-ʿAnbas al-Ṣaymarī,", in *EI2.*
[55] Bosworth, *The Mediaeval Islamic*, 30-31.

sedating the hypocrite friends, cutting their beards while they are asleep, and sending them to their houses on the backs of transporters who will later tell of their shame.

In addition to the humorous plot, the episode captures the value of *adab* and the possibility of restoring one's wealth thanks to strange material. The fictitious protagonist narrates:

> Thus I collected anecdotes and fables, witticism and traditions, poems of the humourists, the diversions of the frivolous the fabrications of the lovesick, the saws of the pseudo-philosophers, the tricks of the conjurors, that artifices of the artful, the rare sayings of convivial companions, the fraud of the astrologers, the finesse of quacks, the deception of the effeminate the guile of the cheats… till I acquired much property, got possession of Indian swords and Yemen blades.[56]

In all the *Hamadhāniyya* episodes, tricksters achieve their goals thanks to their deceptive ways and eloquent tongue. Abū al-ʿAnbas al-Ṣaymarī possesses an additional tool: the corpus of the strange and the unheard-of. Just as the real Abū al-ʿAnbas al-Ṣaymarī, the trickster of *al-Maqāma al-Ṣaymariyya* travels to faraway lands to collect strange and rare language and make a fortune. His corpus provides him with more than coins, meals, charity, and praise; it grants him wealth that brings him revenge. In this episode, al-Hamadhānī emphasizes the rule which indicates that the stranger and rarer the material, the more money it is worth (see Chapter 6) and the more its indirect results.

The fact that al-Hamadhānī traces the steps of Abū Dulaf al-Khazrajī and Abū al-ʿAnbas al-Ṣaymarī and fictionalizes them in his work demonstrates that he is not as simple and intelligible as modern *maqāma*-scholarship claims him to be (see chapters 2 and 3). Just as Ibn al-Ḥajjāj, Abū al-ʿIbar, and al-Ḥarīrī, al-Hamadhānī had a taste for all kinds of strangeness. He created the *maqāma* genre to display his and his age's fascination with the strange, both fictionally and lexically.

3. Al-Hamadhānī's First Readers

Al-Hamadhānī's fondness of strangeness, be it literary or lexical, was evident to his first audience, which is evident in al-Ḥuṣrī's statement discussed in the Introduction. As an admirer of al-Hamadhānī, al-Ḥuṣrī praises the latter generously and cites twenty of his *maqāmāt* in *Zahr al-ādāb*. This, however, was not the case for al-Hamadhānī's readers. Ibn Abī al-Khiṣāl (d.540/1146), for instance, draws a negative picture of al-Hamadhānī, characterizing him as he

[56] al-Hamadhānī, *Maqāmāt Badīʿ al-Zamān*, 160.

who "narrowed speech" (*ḍayyaqa min al-kalām mā tawassaʿ*),[57] and changed "easy Arabic" (*ghayyara al-ʿarabiyya al-sahla*),[58] thus, deserves banishment and disgrace. Ibn Abī al-Khiṣāl portrays al-Hamadhānī in a virtual eschatological scene in which eloquent people come together in heaven and decide to expel the author of the *maqāmāt*. The author says:

> Yes, if eloquent people would ever meet in the day of resurrection to quench their thirst from the [divine] basin, [laid] proportionally to their good deeds, Abū Isḥāq[59] would be the first to drink, and al-Badīʿ would be banished with heavy rods. The owner of the basin would set between us and him [al-Hamadhānī] a barrier, ordering him "Step back to seek light. Your words are too weak to reach oratory. Your sentences are lifeless and pulseless. You have composed nothing but void blusters and scruffy high-sounding words.[60]

أجل لو وُقِّت لِلبُلغاء يوم لا يعدونَه، ونُصِب لهم حوض على قدر الإحسان يَرِدُونه، لَوَرَد أبو إسحاق أول وَارِد وأخذتنا مع البديع عِصي الذوائِد، وضَرَب صاحب الحوض بيننا وبينه سُورًا، وقال ارجعوا وراءكم فالتمِسوا نورًا، ليس بِكَلامكم من البلاغة طَرْق ولا نَبْض لكم في الإعراب عِرق، هذه جَعاجِع رِئْمان وقَعاقِع شِنان.

The passage is rich in eschatological motifs. One may, incidentally, consider the possible influence of Abū al-ʿAlāʿ al-Maʿarrī's (d. 1057) *Risālat al-ghufrān* (*The Epistle of Forgiveness)* in which classical poets gather to enjoy the promised goods of the afterlife and forget about grammar and poetry. But the scene Ibn Abī al-Khiṣāl describes references the 13th verse in *Sūrat al-Ḥadīd*:

> Upon the day when the hypocrites, men and women, shall say to those who have believed: 'Wait for us, so that we may borrow your light.' It shall be said, 'Return your back behind, and seek for a light!' And a wall shall be set up between them, having a door in the inward whereof is mercy, and against the outward therefore is chastisement.[61]

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[57] ʿAbdallāh ibn Abī al-Khiṣāl, *Rasāʾil*, edited by Muḥammad Riḍwān al-Dāya (Damascus: Dār al-Fikr, 1988), 150.
[58] Ibid, 154.
[59] Ibn Abī al-Khiṣāl refers here to Abū Isḥāq al-Ṣābī, the whole passage is in answer to a letter from an anonymous man who asks ibn Abī al-Khiṣāl to compare Badīʿ al-Zamān with al-Ṣābī. We do not have the original letter, but the anonymous interlocuter is in favor of al-Hamadhānī.
[60] Ibn Abī al-Khiṣāl, *Rasāʾil*, 154.
[61] *Al-Qurʾan* 57:13. Translation by Arthur J. Arberry, *The Koran Interpreted*, (London: Oxford University, 1964), 565.

Just as the believers were separated from the hypocrites, al-Hamadhānī is cast away from the eloquent. Ibn Abī al-Khiṣāl assumes the role of judge and condemns al-Hamadhānī for his strange use of language which produces a pompous style. He concludes this scene with firm orders: "Execute him. Seize him. Drag him, then add him to those who slavishly followed his conduct!" (*iqtulūh, wa-khudhūh, fa-iʿtalūh, wa-alḥiqū bi-h man istabṣara fī-mā sharaʿ*).[62]

Despite the obvious difference between Ibn Abī al-Khiṣāl and al-Ḥuṣrī, it is obvious that they both perceived strange language as a defining element in al-Hamadhānī's writings and the *maqāmāt*. Reading Ibn Abī al-Khiṣāl's and al-Ḥuṣrī's statements together with the *maqāmāt al-Ṣaymariyya, al-Ruṣāfiyya, and al-Jāḥiẓiyya* demonstrates that al-Hamadhānī constructs the *maqāma* genre to exhibit rare vocabulary and strange language. This means that *gharīb* and ambiguity were an inherent element in the genre a century before al-Ḥarīrī wrote his episodes.

Conclusion: al-Ḥarīrī's Embellishment

After the fascination with pure language and the Bedouin vocabulary, the educated class in the 3rd/ 9th century shift their gaze to a new informant who is parasitic, transgressive, and shocking. Al-Hamadhānī wrote his *maqāmāt* at the height of this interest. He comically portrays the imbalanced exchange between the scholar and the picaresque informant. Al-Ḥarīrī built on his predecessor's foundations but decided to emphasize language more than the plot in his *maqāmāt*, to include more criticism of the educated class.

Al-Ḥarīrī's negative perception of the educated elite is obvious in the entirety of his oeuvre, which consists of three works. Besides his famous *Maqāmāt*, al-Ḥarīrī composed *Mulḥat al-iʿrāb*, a didactic *urjūza* of 375 verses on grammar, and *Durrat al-ghawwāṣ fī awhām al-khawāṣṣ*, a textbook enumerating 122 common mistakes committed by scholars of his time, and their corrections. The common feature between the three works is the way they depict the educated elite: a dependent group that needs guidance, education, and better taste.

In *Mulḥa*, the target group is composed of students who need to perfect their usage of language. In *Durrat al-ghawwāṣ,* however, the audience is made up of prominent authors of his time who descended lower than the commoners. He says:

> I have noticed that many of the high-ranked figures of *adab* commit in their speech and writing mistakes that are worse than the ones made by commoners. Detecting these

[62] Ibn Abī al-Khiṣāl, *Rasāʾil*, 154.

> mistakes and tracing them back to those who committed them may lower the noble and shame the honorable.[63]

فإني رأيتُ كثيرًا مِمن تَسَنّموا أسنِمَة الرُتب وتَوسّموا بِسِمة الأدب قد ضاهُوا العامة في بعض ما يَفْرُط من كلامِهم وتَرعَف به مَراعِف أقلامِهم مما إذا عُثر عليه وأثِر عن المعزو إليه خَفَض قدر العِلْيَة ووَصَم ذا الحِلْية.

Al-Ḥarīrī is thus not trying to didactically correct common mistakes, but rather to "lower" and "shame" those who commit them. In the conclusion of the same work, al-Ḥarīrī returns once again to the educated class and points out that his material is "a selection from the books of an elite group" (*iltaqaṭuhā min kutub jamāʿa min al-aʿyān*).[64] *Durrat al-ghawwāṣ* is thus the product of an active and thorough research that targeted the written instead of the oral, and the elite instead of the commoners.

In the *Ḥarīriyya*, the critique of the educated class appears throughout. They are anonymous, secondary, silent, shallow, and only preoccupied with lipograms, *badīʿ*, and riddles (see Chapter 6). As a result, the trickster imposes a heavy charge on the elite, while he only asks commoners for coins. Just as al-Ḥarīrī assumes the position of the master and teaches his contemporaries grammar and corrects their vocabulary, the trickster Abū Zayd al-Sarūjī assumes the same role and points for the elite the extent to which their interest in *adab* is trivial. In *al-Maqāma al-Maghribiyyah*, al-Sarūjī leaves the *majlis* promising to return with more palindromes, then sends a note with a messenger, saying, "say to them from me that full sure night-watching spent in tales is among the greatest of harms; and that I fail not to care for myself, nor will bring dryness into my head by vigils"[65] (*qul lahum ʿannī inna al-sahar fī al-khurāfāt la-min aʿẓam al-āfāt, wa-lastu ulghī iḥtirāsī wa-lā ajlibu al-hawas ilā rāsī*).[66] In *al-Maqāma al-Shatawiyya*, al-Sarūjī offers a series of riddles and then leaves his audience without solving any of them. And in *al-Maqāma al-Bakriyya*, he starves the narrator who went looking for eloquent bedouins, leads him astray, steals his sword, and leaves him with one sentence: "Know that adorned speeches satisfy not him who is a-hunger"[67] (*innā al-asjāʿ lā tushbiʿ man jāʿ*).[68]

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[63] Al-Ḥarīrī, *Durrat al-ghawwāṣ fī awhām al-khawāṣṣ,* edited by Heinrich Thorbecke (Leipzig: Verlag von F.C. W. Vogel, 1871), 2-3.
[64] Ibid, 209.
[65] al-Ḥarīrī, *Assemblies I,* 199.
[66] al-Ḥarīrī, *Maqāmāt,* 159.
[67] al-Ḥarīrī, *Assemblies II,* 131.
[68] al-Ḥarīrī, *Maqāmāt,* 494.

Current scholarship holds that al-Ḥarīrī uses *gharīb*, riddles, lipograms, and *tawriya*, to comply with the taste of his era and to make his work unnecessarily ambiguous. I argue, however, is that al-Ḥarīrī actively and systematically employs these tools to criticize and ridicule the obsession with oddity and rare material his time exhibited. Unlike al-Hamadhānī's *maqāmāt*, al-Ḥarīrī's are highly systematic and overly preoccupied with the fictionalized audience of every episode. The trickster addresses three different groups: the commoners, the Banū Sāsān, and the educated elite. *Gharīb* lexicon is exclusively used with the literati and the Banū Sāsān, and the cruelty is only directed to the educated class. Al-Hamadhānī introduced strangeness to the *maqāma* genre, and al-Ḥarīrī channeled it to critique and condemn the taste of his class. Interestingly, the book that was composed to ridicule and defame the elite, was the one that the latter most praised, cherished, and described with *iʿjāz* (See Chapter 1).

Chapter 6

The Tools of the Half-outsider: Jargon, *Badīʿ*, and Argot

Al-Ḥarīrī's and al-Hamadhānī's *maqāmāt* are similar in many aspects. Especially in their capacity to reproduce the quest for rare vocabulary, which began as a scientific and serious pursuit for eloquent language (data-collection period), then evolved into a frivolous quest for the exotic, transgressive, and parasitic (see Chapter 5). Al-Hamadhānī depicts this quest comically through different tricksters and plots. Al-Ḥarīrī, in contrast, systemizes al-Hamadhānī's multitudes and creates one structure that repeats in almost all his episodes. This systematization has earned al-Ḥarīrī the qualification of belle-lettrist who "seems to take the eloquence too seriously,"[1] and his *maqāmāt* as monotonous, and "more serious than one might like."[2] In this chapter, I argue that al-Ḥarīrī relinquishes comedy and emphasizes linguistic and lexical material to criticize the elite who obsess over strange and rare language and constrained writing. This critique is channeled through the trickster's handling of three different audiences: namely, the elite, the commoners, and Banū Sāsān. Of the three, Abū Zayd al-Sarūjī, the *Ḥarīriyya*'s trickster only acts belligerently against *al-nukhba al-ʿālima* or the educated elite.

Al-Sarūjī is neither part of the privileged literati nor one of the masses: his low trade (i.e., that of a beggar) denies him the status of the former, and his encyclopedic learnedness ranks him higher than the latter. He is a "half-outsider,"[3] and a manifestation of a "negative correlation" between the misery of the masses and the propensities of the educated elite to seek and display learnedness.[4] Al-Sarūjī is aware of his in-between position, and this awareness is discernible in how he adapts his rhetorical and lexical tools depending on the audience. Facing commoners, he uses simple language, persuasion, and exhortation. Facing the elite, he uses logic, rare vocabulary, erudition, and constrained forms of composition. The trickster's nature as an outsider is only absent in two *maqāmāt*, in which he meets the Banū Sāsān, whom he considers to be his own people. Among them, al-Sarūjī renounces trickery, deceit, and lipograms, and acts as a guiding figure using argot.

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[1] Jaakko Hämeen-Anttila, *Maqama,* 169.
[2] Ibid.
[3] The anti-hero is primarily what Claudio Guillen has aptly called a *half-outsider*. He can "neither join nor actually reject his fellow men," though he feigns to do so, while being perpetually foiled in his attempts. See James T. Monroe, *The Art of Badīʿ az-Zamān al-Hamadhānī as Picaresque Narrative* (Beirut: Centre for Arab and Middle East Studies, 1983), 103.
[4] Joel L. Kraemer, *Humanism in the Renaissance of Islam: The Cultural Revival during the Buyid Age*, 2nd rev. ed. (Leiden: Brill, 1993), 27.

To illustrate this systematic ability of the trickster to cater his delivery to his audience, this chapter offers a close reading of al-Sarūjī's linguistic tools, especially his vocabulary, and how he uses them differently depending on his relationship with the recipients. I argue that in neutrality, with the commoners, Abū Zayd al-Sarūjī uses simple and straightforward language. In affinity, with his tribe, he uses argot to emphasize the intimacy and the counter-ethos that distinguishes him and his people from the others. And in enmity, he uses all the linguistic tools available to him: riddles, to accentuate ambiguity and render the addressees powerless; lipograms, which belong exclusively to the writing culture, to show its shallowness, and *badīʿ* which, as Lara Harb notes, "often entails intrinsic structures that either mislead or obscure."

Following the structure of the *Ḥarīriyya*, I start with the episodes depicting the elite and men of power, because they occupy half the episodes. I then study the sermon-based *maqāmāt*, which are exclusively addressed to the masses. Then finally conclude with the two trickery-free *maqāmāt*, where Abū Zayd al-Sarūjī finds himself in familiar grounds with a group that shares his trade and ethos.

I. Confronting the Elite with Logos

1. Abū Zayd al-Sarūjī Addressing the Literati

Al-Ḥarīrī's *Maqāmāt* portrays the elite as a group that has power, education, and social status. They belong to the writerly culture, their vocabulary is *recherché* and *raffiné*, and their goal is to seek the curious and the unusual. In the *Ḥarīriyya,* the literati are usually depicted as extras or as extras in a film, as it were. Their role is twofold: to host the narrator al-Ḥārith ibn Hammām who then acts as their spokesman, listens to the trickster, and rewards his speech. Besides welcoming and rewarding, they remain nameless, faceless, and silent. In several *maqāmāt* (Mt. 15, 27, 43, 47), the extras disappear, and the narrator confronts Abū Zayd al-Sarūjī alone. The confrontation usually ends with the humiliation of the former and the flight of the latter.

Abū Zayd al-Sarūjī's relationship with the wealthy learned elite is based on a paradigm of adversariality. In this sense, the episodes in which he confronts them always contain a challenge or an argument, which take one of the following forms: the literati test al-Sarūjī's compositional skills in lipogram-based *maqāmāt* (Mt. 6, 16, 17, 26, 28, 46); the trickster challenges the literati to solve his riddles in puzzle-based *maqāmāt* (Mt .15, 24, 32, 36, 42, 44); or the trickster and the narrator face each other alone in the desert to showcase their knowledge of Bedouin vocabulary (Mt. 27,43).

1.1. Lipogram-based *maqāmāt*

In the famous competition between al-Khawārizmī and al-Hamadhānī, the latter challenges his interlocutor to compose a text that follows constrained writing rules: an epistle, for instance, that contains no dotted letters or one that does not use *alif* and *lām*, or a letter which if read one way constitutes a eulogy, and if read in another, represents a satire. Proud, al-Khawārizmī refuses the proposed challenge, describing it as "*shaʿbadha"* (jugglery).[5]

Al-Ḥarīrī meets the challenge in six *maqāmāt,* in which al-Sarūjī displays his skill in different kinds of constraint composition, or lipograms. In al-*Maqāma al-Marāghiyya*, he composes a petition in which every second word consists of letters written with dots. In *al-Maqāma al-Raqṭāʾ,* he alternates undotted and dotted letters. In *al-Maqāma al-Maghribiyyah,* he invents short palindromes in prose and verse. In *al-Maqāma al-Qahqariyya* (lit. Backward) he composes a long speech that reads from end to beginning the same way it does the other way around. Finally, in *al-Maqāma al-Ḥalabiyya* he summarises all his knowledge of constrained composition and teaches ten lads how to produce ten different kinds of lipograms.

The lipogram-based *maqāmāt* are exclusively addressed to the literati, the only audience who has the training and linguistic apparatus to decipher and appreciate them. The one exception is *al-Maqāma al-Samarqandiyya,* in which al-Sarūjī delivers a Friday sermon that contains undotted letters only. He delivers the sermon to a gathering that traditionally accommodates both the educated and uneducated. In fear of the lipogram going unnoticed, the narrator intervenes and highlights the lipogram: "I saw that the sermon was a choice thing without a flaw, and a bride without a dot" [6](*raʾaytu al-khuṭba nukhba bi-lā saqaṭ, wa-ʿarūs bi-lā nuqaṭ*).[7] The narrator does not express this comment for the benefit of the audience who are in attendance, but rather for the readers who receive the sermon in a written form, yet may fail to notice that all the letters are undotted. Just as the identity of the trickster is spelled out at the end of every episode, so are the linguistic and rhetorical tools clarified. The explicit accentuation of these elements suggests two opposite readings: a friendly gesture towards the readers, allowing them to experience clarity after ambiguity,[8] or, which is more likely in my opinion, a sign of al-

[5] Ibrāhīm al-Ṭarābulusī, *Kashf al-maʿānī wa-l-bayān ʿan rasāʾil Badīʿ al-Zamān* (Beirut: Catholic Printing Press, 1890), 74-76.
[6] al-Ḥarīrī, *Assemblies II,* 12.
[7] al-Ḥarīrī, *Maqāmāt*, 292.
[8] See the epigram of Part I, which contains al-Ḥarīrī's authorial intervention at the end of *al-Maqāma al-Shatawiyya* to explain the riddles that al-Sarūjī flees before solving.

Ḥarīrī's distrust in his audience, who supposedly cannot decode his artistic codes without his help.

In the lipogram-based *maqāmāt* (Mt. 6, 16, 17, 26, 28, 46), rare and strange vocabulary is employed abundantly, not for its strangeness, purity, or transgression (see previous chapter), per se, but rather for its orthographic attributes, e.g., whether they contain a specific letter or lack it[9] or consist of dotted or undotted letters. These words vary in quantity, from a couple of unusual words to several incomprehensible sentences. In *al-Maqāma al-Maghribiyya*, for instance, al-Sarūjī composes the following palindromic verses:

أُسْ أرْمَلا إذاعَرا... وارْعَ اذا المرءُ أسا
أسنِد أخًا نَباهة .... أبِن إخاءً دنَّسا
أُسْلُ جَنابَ غاشِمٍ... مُشاغِبٍ إنْ جَلَسا
أُسْرُ اذاهَبَّ مِرًا .... وارْم به اذا رَسا
اسكنْ تقَوَّ فعَسَى... يُسعِف وقت نَكَسا [10]

Which translate into:

> Bestow on the needy when he comes to thee, and show regard even when a man injures thee.
>
> Have dealings with him that is noble, but put afar from thee the base.
>
> Withdraw from the side of the unjust, the mischievous, when he sits by thee.
>
> When contention rouses itself put it off from thee, and cast it away when it confirms itself.
>
> Be still, and though shalt grow strong; for it may be that time that was perverse to thee shall aid thee.[11]

Comparing prose (*nathr*) with poetry (*naẓm*), Kilito notes that "the most cohesive discourse is the one submitting to the biggest number of constraints."[12] The above palindromes prove this claim to be right, because not one single letter can be moved or removed without harming the structure. This, however, happens at the expense of meaning. Thanks to the translation, one can see that the difficult and complex lexicon hides common and unoriginal advice.

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[9] Choosing a vocabulary based on phonetic and orthographic conditions is not always playful and artificial. Al-Jāḥiẓ recounts the story of the theologian Wāṣil ibn ʿAṭāʾ who suffered a speech impediment and could not pronounce the letter *rāʾ*. Thus, he removed it from all his speeches. Al-Jāḥiẓ, *al-Bayān*, 36-37.
[10] al-Ḥarīrī, *Maqāmāt*, 154-155.
[11] al-Ḥarīrī, *Assemblies I*, 197.
[12] Kīlīṭū, *al-Adab wa-l-gharāba*, 28.

The most interesting lipogram-based episode is *al-Maqāma al-Ḥalabiyya* which summarises all the aforementioned exercises and displays ten kinds of constrained writing. In this episode, the narrator encounters al-Sarūjī who plays the role of a tutor, teaching ten young lads how to compose lipograms.[13] The display of the compositions occurs in a negative context: the inhabitants of the town are described as stupid,[14] the teacher as both stupid and foolish,[15] and the pupils as boys (*ṣibyān*). Despite their characterization as stupid, the pupils produce the following constrained compositions:

- First pupil: verses which contain only undotted letters; technically termed *al-abyāt al-ʿawāṭil,* plural of *ʿāṭil*, a woman who wears no ornaments.
- Second pupil: verses which contain only dotted letters; technically termed *al-abyāt al-ʿarāʾis,* literally: bridal verses.
- Third pupil: writes sequences of dotted and undotted words; technically termed *al-abyāt al-khayfāʾ*. According to al-Muṭarrizī, *khayfāʾ* is a description of horses whose one iris is black and the other is blue.[16]
- Fourth pupil: writes sequences of paired words, which have a similar morphology yet different dots; technically termed *al-abyāt al-matāʾīm.* According to Sharīshī, *matāʾīm* is plural of *mitʾim*, which means a woman who gives birth to twins.[17]
- Fifth pupil: recites two verses that open and end with two identical sequences of sounds or *jinās*; technically termed *al-abyāt al-muṭarrafayn al-mutashābihay al-ṭarafayn.*
- Sixth pupil: recites verses in which the letter *sīn* (s) is the dominant sound.
- Seventh pupil: recites verses in which *ṣād* (ṣ) is the dominant sound.
- Eighth pupil: recites verses that contain words, which make one meaning with "s" and another with "ṣ." These verses, in particular, employ a remarkable number of *gharīb* vocabulary.

[13] al-Ḥarīrī, *Maqāmāt,* 524-39.
[14] The narrator says: "Then my mind … urged me to make for Emessa, so as to pass the summer in her territory and to sound the [proverbial] stupidity of the people of her soil." al-Ḥarīrī, *Assemblies II,* 148.
[15] The narrator, describing the teacher, says: "I was impressed with what his display of ingenuity that mixes with stupidity, and ingeniousness which blends with foolishness."
"فعجِبتُ لِما أبدى من براعةٍ معجُونَة بِرَقاعة، وأظهَر من حَذاقَةٍ مَمزوجَة بحماقَة."
al-Ḥarīrī, *Maqāmāt,* 539; *Assemblies II,* 154.
[16] al-Muṭarrizī, *Sharḥ,* 68.
[17] al-Sharīshī, *Sharḥ,* vol. III, 378.

- Ninth pupil: recites verses that describe the orthography of verbal forms from roots that end in *W* or *Y* (*ḥurūf al-iʿtilāl*).
- Tenth pupil: recites verses listing all the Arabic words that contain *ẓāʾ* (ẓ).

In the lipogram-based *maqāmāt,* the audience always fails the test and never finishes the exercise. In *al-Maqāma al-Ḥalabiyya*, however, the "childish" and "stupid" pupils surpass all the other addressees of the trickster in the *Ḥarīriyya* and exhibit a remarkable ability to come up with compositions in all the proposed kinds of constrained writing. The fact that this *maqāma* is the last of the lipogram-based episodes demonstrates that it was composed as a critique of the previous audiences who preoccupy themselves with shallow exercises and fail to fulfill a childish assignment that little children master easily.

This ridicule of the literati might be subtle and implicit in *al-Maqāma al-Ḥalabiyya,* but it is openly expressed in *al-Maqāma al-Maghribiyya.* In this *maqāma*, al-Sarūjī requests a meal from a group of scholars who are displaying their knowledge of palindromes. After they finish their material and the trickster finishes his food, he joins the conversation and delivers a series of long palindromes. Beguiled, the literati keep rewarding him until he is satisfied (*manaḥnāhu ilā an istakfā*). Under the pretext of feeding his children, al-Sarūjī leaves the *majlis* promising to return shortly. As the reader would expect, he does not come back. Instead, he sends his audience a note with their messenger, saying, "say to them from me that full sure night-watching spent in tales is among the greatest of harms; and that I fail not to care for myself, nor will bring dryness into my head by vigils"[18] (*qul lahum ʿannī inna al-sahar fī al-khurāfāt la-min aʿẓam al-āfāt, wa-lastu ulghī iḥtirāsī wa-lā ajlibu al-hawas ilā rāsī*).[19] Unlike his recipients who are obsessed with constrained writing, rewarding it handsomely, and spending days and nights discussing it,[20] the partakes in it with indifference and produces it only under demand.

To shield his mind from the "dangerous illness" (*aʿẓam al-āfāt*) and "obsession" (*hawas*), al-Sarūjī does not suggest the exercise nor sets the rules for their composition but merely joins an ongoing conversation between privileged scholars to take their money and belittle their interests. He is not invested in the game but only makes use of the material prospects of the endeavor. Lipogram-based *maqāmāt* are positioned at almost every ten *maqāmāt* (Mt. 6, 16, 17, 26, 28, 46), to bring the trickster face to face with the literati who waste their money and

[18] al-Ḥarīrī, *Assemblies I,* 199.
[19] al-Ḥarīrī, *Maqāmāt,* 159.
[20] In *al-Maqāma al-Marāghiyya*, for example, a governor forces a judge to write a lipogramatic petition, and the latter spends a year trying to do so before finally meeting Abū Zayd al-Sarūjī and paying him to compose it on his behalf.

time over trivialities. Al-Sarūjī proves his prominent skills of "jugglery," receives his reward, ridicules his audience, and abandons them unfulfilled, puzzled, and perplexed about their own writerly culture. Lipograms, however, are not al-Sarūjī's only tool. Of the wide range of elaborate linguistic means at his disposal, al-Sarūjī uses *gharīb*, *badīʿ*, and riddles.

1.2. Riddle-based *maqāmāt*

According to Khayr al-Dīn Shamsī, the main characters of riddles are "*taʿwīṣ"* (abstruseness) and "*taʿmiya"* (blindfolding), which the speaker employs to prove his superiority and render the audience speechless (*ifḥām*).[21] Al-Sarūjī implements this tool against the literati in several episodes, in order to display his command of different sciences, such as jurisprudence (M15, M32) and grammar (M24), and to strike them dumb with complicated questions (M36, M42, M44).

Al-Maqama al-Qaṭīʿiyya displays a boon-gathering in which the narrator and his affluent companions discuss linguistic issues and quarrel over declension while ignoring al-Sarūjī in his old rags (*ṭimr ʿalā dhimr*). Despite this, al-Sarūjī imposes himself upon the gathering and challenges them with twelve grammatical puzzles (one for each person among them), and employs a number of metalinguistic jargons, such as *al-ʿāmil, al-iḍāfa, al-maḥdhūf, al-ẓarf, al-iḍmār*. Although the literati have command over the vocabulary, they fail to decipher the riddles. Consequently, they beg the trickster for answers, which he grants only after receiving a reward.

Jargon is also employed in *al-Maqāma al-Ṭayibiyya*. Instead of grammar, however, al-Sarūjī shifts to jurisprudence and claims to be *Faqīh al-ʿArab* (the ultimate Jurist of Arabs).[22] In this episode, the number of riddles ascends to one hundred legal questions based on homonymies and *tawriyāt*.[23] Abū Zayd al-Sarūjī asks his hosting tribe, Banū Ḥarb, to examine his command of Islamic Law and to benefit from his knowledge to solve "all the points of intricacy and explain all difficulties"[24] (*salūnī ʿan al-muʿḍilāt, wa-istawḍiḥū minī al-mushkilāt*).[25] As

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[21] Khayr al-Dīn Shamsī, *"al-Alghāz wa-l-aḥājī wa-l-muʿammayāt,"* in *Majmaʿ al-Lugha al-ʿArabiyya*, Damascus, vol. 71, part. 1 (January 1996), 789.

[22] This title is a reference to Ibn Fāris's book *Futyā faqīh al-ʿarab,* which collects legal questions based on homonymies similar to those in *al-Maqāma al-Ṭayibiyya.* See Ibn Fāris, *Futyā faqīh al-ʿarab*, edited by Ḥusayn ʿAlī Maḥfūẓ (Damascus: al-Majmaʿ al-ʿIlmī al-ʿArabī, 1958).

[23] For example: "He said: 'And what sayest thou with regard to him who has deliberately gouged the eye of a nightingale?' 'Let his eye be gouged, to make the speech short' (*bulbul*, a nightingale, and also "a spare man")," al-Ḥarīrī, *Assemblies II,* 37-57.

[24] Ibid, 39.

[25] al-Ḥarīrī, *Maqāmāt*, 336.

expected, al-Sarūjī solves all the riddles and causes his interlocutor shame (*aṭraqa iṭrāqat al-ḥayīyy*) and powerlessness (*aramma irmām al-ʿayīyy*). The trickster, thus, forces his beguiled audience to reward him handsomely, by giving him she-camels and a female slave. This is a good example of the correlation between the degree of ambiguity and the value of the reward.

In *al-Maqāma al-Malṭiyya*, Abū Zayd encounters a wealthy group (*abnāʾ ʿallāt*) displaying their knowledge of riddles to while away time. He waits until they exhaust their material (*fa-lammā raʾā ijbāl al-qarāʾiḥ wa-ikdāʾ al-mātiḥ wa-l-māʾiḥ*) then intervenes. Instead of challenging his audience or displaying more puzzles, al-Sarūjī reflects on the definition of riddles and their structure:

> Know, ye owners of literary accomplishments and golden coloured wine, that the proposing of riddles is for the purpose of testing the quickness of wit and bringing out its hidden treasures, under the condition, that they are founded on a real resemblance and contain meaning words and some scholarly nicety… and I noticed that your definitions kept not within these limits.[26]

اِعلَموا يا ذَوي الشَمائِل الأدَبِية والشُمُول الذَّهَبية أن وَضْعَ الأُحْجِية لامتِحان الأَلْمَعيّة واِستخْراج الخَبِيَّة الخَفِيّة وشَرْطُها أَنْ تكُون ذات مُماثَلَة حَقِيقيّة وألْفَاظ مَعْنَوية ولَطِيفَة أدَبيّة... ولَمْ أَرَكَم حَافَظْتُم على هذه الحُدود.[27]

Al-Sarūjī acts as a teacher and turns his audience, who were boasting about their learnedness minutes ago, into students who need further instruction. The trickster proposes twenty riddles, two to each recipient, and challenges them to solve them. To accentuate ambiguity, the trickster blends cryptic insinuations (riddles) and *recherché* terms. As expected, all the contestants, without exception, fail the test. Abū Zayd al-Sarūjī, finally, reveals the answers without asking for a reward, as if rendering the educated group powerless, and proving them ignorant is enough of a payment.

In *al-Maqāma al-Najrāniyya*, al-Sarūjī interrupts a contest involving riddles between some witty literati and explicitly criticizes the nonsensicality of their interest in riddles. Annoyed, the educated men curse and swear, until al-Sarūjī decides to join their game and announces, "let us riddle!" (*hallumma ilā an nulghiz*)[28]. He composes ten riddles in verse, employing a lavish number of *recherché* terms. The interlocutors once again fail the challenge, and al-Sarūjī charges them an amount of money, which they must pay before he reveals the

[26] al-Ḥarīrī, *Assemblies II,* 77.
[27] al-Ḥarīrī, *Maqāmāt,* 394.
[28] al-Ḥarīrī, *Maqāmāt,* 464.

answer of each riddle (*fa-faraḍa ʿalā kull muʿammā farḍā wa-istakhlaṣah naḍḍā thumma fa-taḥa al-aqfāl*).[29]

Of all the riddle-based *maqāmāt*, *al-Maqāma al-Shatawiyya* proves the most unsympathetic toward the educated elite. It opens with a lengthy narration by Ḥārith ibn Hammām, who gets lost in the dark before he meets an eloquent man who invites him to his home using verse. In a warm place, al-Ḥārith finds an assembly of literati, and among them is Abū Zayd al-Sarūjī, who describes himself as "*abū al-ʿajab*" (lit. the father of wonders). The trickster proposes fifty-six riddles based on the double-entendre device. For instance, he says, "I encountered people who drink old women's pee [*bawl al-ʿajūz*], and I do not mean the daughter of grapes"; *bawl al-ʿajūz* (lit. old woman's piss) here means 'milk' and *ʿajūz* may also mean 'wine' (referring to its old vintage). Following the example of the previous episodes, the audience first attempt to solve the cryptic sentences (*fa-ṭafiqnā nakhbaṭ fī taqlīb qarīḍih wa-taʾwīl maʿārīḍih*), then admit failure, and the trickster finally demands reward to reveal answers (*al-īnās qabl al-ībās*). *Al-Maqāma al-Shatawiyya,* includes an extra final twist: after obtaining his prize, al-Sarūjī promises to provide the solution of his riddles the next morning but departs in the middle of the night while everyone is asleep. Out of all the educated men which Abū Zayd al-Sarūjī deceives in the *Ḥarīriyya*, the audience of this episode is the only one that was denied 'discovery' and *ʿajab.*[30]

Al-Sarūjī repeats the scheme in six other *maqāmāt* (Mt. 15, 24, 32, 36, 42, 44; namely, challenging, delivering the riddle/s, and demanding the reward. To prove his superiority, he exaggerates the element of ambiguity, using riddles, *tawriyāt,* jargon, and *gharīb*. Besides the reward, the ultimate goal is to ridicule the literati and display their intellectual ineptitude. The members of al-Sarūjī's educated audience never learn their lesson: after failing to solve the riddles, they request more riddles (e.g., M42), and when they discover the trick, they still lament al-Sarūjī's departure (M44). Curiosities and *adab* distract them from their shame and failure, making them long for the trickster's presence and eloquence. The narrator, al-Ḥārith ibn Hammām, is not any better. He, too, accepts deception and humiliation just to accompany Abū Zayd al-Sarūjī, even if that means going to faraway, secluded deserts and losing his possessions.

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[29] Ibid, 471.

[30] "While ignorance might be the impetus for wonder initially, it is the eventual discovery of the meaning and its clarification that also evokes wonder. As such, wonder is an emotional experience that is highly cognitive in nature." Harb, *Arabic Poetics,* 9.

1.3. Back to the Desert: Bedouin *Gharīb*

In two episodes, *al-Wabariyya* and *al-Bakriyya,* al-Ḥarīrī abandons the urban *majālis* and takes his two protagonists back to re-enact the obsessive pursuit of *gharīb* during the data-collection period. *Al-Maqāma al-Wabariyya* opens with al-Ḥārith ibn Hammām saying:

> In the prime of my life that has fleeted, I had a leaning towards intercourse with the people of the hair-tents, so that I might take after their high-mettled spirits and their Arab tongues. So I bestirred myself with the alertness of one not lacking in industry, and began to roam through low lands and high-lands… then I betook myself to some Arabs, [fit to be] lieutenants of kings, sons of speech [saws].[31]

مِلْتُ في رِيقِ زَمَانِي الذي غَبَر إلى مُجاوَرَة أهْل الوَبَر، لِآخُذ أَخْذ نُفُوسِهِم الأَبِيّة وأَلْسِنَتِهِم العربية، فَشَمَّرتُ تَشْمِير من لا يَألُوا جُهْدا وجعلتُ أضرِبُ في الأرضِ غَوْرًا وَنَجْدًا... ثمّ أَوَيْت إلى عَرَبٍ أَرْدَافٍ أَقْيالٍ وأَبْنَاء أَقْوالٍ.[32]

After residing with the Bedouins for a while, the narrator wanders one night but loses his way back to the tribe and his she-camel. The double loss gives ground for a long list of rare terms spread throughout the *maqāma* in description of the night, the heat, riding, and tiredness. Since the main concern of this episode is the display of Bedouin vocabulary, the trickery is reduced to the very minimum (i.e., stealing the horse). The trickster hardly appears in the *maqāma*, and the plot turns into a pretext to invite different themes pertaining to desert life, i.e., camels, horses, heat, fighting, and going astray.

In *al-Maqāma al-Bakriyya,* the two protagonists once again meet in the desert. This time, however, the plot is more developed and indicates that al-Ḥarīrī might have "strung" three episodes together.[33] The first episode occurs in the middle of the desert and opens with al-Ḥārith's description of his miserable condition: exhausted, starving, and lost, using an abundant amount of *gharīb*. He then meets Abū Zayd, who tells him the story (the second episode) of how he lost his camel and found it later following a misunderstanding caused by the word *"maṭiyya"* which means both shoes and camels.[34] Finishing this story, al-Sarūjī invents a debate (the third episode) against a fictitious character, to compare marrying a maid (*ʿadhrāʾ*) to marrying a matron (*thayyib*). As with all comparisons in the *Ḥarīriyya*, the purpose is not to

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[31] al-Ḥarīrī *Assemblies II*, 2.
[32] al-Ḥarīrī, *Maqāmāt*, 270-271.
[33] "This unusually long Imposture consists of three episodes, which may have been strung together because no single one is quite long enough to stand on its own." Cooperson, *Impostures*, 427.
[34] This is the one and only time that Abū Zayd is deceived by language in the entire *maqāmāt*!

determine who is better but rather to demonstrate the ability of the trickster to critique and praise the same subject at once (Chapter 1). Furthermore, he lays the ground for a rich lexicon of matrimonial jargon, including *ẓaʿīna* (wife), *ʿawān* (matron), *bākūra* (first fruit of a tree; a metaphor for maiden), *sulāfa* (unfermented wine; a metaphor for maiden), *luhna* (appetizer; metonymy for a matron), *ṭubba* (companion), *barūk* (a mother of a young boy who remarries), *halūk* (femme fatale), *muhayra* (little filly; metaphor for woman). The debate includes other subjects besides marriage, such as monasticism (*rahbāniyya*) and masturbation (*tajluda ʿumayra*).[35]

Once the display of sexual vocabulary ends, the text returns to the frame story (the first episode), in which the trickster and narrator continue to walk miserably in the desert without food or support, until they reach a dry, poor village (*qarya aʿzaba al-khayr ʿanhā*). Despite the wretchedness that surrounds him and the hunger that weakens his energy, the narrator continues to dwell on *adab* and its value. He says: "Then I began to expatiate in the praise of learning, and to exalt its owner above the possessor of riches. But he [i.e., the trickster] glanced at me with the glance of one who taxes with ignorance."[36] Annoyed and dismissive, Abū Zayd al-Sarūjī decides to teach his companion a lesson. To this end, he chooses a random young boy and asks him:

> Are here fresh dates sold for discourse?" He replied: "No, by Allah." Said he: "Nor green dates for witticisms?" He replied: "Certainly not, by Allah." Said he: "Nor fruit for night-talk?" He replied: "Far from it, by Allah." Said he: "Nor honey-fritters for poems?" He replied: "Be silent, may Allah preserve thee!" Said he: "Nor bread in broth for choice verses?"[37]

«أ يُباع ههنا الرَطْبُ بالخُطَب؟» قال: «لا والله.» قال: «ولا البَلَح بالمُلَح؟» قال: «كلا والله.» قال: «ولا التّمْر بالسَمَر؟» قال: «هيهات والله.» قال: «ولا العَصَائِد بالقَصَائِد؟» قال: «اسكت عافاك الله.» قال: «ولا الثَّرَائِد بالفَرَائِد؟»[38]

To Stop Abū Zayd al-Sarūjī from further enumeration, the young boy puts an end to the conversation, saying:

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[35] This display of sexual vocabulary recalls Abū Dulaf al-Khazrajī's poem, in which sexual words are stated to be the first tool of the children of Sāsān acquire (See Chapter 5). This is also obvious in the *maqāmāt* which feature the trickster with his wives (see below).
[36] al-Ḥarīrī, *Assemblies II,* 129.
[37] Ibid, 130.
[38] al-Ḥarīrī, *Maqāmāt,* 492.

> Let this suffice thee, O Shaykh … In this place poetry fetches not a barley-corn, nor prose a bread-crumb, nor a narrative nail-parings, nor a treatise slop-water, nor the wise maxims of Luqmān a mouthful of food, nor the history of battels a morsel of meat.[39]
>
> حَسْبُكَ يا شيخ ... أمّا بِهَذا المكان فلا يُشْتَرَى الشِعر بِشَعِيرة، ولا النَثْر بِنُثارَة، ولا القَصَص بقُصاصَة ولا الرسالة بغُسالة، ولا حِكَم لُقمان بِلُقمَة، ولا أخبار المَلَاحِم بِلَحْمة.[40]

The lad's words highlight the gap between the elite who seek *adab* as a luxury and the poor who try to make a living and survive on "bread-crumbs" and "slop-water." Similar to *al-Maqāma al-Ḥalabiyya*, in which young children realize that scholars cannot, putting the words in the mouth of the anonymous child (*ṣaby*) in *al-Maqāma al-Bakriyya* accentuates the ignorance of the narrator and the other collectors who cannot notice the evident uselessness of *adab*. Furthermore, this act emphasizes the incompatibility of the literati's preoccupations with reality.

To teach al-Ḥārith ibn Hammām the worthlessness of *adab*, Abū Zayd al-Sarūjī decides to steal the last of his possessions, his sword, and leave him alone in the desert to fend for himself. Before parting, however, the trickster summarizes the message of the *Ḥarīriyya* in one sentence: "Know that adorned speeches satisfy not him who is a-hunger."[41]

Al-Wabariyya and *al-Bakriyya* complete each other. The first depicts the obsession with rare vocabulary, using every event as a pretext to display more and more words. The second proves the worthlessness and triviality of pursuing words for their own sake. *Al-Maqāma al-Bakriyya* summarizes what al-Sarūjī tries to articulate in all his encounters with the literati; namely, riddles, doubles-entendre, *gharīb*, jargon, and lipograms, are aesthetically valuable to those who can afford their price, but they cannot cover basic human needs. For the privileged and the wealthy, however, basic needs are no issue, which means that the question of value never arises concerning their interest in linguistic curiosities and their quest to accumulate material. To quote Abū Zayd al-Sarūjī:

> They say that a man's chief adornment and pride, and his beauty is learning deep-rooted, sound,
> Alas, it adorns but the wealthy and him, whose summit of lord ship is rising aloft:
> But as for the poor man I reckon for him far better than learning a loaf and a stew.

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[39] al-Ḥarīrī, *Assemblies II*, 131.
[40] Al-Ḥarīrī, *Maqāmāt*, 493.
[41] al-Ḥarīrī, *Assemblies II*, 131.

What beauty bestows it on him, if they say: a scholar, a school-drudge, or maybe a clerk.[42]

يقولونَ إنّ جمال الفتى وزِينَتهُ أدبٌ راسِخٌ
وما إن يُزيّن سوى المُكثِرين ومَن طُودُ سُودَدِه شامِخُ
فأمّا الفقير فخيْرٌ له من الأدَب القُرصُ والكامخُ
وأي جمالٍ لهُ أن يُقال أديبٌ يُعلِّم أو ناسخُ[43]

Every encounter between the trickster and the literati is an intellectual confrontation and an economic opportunity. Whether it is orthographic (lipograms), cognitive (riddles), or lexical (*gharīb*), al-Sarūjī's basic weapon is logos, a double-entendre that refers to both words and reason. He uses his eloquence and vast knowledge of the Arabic language to belittle his opponents and demonstrate the senselessness of their luxurious quest. Al-Sarūjī composes playful texts and riddles to make money and survive, whereas the literati do so to amuse themselves, consume time, and prove their so-called learnedness. They can afford *adab*, because they have the privilege of wealth and power, but al-Sarūjī is only oriented toward his situation and needs and used a sweet tongue that can deceive both scholars and men of power.

2. Facing Men of Power

As Angelika Neuwirth notes, the episodes featuring a judge are meta-*maqāmāt* that focalize and question "the legitimacy of play based on fiction."[44] These "forensic" *maqāmāt* as she calls them, are not any different from the ones this chapter has discussed so far. They, too, ridicule the elite and allow trickery and eloquence to rule over justice and truth. Mainly because those who are supposed to govern and lead are also obsessed with *badīʿ* and susceptible to empty ornamented words. While confronting a judge, al-Sarūjī does not stand alone. Instead, he is accompanied by an accomplice, a relative, more specifically. The choice of accomplice defines the subject of the episode. Whereas the episodes with the wives are always related to marital and sexual problems, the *maqāmāt* that include the son feature different motifs and plots, including slavery, murder, literary theft, and recalcitrance. Regardless of the topic, however, duplicity plays a fundamental role in these episodes. The judge is confronted with two opposite narratives of the same issue truth. And the trickster's main aim is to accentuate confusion and

[42] al-Ḥarīrī, *Assemblies II*, 129.
[43] al-Ḥarīrī, *Maqāmāt*, 491.
[44] Angelika Neuwirth, "Woman's Wit and Juridical Discourse: A Forensic *Maqāma* by the Classical Arabic Scholar al-Ḥarīrī," in *Figurationen* No 1 (2005), 25.

ambiguity by using *double-figure* of style,[45] such as *tawriya* (two meanings), *ṭibāq* (two antonymous terms), *muqābala* (two opposed sentences), and *jināS* (two or more similar sounding words) dominate these episodes.[46]

2.1. The Wife as Accomplice

The trio judge, trickster, and wife meet in three episodes in the *Ḥarīriyya*. *Al-Maqāma al-Iskandariyya* features a woman who comes from a good family but one who has married al-Sarūjī because she misinterpreted the real nature of his occupation as a "*nāẓim durr ila durr"* (a stringer of pearls), a double-entendre that means a jeweller and a literary composer. To the wife's great misfortune, the trickster was referring to the second meaning while she understood the former. *Al-Maqāma al-Tabrīziyya* and *al-Maqāma al-Ramliyya*[47] depict another kind of wife. In these episodes, the wives are as shameless and sharp-tongued as the trickster. Their problems with the husband are of a sexual nature: one refuses anal intercourse and the other complains about her sexual dissatisfaction. They express their cases frankly and keep causing the judge embarrassment until he pays them to stop talking.

These three episodes, as Orfali and Pomerantz note, are inspired by *al-Maqāma al-Shāmiyya* by al-Hamadhānī. In this episode, Abū al-Fatḥ al-Iskandarī goes to court with two wives. One asks for a dowry *(ṣadāq*) and the other for a divorce and alimony (*nafaqa*).[48] *Al-Maqāma al-Iskandariyya* is more of an explicit emulation of the *Shāmiyya*. It is entitled after Abū al-Fatḥ al-Iskandarī and re-enacts the same concerns of the first wife about money and her dowry. *Al-Tabrīziyya* and *al-Ramliyya,* however, stray farther from their inspiration and exploit sexual metonymies and insults deliberately and more explicitly than al-Hamadhānī does in his *maqāma.*[49]

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[45] I call them *double-figures* because they always include at least two elements that are similar or contradictory.

[46] "Figures that are identified as *badīʿ* often entail intrinsic structures that either mislead or obscure. In the case of paronomasia, padding, and figures of disguise such as *tawriya* and *istikhdām*, certain expectations are created just to be broken through the repetition of similar-sounding words [paronomasia], apparent meaninglessness [padding], and a play on double meaning [*tawriya*]." Lara Harb, *Arabic Poetics,* 72.

[47] See Angelika Neuwirth reading of this episode in "Woman's Wit and Juridical Discourse," 23-36.

[48] Bilal Orfali and Maurice Pomerantz, *The Maqāmāt of Badīʿ al-Zamān,* 119.

[49] Despite that, Muḥammad ʿAbduh decides to omit *al-Maqāma al-Shāmiyya* from his edition of al-Hamadhānī's *Maqāmāt*. The same censorship could not be forced on al-Ḥarīrī's *maqāmāt* who were preserved by various tools of authorial control (e.g., *ijāza* or certificate of transmission) and circulating widely for centuries. See Chapter 1.

Despite the class difference and the nature of their quarrels, al-Sarūjī's three wives share eloquence and the ability to use rare vocabulary that dazzles the judge even before the trickster speaks. The wife in *al-Maqāma al-Iskandariyya*, for instance, uses *gharīb* and *sajʿ* to display her noble origins, to express her longing for home, and to lament the humiliation she suffered with al-Sarūjī. Some of the expressions she uses are:

أكرَمَ جُرْثُومَة، أَطهَر أَرُومَة، رَهْط، اِستَخْرَجَنِي من كِناسِي، رَحّلَني عن أُناسِي، نقلني إلى كَسرِه، حَصَّلَنِي تحت أسره، وجدتُه قُعْدة جُثْمَة، أَلْفَيتُه ضُجعة نُومة، الخَضْمُ والقَضْم، لِي منه سُلالَة كأنه خِلالَة.

Compared to the other two wives, she is the most empathic and miserable and the least obscene. The fight between the couple in *al-Iskandariyya* is limited to the wife boasting of her origins, and al-Sarūjī complaining about the decline of *adab* in ornamental language, full of rhyming sentences, miscellaneous *gharīb* and literary jargon, such as

رأس مالي سِحرُ الكَلام، القَرِيضُ والخُطب، أغُوص في لُجّة البيان، أَمْتَري نَشبًا بالأدب، أَكسَدُ شَيء الأَدَب، في عِراصِهِم جِيَف، لَمْ يَبْقَ لِي سَبَد، طَويتُ الحَشَا عَلَى سَغَب.

Since the judge is fond of *sajʿ* (rhymed prose) and *badīʿ* (figures of style) and uses them in his own speech (*waʿītu qiṣaṣ ʿirsik, fa-barhin al-ān ʿan nafsik, wa-illā kashaftu ʿan lubsik, wa-amartu bi-ḥabsik*), he aligns himself with the trickster and advises the wife to accept her fate and show some mercy to her unfortunate husband, whom he rewards handsomely. The clear unfairness of the verdict, and the favouring of eloquence (trickster) over truth (wife), deprecates the judge more than the trickster. Abū Zayd al-Sarūjī acts compatibly with his character as a *mukdī*, whereas the judge ignores the duties and responsibilities of his job and favors elaborate language over desperate appeals.

The woman in *al-Maqāma al-Tabrīziyya* inspires less empathy. She, however, stands for her rights fiercely and flagrantly. She is introduced as a "tigress" and a "palfrey who refuses bridle"[50] (*inna maṭiyyatī hadhih abiyyat al-qiyād*).[51] She expresses her problem licentiously and accuses her husband openly of preferring anal intercourse, which leaves her unsatisfied: "he is of those who use to prowl behind the house and to take the neighbour along with the

[50] al-Ḥarīrī, *Assemblies II*, 103.
[51] Al-Ḥarīrī, *Maqāmāt*, 439.

neighbour"[52] (*innahu mimman yadūr khalfa al-dār, wa-yaʾkhudhu al-jār bi-l-jār*).[53] Furthermore, she describes him with an erudite satire that demonstrates her knowledge of *adab* and mastery of satire:

> thou meaner than Mādir, and more ill-omened than a Qāshir, and more cowardly than Ṣāfir, and flightier than Ṭāmir, hurlest thou at me thy own shame, and thrustest thy knife into my honour, while thou knowest that thou art contemptible than Kulâmeh and more vicious than the mule of Abū Dulāmeh.[54]

يا أَلْأَمَ مِن مَادِر وأَشْأَمَ مِن قَاشِر وأَجبَن مِن صَافِر وأَطيَش مِن طَامِر أَتَرْمِيني بِشِنارِك وتَفْرِي عِرْضِي بِشِفَارِك وأنتَ تَعلمُ أنّك أَحقَر مِن قُلامَة وأَعْيَب مِن بَغْلَة أبي دُلامَة.[55]

Abū Zayd al-Sarūjī answers her attack with even harsher words, saying:

> Woe to thee, O thou slattern, O thou strumpet, O thou bane for they husband and thy neighbour … Yet thou knowest, that when I made thee a wife and gazed at the, I found thee uglier than a monkey, ad drier than strip of hide, and tougher than a palm-fibre, and more offensive than carrion, ad more troublesome than the cholera, and dirtier than a menstrual cloth, and more barefaced than the bark of a tree.[56]

وَيْلَك يا دَفَار يا فَجار يا غُصّة البَعْل والجَار ... وقَد عَلِمتِ أني حين بَنَيتُ عليكِ أَلفَيتُك أَقبَح من قِردَة وأَيْبَس مِن قِدَة وأخشَن مِن لِيفَة وأَنْتَن من جِيفَة وأثقل من هَيْضَة وأَقْذَر من حَيْضَة وأَبْرَز مِن قِشْرة وأبْرَد من قِرّة وأحمق من رِجْلَة وأَوْسَع من دِجْلَة.[57]

On his deathbed, al-Sarūjī instructs his son to master four tools: roaming (*irtikāḍ*), agility (*nashāṭ*), intelligence (*fiṭna*), and shamelessness (*qiḥa*) (see Chapter 9). His graphic description of his wife above illustrates the extent to which shamelessness can go in the *Ḥarīriyya*. This tool, however, is only used in special circumstances or when the usual tools of oratory, style, and ornamentation are not enough. The judge of Tabriz is introduced as someone "who belongs to the number of those who appreciate parsimony and stint even tooth-pickings."[58] He is, in other words, a miser who will definitely not pay for a performance of beautiful language but may pay to avoid embarrassment. The couple, thus, uses al-Jāḥiẓ's aforementioned trick (Chapter 4): to first show the ugly side then to speak eloquently, which means to first cause revulsion,

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[52] al-Ḥarīrī, *Assemblies II*, 103.
[53] al-Ḥarīrī, *Maqāmāt*, 440.
[54] al-Ḥarīrī, *Assemblies II*, 104.
[55] al-Ḥarīrī, *Maqāmāt*, 443.
[56] al-Ḥarīrī, *Assemblies II*, 103.
[57] al-Ḥarīrī, *Maqāmāt*, 441.
[58] al-Ḥarīrī, *Assemblies II*, 103.

then shock, then wonder. Al-Sarūjī and his wife employ the scheme perfectly cursing then versing, embarrassing then displaying their *badīʿ* and *sajʿ*, until they exhaust the judge's patience and force him to join their shamelessness and say: "*laqad akhṭaʾat istikumā al-ḥufra*"[59] which literally translates into, "your anus has missed the ditch." When the judge is finally worn down, he pays both litigants a dinar each, just to leave his court. [60]

The sexual curses, which bring to mind Ibn al-Ḥajjāj's collection of curses (see previous chapter) and al-Hamadhānī's *al-Maqāma al-Dīnāriyya*,[61] are the first part of the ruse this *maqāma* features. The second represents the poems that the couple compose to mercilessly exploit the judge's vulnerability to *badīʿ* and *sajʿ*. This is most obvious in the usher's final words to Abū Zayd al-Sarūjī and his wife:

> I bear witness that ye twain are the most crafty amongst men and Jinn, but [henceforth] respect the court of judges, and eschew therein ribaldry of speech. For not every Kadi is a Kadi of Tebrîz and not at all times will people listen to doggerel rhyme.[62]

أشهَد إنّكُما لَأَحْيَل الثَّقَلَيْن، لكِن اِحتَرِمَا مَجَالِس الحُكّام، واِجتَنِبا فيها فُحْش الكَلَام، فَمَا كُل قَاضٍ قاضي تبريز، ولا كل وَقتٍ تُسمَع الأراجيز.[63]

This conclusion proves that even the most serious and frugal of the *Ḥarīriyya*'s judges is an easy target of al-Sarūjī's wits and tongue. Because, unlike his victims, this trickster has the ability to go beyond the surface and adjust his tools, lexical, rhetorical, and practical, to the needs and psyche of his audiences.

The confrontation with the judge of Ramla in the forty-third episode, runs more harmoniously than the previous one, mainly because the wife uses euphemisms and metonymies (*kināyāt*) and avoids blatant sexual references. Instead of announcing that al-Sarūjī refuses intercourse, the woman explains that her husband only went on pilgrimage once (*lam yaḥjuj al-bayt siwā marra*), implying that they only had intercourse once; and that even during that one

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[59] al-Ḥarīrī, *Maqāmāt*, 445.
[60] While enumerating the tricks of Banū Sāsān, Abū Dulaf cites the example of "one who feigns an internal discharge, or who showers the passers-by with his urine, or who farts in the mosque and makes a nuisance of himself, thus wheedling money out of people." See Bosworth, *Medieval Underworld*, Vol. II, 197. These obscene measures illustrate that the shamelessness of Banū Sāsān can be expressed using more than language.
[61] A remarkable episode in which two beggars compete to prove who is the most insolent using the weirdest of descriptions and the rarest of curses (see Introduction).
[62] al-Ḥarīrī, *Assemblies II*, 108.
[63] al-Ḥarīrī, *Maqāmāt*, 450.

time, he did not throw the pebble[64] (*lam yarmi al-jamra*), a euphemism that he did not achieve orgasm. Just as his wife does, al-Sarūjī defends his position using figurative language, employing the jargon of agriculture (*miltu ʿan ḥarthī lā raghba, wa-lakin li-aqī bidhrah*), and arguing that he is refraining from sexual intercourse in order not to give birth to a child who will have to share his poverty. Hearing this argument, the wife loses her euphemisms and curses him: "Woe betide thee, thou fool, thou lack-food and lack-a-lance"[65] (*waylak yā marqaʿān, yā man huwa lā ṭaʿām wa-lā ṭiʿān*).[66] Once again the judge takes the side of the husband and gives him money; and even when he discovers later that the trickster has fooled him, he recalls his mastery of language and says, "Allah confound him! How charming are his ways and how exquisite his arts"[67] (*qātalahu allāh fa-mā aḥsan shujūnah wa-amlaḥ funūnah*).[68] The judge then sends the couple even more money, "two mantles and a purse of coins."[69]

These three *maqāmāt* share their use of figures of style (*tawriya*, metonymy, euphemism) and strange vocabulary, to illustrate the power of language and its firm grip over those who are supposed to be "the key for the truth and the openers [of justice] amongst mankind"[70] (*miftāḥ li-l-ḥaq, wa-fattāḥ bayn al-khalq*).[71] Instead of uncovering trickery and depicting truth, the three judges stop short at only expressing their fascination with language, enjoying its ornaments and rhymes, and failing to detect the intentions of the plaintiffs. Abū Zayd al-Sarūjī, in contrast, studies the judges' personalities and preferences and adapts his language to accommodate their needs. He selects his vocabulary and rhetorical tools depending on the nature of his audience: he begs using poetry and metonymies with the admirers of *adab* (Judges of Ramla and Alexandria), and shocks using obscenities with misers (judge of Tabriz). The three judges are easily duped, vulnerable, and rigid. Abū Zayd al-Sarūjī, in contrast, is flexible, preceptive, and resourceful. He represents everything that they search for, and by being himself he questions their legitimacy and role in society.

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[64] "Throwing of the *jamarāt* [place of pebbles]" is part of the annual Islamic Ḥajj pilgrimage. During the ritual, pilgrims throw pebbles at three walls (formerly pillars), called *jamarāt*, in the city of Mina, east of Mecca.
[65] al-Ḥarīrī, *Assemblies II*, 143.
[66] al-Ḥarīrī, *Maqāmāt*, 517.
[67] al-Ḥarīrī, *Assemblies II*, 146.
[68] al-Ḥarīrī, *Maqāmāt*, 521.
[69] al-Ḥarīrī, *Assemblies II*, 146.
[70] al-Ḥarīrī, *Assemblies II*, 87.
[71] al-Ḥarīrī, *Maqāmāt*, 412.

2.2. The Son as Accomplice

Unlike the wives, who are only present in the *maqāmāt* in a context of litigation, Abū Zayd's son appears more frequently accompanied by a multitude of motifs, including slavery, literary theft, seduction, and recalcitrance. The common feature that holds these different scenarios together is the use of *badīʿ* or figures of style as a conning tool, a well-suited device that can, as Lara Harb notes, "mislead and obscure."[72] In *al-Maqāma al-Maʿarriyya* and *al-Maqāma al-Zabīdiyya,* al-Sarūjī and his son use *tawriya* to fool their victims (Judge of *Maʿarra* and the narrator). In *al-Maqāma al-Shiʿriyya,* they use paronomasia or *jinās*. And in *al-Maqāma al-Ṣaʿdiyya*, they use *ṭibāq* or antonymy to argue both in favor and against *suʾāl* (begging). To Abū Zayd al-Sarūjī, all verbal means are permissible so long as they resonate with the desires of the targeted audience.[73]

Each of these episodes uses a remarkable amount of *gharīb* vocabulary, always proportionally and compatibly with the theme of the episode and the demands of the addressees. The most obscure episode is *al-Maʿarriyya,* in which al-Sarūjī and his son first fight over a needle, which is described in a series of double-meaning words that can also apply to a slave woman, and then over a kohl pencil whose attributes also apply to a slave man. By using double-entendre, the difference between reality (needle/ kohl pencil) and illusion (slave woman/ slave man) fades, and the sexual references prioritize the latter over the former. In reference to the needle/ slave woman, al-Sarūjī uses the following expressions:

مَمْلُوكة رشِيقة القَد، تَخبّ كالنَهْد، تَرْفُل فِي زِي فَضْفَاض، تُسْقى مِن غَير حِياض، خُدعة، خُبْأة طُلْعة، أُولَج فيها مَتاعه، أطال بِها اِستِمتَاعَه.[74]

Following the example of his father, Zayd describes the eyeliner with a set of terms that applies to the phallus as well:

مَمْلُوكًا مُتناسِب الطَّرَفَين، قَلّما يَنْكَح إلا مُثَنى، يَسْخو بِمَوجُودِه، يَنْقادُ مع قَرِينَتِه وإن لم تَكُن من طِينَتِه.[75]

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[72] Harb, *Arabic Poetics*, 72.

[73] *Al-Maqāma al-Raḥbiyya*, is the one exception in which al-Sarūjī abandons his usual linguistic tools to rely on pure seduction, using his handsome son as bait to entice the judge. Nevertheless, he does so by exploiting the judge's weakness for young men. The choice for this motif is perhaps to emphasize the common feature between all judges: they are all blind to intentions and content and seduced by external beauty, be it linguistic or bodily. See al-Ḥarīrī, *Maqāmāt*, 89-97.

[74] Ibid, 69-71.

[75] Ibid, 71.

Confronted with stylistic and lexical ambiguity, the judge loses his temper and shouts, "Speak clearly, or be off!"[76] (*immā an tubīnā wa-illā fa-bīnā*), then later "Yes, directly!" (*īh bi-ghayri tamwīh*).[77] These sentences may articulate the firmness of the judge, yet they also unveil his admiration for paronomasia: *tubīnā* (clarify)/ *bīnā* (be off); *īh* (answer)/ *tamwīh* (camouflage). After these two threats, the litigants begin to speak clearly, explaining their puzzling references, then begging for charity. Instead of scolding or condemning them, the judge is beguiled by their *tawriyāt* and says admiringly:

> Oh rare! How admirable are the breathings of thy mouth; well done! Should I say of thee, were it not for the guile that is in thee.[78]
>
> لِلَّهِ دَرُّك، فَما أَعذَب نَفَثاتٍ فِيك. وَاهًا لَك لَولَا خِدَاعٌ فِيك.[79]

Similar to the judges discussed before, the judge of Maʿarra falls into the trap of being beguiled by *badīʿ* and forgives the trickster and his son for their attempt to deceive him.

In *al-Maqāma al-Shiʿriyya*, Abū Zayd al-Sarūjī accuses his son of plagiarizing his verses, copying two-thirds verbatim and omitting the rest (*aqdama ʿalā abyātī al-thulāthiyya, fa-ḥadhafa minha juzʾayn*). After the two poems are recited, Abū Zayd is proven right. The son objects, however, and argues that he never heard the original poem and that it is *accidental plagiarism* (*innamā ittafaqa tawārud al-khawāṭir*). The judge who is familiar with plagiarism and its degrees[80] proposes a challenge, in which the defendant and the plaintiff alternately improvise ten verses, using *jinās* or paronomasia. The judge describes his choice for *jinās* as follows:

> Of all kinds of eloquence, I am fondest of *tajnīs*, and I look upon it as the chief of them. So, string now ten verses, weaving them with its colouring, broidering them with its ornament. And put in them the tale of my condition in respect to a mistress of mine, who is rare of form, dark red of lip, graceful in undulation, but full of pride.[81]

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[76] Ibid, 72.
[77] Ibid, 73.
[78] al-Ḥarīrī, *Assemblies I,* 150.
[79] al-Ḥarīrī, *Maqāmāt,* 76.
[80] He asks: "*hal ḥīna saraqa, salakha* (lit. skinning) *am masakha* (lit. metamorphosis)." *Naskh* means copying words and meanings as they are, without any change. *Salkh* means taking only a part of the meaning. *Maskh* means changing the meaning into something else. Of course, the more change the better the plagiarism. For examples of each type, see Ibn al-Athīr, "Chapter 30: *al-Sariqāt al-shiʿriyya*" in *al-Mathal al-sāʾir*, 218-292.
[81] al-Ḥarīrī, *Assemblies I,* 238.

إِنّي مُوْلَعٌ من أنواع البَلاغَة بِالتَّجْنِيس وأَرَاهُ لَه كالرَّئِيس، فَانْظُمَا الآن عَشَرَة أبياتٍ تُلْحِمانِها بِوَشْيِه وتُرَصِّعَانِها بِحَلْيِه وضَمِّناها شَرح حَالِي مع إِلْفٍ لي بدِيع الصفة، أَلْمى الشِّفَة، مَلِيح التَثَنِّي، كَثِير التِيه والتجنّي.[82]

As the reader would expect, both father and son prove to be identical in their literary skills and produce together twenty instances of paronomasia[83]. Bewitched by their craft and beguiled by the similarities between them, the judge announces, "I testify before God that ye are the *Far-qadān* of heaven, and like a pair of fire-staves."[84] He then gives both money and expensive garments. After the two tricksters leave, they send the narrator back to the judge to accomplish the last part of the scheme: recognition. Al-Sarūjī's instructions are simple: "show him the folly of his heart, and how I have played with his understanding"[85] (*bayyin lah ghabāwat qalbih wa-tilʿābī bi-lubbih*[86]**).** The narrator thus returns to the judge to deliver the message and ridicule him openly, again using paronomasia, the judge's favorite kind of eloquence. Ibn Hammām says:

> Now when I was in presence of the Governor, whose hall was by now empty … he said, "I conjure thee by God, art thou not he who lent him the suit?" (dast)- I said, "No, by Him who has set thee on that cushion, (dast) I am not the owner of the suit, (dast) but thou art he against whom the game (dast) has gone.[87]

فلمّا حَضرتُ الوالي وقد خلا مجلسه (...) قال «نَشَدتُك الله أَلَسْتَ الذي أعاره الدَّست» فقلتُ «لا والذي أَحَلّك هذا الدَّسْت، ما أنا بِصاحِب ذلِك الدَّست بل أنت الذي تَمّ علِيه الدَّست.»[88]

In forensic episodes, al-Ḥārith ibn Hammām usually acts as a bystander, his role being limited to attending the scene and narrating it. In *al-Maqāma al-Shiʿriyya*, however, he acts as a messenger and criticizes the judge for an obsession that he himself shares and actively seeks in several episodes. The subject of criticism, consequently, is not paronomasia and eloquence, but the person who is allowed to seek and compose them. The one difference between the narrator and the judge is their responsibility, or more accurately, their positionality. This explains why al-Ḥārith ibn Hammām points to the "Him who has set thee on that cushion," meaning he who appointed you judge. Correspondingly, those who hold responsibilities, are more condemnable

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[82] al-Ḥarīrī, *Maqāmāt,* 227-228.
[83] Ibid, 228-9.
[84] al-Ḥarīrī, *Assemblies I,* 239.
[85] al-Ḥarīrī, *Assemblies I,* 242.
[86] al-Ḥarīrī, *Maqāmāt,* 233.
[87] al-Ḥarīrī, *Assemblies I,* 242.
[88] al-Ḥarīrī, *Maqāmāt,* 234.

in the *Ḥarīriyya* than the educated elite whose preoccupation with *adab* wastes their money and time, but whose activities do not impact their duties.

In addition to *tawriya* and *jināS,* which emphasize resemblance and likeness, al-Sarūjī and his son display their difference and opposition using antonyms in contexts of disobedience and ingratitude. In *al-Maqāma al-Ṣaʿdiyya*, for example, al-Sarūjī accuses his son of recalcitrance (*ʿuqūq*) as a ruse to provoke the judge's vanity and need for praise. This episode employs different degrees of antonymy, which heightens as the plot progresses: first by describing two different characters, a trembling old man (*shaykh bālī al-riyāsh bādī al-irtiʿāsh*) and strong a young lad (*ghulām ka-annah ḍirghām*); second by using a series of antitheses (*in aqdamtu aḥjam, idhā aʿrabtu aʿjam, idhā adhkaytu akhmad*); and third, by employing *ṭibāq* (two opposite words) and *muqābala* (two opposite sentences); finally, composing two contradictory poems, one about virtue, contentment, and moderation and the other on the perks of begging.

In this episode, al-Ḥarīrī displays one of premodernity's favorite literary genres: *al-maḥāsin wa-l-masāwiʾ* or merits and faults (see Chapter 1). Since this *maqāma*'s subject is *suʾāl* (begging) and *talawwun* (chameleonism) both are represented with a rich and rare lexicon,[89] which causes the son to finally admit the validity of his father's logic and agrees that begging is a positive occupation. However, the son argues that even if he submits to his father's will and becomes a beggar, he will not gain any money because all people are close-fisted. The son dupes the judge with this argument. Offended by the suggestion that all people are misers (*ghaḍiba li-l-kirām wa-aʿẓama tabkhīl sāʾir al-anām*), which implicates him, the judge decides to prove the son wrong and rewards al-Sarūjī generously. Unlike other judges in the *Ḥarīriyya*, who discover their stupidity and foolishness after it is too late to do anything about it, the judge in *al-Maqāma al-Ṣaʿdiyya* is kept in the dark, unassuming of his ignorance and content in his vanity.

These six *maqāmāt*, those that feature the wives (Mt. 9, 40, 45) and those that feature the son (Mt. 8, 23, 37) illustrate how Abū Zayd al-Sarūjī can deceive justice by using euphemisms, figures of style, *double-figures,* and specialized jargon. The trickster and his accomplices always win the argument and receive substantial rewards. Except for the woman of Alexandria, the protagonists enter the scene as opposites and merge by the end, and the only one who loses, every time, is the figure representing justice. Every judge fails to go beyond the surface level of language and loses his judiciousness and good judgment in the presence of *adab* (Mt. 8, 9, 23, 37), obscenity (Mt. 40,45), and figures of speech. Besides these episodes, which share the

[89] See: al-Ḥarīrī, *Maqāmāt,* 406-415.

same characters and linguistic tools, al-Ḥarīrī also composes two unconventional *maqāmāt*, in which al-Sarūjī confronts men in power, alone without an accomplice, to critique their conduct. In *al-Maqāma al-Rāziyya,* the trickster openly rebukes the governor of Rayy and "takes the cause of the oppressed and speaks truth to power."[90] In *al-Maqāma al-Marwiyya,* al-Sarūjī composes a long panegyric to the governor, which eventually turns into an insolent poem when he denies him reward.

Alone or accompanied by his accomplices, al-Sarūjī is always against authority and men in power. When the charms of language fail, he turns to insults as a last resort. In other words, al-Sarūjī first opts for showcasing the curiosities of language before using its transgressive and verbally abusive properties. Although the tools of deception that are used against the literati are different from the ones used against men in power, they all have a foundation in an ability to argue one's case and convince the other party (logos). Conversely, with the masses al-Sarūjī abandons fancy words and misleading rhetorical figures and focuses on emotions (pathos), emphasizing death, punishment, and infernal hell.

II. Persuading the Masses with Pathos

1. Problematic Episodes

Unlike the previous *maqāmāt,* in which Abū Zayd al-Sarūjī confronts the literati and judges to prove his superiority and challenge authority, in the *maqāmāt* that feature commoners al-Sarūjī is neutral toward his audience. He opts for persuasion instead of convincing. Addressing the general, ordinary public, al-Sarūjī does not resort to any of the above tools, be they lipograms, riddles, figures of style, or *gharīb* vocabulary. In this particular social context, al-Sarūjī's audience is composed of an uneducated class that is not preoccupied with learnedness or writerly culture. The key to their pockets is through emotions, morality, religion, and their fear of death and the afterlife. The trickster, therefore, removes the hat of the lettered man and wears the hat of the preacher, limiting his primary mode of discourse to exhortation, instead of *adab*.

Al-Ḥarīrī composed six exhortatory *maqāmāt* which he positions strategically in his book. The importance of exhortation (*waʿẓ*) in the *Ḥarīriyya*, as Kilito notes, shows in their distribution in the book, as

> six *maqāmāt* among fifty are exhortatory: the first, the eleventh, the twenty-first, thirty-first, forty-first, and the fiftieth ... Here we have a very precise order, which divides the

[90] Cooperson, *Impostures*, 190.

> book into five parts, each of them includes ten *maqāmāt*, which opens with an exhortatory *maqāma*.[91]

The six exhortatory *maqāmāt* play a structural role in the *Ḥarīriyya*, in that they function as transitional stops that announce the beginning of each part. These *maqāmāt* break the usual ambiguity and display of elaborate language and supply a repeating admonitory message. Furthermore, they rely on a plot that is indeed basic and redundant (see the table below). These *maqāmāt* are not only easier than the other episodes, but they also lack the comedy, embellishment, and learnedness of the ones we have seen so far. They strike one as being out of place.

Exhortatory episodes are thus problematic and suggest many readings. One possible reading is that exhortation breaks the dominant critical tone toward a culture of erudition in the *Ḥarīriyya*, shifting from jest to seriousness, and from ambiguity to relative clarity. This reading is confirmed by al-Ḥarīrī's own words in the preface when he says: "Whenever I change the pasture I have no purpose but to inspirit the reader, and to increase the number of those who shall seek my book"[92] (*mā qaṣadtu bi-l-iḥmāḍ fīh illā tanshīṭ qāriʾīh wa-takthīr sawād ṭālibīh*).[93] In this sense, al-Ḥarīrī offers less ambiguous episodes to readers who do not fully master the different branches of the *ʿarabiyya* and prepares them for the more complicated episodes that are yet to come. Exhortatory *maqāmāt*, according to the above, can be understood as an initiation to the book's various parts, or perhaps as a recreational break from the taxing demands ambiguity, *gharīb*, and *badīʿ* make on the reader. Conversely, one may argue that al-Ḥarīrī simply did not expect the literati to understand his literary and writerly episodes, so he gave them more suitable *maqāmāt* for their comprehension. This reading is compatible with the author's mockery and critique of the educated class.

Another possible reading is that exhortatory episodes could function as occasions to take a peek at commoners, a desire that the elite expressed since the 3rd/9th century, especially considering Abū al-ʿIbar's treatises (see Chapter 5). Unlike the latter, however, al-Ḥarīrī's exhortatory episodes are neither humorous nor meaningless. He describes them in the preface as "*mawāʿiẓ mubkiyāt*"[94] or "tear-moving exhortations."[95] Reading them, the elite would not feel superior to the masses, but perhaps understand they are similar. Both the elite and commoners

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[91] Kīlīṭū, *al-Maqāmāt,* 197.
[92] al-Ḥarīrī, *Assemblies II*, 106.
[93] al-Ḥarīrī, *Maqāmāt,* 7.
[94] Ibid, 6.
[95] al-Ḥarīrī, *Assemblies II*, 106.

share a propensity to commit immoral deeds and they both fear death. They also share a susceptibility to the trickster's tools and a weakness for oratory.

Interestingly, empathy in the *Ḥarīriyya* is only afforded to the commoners but never to the elite. Despite their portrayal as anonymous, emotional, and deceivable crowds, the commoners are allowed the final word in the *Maqāmāt*. In the fiftieth episode, *al-Maqāma al-Baṣriyya*,[96] al-Ḥarīrī breaks from the repetitive plot of the other exhortations to describe the trickster's sudden repentance while delivering a sermon in his native city of Basra. Here, the commoners are not depicted as bystanders who merely witness the repentance, but they also contribute to the change by praying for Abū Zayd al-Sarūjī. Al-Ḥārith ibn Hammām narrates:

> Forthwith the congregation commenced to aid him with their prayer, while he turned his face heavenward, until his eyelids brimmed with tears and his agitation became conspicuous, when he cried out: "Allah is greatest! The sign of acceptance has appeared, and the veil of doubt is removed, May ye then, O folks of dear Basra, be rewarded with the reward of Him who guides out of perplexity.[97]

فطَفِقَت الجَماعَة تَمُدّه بالدعاء وهو يُقَلِّب وجْهَه في السّماء إلى أن دَمَعَت أجْفانُه وبَدا رَجَفانُه فصَاح الله أكبر بانَت أمارَة الاستِجابَة وانجابَت غَشاوَة الاستِرابَة، فَجُزِيتُم يا أهل البصيرة جَزَاء من هَدى مِن الحَيْرَة.[98]

The implication of this closure is twofold. First, al-Ḥarīrī pays homage to the people of his city, portraying them as being the only audience that was not deceived by the trickster's words, thus, rendering him silent and forcing him to repent. Second, al-Ḥarīrī again, by implicitly comparing the educated class to the commoners, criticizes them for constantly falling for Abū Zayd al-Sarūjī's trickeries and failing to influence his behavior as the commoners have done.

2. Structure and Basic Linguistic Tools

Owing to their obvious resemblance of exhortatory episodes to one another, they can be described as follows:

[96] I discuss this *maqāma* in more detail in Chapter 9.
[97] al-Ḥarīrī, *Assemblies II,* 181.
[98] al-Ḥarīrī, *Maqāmāt,* 592.

	Place	Subject	Compensation	Trickery	Linguistic tools
M1	Public square	Forgetting death and cherishing ephemeral life.	Brings the audience to tears and then takes their money.	Double-faced: renouncing pleasure in public then drinking in private	Straightforward language
M11	Cemetery	The inevitability of death and shortness of life	Tears then money.	=	=
M21	Public square	1st speech: *ḥisāb*, and the afterlife. 2nd speech: justice, and the afterlife.	Tears from the general audience, reward from the governor.	=	An increasing amount of *gharīb*, using it less with the commoners and more with the governor.
M31	Road to Mecca	Pilgrimage	No compensation	No ruse	*ḥajj* jargon
M41	Mosque	Obsessing over ephemeral life; forgetting the afterlife.	The trickster and his son receive money.	Double-faced	Ø
M50	Public square	A panegyric on Basra, confession, then repentance.	The audience prays for the new repentant, then gives him alms.	No trick; intentions finally match deeds.	Clear speech

These episodes share multiple patterns. The optimal space, for instance, is always public and open. Some locations are religious, such as Mecca and mosques; other locations, such as cemeteries, soften the coldest of hearts,[99] but they are all accessible to common people. The audience is not a host, nor are they guests or party-crashers. They are simple people who happen to be present when the trickster is performing. Furthermore, they are anonymous and less privileged than the other audiences in the *Ḥarīriyya*. Their reward for the trickster, as a result, is small: prayers, tears, and a few coins.

The trickster usually delivers his exhortations alone, except in the two episodes where he recruits an assistant to introduce him (M1) or to help him in the ruse (M41). As for the narrator, he acts mainly as the agent who discovers the true face of Abū Zayd al-Sarūjī. Unveiling the double-faced character of the trickster is a recurrent motif in the *Ḥarīriyya* and takes different forms: by interrogating al-Sarūjī, following him to his hiding place, or even acting as his accomplice to make him reveal his identity. In the exhortatory episodes, however, it suffices to catch him drinking alcohol. The use of alcohol as a marker of hypocrisy and the double-faced behavior of the trickster is inspired by al-Hamadhānī's *al-Maqāma al-Khamriyya*, in which the

[99] In his commentary, al-Sharīshī enlists the main *aḥādīth*, accounts, and examples of poetry about the impact visiting cemeteries has on cold hearts. See al-Sharīshī, *Sharḥ*, vol. I, 311-5.

narrator and his friends are beaten in the mosque for drinking alcohol, but discover in the following day that the Imam, who previously incited people to punish them is a drinker himself.

In terms of language, the exhortations are similar. Abū Zayd al-Sarūjī tailors his curious linguistic products (*gharīb*, rhetorical figures, lipograms, etc.) to the audience's financial and intellectual ability. The literati seek curiosities and pay generously for them, while the uneducated neither understand nor can afford them. Al-Sarūjī, therefore, hardly uses *recherché* words and rhetorical figures in these episodes. Instead, he repeats the same motifs: denouncing ephemeral pleasures, reminding the audience of mortality and hell, and urging them to repent and be charitable. Abū Zayd al-Sarūjī leverages his wit and silver tongue to play on the emotions of his recipients and saves his erudition for those who can afford to pay for it.

While al-Sarūjī simplifies his vocabulary and refrains from jugglery, al-Ḥārith ibn Hammām uses rare words in his narration and acts as the one and only erudite man in these episodes. When al-Sarūjī refrains from displaying learnedness, the narrator intervenes and uses unusual words.[100] This vocabulary highlights the gap between the narrator and the commoners in these *maqāmāt* and demonstrates his inability to adapt his linguistic tools to different circumstances. Unlike the trickster who acts as a chameleon, changing his identities, faces, styles, vocabularies, and tools, al-Ḥārith ibn Hammām is inflexibly the same, fixated on the toolkit of *adab* even when the context demands other tools.

The episodes with the commoners in the *Ḥarīriyya* do not involve enmity or challenge. Consequently, they are less playful and hardly comical. The speech at times is indeed serious and relies on so much persuasion that the trickster himself believes his own speech (Mt. 31 and 50). The identification with the performance never occurs in the episodes involving the elite, because the language is embellished and ornamented to highlight the mockery the trickster directs at the elite and their "alienation."[101] Al-Ḥarīrī's *iḥmāḍ* or "change of pasture" is not limited to shifting from seriousness to humour, pathos to logos, pious speech to elaborate writerly performances. It also involves shifting from empathy to apathy. Despite his occasional identification with the commoners, al-Sarūjī remains a half-outsider. His sophisticated

[100] For instance, in M1 the narrator uses numerous rare words such as *ḥanīdh, mathāfin, mahyʿah*. Al-Ḥarīrī, *Maqāmāt*, 10-15; and in M21 he describes the trickster saying: *shaykh qad taqawwasa, wa-iqʿansasa, wa-taqalnsa, wa-taṭallasa* ("an old man, bowed and with a breast-hunch, and he wore the cap and the cloak"). Al-Ḥarīrī, *Maqāmāt,* 200; *Assemblies II*, 224.

[101] The trickster's use of language with the literati brings to mind Brecht's concept of *Verfremdungseffekt,* in which both actor and spectator are constantly reminded of the performative nature of the speech to prevent all empathy. See Brecht, "Alienation Effect in Chinese Acting," in *Brecht on Theatre*, ed. John Willett (New York: Hill and Wang, 1966), 91-99.

knowledge of language and his shrewd trickeries do not allow him to be part of the crowd. His people will forever remain the tribe of Banū Sāsān, despite being featured in a minor form in the *Ḥarīriyya*.

III. Guiding the *Banū Sāsān* with Ethos

1. Banū Sāsān in the *Ḥarīriyya*

The Banū Sāsān tribe includes "various ethnicities and confessions, outcasts of various tribes,"[102] and "anyone who practices cunning, deceit, and trickery."[103] All tricksters, criminals, street performers, and strangers can be identified as one of them. In the *Book of Charlatans*, al-Jawbarī goes as far as claiming that almost all people have some connection to the tribe of Banū Sāsān (*yadkhulu fīh jamīʿ al-ṭawāʾif, wa-yataʿallaqu bih akthar al-khalq*).[104] As with other tribes, the members of the Banū Sāsān tribe are bound by social constraints. Kristina Richardson explains:

> Rather than constituting a mysterious, dysfunctional social group, the Banū Sāsān seem to have organized themselves in ways ordinary for the time. Viewed from this perspective, the Banū Sāsān lose some of their mystery, but one clearly sees that their social patterns are not deviant or even obscure. They actually accord with traditional tribal hierarchies in medieval Islam and behave as one would expect a commercial nomadic tribe to behave, that is, they share a common line of descent (from Shaykh Sāsān), have a recognized leader, reproduce their customs and trades generationally (begging, entertaining) and speak a tribal dialect (*lughat al-shaykh Sāsān*).[105]

Following in the steps of al-Jāḥiẓ, Ibn al-Ḥajjāj, Abū Dulaf al-Khazrajī, and al-Hamadhānī, al-Ḥarīrī displays the peculiar ethos of the Banū Sāsān social group in his *Maqāmāt*, but only in two episodes. The limited presence of this group in the *Ḥarīriyya* is indeed remarkable. Though the genre is associated with displaying their argot and curiosities, al-Ḥarīrī shows little interest in them. In this context, Hämeen-Anttila notes that

> the Sasanian poem of Abū Dulaf and the *maqāmāt* of al-Hamadhānī may have provided a hole for peeping into the life of the underworld, but in al-Ḥarīrī, the reality of the

[102] Kristina Richardson, "Tracing a Gypsy Mixed Language through Medieval and Early Modern Arabic and Persian Literature," in *Der Islam*, 94(1) (2017), 117.
[103] al-Jawbarī, *The Book of Charlatans*, 99.
[104] Ibid, 98.
[105] Kristina Richardson, "Tracing a Gypsy Mixed Language," 122.

> scenes has been dimmed. The scenes are not revealing the way the lower classes led their lives and they do not aim at being realistic. Al-Ḥarīrī is not giving sketches of the street life of the 12th century but setting pieces of superb artistic prose into its by now conventional frames.[106]

This point is legitimate if one compares the *Ḥarīriyya* to the *Hamadhāniyya*. However, al-Ḥarīrī was not concerned with the underworld, but with the educated class whose learnedness he shared, and for that he amplified the aesthetic, linguistically elaborate aspect of his work and reduced the social aspect. Another reason, which I explain more thoroughly in Part III, is that al-Ḥarīrī does not want his trickster to be similar to the free-roving characters whom Abū Dulaf and al-Hamadhānī portray. He constructs his trickster as a dramatic figure, with little moments of familiarity and belonging, who suffers from exile and yearning, an everlasting stranger who constantly feels as one (see Chapters 8 and 9).

Al-Ḥarīrī, nevertheless, emulates the model of al-Hamadhānī and composes two episodes on the Banū Sāsān, perhaps as an homage to his predecessor, or because he also shared the fascination with their slang and unique ethos. The first episode is *al-Maqāma al-Ṣūriyya,* in which the Banū Sāsān gather to attend the wedding of two beggars. The second is *al-Maqāma al-Sāsāniyya* in which Abū Zayd al-Sarūjī is on his death-bed summarizing the secrets of the trade for his son. The two episodes share the same motifs: praising begging, encouraging shamelessness, and using argot. They both feign seriousness to display the unique and counter-ethos of the Banū Sāsān and reduce the role of the narrator to the very minimum. To illustrate, it would suffice to closely read *al-Maqāma al-Ṣūriyya* to understand how al-Ḥarīrī portrays this unusual audience in a "carnivalesque" manner.[107]

2. A Carnivalesque *maqāma*: *al-Maqāma al-Ṣūriyya*

In the episodes that feature the elite, al-Ḥārith ibn Hammām is always accepted automatically by the host group while Abū Zayd al-Sarūjī is denied entrance (see Chapter 8). In *al-Maqāma al-Ṣūriyya,* however, it is the other way around: the trickster acts as the host of the party and its most eminent figure, while the narrator plays the role of an unwelcomed party-crasher. It is a "carnivalesque"[108] episode, in which the banished is a prosperous host, the educated man is an unwelcomed guest, and the strange is normal.

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[106] Hämeen-Anttila, *Maqama,* 169.
[107] *al-Maqāma al-Sāsāniyya* is discussed thoroughly in Chapter 9.
[108] J.A. Cuddon, "Carnivalization/carnivalesque," in *Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory* (London: Penguin, 1999), 111-112.

Al-Ḥārith narrates that he arrived in Egypt and encountered a group of splendid-looking men who were heading to a wedding party. The group shows little interest in the narrator, barely answering his question and not inviting him to the wedding. Al-Ḥārithm, nevertheless, joins them to witness the party. He recounts:

> So I inquired for the sake of procuring me a pleasure-trip, about the troop and their destination, when I was told that the people were witnesses and their goal a wedding to be witnessed. Then the sprightliness of youth urged me to fare along with the foragers, so as to obtain a share in the sweets of the bridal scatterings get some delicacies of the festive board.[109]

فسَأَلْتُ لِانتِجَاع النُزْهة، عن العُصبَة والوِجْهَة، فقِيل أمّا القَوم فشُهُود، وأمَا المَقصَد فإِمْلَاك مَشْهُود.

فَحَدَتْنِي مِيعَة النّشَاط على أن سِرْتُ مع الفُرَّاط لِأفُوز بِحَلَاوة اللُّقاط وأَحُوز حَلْواء السِمّاط.[110]

Arriving at the party, however, al-Ḥārith ibn Hammām does not find sweets or delicacies. What he finds instead is a mansion with "strange furniture" and vestibules adorned with "tattered garments and begging baskets"[111] (*dihlīzuhā mujallal bi-aṭmār mukharraqa wa-mukallal bi-makhārif muʿallaqa*).[112] After inquiring, he discovers that the mansion "has no distinct owner and no manifest master, it is but the inn of the importune beggars and low artisans and the den of ballad-singers and rehearsers of the traditions"[113] (*laysa lahā mālik muʿayyan wa-lā ṣāḥib mubayyan. innamā hiya miṣṭabat al-muqayyifīn wa-l-mudarwazīn wa-walījat al-mushaqshiqīn wa-l-mujalwizīn*).[114] In the *Hamadhāniyya*, the Banū Sāsān are placed in open arenas, accessible to everyone's eyes.[115] In contrast, al-Ḥarīrī depicts them as a community that can afford luxury, and who can seem *normal* on the surface. He breaks the stereotypes about them by showing them wearing elegant garments, and owning a mansion with "state-chairs, spread carpets, cushions laid in rows, and arrayed curtains." Allowing normality to this group makes them even stranger to the narrator who repeatedly expresses his fear, reluctance, and the need to leave.

The markers that identify them as the Banū Sāsān, that is to say, the rags and begging baskets, are not totally omitted, however, as they hang on the walls. This is a sign that this party

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[109] al-Ḥarīrī, *Assemblies II*, 26.
[110] al-Ḥarīrī, *Maqāmāt,* 313.
[111] al-Ḥarīrī, *Assemblies II*, 26.
[112] al-Ḥarīrī, *Maqāmāt,* 313.
[113] al-Ḥarīrī, *Assemblies II*, 26.
[114] al-Ḥarīrī, *Maqāmāt,* 314.
[115] See for example al-Hamadhānī's *al-Maqāma al-Sāsāniyya*.

is only a temporary break from their normal way of life, and their one opportunity to act as the better half: the elite. The one single element that is not suspended in the carnivalesque scene is the shameless language and the mockery.

Officiating the wedding, Abū Zayd al-Sarūjī begins his speech with formal praise for God and his Prophets, then proceeds to unusual praise for begging, which he argues is a medium to bring the poor justice (*li-yantaṣifa li-l-fuqarāʾ min al-aghniyāʾ*). Finally reaching the topic of matrimony al-Sarūjī says:

> Allah, be He exalted, has made matrimony a law so that you may be chaste, and instituted propagation so that you may multiply. … Now this is Abū al-Darrāj Wallāj [ingoer], son of Kharrāj [out-goer], lord of the impudent face, and manifest mendacity, of yelping and shouting, of importunity and persistency in begging; -who woos the shrew of her people, fit mate of her husband, Qanbas [spit-fire]. Daughter of Abū ‘Anbas [frowning lion], for the sake of that which reached him of her being clad with pertinacity, and her excessiveness in stooping to beggary, and her quickness in grasping a livelihood, and her rising after a fall, along with her combativeness. And he has lavished upon her for a dowry a wallet and ferruled stick, together with a kerchief and a pitcher. [116]

أمّا بعد، فإن الله تعالَى شَرَّع النِّكَاح لِتَتَعَفَّفُوا وسَنّ التَنَاسُل لِكَي تَتَضَاعَفُوا (...) هذا أبو الدَرَّاج وَلّاج بن خَرَّاج ذو الوَجْه الوَقّاح والإفْك الصَرّاح والهَرِير والصِيَاح والإبْرَام والإلْحَاح يَخطُب سَلِيطَة أهْلِها وشَرِيطَة بَعْلِها قَنْبَس بنت أبي العَنْبَس لِما بَلغَه مِن اِلتِحافِها بالْحَافِها وإسرَافِها في إسْفافِها واِنْكِماشِها على مَعَاشِها واِنْتِعَاشِها عند هِرَاشِها وقد بَذَل لها من الصَدَاق شِلّاقًا وعُكّازًا وصِقاعًا وكَرَّازًا.[117]

Parody, as Antoon notes, is a “writing against tradition. It involves appropriating the narrative, context, style, persona … then redeploying in such a way as to serve different, and inverted purposes.”[118] This is exactly what Abū Zayd al-Sarūjī does in this scene. He emulates the style and tone of a traditional speech, cites the word of God, then introduces the couple in an inverted manner. In contrast to the normal officiating speech, in which the groom and the bride are praised for their lineage and possessions, and in which dowry consists of she-camels and jewelry, the present bride and groom are praised for their shameless tongues and tricks, and their dowry consists of basic tools which every beggar need. The description might seem shocking

[116] al-Ḥarīrī, *Assemblies II*, 28-29.
[117] al-Ḥarīrī, *Maqāmāt*, 318-9.
[118] Antoon, *The Poetics of the Obscene*, 45.

to outsiders (i.e., the narrator). To the Banū Sāsān, however, it is perfectly compatible with their ethos and customs; for they believe, that "a man held worth for his wealth, not his pedigree, and inquiry is made after his gain, not after his deserts"[119] (*al-marʾ bi-nashbih lā bi-nasabih, wa-l-faḥṣ ʿan maksabih lā ʿan ḥasabih*).[120]

Here, the harmony between Abū Zayd al-Sarūjī and his audience is incomparable. To them, he is not a curious interlocutor giving an entertaining performance, or displaying rare words, but rather one of the community's guiding figures. He is one "who has roved and roamed, who has been young and waxed old in adversity"[121] (*jāla wa-jāb, wa-shabba fī al-kudya wa-shāb*).[122] In this context, the trickster liberates his tongue from trickery, erudition, and learnedness, and speaks the language of his people: their argot.[123]

To highlight the unusual nature of this social group, al-Ḥarīrī presents the scene through the eyes of the outsider/narrator. In this sense, the *Ḥarīriyya*'s episodes are always in need of an outsider; thus, when al-Sarūjī is at home, the narrator adopts his strangerhood. Al-Ḥārith is portrayed in an anxious state, overwhelmed by the oddity of Banū Sāsān, although he is the one who constantly seeks curiosities. His preoccupation with finding a way out distracts him from both the slang and the events of the party. He waits for al-Sarūjī to finish his speech, and for people to take their seats, then he "slips out of the row and flees from the throng."[124]

As Bakhtin would say, everything in this episode is "carnivalesque." It questions normality, introduces alternatives, and offers liberation from social conventions. The *maqāma* displays a reversed world, where rags are decoration, begging is a virtue, and insults are praise. Unlike the other *maqāmāt*, in which the trickster is performing for strangers to ridicule them or take their money, in the *maqāmāt* featuring Banū Sāsān, he is a part of a community, able to be himself, and speak in his tongue. His usual strangeness and eccentric behavior are diffused in a larger picture in which the unconventional become conventional.

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[119] al-Ḥarīrī, *Assemblies II,* 170.
[120] al-Ḥarīrī, *Maqāmāt,* 571.
[121] al-Ḥarīrī, *Assemblies II,* 27.
[122] al-Ḥarīrī, *Maqāmāt,* 316.
[123] Argot in this *maqāma* manifests in Banū Sāsān's tools: *makhraf* (beggar's basket), *shallāq* (wallet), *ṣiqāʿ* (kerchief) *karrāz* (pouch)), and their different types of beggars: *al-muqayyifīn, al-mudarwizīn, al mushaqshiqīn,* and *al-mujalwizīn*.
[124] al-Ḥarīrī, *Assemblies II,* 29.

Conclusion: A Chameleon Tongue

Throughout the *Ḥarīriyya*, al-Sarūjī displays the different varieties of his chameleon character. He changes his hats, identities, roles, and gender. He also changes his vocabulary, rhetorical figures, and modes of persuasion. Confronting the elite, he uses jargon, *gharīb*, *badīʿ*, paronomasia, *tawriya*, antonyms, riddles, and lipograma. In the presence the commoners, he drops all his linguistic tools, lexical and rhetorical, and replaces them with quotations from the *Qurʾān* and solemn speeches. With the people to whose midst he belongs, al-Sarūjī uses argot and parody to demonstrate the peculiar system of beliefs that binds the Banū Sāsān. The abilities of al-Sarūjī's chameleon tongue may be illustrated as follows:

Recipients	Mode of Persuasion	Vocabulary	Rhetorical figures and imagery
Literati	logos	Jargon, *gharīb*	Riddles, lipograms, double-entendre
Men in Power	logos	Obscene language, *gharīb*	*double-figures* of style: double-entendre, *ṭibāq* (antonymy), *muqābala* (opposed sentences), Paronomasia, homonymy, euphemism and metonymy
Commoners	Pathos	Simple language	--
Banū Sāsān	Ethos	Argot, *gharīb*	Argot, parody

Abū Zayd al-Sarūjī adopts different kinds of *gharīb* vocabulary (Bedouin, jargon, transgressive, and argot), shifts between the three pillars of Aristotle's rhetorical triangle (logos, pathos, and ethos), and deceives through different misleading figures of style (paronomasia, double-entendre, riddles, lipogram, homonymy, antitheses, antonymy), depending on his relationship with his audience. In the *Ḥarīriyya*, neutrality is the weakest emotion, producing simple and accessible episodes. Enmity incites all kinds of trickeries, embellishments, and ambiguities. As for belonging and familiarity, they are hardly present, but they nevertheless offer the trickster the rare opportunity to be himself and to take a break from strangerhood.

Al-Ḥarīrī was highly attuned to the various ways in which readers would receive his work. In a sense, one may argue that the whole work is a dramatization of this knowledge. The relationship between the trickster and his different addressees influences the episodes linguistically and affectively. The present chapter has been an attempt to clarify the linguistic impact of al-Sarūjī on his different audiences and the end to which he uses language. The affective aspect, however, is yet to be dealt with. Owing to the association between ornamented language

and the absence of substance in the modern reception of the *Ḥarīriyya* (see Chapters 2 and 3), the affective dimension of the work and the emotional state of its trickster has not been studied so far. To fill this gap, the following three chapters move from the use of vocabulary and different rhetorical devices to the inner feelings of the trickster, his longing, feelings of banishment, instances of recognition, companionship, exile, and existential angst. I will, therefore, shift from the second connotation of *gharīb,* that is, a rare vocabulary that comes from remote tribes to its other connotation, meaning a stranger who is far away from home.

Part III

Being a *Gharīb*

“Listen, you! Thou art the stranger in what you mean.”
يا هذا! أنتَ الغَرِيبُ فِي مَعْنَاك.
Al-Tawḥīdī, *al-Ishārāt al-ilāhiyya*

Preface

Philip Kennedy once asked rhetorically: "What are the *maqāmāt* if not a long cycle of wandering impostures?"[1] This question is answered affirmatively in many episodes of the *Hamadhāniyya*, and almost every episode of the *Ḥarīriyya*. The trickster and the narrator hardly rest. They are constantly moving through landscapes, traveling arbitrarily to different destinations, jumping randomly from one adventure to the next, from one place to another, and from one audience to the next. During their journeys, the two characters reflect on their positionality in space and on their movement with a rich vocabulary, which diversifies into a great number of words and expressions that describe walking, riding, running, yearning, separation, homesickness, rootlessness, and exile. Thus, if the center of the episodes is dedicated to the trickster's discourse about *adab* and *gharīb* vocabulary, the beginning and end of the *maqāmāt* are usually dedicated to reflecting on strangerhood and voyaging, be it in the narrator's description of the journey in prose, or the trickster's speculations on trickery, home, time, and exile in verse. In other words, while the essence of the *maqāmāt* revolves around strange jargon, its frame is usually dedicated to portraying the main characters as restless wanderers, and strangers.

The educated narrator stands for the vibrant age of the Buyid era in which the *maqāma* was conceived, and in which "individualism," "self-awareness," "competitiveness," "cosmopolitanism," and "secularism" dominated the intellectual scene.[2] As a result, "Poets, scholars, and secretaries roved from court to court, transferring allegiance with impressive ease, readily shifting landscape and horizon, always strangers, never 'home'."[3] As for the trickster, he represents those who made a name for themselves on the literary scene using roaming, trickery, obscenity, libertinism, and frivolousness, such as Abū al-ʿAnbas al-Ṣayramī, al-Aḥnaf al-ʿUkbarī, Abū Dulaf al-Khazrajī, and al-Aqtaʿ al-Kūfī (Chapter 5). Consequently, the *maqāma* genre in general, and the *Ḥarīriyya* in particular, gives voice to two types of travelers that dominated the literary scene: the educated elite who sought *adab* as entertainment, and the *mukaddīs* (wandering beggars) who used it as merchandise.

In Part III, I argue that the *Ḥarīriyya* combines two contradictory experiences of strangerhood. The first is positive and privileged, associated with profit and curiosity, and represented

[1] Kennedy, *Recognition*, 247.
[2] Kraemer, *Humanism,* 11-20.
[3] Ibid, 13.

by the narrator al-Ḥārith ibn Hammām. The second is negative, associated with refusal, disgust, displacement, and desolation, and it is represented by the trickster Abū Zayd al-Sarūjī. Experiencing this undesirable side of strangerhood does not hurt or devalue the trickster, but rather furnishes him with a more elaborate backstory and turns him into an ambiguous character: a tragic hero and a trader of the exotic. In other words, by suffering strangerhood and being a *gharīb* (a stranger), Abū Zayd al-Sarūjī provides *gharīb* (strange vocabulary) and becomes the object of desire of the literati.

To address the complicated relationship between the *adīb* as a privileged stranger and the trickster as a displaced refugee and trader of the exotic, Part III considers three aspects, divided into three chapters. In Chapter 7, I analyze the ambiguity of *ghurba* and its different connotations and representations in premodern literature from the pre-Islamic period till the 6th /13th century, to develop an understanding of the context in which the *maqāma* genre developed. In Chapter 8, I compare al-Hamadhānī's cynical and detached strangers to al-Ḥarīrī's trickster who feels homesickness and desolation, to argue that the author of the *Ḥarīriyya* borrowed the *ghurba* motif from al-Hamadhānī, then made it more nuanced, to portray a more human and ambiguous character. Building on the latter argument, Chapter 9 offers a close reading of the four *maqāmāt* (Mt. 19, 39, 49, 50) in which al-Sarūjī suffers the utmost manifestations of strangerhood, which take the form of isolation, desolation, and existential angst.

Chapter 7

Ghurba in Premodern *Adab*: On Recognition, Isolation, and Marvels

Before examining strangerhood in the *maqāmāt* and contrasting the *adīb*'s search for vocabulary with the trickster's flight from the deceived audience, this chapter highlights *ghurba* in premodern literature: an ambiguous notion combining physical and intellectual alienation, voluntary and forced displacement, as well as yearning and rootlessness. *Ghurba* inspires ambivalent reactions: it can pique curiosities and bring profit, yet it can also cause danger, otherness, and desolation. To approach the complex semantic field of *ghurba*, I first list the different denotations associated with the stranger in *Lisān al-ʿArab*. These include, for instance, isolation, banishment, exoticism, remoteness, and discrimination. Second, I examine these meanings by referring to the different experiences of strangerhood recorded in *adab* from the pre-Islamic period until the 7th/13th century.

These literary experiences are analyzed under three different headings: First, under recognition, which is taken here to mean an ambivalent act that can cause otherness yet also signify familiarity and empathy. The act of recognition is addressed primarily due to its significance in the *Ḥarīriyya*, since the incomprehensible distant trickster becomes the familiar Abū Zayd al-Sarūjī the moment the narrator recognizes his identity.

Second, under isolation, which is viewed here as a double state: forced, in form of banishment or imprisonment, and voluntary considering the absence of a worthy audience and compatible companionship. To overcome the first kind of isolation, the exiled and imprisoned individuals express their *ghurba* by addressing non-speaking animals and graves, or by inscribing their feelings in the hope of being heard. On the other hand, those who opted voluntarily for isolation chose to criticize society and various gatherings, arguing that solitude is better than inferior company. The state of banishment and forced *ghurba* is recurrent in the *Ḥarīriyya* since its trickster had no choice but to leave his homeland after its invasion (Chapter 8). Incidentally, Abū Zayd al-Sarūjī expresses a voluntary need to avoid life and people in two remarkable episodes: *al-Maqāma al-ʿUmāniyya* and *al-Maqāma al-Baṣriyya* (Chapter 9).

Third, the positive connotations of strangerhood are analyzed to argue that despite its emotional harshness, *ghurba* can generate profit, engender curiosities, and bring marvelous findings. These benefits encourage movement and generate the plot in Ḥarīrī's *maqāmāt*: through the trickster, who acts as a "trader of the exotic," and the elite, who seek his curious company.

This chapter's material is not a homogeneous corpus. It is only a selection of fragments and perspectives that aim to approach the complicated concept of *ghurba*. We owe the complexity of the topic to the historic depth of intertextuality in Arabic *adab* and the nature of informers: first, since the manifestations of *ghurba* addressed here occur centuries ago, it is approached as literary textual material, not as a human experience. Second, the available material about the concept is filtered through the eyes of "*des êtres de papier*,"[1] whose voice is recorded in books and epistles, and who belong to a privileged educated class. John F. Romano in his *Medieval Travelling* reminds us that

> travel in this period was expensive, which limited who could undertake it. Generally speaking, one had to be at least in the middle class to have some access to writing because of the expense involved in producing texts. So, we tend to hear less about the journeys of poor travelers. The sources that discuss travel skew overwhelmingly male and represent a male viewpoint. ... The writers often display bias toward those who are different from them, in some cases with offensive language. In all of these examples, the sourcebook reflects the characteristics of the sources that scholars have at their disposal. [2]

Consequently, this chapter is based on selective sources, highlighting the discourse of privileged strangers who could record their strangerhood, or who had the power of putting words in the tongues of others, such as illiterate Bedouins.

I. *Gharīb*'s Ambiguity

The linguistic root *gh-r-b* offers numerous derivations, related to wine (*gharb* as *al-khamr*), crows (*ghurāb*), tears (*istaghraba al-damʿ*: weeping), edges (*ghārib al-sayf*: *ḥadduh*), and sunsets (*ghurūb*). Within the same word family, we encounter '*gharīb'*: a homonym that means both strange and stranger, thus producing connotations that relate to remoteness, banishment, uncanniness, exoticism, and difference. To illustrate this, I enumerate here the list of terms associated with *gharīb* in *Lisān al-ʿArab* in the order of their appearance:[3]

[1] This expression was coined by Roland Barthes, to describe fictional characters who live and die on paper. I use it here to refer to premodern literary figures, whom we perceive as real historical figures, yet are only accessible to us through books and other literary material.
[2] John F. Romano, *Medieval Travel and Travelers: A Reader,* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2020), xii-xiii.
[3] I refer to this list below as "the *gharīb* list."

1. *Al-gharb*, (to avoid): leaving (*al-dhahāb*) and avoiding people *(al-tanaḥḥī ʿan al-nās).*[4]
2. *Aghrabahu: naḥḥāh* (to banish): In the *ḥadīth*, the prophet ordered that the adulterer must be banished (*taghrīb*) from his country for one year.[5]
3. *Al-gharba wa-l-gharb*: destination (*al-nawā*) and distance (*buʿd*); *aghraba al-qawm: Intaʾaw* (went faraway).[6]
4. They say: *hal aṭraftanā min mugharriba khabar*? [can you entertain us with news from elsewhere],[7] meaning news that originates from a different land. *Al-khabar al-mughrib*: strange, novel, amusing news [*gharīb, ḥādith, ṭarīf*].[8]
5. *Al-ghurba wa-l-ghurūb*: leaving one's homeland (*al-nuzūḥ ʿan al-waṭan*).[9]
6. In the *ḥadīth*, "Islam began as something strange, and it will return to being strange, so blessed are the strangers," the meaning is that Islam started alone as a stranger without a family (*waḥīd lā ahl lah*).[10]
7. *Ightaraba al-rajul*: to marry an unrelated woman, from outside the family (*nakaḥa fī al-gharāʾib*).[11]
8. *Mugharribūn*: possessed by the jinn.[12]
9. *Rajul gharīb*: outside of the group (*min ghayr al-qawm*).[13]
10. *Aghraba al-rajul*: to do something strange.[14]
11. *Aghribat al-ʿarab*: black Arabs, the sons of black slave women (pre-Islamic: e.g., ʿAntara and al-Sulayk Ibn al-Sulaka) They were compared to ravens based on their colour (*shubbihū bi-l-aghriba fī lawnihim*).[15]
12. The expression "*ḍarbat gharāʾib al-ibil* [the beating of alien she-camels]" is idiomatic: because if a group of she-camels are drinking, and a foreign she-camel join them from

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[4] Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān al-ʿArab*, edited by A. A al-Kabīr, M.A. Ḥasab Allāh, and H.M. al-Shādhilī, vol. V (Cairo: Dār al-Maʿārif, N.D.), 3225.
[5] Ibid.
[6] Ibid.
[7] A similar sentence is used in M50, while the narrator is seeking the news of the trickster, asking random voyagers, "*hal min mughribat khabar?*" (is there any strange news from elsewhere?). The news turns out to be about Abū Zayd al-Sarūjī. Al-Ḥarīrī, *al-Maqāmāt*, 594.
[8] Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān al-ʿArab*,3225.
[9] Ibid.
[10] Ibid, 3226.
[11] Ibid.
[12] Ibid.
[13] Ibid.
[14] Ibid.
[15] Ibid, 3230.

the outside, the group would beat the outsider till it leaves (*inna al-ibil idhā waradat al-māʾ, fa-dakhala ʿalayhā gharība min ghayrihā, ḍuribat ḥattā takhruja ʿanhā*).[16]

Based on this list, *gharīb* suggests the following: isolation (1), banishment (2), remoteness from home (3, 5, 9), exoticism and entertainment (4), absence of family and kin (6, 7, 9), being or acting in a weird fashion (8, 10), discrimination (11), and physical punishment (12). Accordingly, *ghurba* is a contronym. On the one hand, it implies banishment, exile, separation, loneliness, discrimination, non-belonging and punishment. On the other, it means voluntary solitude, amusement, and newness. Moreover, *ghurba* is an ambiguous experience: it can be positive (adventure, sustenance) or negative (exile, desolation, anonymity); voluntary (traveling, avoiding people, divorce) or forced (exile, imprisonment); physical (banishment, punishment, remoteness) or spiritual (isolation, discrimination); and normal or abnormal (acting strangely or being possessed), due to spatial displacement (remoteness from the homeland) or social othering (e.g., black poets). Consequently, *ghurba* is a concept that gains its usefulness and efficiency from its ambiguity, as well as its relation to closely similar terms, such as familiarity, empathy, recognition, otherness, and discrimination.

II. Recognition as an Act Inspiring Familiarity, Empathy, and Otherness

1. Familiarity (*uns/ ulfa*)

The English term familiarity is derived from the word 'family.' This corresponds with the *gharīb* list above, in which four out of twelve derivations point to the stranger's social relationships: with family (6), wives (7), the tribe (9), and parents (11). Thus, a stranger is not the one who leaves a familiar place, but rather the one who departs alone and unaccompanied. In other words, familiarity and its antonym *ghurba* are rarely a geographical term, but primarily a social concept that implies kinship and companionship. This is most obvious in the following accounts attributed to two anonymous Bedouins:

1. A Bedouin was asked: Do you miss your homeland? How could I not miss the sand that held me as an embryo and the clouds that nursed me?[17]

قِيلَ لِأَعْرَابِي: أَتَشْتاقُ إلى وَطَنِك؟ فقال: كَيْف لا أَشْتَاق إلى رَمْلَة كُنتُ جَنِينَ رُكَامِها ورَضِيع غَمَامِها.

[16] Ibid, 3231.
[17] Ibn Ḥamdūn, *al-Tadhkira al-Ḥamdūniyya*, edited by: Iḥsān ʿAbbās and Bakr ʿAbbās, vol. VIII, (Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, 1996), 142.

2. A Bedouin was told that you [his people] are always roaming, traveling, and deserting your homes. He answered: the home is not a conceiving father or a nursing mother. Any place in which your life is good, [where you feel well, and have an abundance of wealth, you should saddle your horse.] That is your home, your father, your mother and your kin.[18]

قِيل لِأَعرَابي: إنّكُم لَتُكثِرون من التَجَوّل والرَحِيل وتَهْجُرون الأوطَان، قال: لَيْس الوَطَن بأَبٍ وَالِدٍ ولا بِأُمٍ مُرْضِع، فأَيُ بلَدٍ طَابَ فيه عَيشُك، وحَسُنَت فيه حَالُك، وكَثُر فيه دِرْهَمُك ودِينارُك، فاحْطُط بِه رَحْلَك، فَهو وَطَنكَ وأَبُوكَ وأُمُّكَ وأَهْلُك.

Both accounts, although expressing opposing attitudes towards home, are based on anthropomorphism. In the first statement, the Bedouin attributes a womb and a nursing breast to the sand and the clouds, transforming the home into a loving mother who provides shelter and nourishment to her frail infant. Conversely, the second statement refutes any attributions of fatherhood or motherhood to the home. Whether expressing loyal attachment or pragmatic rootlessness, both Bedouins use the same familial analogy, as if home could not be comprehended outside of the family domain. To the speakers, be it through inclusion or exclusion, home is unimaginable away from the mother's warmth and the father's genealogy.

Similar to these two Bedouins, al-Tawḥīdī uses familial similes while pondering the question of wanderlust. He says:

> Why do some people experience a hankering after travel from when they are *children* till they are fully grown men, from youth to old age, so much so that they *disobey their parents* and roam from one end of the world to the other, enduring the hardships of travel, the mortifications of living away from home, and the humiliations of *being a nobody*? … Others grow up *in their mothers' arms* and on their *wet nurses' shoulders*, undisturbed by hankerings for other lands and unoppressed by a longing for anything, as though they were a stone ever *fixed* on its slope or a pebble immobile in the stream [emphasis added].[19]

Al-Tawḥīdī juxtaposes two categories of people: recalcitrant children who travel the world separated from their parents, and perpetual infants who never leave home. The first category

[18] Ibid, 125. Translation by Beatrice Gruendler, ''al-Ḥanīn ilā al-Awṭān and its Alternatives in Classical Arabic Literature,'' in *Representations and Visions of Homeland in Modern Arabic Literature*, ed. Sebastian Günther and Stephan Milich (Hildesheim, Zurich, New York: 2016).
[19] Abū Ḥayyān al-Tawḥīdī and Abū ʿAlī Miskawayh, *The Philosopher Responds: An Intellectual Correspondence from the Tenth Century*, trans. Sophia Vasalou and James E. Montgomery (New York: New York University Press, 2021), 209.

suffers humiliation, solitude, anonymity, and hardships, while the second inflexibly lingers in one place ignoring the stream of life and clinging to their mothers' arms like helpless infants. Both types are defined based on their relationship to their parents. They are children before anything else, and their relation to space (traveling or staying) comes second, after their relationship to their families (disobedience or dependence). A crucial point in the comparison between the traveler and the settler is that one cannot survive without the loving eyes of one's family, who give one a name, an identity, and a state of belonging, while the other accepts "the humiliation of being nobody." Al-Tawḥīdī, who "identified with the fate of the stranger, whether he himself was one in actual fact or only in his imagination,"[20] dwells on the nobodiness of the stranger later in his life. In *al-Ishārāt al-ilāhiyya* he portrays the stranger as follows:[21]

> The stranger is the one whom you do not recognize when you see him, and whom you do not ask who he is when you do not see him … The stranger is one who has no name to be remembered by, no prominent features (*rasm*) to be recognized by, no secrets to be revealed, no excuses that could be made for him, no sins to be forgiven, no blemishes to be covered … The stranger is the one who is not visited when he is sick, whom he visits close doors in his, and for whom curtains are not pulled aside when he asks for permission [to enter a place].[22]

الغَرِيب من إِنْ رَأَيْتَه لَم تَعْرِفه، وإِنْ لمْ تَرَه لَمْ تَسْتَعْرِفه (...) الغريب الذي لا اِسم له فَيُذْكَر، ولا رَسْمَ له فَيُشْهَر، ولا طَيّ له فيُنْشَر، ولا عُذْر له فَيُعْذَر، ولا ذَنْب له فيُغْفَر ولا عَيْب عِنْدَه فيُسْتَر (...) الغريب من إن مَرِض لم يُتَفَقّد. الغريب من إن زَار أُغْلِق دُونَه الباب، وإِن اِستَأْذَن لم يُرْفَع له الحِجَاب.

Here, the stranger is nameless, an unnoticeable nobody, because he is not included in social relations. The stranger's main predicament is the absence of recognition, either in a positive sense of giving the *gharīb* a name, noticing his face, and accommodating him, or in a vicious sense, by criticizing, defaming, and intruding on his private life. Al-Tawḥīdī's portrait of the invisible stranger is reminiscent of Todorov's argument in *Life in Common* concerning the absence of recognition:

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[20] Franz Rosenthal, "The Stranger in Medieval Islam," in *Men versus Society in Medieval Islam*, ed. Dimitri Gutas (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2015), 775.

[21] See al-Qāḍī's insightful reading of al-Tawḥīdī's *ishāra* of *ghurba*: Wadād al-Qāḍī, "*Al-Gharīb fī ishārāt al-Tawḥīdī,*" *Mélanges de l'Université Saint Joseph*, 50.2 (1981), 127-139.

[22] Al-Tawḥīdī, *al-Ishārāt al-ilāhiyya*, edited by ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Badawī (Cairo: Fouad I University, 1950), 81-82.

> The physical condition of the lack of recognition is solitude. If others are absent, by definition we cannot capture their gaze. But what is even more painful than physical solitude, which can be improved or enlivened in different ways is to live among others without receiving any sign from them. … It is the position of the outsider, the stranger, the excluded, that makes us recognize this.[23]

Todorov compares two states that result from the absence of recognition: solitude, in which the self is physically alone without company, and exclusion, in which others are there, yet they refuse to offer even a simple sign of acknowledgment. Evidently, the second state is more painful than the first, because the self is not only denied a gaze, but also belonging, familiarity, and visibility. This may explain the emphasis on recognition in the *Ḥarīriyya*. In this way, the narrator is not only there to be witness to the trickster's episodes, but also to make him feel less of an invisible outsider.

In premodernity, the significance of recognition for strangers is highlighted in several accounts. In *al-Muntaẓam fī tārīkh al-umam wa-l-mulūk,* Ibn al-Jawzī reports the following story about a stranger who decides to return to his homeland, to save himself from being rendered nameless after death:

> I heard Abū al-ʿAbbās Muḥammad ibn Isḥāq al-Sarrāj [nostalgically] lamenting: "Oh, Baghdad what a pity!" He was asked: "Then why did you leave it?" He replied: "My brother Ismail lived in it for fifty years. When he died, and I was walking in his funeral procession, I heard a man at the end of the street asking, 'Who is the dead guy?' and someone answered, "A stranger that was here" (*gharīb kāna hā hunā*). Then I realized: Oh God! After all his years of living here as a man of learning and trade, now he is only remembered as "a stranger that was here!" These words made me seek the homeland (*ḥammalatnī hadhih al-kalima ʿalā al-inṣirāf ilā al-waṭan*).[24]

The story is told from the perspective of a stranger who had to return home to rescue himself from anonymity and oblivion after death, or in al-Tawḥīdī's terms, from being "a nobody." Thus, despite his attachment to Baghdad, he returns to his native land to be a somebody, to be buried by people who recognize him, and who would never refer to him as a 'stranger that was

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[23] Todorov, *Life in Common*, trans. Katherine and Lucy Golsan (Lincoln/London: University of Nebraska, 2001), 58.

[24] Ibn al-Jawzī, *al-Muntaẓam fī tārīkh al-umam wa-l-mulūk*, quoted by Falāḥ al-Mirānī, *"al-Ḥanīn ilā al-awṭān ʿinda ʿulamāʾ al-mashriq al-islāmī fī al-qarnayn al-thālith wa-l-rābiʿ al hijriyyayn,"* in *Humanities Journal of University of Zakho (HJUOZ)*, Vol. 7, No. 3, Sept.-2019, 343.

here.' The narrator pays homage to the memory of the unjustly-treated stranger, who has a name (Ismail), was kin (my brother), and had social status (a man of learning and trade). Thus, returning home and narrating the story of Ismail, the stranger, he reconstructs a state of recognizability that saves both of them from exclusion and being labeled as outsiders.

While at first glance familiarity may seem to be solely limited to patronage, the immediate family, and other blood ties, al-Tawḥīdī's *'ishāra* and al-Sarrāj's account prove that familiarity extends to contain all human relations, which involve empathy and the willingness to offer companionship and recognition. Familiarity depends on the *anīs* (a close or intimate friend), or more generally, on *uns*: a term that stands for "all places that offer respect, appreciation, love, sympathy and care."[25] Accordingly, strangers do not have to be glued to their "mothers' arms", or to "the wet nurses' shoulders" to attain familiarity. They may also rely on people's memory (al-Sarrāj's account) and recognition (al-Tawḥīdī's *'ishāra).* After all, as an anonymous poet once said, "the stranger to the stranger is kinsman, too" (*kullu gharīb li-l-gharīb nasīb*).[26] Still, despite the poeticity of the friendly gaze, which inspires belonging, and remembrances and furnishes one with an identity, not all eyes are empathic. Some can engender reflexivity, discrimination, humiliation, and otherness.

2. Reflexivity and Otherness

In the anthology attributed to al-Jāḥiẓ under the title *al-Ḥanīn ilā al-awṭān*, one encounters the following expression: "Clearer than the foreign woman's mirror" (*awḍaḥ min mirʾāt al-gharība*)[27], which the author explains as follows: "When a woman is elsewhere, she checks her face and appearance regularly, much more than when she is with her family and relatives, hence, her mirror is usually more polished [when she is far away]."[28] In a familiar setting, the woman is usually surrounded by ordinary faces who know her looks and nature. Therefore, she rarely needs to polish her mirror. In *ghurba* however, foreign eyes force her to perfect her appearance and to constantly reflect on her image. In other words, within the family, the woman can be herself, without pretense or worry. Once a stranger, however, she feels watched, which forces her to watch herself as well. Therefore, if the household engenders a state of natural

[25] Bauer, *A Culture of Ambiguity*, 238.
[26] Quoted by: ʿAyn al-Quḍāt al-Hamadhānī, *A Sufi Martyr: The Apologia of ʿAyn al-Quḍāt al-Hamadhānī*, translated by A. J. Arberry (London and New York: Routledge, 1969), 29 [adapted].
[27] Ps. al-Jāḥiẓ [Mūsā b. ʿĪsā al-Kisrawī (d.c. 295/868/9)], *al-Ḥanīn ilā al-awṭān*, 2nd ed. (Beirut: Dār al-Rāʾid, 1982), 15.
[28] Ibid, 15.

disregard, *ghurba* engenders a state of pretense and performance, where the stranger is watched twice: first by the receiving group, and then by oneself.

What happens when strangers fail to refine their appearances? when instead of polished mirrors, they enter the new space wearing torn rags? when instead of showing their best features, they look like madmen? These questions find an answer in the account of the Persian traveler Nāṣer-e Khosraw (1003-1088),[29] who narrates his arrival in Basra as follows:

> When we arrived, we were as *naked and destitute as madmen*, for it had been three months since we had unloosed our hair. I wanted to enter a bath in order to get warm, the weather being chilly and our clothing scant. My brother and I were clad only in old *lungis* [a garment wrapped around the waist] with a piece of coarse fabric on our back to keep out the cold … When I handed him [the bath attendant] the coins, he looked at us *as though we were madmen* and said, "Get away from here! *People* are coming out of the bath." As he would not allow us in, we came away *humiliated* and in haste. Even the children who were playing at the bathhouse door thought we were *madmen* and *chased after us, throwing stones and yelling*. We retired into a *corner* and reflected on the state of the world [emphasis added].[30]

Similar to the stranger who takes care of her looks to gain approval from a new entourage, Khosraw heads to the public bath to regain an acceptable appearance, to enter the city of Basra properly. However, he faces expulsion and scandal. The bathkeeper contrasts his appearance to the clients', who were admitted immediately: these are "people," while Khosraw and his brother look like madmen (mentioned three times). Like the alien she-camel (*gharīb* list (12)), they are chased and beaten by little children, who force them to hide in a corner away from public humiliation and the scores of judging eyes. Later in this account, Nāṣer-e Khosraw narrates his glorious return to the bath a few months after the incident:

> After our worldly condition had taken a turn for the better and we each had on decent clothing, we went back one day to the bathhouse we had not been allowed to enter. As

[29] Nāṣer-e Khosraw: a poet, theologian, and religious propagandist. In 1045 he went on a pilgrimage to Mecca and continued his journey to Palestine and then to Egypt, which was ruled at that time by the Fāṭimid dynasty. He returned to his homeland in what is now Afghanistan, but his vigorous advocacy of the Ismāʿīlī ideology within Sunni territory forced him to flee to Badakhshān, where he spent the rest of his days, lamenting in his poetry that he was unable to be an active missionary. See Britannica, "Nāṣer-e Khusraw."

[30] Nāṣer-e Khosraw, *Book of Travels (Safarnāma*), trans. W. M. Thackston, (New York, Bibliotheca Persica, 1986), 91.

> soon as we came through the door the attendant and everyone there stood up respectfully until we went inside, and the scrubber and servant came to attend to us. When we emerged from the bath all who were in the dressing room rose and remained standing until we had put on our clothes and departed. During that time the attendant said to a friend of his, "These are the very young men we refused admission one day." They imagined that we did not know their language, but I said in Arabic, "You are perfectly correct. We are the very ones who had old sacks tied to our backs." The man was ashamed and most apologetic.[31]

In this happy ending, the stranger restores his status as a sane man and forces those who once humiliated him to receive him respectfully and ceremoniously. After being a rejected nobody, Khosraw becomes the center of attention. By wearing the right outfit, speaking Arabic, getting admittance to the bath, and most importantly having the protection of the patron, the stranger transforms Basra from a land of *ghurba* and humiliation into a *maʾlaf*, "a place to which a man is familiar, to which he is accustomed."[32]

In both examples (the woman with the mirror and Khosraw), foreignness is ascribed to a person by a receiving group who conditions their entrance upon the completion of certain aesthetic standards, such as self-reflectivity, refinement, and decent clothing. These standards are not forced only on those who come from faraway, but also on those who never leave their native land, but have a different appearance from the group, such as *aghribat al-ʿarab* or "ravens of Arabs" (*gharīb* list. 11).

3. Discrimination

In his book about black poets in premodernity, ʿAbdū Badawī interprets *aghribat al-ʿarab's* name as a word designating "poets to whom blackness was transmitted by their slave mothers, and whom at the same time their Arab fathers *did not recognize*, or *recognized* only *under constraint* from them" [emphasis added].[33] Once again, the term "recognition" resurfaces, but this time it is not about a local unity ignoring an outsider, but a father disowning his own child

[31] Ibid, 94.
[32] Edward Lane, *Arabic- English Lexicon*, Book I, Part I (London: Williams and Norgate, 1877), 81.
[33] ʿAbdū Badawī, *al-Shuʿarāʾ al-sūd wa-khaṣāʾiṣuhum fī al-shiʿr al-ʿarabī* [Black poets and their characters in Arabic Poetry], (Cairo: al-Hayʾa al-Miṣriyya li-l-Kitāb, 1988), 21.

and treating him as a slave, unless forced to acknowledge his parentage under exceptional circumstances (e.g. ʿAntara Ibn Shaddād).[34] Black Arabs were not only denied lineage, freedom, and recognition, but also humanity, by comparing them to ill-omened ravens. According to al-Jāḥiẓ:

> The raven (*ghurāb*) is where *ghurba* (strangerhood), *ightirāb* (exile) and *gharīb* (stranger) derive from … because [the raven] is a stranger that comes from far (*li-annah gharīb yaqṭaʿ ilayhim*). He does not exist or settle next to their tents till they depart from them (*lā yuwjadu fī mawḍiʿ khiyāmihim yataqammam, illā ʿinda mubāyanatihim limasākinihim*) … [The expression] *ghurāb al-bayn* originates from ravens settling in people's homes when they leave them. … Ravens are the worst birds of ill omen. [In fact,] when it comes to evil omens, ravens are the first ones (*al-muqaddam fī al-shuʾm*).[35]

This is likely a fabricated etymology, but it does reflect the spirit of the time. With these cultural connotations, comparing the sons of slave women to ravens stigmatizes them as malicious beings, as strangers who disturb the harmony of the tribe, and as unwanted individuals who bring bad luck and separation. Carrying these stigmas makes one anxiously aware of the others' gaze and to reflect on their skin color as a problem.

A case in point is the Umayyad poet Nuṣayb Ibn al-Rabāḥ (d. 108/726), who made his way to the court despite being a slave, and regardless of numerous discouragements, including some by his own sister.[36] Against the odds, Nuṣayb eventually meets ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz ibn Marwān (r. 685-705), the fifth Umayyad Caliph, who gives him enough money to buy his freedom, and he becomes a prominent member of the court. Yet, he is unable to enjoy his freedom, fame, and the other perks of his position: Nuṣayb hides from the sight of the courtly

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[34] According to Ibn Qutayba, ʿAntara ibn Shaddād gained his freedom, when one day his tribe, the ʿAbs, were attacked by raiders from a hostile tribe, who drove off their camels. "The Abs pursued and fought them, and Antara, who was present, was called on by his father to charge. "Antara is a slave', he replied, 'he does not know how to charge, only to milk camels and bind their udders.' 'Charge!' cried his father, 'and you are free.' And Antara charged." Ibn Qutayba, *al-Shiʿr wa-l-Shuʿarāʾ*, edited by: Aḥmed M. Shākir, Vol. I, Second Edition (Cairo: Dār al-Maʿārif, 1958), 250.

[35] al-Jāḥiẓ, *al-Ḥayawān*, 439-444.

[36] Nuṣayb narrates the following: "I intended to travel to ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz ibn Marwān, who was back then in Egypt, so I went to my sister, who was a tough reasonable woman and said: I have composed poetry, and I am heading to ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz b. Marwān. I hope God would give freedom, to you, our mother and our relatives. She replied: Oh God! Brother, do you want to combine two defaults: being black and being a joke to people!" *Al-Aghānī*, vol. I, 259.

society. Two such incidents are narrated in *al-Aghānī*. In one, a group of women requests to meet Nuṣayb and hear his compositions, but he replies:

> "What shall they do with me? They will only see black skin and grey hair. Better let them hear me behind a veil."[37]

إنّ ها هُنا نِسوة يُرِدْن أن يَنْظُرْن إليك ويَسْمَعن منك شِعرَك. قال: وما يَصنَعْن بي! يَرَيْنَ جِلْدَة سَوداء وشَعْرًا أبيضًا، ولكن لِيَسْمَعْن شِعرِي من وراء سِتْر.

In another anecdote, Nuṣayb Ibn al-Rabāḥ is dining with the caliph ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz b. Marwān, who then invites him to drink wine (*hal lak fīmā natanādamu ʿalayh?*). Instead of accepting or refusing the offer, the poet asks for *amān* (indemnity) to speak his mind, then proceeds:

> My color is pale, my hair is like peppercorns, and my physique is deformed. I did not earn your kindness thanks to the honor of a father, a mother, or a clan. I earned it thanks to my mind and tongue. Thus, I beg you, Oh prince of believers, to recall my deeds, which have allowed me such privilege, and pardon me![38]

لَوْنِي حَائِل، وشَعْرِي مُفَلْفَل، وخِلْقَتِي مُشَوَّهَة، ولم أبلُغ ما بَلَغتُ من إكرامِك إيّاي بِشَرَف أبٍ أو أمٍّ أو عَشِيرة، وإنّما بَلغتُه بِعَقلِي ولِسانِي. فأُنْشِدُك الله يا أمير المؤمنين أن تَحُولَ بيني وبين ما بَلَغْتُ بِه هذه المَنْزِلَة مِنك فأعْفَاه.

In both events, Nuṣayb is inhibited by his appearance: his hair, on one occasion, is grey and on another, similar to peppercorns; his skin color is at one time pale and at another too dark; and his body he describes as deformed. Facing the anonymous women, he hides behind a veil to protect himself from their gaze and judgment. With the caliph, hiding was no option, so he opts for truth and confrontation, but only after obtaining indemnity. Here Nuṣayb portrays to the caliph his paradoxical situation: his lack of social and physiological qualifications (physique, color, lineage), which make him unworthy of being close to the caliph, are juxtaposed against his eloquent tongue and sharp mind, which allowed him to achieve the impossible. By accentuating the intellectual nature of his limited assets (tongue and mind), the poet implies that the proposed *munādama* (boon-companionship) can put him at peril. To remain 'inside' and to maintain closeness with the caliph, he must remain sober and aware all the time, because his intellect is his only asset.

[37] Ibid, 271.
[38] Ibid, 269.

These three strangers (the mirror owner, Nāṣer-e Khosraw and Nuṣayb), illustrate that "some strangers are stranger than others":[39] some only need to mind their appearance with a mirror, a shower or decent garments, while others need heavy veils and sobriety. However, whether sympathetic (offering recognition and familiarity) or malicious (provoking otherness and discrimination), eyes are not always central to the experience of *ghurba,* namely in the case of strangers who lived far away, isolated, and in a state of desolation.

III. Forced and Voluntary Desolation

1. *Waḥsha* (desolation): Banishment, Imprisonment, and Exile

The Arabic term *waḥsha* (desolation) shares the same root as the word *waḥsh,* meaning wild animal or monster. It is opposed to *uns,* which derives from the same root the word human (*insān*) does (see discussion about familiarity above). Accordingly, if *uns* implies seeking companionship, *waḥsha* implies absconding from society to be totally alone (*gharīb* list (1)), or following the example of the *Ṣaʿālīk* (brigand poets), that is, being solely in the company of wild creatures, and forming "fictitious dialogues with other animals of the desert, especially in the form of dialogues with a lone wolf (*dhiʾb*),[40] or with ghosts (*jinn*)."[41] This attitude gave to the *Ṣaʿālīk* the name of *dhuʾbān al-ʿarab* (the wolves of the Arabs). Like wolves, they were "remote from human nature, devious, sneaky, and agile."[42] However, brigand poets addressed wild animals only after they were banished from their tribe by way of *khalʿ* (exclusion), which

> constituted a sentence pronounced against a fellow-tribesman guilty of a crime leading to dishonour. Such opprobrium damaged the pact instituted by *ʿaṣabiyya* … ("loyalty to the group"), ... [Thus,] the *khalīʿ* was banished and his blood could be shed with impunity. ... At other times, those excluded were banished to *Ḥaḍawḍā*. ... [T]his moun-

[39] Sara Ahmed, *Strange Encounters: Embodied Others in Post-Coloniality,* (London & New York: Routledge, 2009), 25.

[40] For instance, the poet al-Najāshī al-Ḥārithī (d. c.40/660 or 49/669) converses with a wolf in the following verses: "Similar to washing water, the pond was dark // In barren land where sounds were few // I encountered a wolf howling as if // He was a *khalīʿ* who lost all money and family // Thus, I said: Oh, wolf are you interested in a lad // who comforts your pain unreluctantly?" al-Najāshī al-Ḥārithī, quoted in al-Baghdādī, *Khizānat al-adab*, 419.

[41] G. Borg, "*Ṣaʿālīk", EAL*, vol. II, pp. 671.

[42] Nibrās Hishām, *"al-Intikhāb al-thaqāfī: al-Shanfarā unmūdhajan"* [Cultural Selection: *al-Shanfarā* as an example], in *al-Adab Journal*, vol. IV, 2019, 325.

> tain is located in western Arabia; the Bedouin of the D*jāhiliyya* banished their undesirables there. … The strongest and most determined either constituted or joined a band of brigands and became *ṣaʿālīk*.[43]

This act of *khalʿ* was always public, conducted in festivals (*mawsim*)[44] and markets (e.g., *Sūk ʿUkāẓ*),[45] in order to inform everyone that the banished is no longer part of the tribe and should not have its protection. When the murderers of the poet Qays Ibn al-Ḥudādiyya had tried to force him to request captivity (*asr*), which would have allowed them to demand ransom from his tribe, he refused, saying,

> "What good would surrendering myself for captivity do you? I am excluded [from the tribe]. I swear to God, if you take me captive and demanded mangy goats from my people [in exchange], you would not be given any."

وما ينفَعكُم منّي إذا اِسْتَأسَرْتُ وأنا خَلِيع؟ والله لو أسرْتُموني ثمّ طَلَبْتُم بي مِن قومِي عِنزًا أجربًا جَدماء ما أُعطِيتُموها.[46]

Following geographical expansion, which brought together people from different lands, tribes, and tongues, the role of *ʿaṣabiyya* in society becomes less powerful. Instead of *khalʿ*, imprisonment becomes the more suitable punishment for society's misfits and outsiders. ʿAlī ibn al-Jahm (d.249/863), the Abbasid poet who crossed al-Mutawakkil with his satirical verses, composed the following verses after he left prison and headed to the cemetery in search for company:

> Every stranger residing in a strange country longingly.
> Remembers his family, neighbours, and home country.
> I, however, have no home country that I could remember.
> Except graves, the homes of those buried in them.[47]

يشْتاقُ كل غريبٍ عند غُربتِه
ويذكُر الأهل والجِيران والوطَنا
وليس لي وطنٌ أمْسَيْتُ أذكُره

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[43] See Arazi, A., "Ṣuʿlūk", in *EI2*.
[44] Jawād ʿAlī, *al-Mufaṣṣal fī tārīkh al-ʿarab qabla al-islām*, vol. XVIII (Beirut: Dār al-Sāqī, 2001), 171.
[45] For instance, Qays Ibn al-Ḥudādiyya was publically excluded in *Sūq ʿUkāẓ*. See: *Al-Aghānī*, vol. 14, 348.
[46] Ibid, vol. 14, 358-9.
[47] ʿAlī ibn al-Jahm, *Dīwān*, edited by Khalīl Mardam, 2nd ed. (Beirut: Dār al-Āfāq, 1980), 184 (Rosenthal's trans.).

إلّا المقابِر إذ صارَتْ لهُم وَطَنا

In the absence of the family whose members died while he was imprisoned, he accepts the company of the dead, who—just as wolves and *jinn* for brigands—offer better company than the ones who imprisoned him. Both the *ṣaʿālīk* and Ibn al-Jahm represent the state of banished outlaws who forfeit human companionship after their people reject them (*Ṣaʿālīk*) or leave them (Ibn al-Jahm). They address animals and dumb objects, which offer company and perhaps a glimpse of home even.

Similarly, in *Kitāb al-Ghurabāʾ* (*The Book of Strangers*), al-Ājurrī (d.360/970) reports the following account:

> Muḥammed Ibn al-Ḥusayn narrates: Years ago, I saw a pair of white socks with an old lady. She told me that they belonged to a young man from Damascus unjustly detained in al-Muṭbaq prison, and that he had woven either cuff two verses of poetry on strangers. On the first [cuff], 'The stranger feels sorrow in a land of *ghurba* / Would God bring every stranger's home closer!' On the second, 'I am the stranger, but I am not to be blamed for weeping; / for weeping suits every stranger.'[48]

قال مُحمّد بن الحُسَين: رأيتُ منذ سِنين كثِيرة مع عَجُوزٍ جَوْرَبَيْن أَبْيَضَيْن، أَخْبَرَتْنِي أنّ شابًا من أهل دِمشق مَحْبُوس في المُطْبَق، مَظْلُوم، وأَنّه نَسَجَ على خِصْرَيهِما بَيْتَين مِن الشِعر في الغُرباء، على الأول: غَرِيبٌ يُقاسِي الهَمّ في أرضِ غُربَةٍ.. فيا رَب قَرّب دار كلِّ غَرِيبٍ. وعلى الثاني: وأنا الغريب فلا أُلَامُ على البُكا .. إنّ البُكَا حسَنٌ لِكُلّ غرِيبٍ.

This account portrays *arḍ al-ghurba*, or the land of strangerhood, as a space that encompasses all kinds of injustices and desolations. It also records yet another medium for expressing one's alienation: a pair of socks that escape while their maker remains detained.[49] In a way, this prisoner is a trickster who smuggles his words out, despite censorship, in the hope of finding an empathic listener.

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[48] Quoted in al-Ājurrī, *Kitāb al-Ghurabāʾ,* edited by: Badr al-Badr, (Kuwait: Dār al-Khulafāʾ, 1983), 30.

[49] This method of self-expression brings to mind *Adab al-ghurabāʾ* (*The Adab of Strangers*) attributed to Abū al-Faraj al-Iṣbahānī (d.356/967), which reports a similar way of recording one's *ghurba* using graffiti on all kinds of surfaces. Be it walls of taverns or mosques, one shares one's sorrow, lonesomeness and distress with future travelers, whom one would never meet, yet they can still read one's verses, empathise with them, and in some cases, even reply to them (Would the traveler ever pass the same place to read the other strangers' reply?). See ps.-Abū al-Faraj al-Iṣbahānī, *The Book of Strangers*, trans. Patricia Crone and Shmuel Moreh (NJ: Princeton, 2000).

Analogous to the anonymous weaver, ʿAyn al-Quḍāt al-Hamadhānī (crucified 525/1131)[50] wrote an apologia in prison entitled *Shakwā al-gharīb ʿan l-awṭān,* (*A Complaint of the Stranger Exiled from Home*) to lament his remoteness from home, and to defend his reputation and life against unjust charges of heresy. ʿAyn al-Quḍāt compiled verses of poetry on yearning and strangerhood and addressed them to the scholars of his time, to plead for their compassion, in case his arguments fail to persuade them. The apologia begins with his reproachful question:

> Servants of God, is it not true,
> Where'er I go, whate'er I do,
> I cannot aught, except there be
> A Watcher watching over me?[51]

أ حقًّا عِباد الله أن لسْتُ صادِرًا
ولا واردًا إلّا على رقِيبٍ

We thus return to the motif of the watchful eye. Instead of inspiring familiarity or otherness, however, the eyes here act as agents of surveillance, control, and censorship. They shadow the author "wherever he goes and whatever he does," searching for proof of incrimination, and haunting him even in captivity. After acknowledging in the first verse the omnipresence of the watchful eye, he turns to address a hopefully kinder and fairer audience:

> This is a flash issued to the outstanding scholars and renowned servants … by one in exile from his motherland and afflicted by the trials and tribulations of time. His eyelids are ever beset by sleeplessness, and trepidation is the constant companion of his pillow, with prolonged weeping, and sighs and lamentations; anxiety grips the whole of his heart; his soul entire is inflamed with grief.[52]

ʿAyn al-Quḍāt seems to be reaching out to a public of reasonable scholars who can engage critically and empathically with his arguments, scholars who would understand his suffering,

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[50] ʿAyn al-Quḍāt al-Hamadhānī was an influential Ṣūfī and important author of original works on mystical theology and spiritual practice in both Arabic and Persian. He is famous for being a Ṣūfī martyr. When he was thirty-three years old, ʿAyn al-Quḍāt was sent to prison provisionally in Baghdad, where he was given a chance to write an apologia. However, he was later publicly executed, by order of the Saljūq Sulṭān Maḥmūd b. Muḥammad b. Malikshāh, at Hamadhān, during the night of the 6th to the 7th Jumādā II 525/6–7 May 1131. See Landolt, Hermann. "ʿAyn al-Quḍāt al-Hamadhānī (life and work)," in *EI3.*

[51] ʿAyn al-Quḍāt al-Hamadhānī, *A Sufi Martyr*, 24.

[52] Ibid, 24.

agony, and insomnia. ʿAyn al-Quḍāt and the prisoner of Muṭbaq share the distress of imprisonment and the grief stemming from injustice. However, ʿAyn al-Quḍāt is also abandoned by those who should be his allies. He says, "Neither the theologians of the sects, nor the wearers of patched frocks and rags and tatters, have performed their duty by me. They have delivered me over to my adversaries, to conciliate or declare war on as I choose."[53]

Imprisoned and ignored, ʿAyn al-Quḍāt articulates a condition more miserable than the *Ṣuʿlūk*'s, who spoke to wolves, more lonesome than the poet's, who addressed graves, and as secluded as the prisoner's, who wove his verses on the cuff of a sock. Indeed, they found solace and company in dumb objects, while he only encountered silence and disdain from the scholars of his time. Evidently, the fact that these experiences were transmitted and documented in anthologies and literary works attests that despite—or because of—exile and imprisonment these strangers did gain a degree of attention and empathy. The isolation of exiles and prisoners is an extreme manifestation of a something that transpires even in one's homeland: i.e., in the absence of a *mushākil*, or a peer that understands one's mind and intellectual worth.

2. On Voluntary Solitude and Lamentations

The strangers whose voices I have explored above experienced *ghurba* physically, as a result of exclusion, imprisonment, departure, or discrimination. But not all *ghurba* is physical or spatial. Scholars living in their homelands, surrounded by family and accustomed to familiarity, addressed intellectual strangerhood, too. The Abbasid philologist Abū Sulaymān al-Khaṭṭābī[54] describes his *ghurba* in his hometown of Bust as follows:

> Man suffers not from remote distance,
> But rather from the absence of a similarity
> I am a stranger in Bust and among its people
> Although they are my family and kin[55]
>
> وما غمّة الإنسان في شِقّة النوى
> ولكنها والله في عدَم الشكل

[53] Ibid, 110.
[54] Born at Bust in 319/931, he traveled throughout the Muslim world, from Khurāsān and Transoxania to ʿIrāḳ and the *Ḥijāz* "in search of learning." He also engaged in trade. He studied in Baghdād with famous teachers and had in turn a number of pupils. Al-Thaʿālibī, who reproduces a selection of poems by al-Khaṭṭābī, compares him with Abū ʿUbayd al-Qāsim ibn Sallām in his learning and piety, and even considers him superior to the latter because he wrote poetry. See Ed., "al-Khaṭṭābī," in *EI2*.
[55] Abū Sulaymān al-Khaṭṭābī, quoted in al-Thaʿālibī, *Yatīmat al-dahr*, vol. IV, 383.

وإنّي غريبٌ بين بُست وأهلِها
وإن كان فيها أُسرَتي وبها أهلِي

al-Khaṭṭābī negates the connection between *ghurba* and remoteness and the assumption that family is synonymous with home. His struggle is intellectual: he wishes for a *mushākil,* a compatible mind without whom he feels alien in his birthplace. In the absence of the *mushākil*, al-Khaṭṭābī frees himself of all kinds of social bonds and lives in a state of isolation. He elaborates upon this in *Kitāb al-ʿUzlah* (*The Book of Isolation*), a collection of parables, *aḥādīth,* and poetry on avoiding people and on being alone. In the first chapter, al-Khaṭṭābī clarifies his "doctrine of isolation" (*al-madhhab al-ladhī nadhhabuhu fī al-ʿuzla*), which is "refraining from the company of persons and bodies" (*mufāraqat al-ashkhṣ wa-l-abdān*), especially "the commoners and the populace" (*al-ʿāmma al-dahmāʾ*).[56] The chapter titles of the book indicate that al-Khaṭṭābī's doctrine of isolation includes friends ("A Chapter on Having Fewer Friends and the Perks of Occasional Meetings"),[57] family ("On keeping One's Back Free with Few Children and Relatives"),[58] his contemporaries ("A Chapter on the Decay of Time and its People"),[59] the elite ("A Chapter on the Elite's Decay and Malicious Scientists"),[60] the ascetics ("On the Vices of Reciters, Sufis and Ignorant Ascetics"),[61] and rulers ("Notes on Reducing Comradery of Rulers").[62] al-Khaṭṭābī's refusal of social relationships reaches its climax in the chapter entitled "On Those Who Preferred Death, Sickness, and Blindness over Meeting people" (*man tamannā al-mawt wa-āthara al-maraḍ ʿalā liqāʾ al-nās*).[63] Al-Khaṭṭābī thus manages to find fault in every group and class of his society to justify his voluntary solitude (See *gharīb* list (1)). It is no wonder that he failed to find an equal or a *mushākil* who could fit his impossible standards.

Al-Khaṭṭābī's attitude of blaming his strangerhood on the incompatibility of the others with him echoes al-Tawḥīdī's difficult character, which alienated his companions. Yāqūt al-Ḥamawī describes him as follows:

> He had a foul tongue and was dissatisfied with both offense and compassion. Slander was his occupation and defamation was his profession. Nevertheless, he was unique in

[56] al-Khaṭṭābī, *Kitāb al-ʿUzlah: kitāb adab, ḥikma wa-mawʿiẓa,* annotation: Yāsīn Muḥammad al-Sawwās, 2nd edition (Damascus & Beirut: Dār Ibn Kathīr, 1990), 57.
[57] Ibid, 127-33.
[58] Ibid, 120-6.
[59] Ibid, 181-94.
[60] Ibid, 208-17.
[61] Ibid, 218-25.
[62] Ibid, 226-35.
[63] Ibid, 195-6.

> intelligence, witticism, erudition, and vigor. … Yet, he was also unlucky and deprived, constantly mourning the changing times, and weeping about deprivation in his works.[64]

سخِيفُ اللِسَان، قَلِيلُ الرِضى عِند الإساءَة إليه والإحسان، الذَمّ شَانُه والثَّلْب دُكانُه، وهو مع ذلِك فَرْدُ الدُنيا الذي لا نَظِير له ذَكَاءً وفِطْنةً وفَصاحَةً ومُكْنَة... وكان مع ذلك مَحْدُودًا مُحَارِفًا يتَشَكّى صَرْفَ زَمانِه، ويَبْكي في تَصانِيفِه على حِرْمانِه...

Yāqūt depicts al-Tawḥīdī as a contradictory personality: though his intelligence could have turned him into a wealthy protegee, his bitterness made him lose every patron and scholar whom he contacted. This brought him deprivation and loneliness. In a letter to judge Abū Sahl ʿAlī b. Muḥammad, al-Tawḥīdī explains his reasons for burning his books:

> It was thus unbearable for me to leave the books to people who would *mock* them, would *impugn my honor* when they examined them, would *rejoice* at my *inadvertence and error* when they paged through them, and would show one another my [own] *shortcoming* and failing on account of them. If you were to say: 'Why do you brand then with *distrust* and *censure* their group with this fault?' then my reply to you is that *my witness* of them in life is that which affirms my belief concerning them after death. Just how could I leave my books to people near to whom I lived as a neighbor for twenty years and yet *no affection from one of them* to me ever proved true, *nor was loyalty* from any one of their number apparent? Indeed, I was forced in many instances [while living] among them, *after fame and recognition*, to eat greens in the desert, to *beg* disgracefully from the elite and the commoners, to *sell* religion and honor, to engage in *hypocrisy* [emphasis added].[65]

In the same year (400/1009), al-Tawḥīdī dwells again on his *ghurba* in al-*Ṣadāqa wa-l-Ṣadīq* (*Friendship and Friends*), a book that was supposed to mention neither alienation nor stranger-hood. The patron Ibn Saʿdān (d. 374/984-5) requested it to the following specifications:

> Record these words, and add to them what you find on the subject, for conversations about friends are sweet, and accounts of supportive companions are delightful.[66]

دوِّن هذا الكَلام وصِلْهُ بِصِلاتِه مِمَّا يَصِحُّ عِنْدَك، فإنَّ حَدِيث الصديق حُلْوٌ ووَصْفُ الصاحِب المُساعِد مُطْرِب.

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[64] Yāqūt, *Irshād*, vol. V, 1924.

[65] Abū Ḥayyān al-Tawḥīdī, "Letter about Burning His Books." Appendix in Wadād al-Qāḍī, "Scholars and Their Books: A Peculiar Islamic View from the Fifth/Eleventh Century," in *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, Vol. 124, No. 4 (Oct. - Dec., 2004), 637-8.

[66] al-Tawḥīdī, al-*Ṣadāqa wa-l-Ṣadīq* (*Friendship and Friends*), edited by Ibrāhīm al-Kīlānī (Damascus: Dār al-Fikr, 1964), 9.

True to his "mournful," "dissatisfied," and "deviant" character, al-Tawḥīdī ignores his patron's instructions and compiles a collection of verses and anecdotes that is hardly "sweet" or "delightful." After a short positive discussion of friendship in the opening, al-Tawḥīdī enumerates all kinds of impossible friendships: for example, between scholars, tradesmen, and rulers.[67] Afterward, he discusses his own lack of companionship, stressing the impossibility of friendship, saying:

> I wrote these letters, despite the agony, regret, grief, anger, and heartsickness that my spirit suffers … For I have lost every friend and companion. I swear, there come days when even in the mosque I pray alone. And if by chance, someone was praying next to me, they are either a grocer, a miller, a cotton carder, a butcher. Whoever stands next to me makes me nauseated with their noisome and fetid smell. Thus, I become a stranger in my condition, a stranger in my words, a stranger in my beliefs, a stranger in my shape, finding familiarity in desolation, satisfied with loneliness, accustomed to silence.[68]
>
> أنّا كَتَبنا هذه الحُروف على ما في النَفسِ من الحَرْقِ، والأَسَف، والحَسْرة، والغيْظ، والكَمَد ... لِأنّي فَقَدتُ كل مُؤنِس وصاحِب.. والله! لَرُبَما صَلّيْت في الجامع فلا أرى إلى جَنْبِي مَن يُصَلِّي معي، فإن اِتفَق فبَقّال أو عَصّار أو نَدّاف أو قَصّاب، ومَن إذا وَقَف إلى جانبي أَسْدَرَني بِصِنانِه وأَسْكَرَنِي بِنَتَنِه، فقد أمْسَيتُ غريب الحال، غريب اللفظ، غريب النِحلَة، غريب الخُلْق، مستَأنِسًا بالوحشَة، قانِعًا بالوحدة، مُعتادًا للصَمْت.

And in case *al-Ṣadāqa*'s reader fails to deduce al-Tawḥīdī's position towards friendship from his lamentations, the author concludes the introduction of the book with the following warning:

> Before anything, we ought to trust that there is no friend and not even one that resembles a friend.
>
> وقبل كُلِّ شيء يَنْبَغي أن نَثِق بأنّه لا صَدِيق ولا مَنْ يَتَشَبَّهُ بالصَّدِيق.[69]

While the aforementioned banished and punished strangers expressed their *ghurba* to seek justice, empathy, and companionship, al-Tawḥīdī and al-Khaṭṭābī lamented their strangerhood to criticize their contemporaries who failed to recognize the worth of their intellect. Both intellectuals actively preferred their *ghurba* and dwelt lengthily in it. Their strangerhood distinguished them from "the commoners" and those who easily conformed to mediocre standards, such as "hypocrisy" and "selling one's honor." To gain back his exposure, al-Khaṭṭābī

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[67] Ibid, 5-6.
[68] Ibid, 7.
[69] Ibid, 9.

laments the absence of a compatible peer and criticizes all kinds of social groups, implying that his contemporaries were beneath him. As for al-Tawḥīdī, he takes matters into his own hands and burns his books, to explicitly convey the superiority of his intellect. In both cases, strangerhood materializes as the consoling narrative of those who failed to gain recognition and appreciation of their time. In other words, *ghurba* is a positive state, soothing those who fail to integrate themselves into society or fail to achieve fame. Besides the symbolic profit, *adab* records many instances in which strangerhood was praised for bringing concrete material gains, such as giving access to exotic materials and curious goods.

IV. The Perks of *Ghurba*

1. Reasons to Leave

Besides the strangers who longed for their families and homelands, literary anthologies also record the voices of rootless travelers, who—in keeping with familial metaphors—cut the umbilical cord that ties them to the nourishing motherlands and depart for faraway lands, seeking *rizq* (sustenance), recognition, and intellectual stimulation. al-Jāḥiẓ elaborates on the first reason thus:

> God has divided profit between residence and journeying, between strangerhood and familiarity of the homeland, and between what is more valuable and more beneficial, when he made the streams of sustenance reliant on movement and pursuit. Most of it [meaning *rizq*] is attainable after long strangerhood and remoteness. … Don't you see how God did not make familiarity a tight chain hindering people, nor made sufficiency tied to it… [Thus,] he divided needs and placed most of them in remoteness.[70]

قسّمَ الله تعالى المَصالِح بين المقام والظَعْن، وبين الغُربَة وإلْف الوطن، وبين ما هو أربَح وأنفَع، حِين جَعَل مجاري الأرزاق مع الحَرَكة والطَلَب، وأكثَر من ذلك ما كان مِن طول الاغتِراب والبُعد في المسافة ... ألا ترى أن الله لم يجعَل إلْفَ الوطن عليهم مِترَصًا وقيدًا مُصْمّتًا ولم يجعل كِفاياتِهِم مقصورَة عليه ... فقسّم الحاجات فجَعَل أكثرَها في البُعد.

Al-Jāḥiẓ links home with *muqām* (stay), *ilf* (familiarity and attachment), and *kifāya* (sufficiency). In this sense, home is a space of rest and satisfaction, yet of little *rizq* (sustenance). In contrast, *ẓaʿn* (departure) involves movement (*ḥaraka*) and pursuit (*ṭalab*), and it generates

[70] Al-Jāḥiẓ, *Kitāb al-Buldān*, edited by Ṣāliḥ Muḥammad al-ʿAlī, published in *Journal of Literature Faculty*, (Bagdad: Maṭbaʿat al-Ḥukūma, 1970), 464-5.

profit (*ribḥ)* and benefit (*nafʿ*).[71] Al-Jāḥiẓ adopts a pragmatic financially-oriented approach, which places profit over attachment and familiarity.

By leaving home, the trader/ traveler increases his chances of profit and fortune, as well as his chances of social equity:

Mingle! For this is a time of mingling,
And people are two kinds: deprived and fortunate.
Do not dwell in a country that is of no use,
For the earth is wide and substance is spread.[72]

خلِّط فهذا زمانٌ فيه تخليط
والناس صِنفان مَحْروم ومَغبوط
ولا تُقِم ببلادٍ لا انتفاع بها
فالأرض واسِعة والرزق مَبْسوط

Ibn ʿAbd al-Barr (d. 463/1071) quotes these two verses in *Bahjat al-Majālis,* in a chapter on "departing from homes of humiliation" in support of rootlessness and profit over attachment and deprivation.[73] His argument is clear: one must leave a land that limits one's potential and freedom, and seek to optimize one's chances, mingling virtue and vice, strangerhood, and residency. He stresses this argument once again a few lines later, quoting the words of Ḥātim al-Ṭāʾī, the iconic figure of generosity and hospitality in pre-Islam:

Remaining in the household makes people
blind to news and foolish in their earnings[74]

إذا لزِم الناس البيوت وجدتَهُم
عُماةً عن الأخبار خُرْقَ المَكاسِب

According to this verse, those who never leave their native lands remain limited in their experience and existence, as opposed to those who take the risk of leaving. In his travelogue, Nāṣer-e Khosraw tells how he encountered a tribe who "in their whole lives, had drunk nothing but camels' milk, since there is nothing in the desert, but bitter scrub eaten by the camels." He adds: "they actually imagined the whole world was like this!"[75] From the opportunity-seeking

[71] Al-Jāḥiẓ's statement resonates with Abū Zayd al-Sarūjī's last testament in M49. See Ch. 9.
[72] Ibn ʿAbd al-Barr, *Bahjat al-majālis wa-uns al-mujālis wa-shaḥdh al-dhāhin wa-l-hājis,* edited by Moḥammad Mursī al-Khūlī (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, N.D), 242 [Gruendler's translation].
[73] For more on this chapter and other literary works on the homeland (*al-waṭan*), see Beatrice Gruendler, "al-Ḥanīn ilā al-Awṭān and its Alternatives in Classical Arabic Literature," 1-41.
[74] Ibn ʿAbd al-Barr, *Bahjat al-majālis,* 234.
[75] *Safarnama*, 84.

traveler's perspective, home-dwellers blindly project their limited experience on a wide universe they cannot imagine. In contrast, according to Abū ʿAlī Miskawayh, travelers are never blind, they roam the universe driven by avid eyes that seek to see everything. He says:

> It is now clear why some people long to leave their homes and roam the earth. For the desiderative power that specifically concerns sight loves to multiply and renew the objects of sight, and they think that individual objects of sight can be fully encompassed, so they endure many hardships in order to perceive that species.[76]

According to Abū ʿAlī Miskawayh, therefore, human choices are defined by a dominating sense, which in the case of the traveler is that of sight. The difference between those who stay and those who travel is not in the degree of their attachment to their family, nor their social and economic aspirations, but rather in the degree of avidity in their eyes. Thus, those with a strong desire to *see more, to find the rare, and to witness the exotic* are controlled mainly by their eyes, while the ones who stay behind, content with familiarity are, if not blind, then at least driven by other senses that are more stimulated at home.

It is no wonder that even *firāq* (separation) inspires praise on occasion. According to al-Thaʿālibī, "in separation, one finds the promise of return, protection from boredom, heart-warming longings, and the entertainment of exchanging" (*fī al-firāq rajāʾ al-awba, wa-l-salāma min al-malal, wa-ʿimārat al-qalb bi-l-shawq, wa-l-uns bi-l-mukātaba*).[77] Therefore, the appreciation of adventure, stimulation, and profit which remoteness offers, does not deny the possibility of homesickness. Rather, it is expected of strangers to feel perplexed toward home. Home offers familiarity, recognition, and nourishment, but also brings up deprivation and blindness. The same applies to strangerhood, which causes othering, desolation, and alienation, and at the same time offers the avid traveler not only sustenance and knowledge but also the opportunity to trade wonders and curiosities.

2. Trader of the Strange

The *gharīb*'s capacity to see the new and the rare makes him suitable as a trader of the exotic. George Simmel argues for this as being a key sociological feature of strangerhood:

> Throughout the history of economics, the stranger everywhere appears as the trader, or the trader as stranger. As long as economy is essentially self-sufficient, or products are

[76] al-Tawḥīdī and Miskawayh, *The Philosopher Responds*, 209-210.
[77] al-Thaʿālibī, *Taḥsīn alqabīḥ wa-taqbīḥ al-ḥasan,* edited by Shākir al-ʿĀshūr (Baghdad: Ministry of Awqaf, 1981), 57.

> exchanged within a spatially narrow group, it needs no middleman: *a trader is only required for products that originate outside the group.* [emphasis added][78]

Simmel's trader acts as a mediator between the inside as a space of ordinariness, and the outside as a space of the bizarre and that which is coveted. He is a 'middleman' who disturbs the paradigm of sufficiency inside the home, its normality, and contentedness by providing wonders that figure elsewhere—outside. The main role of the stranger as a trader is to supply the strange. It can be tangible goods, similar to those enumerated by al-Jāḥiẓ as "Exquisite Commodities, Goods, Slave-women, and Stones that Can Be Procured from [other] Countries, etc." (*mā yujlab min al-buldān min ṭarāʾif al-silaʿ, wa-l-amtiʿa, wa-l-jawāhir, wa-ghayr dhalik*).[79] It can also be stories and accounts from faraway lands. The stranger as a trader is not only a vendor of goods, but also a narrator of curious stories that make his products more valuable. In the above *gharīb* list (4), the stranger is asked "*halla aṭraftanā min mugharribatin khabar*? [can you entertain us with news from elsewhere?]. Travelers brought with them stories of giants who belonged to the tribes of Gog and Magog,[80] massive fish that can eat an entire camel,[81] cannibals who devour outsiders,[82] and fish that climb trees to drink coconut sap.[83]

The desire to hear the unique but also the useful guided Abū Dulaf al-Khazrajī—the traveler, mineralist, and composer of the long ode on the argot of the beggars (*al-Qaṣīda al-Sāsāniyya*)—to write two geographical epistles in the fourth/tenth century. He opens the second *risāla,* in which he describes his journey to China and as follows:

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[78] George Simmel, "The Stranger," in *The Sociology of George Simmel,* translated and edited by Kurt H. Wolff (Illinois: Free Press, 1950), 403.

[79] al-Jāḥiẓ, *al-Tabṣira bi-l-tijāra,* edited by: Ḥ. Ḥ. ʿAbd al-Wahhāb al-Tūnsī, 3rd ed. (Cairo: al-Khānjī, 1994), 25-34.

[80] See Aḥmad ibn Faḍlān, *Mission to the Volga,* trans. James E. Montgomery, in *Two Arabic Travel Books,* edited by Philip Kennedy and Shawkat M. Toorawa (New York: NYU Press, 2014), 233-234.

[81] This story figures in the *Safarnama* as follows: "In the town of Aydhab a man whose word I trust told me that once a ship set out from that town for the Hejaz carrying camels for the emir [commander or ruler] of Mecca. One of the camels died so it was thrown overboard. Immediately a fish swallowed it whole, except for one leg that stuck a bit out of the fish's mouth. Then another fish came and swallowed whole the fish that had swallowed the camel. 'That fish is called *qarsh*,' he said." See *Safarnama,* 65.

[82] See Abū Zayd al-Sīrāfī (d. after 330/941), *Accounts of China and India,* trans. Tim Mackintosh-Smith, in *Two Arabic Travel Books,* 35.

[83] "They have also reported that in a certain part of the sea there are small flying fish that fly over the surface of the water, called "water locusts," and that elsewhere in the sea there are fish that come out of the water, climb the coconut palms, drink the sap of the palms, and then return to the water." *Ibid,* 35.

> I present to you the sum of my journey from Bukhara to China … and my return from it through India … I have mentioned some of the marvels I witnessed in the lands I entered and among the tribes I traversed … I decided to write this detailed epistle to record what I saw and experienced, so the wise can use it as an example, and the men of glory and comfort can use it as training. As for those who are incapable of roaming the world, they can use it to cultivate their judgment. I begin with natural and marvelous minerals, because they are the most beneficial.[84]

أما بعد.. فإنّي جَرّدتُ لكُما.. جُملَة مِن سَفَري كان من بُخارى إلى الصين ... ورُجوعِي مِنْها على الهند ... وذَكَرْتُ بعض أعاجِيب ما دَخلْتُهُ من بُلدانِها وسَلَكْتُه من قبائِلِها.. رأيتُ الآنَ تَجرِيد رِسالَة شافِية تجمعُ ما شاهَدتُه وتُحِيطُ بأكثر ما عايَنْتُه لِينتَفِع به المُعْتَبِرُون ويَتَدَرّب به أولو العِزّة والطمَأنِينة ويُثَقّف به رأي مَنْ عَجَزَ عن سياحَة الأرض فأبْدَأ بِذِكْر المَعَادِن الطبيعية والعجائب المَعْدِنِيّة إذ هي أعم نَفْعًا..

Abū Dulaf addresses a hierarchy of readers: at the top, the wealthy and comfortable who can appreciate both information and wonders, then the educated who would most likely only focus on the useful minerals, and finally, at the bottom, those who would never see the world, and in all probability only enjoy the marvelous accounts. While useful knowledge is to be used by the wealthy and the wise, the locals, who never leave their land, are addressed mainly through marvelous accounts.[85]

In his pilgrimage to Mecca in 6th/12th century, the Andalusian traveler Ibn Jubayr (d. 614/1217), one of the *Ḥarīriyya*'s big admirers,[86] returned with a different kind of account. His travelogue does not include mythical creatures or rare minerals. Instead, it describes the remarkable architecture of his time,[87] as well as the beguiling orators of the *mashriq,* who possessed a kind of "lawful magic" (*siḥr ḥalāl*), which brought tears to the eye and engender *ṭarab* (excitement). He describes a preaching scene in Mecca as follows:

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[84] Abū Dulaf, *Second Epistle*, translated from Russian to Arabic by M.M. Mursī, edited by Buṭrus Bulghākūf & Anas Khālidūf (Cairo: ʿĀlam al-Kutub, 1970), 29-30.

[85] This hierarchy brings to mind Ibn al-Muqaffaʿ's hierarchy of readers: the educated who can benefit from both *hikam* and *ḥikāyāt*, and the commoners who can only make use of the latter.

[86] Traversing Sarūj, Ibn Jubayr says: "the city of Sarūj, whose story is made famous by al-Ḥarīrī in connection with Abū Zayd … has gardens and running waters as described in his *Maqāmāt*" Ibn Jubayr, *The Travels of ibn Jubayr,* translated by Ronald Broadhurst (London: I.B. Tauris, 2020), 277-8. Moreover, in his introduction to the book, Robert Irwin makes the connection between Ibn Jubayr's occasionally high style and his study of the *Ḥarīriyya*. See Robert Irwin, "Introduction," in *The Travels of ibn Jubayr,* 36.

[87] For instance, see his description of the Tulun Mosque. Ibid, 64, and the Lead Dome, Ibid., 325-8.

> [A] preacher from Khurasan, a man of handsome countenance and graceful gestures … used both the Arabic and the Persian tongues, employing them together with a *lawful magic of rhetoric*, an eloquence of language, and a distinction of expression. He then addressed his discourse to the Persians, using their tongue and *causing them to shake with emotion and to melt in sighs and sobs*. The following night … [h]e delivered a sermon through which he strung, word by word, the verse of 'The Throne' [Q II, 256], employing all forms of exhortatory exposition, and dealing with all branches of knowledge. Also, in this he used both languages, *moving hearts to rapture, and, after overwhelming them, setting them on fire with emotion* [emphasis added].[88]

Later in Baghdad, Ibn Jubayr continues his quest for eloquent preachers, rarely quoting their words. Instead, he recorded the reactions of their audiences who "threw themselves upon the preacher, confessing their sins and showing their penitence,"[89] "openly weeping,"[90] "rolling in the dust,"[91] as well as his own dazzlement and astonishment in the presence of these "unrivalled men":

> We witnessed an awesome spectacle which filled the soul with repentance and contrition, reminding it of the dreads of the Day of Resurrection. Had we ridden over the high seas and strayed through the waterless desert only to attend the sermon of this man, it would have been a gainful bargain and a successful and prosperous journey.[92]

Charmed by the power of oratory, Ibn Jubayr lays aside the original goal of his journey (the *ḥajj*) and the wondrous sights he encountered in his journey and describes an exhortatory scene as the highlight of his journey. Ibn Jubayr's personal perspective and emotional description of what 'magically' moved him, proves that the choice of wonders is not always dictated by the audience/customers who request exquisite rarities (al-Jāḥiẓ), entertaining stories (Ibn Faḍlān and Khusraw), or useful sources (Abū Dulaf), it is also conditioned by the personal taste of the trader. The traveler enjoys a special degree of freedom, which allows him to have—and even impose—his own taste of *ṭarāʾif*. In the "blind" eyes of the locals, the stranger is the authority on the strange.

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[88] Ibid, 206-7.
[89] Ibid, 252.
[90] Ibid, 252.
[91] Ibid, 252.
[92] Ibid, 251.

Conclusion

Ghurba proves to be a nuanced and ambiguous experience resisting a fixed definition. It combines spiritual and physical alienation, as well as voluntary and forced isolation. It is a state in which the self interacts with both space and society to find recognition and familiarity, or to act as a trader of the unusual and the strange. The above experiences of strangers and the different connotations of *gharīb* can be summarized in two physical organs: eyes and feet. The eyes are the stranger's reason to travel (Abū ʿAlī Miskawayh), to find the exotic (al-Jāḥiẓ, Ibn Dulaf), or to seek isolation (al-Tawḥīdī, al-Khaṭṭābī). The eyes provide empathy, validation, and companionship for the fortunate travelers and inflict otherness, discrimination, and rejection on the unfortunate strangers. As for the feet, they represent movement in space, with an obvious class difference. In the case of the poor and banished *ṣaʿālīk*, the feet that carried them everywhere even become their nickname, "*al-rijliyyūn.*"[93] However, in case of privileged travelers, who wanted to discover the world and have access to curiosities on the back of horses and she-camels, feet only carry metaphorical implications.

Eyes and feet are quite significant in *Maqāmāt al-Ḥarīrī*. The narrator represents the eyes and acts at the beginning of each episode as the curious traveler who seeks the strange and the exotic; at each episode ending, he functions as the one who recognizes and identifies the trickster. As for Abū Zayd al-Sarūjī, he represents the tireless feet that rove from place to place, to trade goods and endure exile by making a living and surviving. The organs keep competing in the *Ḥarīriyya* until the trickster returns to his homeland, abandoning both his roles as the refugee and the trader of the strange. Once al-Sarūjī's feet stop running, he loses his strangeness and strangerhood, as well as the narrator's curiosity.

[93] Jawād ʿAlī, *al-mufaṣṣal,* 172.

Chapter 8

Being a *Gharīb* in al-Hamadhānī's and al-Ḥarīrī's *Maqāmāt*: Strangers, Affinities, and Space

The preceding chapter provided an overview of the concept of *ghurba* between the pre-Islamic period and the 13th century. It covered up to one century after the production of al-Ḥarīrī's *Maqāmāt* in order to include the travelogue of Ibn Jubayr, a reader of the *Ḥarīriyya* who, in a way, imitated its narrator's quest for oratory and beguiling language. In his travelogue, Ibn Jubayr recounts stories of remarkable orators he met on his journeys and communicates a love for beautiful language, which he preferred over the architecture and other marvels he witnessed on his travels. The other strangers and anthologists who recorded different instances of strangerhood before the 12th century were cited to draw a picture of the tradition within which the *Ḥarīriyya* was produced. Al-Ḥarīrī did not produce his oeuvre in a vacuum. Through the *Maqāmāt*, he represents the two dominant types of strangers: the scholars, who wandered through Islamic territories and beyond as strangers, seeking learnedness and curiosities; and the destitute outcasts, who used deceit and trickery to survive. These two types of strangers, though belonging to al-Ḥarīrī's immediate reality[1] and were represented as literary figures in poetry and anthologies, were juxtaposed a century earlier in the *Maqāmāt* of the eminent al-Hamadhānī, which features characters wandering, running away, and seeking strangeness and *adab* in faraway lands.

In this chapter, I argue that al-Ḥarīrī adopted several conventions established by al-Hamadhānī, such as the two types of strangers (the *adīb* and the trickster), the narrator's minimalism (I call it nobodiness), the repetitive encounters in which words are exchanged for money, and the use of *ghurba* as a liminal motif. However, while al-Hamadhānī creates a free-wheeling trickster who hardly remembers home let alone yearn for it, al-Ḥarīrī constructs a protagonist with a round character and elaborate backstory that raises empathy in the audience, one that involves invasion, losing family, and return. Accordingly, I compare the two works using two variables: first, the typology of strangers), and second the complex relations between

[1] According to several accounts, the inspiration behind al-Ḥarīrī's trickster was a wandering beggar whom the author met in the mosque, claiming that the Byzantines captured his son, later comparing notes with others al-Ḥarīrī discovered that the beggar showed in other places narrating different scenarios to collect charity. See Yāqūt, *Irshād*, 5, 2203.

the narrators and tricksters, by examining their "basic rapports," meaning desire, communication, and support.

I. Portraying Strangers

1. The Narrators as Nobodies

Narrators are the eyes through which a fictitious world is developed, filtered, and perceived. Narratology offers many categories to define a narrator, yet in the *maqāma* genre, only two questions matter. First, is the narrator a participant character in the story (homo-diegetic), or is he merely recounting it (hetero-diegetic)? Second, how much does he know? More than the protagonist (Narrator Zero), as much as the protagonist (an internal narrator), or less than the protagonist (an external narrator).[2] Applying these two questions to the *Hamadhāniyya* and the *Ḥarīriyya* shows that the two narrators ʿĪsā ibn Hishām and al-Ḥārith ibn Hammām combine participation and narration (homo-diegesis, hetero-diegesis), with a few exceptions where they are absent from the episodes, and act only in hetero-diegetic capacity. Moreover, they function exclusively as external narrators, with very limited information and no access to the protagonists' inner thoughts, a logical choice, given that the *maqāma* genre revolves around surprising moments of recognition.

As narrators, ʿĪsā ibn Hishām and al-Ḥārith ibn Hammām are nearly identical. They differ only in their degree of participation in the episodes (see below). Otherwise, they share a vocation, belong to the class of the educated elite, and pursue the goal of collecting *adab*, more generally, and *gharīb*, more particularly. These two narrators also function similarly in most of the episodes, narrating their arrivals, witnessing the trickster's speech, describing his rewards, revealing his identity, and announcing separation and departure. All these features are explicitly relevant to the plot and linked immediately to seeking exotic accounts and strange vocabularies.

However, the one feature that is unrelated to the above, which both Ibn Hishām and Ibn Hammām likewise share is the absence of any backstory for either, which their facelessness, infrequent allusion to the homeland, and lack of blood relations manifest. Despite their participation in the episodes, the reader gains little information about them. Never reflecting on themselves or their outward appearance, Ibn Hishām and Ibn Hammām instead direct their

[2] These two questions represent a simplification of what Gerard Genette called Mode and Voice. See Gerard Genette, *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method*, trans. Jane E. Lewin (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University, 1980), 212-262.

gaze—and, by extension, the reader's—to the tricksters, who continually change their masks, age, and even gender. Thus, although these two narrators seem homo-diegetic, they act mainly as transparent hetero-diegetic ones. Thus, in the awe-inspiring changes of al-Sarūjī and al-Iskandarī, the reader completely forgets that they are viewed by narrators who must also have a face. To the readers, these narrators are merely eyes that witness the trickster's speech, uncover his true identity, then describe his departure.

The birthplace of the narrators is mentioned one time each in both the *Hamadhāniyya* and the *Ḥarīriyya*,[3] unlike the tricksters who always carry their native cities with them in their names, i.e., Iskenderun and Sarūj. Devin Stewart notes the "complementary incompleteness"[4] of the protagonists' names, meaning that what the narrator lacks in his name (nisba or origin) is given to the trickster, who in his turn lacks a first name which the narrator has (ʿĪsā, al-Ḥārith). In other words, the trickester and narrator in each work complement each other's identities. This theory is also maintained by Cooperson, in the case of the Hamadhāniyya, whose narrator and trickster, he holds, act as doppelgangers.[5]

Both ʿĪsā ibn Hishām and al-Ḥārith ibn Hammām travel without a child or a wife, and in the few occasions when they are accompanied, it is by other anonymous strangers.[6] Instead of lamenting the family's absence, the narrators praise their "lightness," which allows them to seek adab without chains. For instance, in M46, Ibn Hammām describes how easy it was to travel to Aleppo because his "back was light"[7] (*khafīf al-ḥādh*),[8] meaning without money, family, or responsibility. Similarly, in *al-Maqāma al-Balkhiyya*, Ibn Hishām nostalgically recalls his youth, when he was *khālī al-bāl* (carefree), carrying a quest for "stray words to catch" (*shurūd min al-kalim aṣīduhā*). Consequently, the two narrators are portrayed as transparent,

[3] In the second *maqāma* in the *Ḥarīriyya* the narrator claims that he just returned from *ghurba* to his native city (*fa-lammā ubtu min ghurbatī ilā manbat shuʿbatī*), but he does not say which city it is, nor does he mention it again on any other occasion. al-Ḥarīrī, *al-Maqāmāt*, 20. As for *al-Hamadhāniyya*, in *al-Maqāma al-Ḥulwāniyya* while speaking to a talkative hairdresser, he mentions briefly that he comes from Qumm, and once again, in no other occasion is his homeland mentioned by name. al-Hamadhānī, *al-Maqāmāt*, 199.

[4] Devin Stewart, "ʿĪsā b. Hishām's Shiism and Religious Polemic in the *Maqāmāt* of Badīʿ al-Zamān al-Hamadhānī (d. 398/1008)," *Intellectual History of the Islamicate World* 10, 12.

[5] Michael Cooperson, "Baghdad in Rhetoric and Narrative," in *Muqarnas*, Vol. 13 (1996), 107.

[6] For instance, in the *Ḥarīriyya*, see: M4, M18, M20, M32. In the *Hamadhāniyya*, see: *M. al-Shīrāziyya, M. al-Kūfiyya, M. al-Asadiyya.*

[7] al-Ḥarīrī, *Assemblies II*, 147.

[8] al-Ḥarīrī, *Maqāmāt*, 522.

detached characters who abandon social relations, to single-handedly collect *adab* and specimens of strange language. Thus, "they leave behind them the attachments of stay and shake off the impediments of travel"[9] (*rafaḍtu ʿalāʾiq al-istiqāma, wa-nafaḍtu ʿawāʾq al-iqāma*).[10]

The two narrators rarely refer to home, and when they do, it is always in contrast to the exotic, entertaining *adab*, which deserves all sacrifices, including time, money, land, and kin. This attitude is summarized in the opening of *al-Maqāma al-Ramliyya* (M31), where Ibn Hammām says:

> In the prime of my youth and the freshness of vigorous life, I hated making my den in the thickets [towns], and loved slipping out of scabbard, from my ken, that travel fills the provision bags and produces gain, while cleaving to one's country hamstrings [houghs] the intellect and lowers the Stay-at-home.[11]

This opening resonates with the texts mentioned in the previous chapter, which argue for the advantages of *ghurba* and pursuing the curiosities that exist only in remoteness. Accordingly, this fragment and other similar openings, anchor Ibn Hishām and Ibn Hammām in a wider group of avid travelers and passionate collectors of language, who hardly inspire any empathy: they are happy in their quest, and they never regret their choice.

The narrators' moments of arrival, which are uneventful and almost positive,[12] accentuate their flat nature. The moments of arrival contradict Rosenthal's description of the *gharīb*'s entrance, which he depicts as being "primarily seen from, so to speak, the receiving end, that is, the group faced with persons attempting to enter it, who were usually not welcomed with open arms, and even less so as equals."[13] According to this, the stranger is the one who asks for admittance, yet rarely obtains it. In contrast, in both the *Hamadhāniyya* and the *Ḥarīriyya*, the two narrators receive immediate acceptance. The case is so regardless of where they are or whose hospitality they seek, be it scholars who share their interests, or Bedouins who ignore their jargon.[14] Thus, welcomed and integrated, the two narrators are saved from the rejections

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[9] al-Ḥarīrī, *Assemblies II,* 25 [adapted].
[10] al-Ḥarīrī, *Maqāmāt,* 312.
[11] al-Ḥarīrī, *Assemblies II,* 31.
[12] In the *Hamadhāniyya,* we have an example of an unhospitable entry in *al-Maqāma al-Nahīdiyya*, where the narrator and a group of travelers ask for food from a guy who teases them with descriptions of delicious food he does not own. Eventually the host's daughter offers bread to the hungry strangers, which sets the whole anecdote as a pretext for displaying food related vocabulary.
[13] Rosenthal, "The Stranger," 757.
[14] For instance, see al-Hamadhānī, "*al-Maqāma al-Aswadiyya*," 159; and al-Ḥarīrī, "*al-Maqāma al-Wabariyya*," 270.

groups usually inflict on the outsider, but most importantly they lose the reader's empathy. As al-Tawḥīdī argues in his *Ishārat al-ghurba*, which was discussed in the previous chapter, losing empathy costs the stranger his visibility and his identity, turning him into a "nobody."[15] Both the *Ḥarīriyya* and the *Hamadhāniyya* employ the narrators' nobodiness as a literary device, stripping them of any shroud of identity, to turn them into transparent channels of transmission. In this sense, they do not draw attention to themselves. Instead, they direct the audience's gaze to the trickster, the mysterious stranger, who possesses a myriad of stories, words, and masks. Ibn Hishām and Ibn Hammām are, therefore, portrayed minimally, to act as a prism, through which diversity, strangeness, and curiosities emanate.

Despite the minimality of both narrators, al-Hamadhānī does give his narrator Ibn Hishām a larger role in his *Maqāmāt*, which more than al-Ḥarīrī allows for his narrator. For instance, in *al-Maqāma al-Shāmiyya*, Ibn Hishām plays the role of the judge,[16] whereas Ibn Hammām always acts a mere witness in the *Ḥarīriyya*, such as in the episodes based on the trio of judge + trickster + wife. Moreover, al-Hamadhānī even makes his narrator the sole protagonist of *al-Maqāma al-Baghdādiyya*, where he acts as a cunning trickster, replacing al-Iskandarī. Al-Ḥarīrī, on the contrary, accentuates the nobodiness of his narrator. First, he ascribes to him a name that can apply to anyone, which he composes based on the *ḥadīth* (*kullukum ḥārith, wa-kullukum hammām*) (Chapter 1). Second, he makes him serve as a secondary character with redundant functions that are limited to witnessing, narrating, then unveiling the character's identity. Finally, al-Ḥarīrī includes him as a placeholder, with little semantic information, that can be replaced at any time by the central protagonist: the trickster. A case in point is *al-Maqāma al-Ḥarāmiyya*, which is narrated—unlike the rest of the episodes—by the trickster himself. Ibn Hammām's role, in this case, is limited to that of the hetero-diegetic reporter. The hero's arrival in this *maqāma* is described in the first person, as follows:

> I ceased not since I bestrode my stout camel and departed from my spouse and my sprigs, to crave for the sight of Basra with the craving of the oppressed for help, since the possessors of knowledge and the lords of tradition agreed upon the eminence of her schools and scholars and the glories of her tombs and martyrs, and I begged of Allah to make me tread her soil, so that I might feast my eyes on her.[17]

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[15] al-Tawḥīdī, *al-Ishārāt al-ilāhiyya*, 81-82.
[16] For a commentary and a translation of this *al-Maqāma al-Shāmiyya*, see Bilal Orfali and Maurice Pomerantz, *The Maqāmāt of Badīʿ al-Zamān*, 119-140.
[17] al-Ḥarīrī, *Assemblies II*, 163-164.

Here, discourse belongs to a privileged traveler, whose journey was voluntary, whose references were intellectual, and whose main motivation was curiosity. These reasons contradict the well-established background of al-Ḥarīrī's trickster: a refugee who is forced to leave his invaded homeland, one who does not select locations based on desire or any accounts about them, but rather based on the opportunity they offer him and the profit he can gain.

This contradiction can be explained by one of the following. First, as many accounts state, *al-Ḥarāmiyya* was al-Ḥarīrī's first episode,[18] meaning that it was a pilot *maqāma*, in which he was experimenting with different modes and voices. Second, the opening—where the acts of traveling and reflection on *ghurba* occur—is a fixed convention of the genre. Thus, it is unrelated to the emotional state of whoever happens to narrate the episode. In other words, the privileged and educated discourse on *ghurba* is a generic component independent of the speaker. It is a liminal phase that precedes and follows the exchange of words. Hence, when the narrator recedes into the background, the trickster takes over and replaces him.

To summarize, both the *Ḥarīriyya* and the *Hamadhāniyya* revolve around two strangers, the *adīb* and the trickster, who episodically meet to exchange odd words and bizarre styles of composition, before going their separate ways. The narrator is more or less flat, functioning as a transparent channel for the trickster. His sole mission is to seek *adab* and its representative, the trickster. On a few occasions, al-Hamadhānī allows the narrator to draw some attention to himself and to play a larger role in the plot. Conversely, al-Ḥarīrī systematizes the role of the narrator and fixes his nature as a secondary character, whose main role is to witness and narrate. Nevertheless, even these functions are sometimes eliminated, as in *al-Maqāma al-Ḥarāmiyya*. Curiously, al-Ḥarīrī's handling of the narrator contradicts his development of the trickster, who is far more complicated than al-Hamadhānī's Abū al-Fatḥ al-Iskandarī.

2. Tricksters

Comparing the *Hamadhāniyya*'s and the *Ḥarīriyya*'s tricksters is less straightforward than comparing their two narrators. The latter were minimalized and depicted as detached and flat because they represented the educated class which was both socially and literarily accepted and familiar. Thus, they required little to no description. The tricksters, however, stand for an unusual group, the Banū Sāsān, who possess an exotic language, an argot that is exclusive to them,

[18] Mathew Keegan analyzes these accounts in the course of discussing how some readers insisted on the *Ḥarīriyya*'s characters being real people. See Keegan, "The Poetics of Virtual Experience and the Semiotic Theory of Fiction," 231-302.

and follow a moral system that is atypical. For this reason, they demand more elaboration and necessitate that the narrative be more focused on them. These tricksters made the *maqāmāt* a popular genre among premodern readers, who did not pick them up for their narrators, but for their tricksters who represent the curious and the transgressive. To outperform his predecessor, therefore, al-Ḥarīrī's challenged himself to create a more fascinating trickster that would overshadow *al-Hamadhāniyya*'s main trickster,[19] Abū al-Fatḥ al-Iskandarī. This is most explicit in *al-Maqāma al-Ḥajariyya*, where Abū Zayd al-Sarūjī enumerates his types of wit and tricks, before announcing boastfully:

> If al-Iskandarī has been before me,
> the dew precedes the shower,
> but the shower excels the dew in fructifying bounty.[20]
>
> إنْ يكُنْ الاسكندَريّ قبْلِي
> فالطَّلُ قد يبدو أمام الوبَل
> والفَضلُ للوابِل لا للطّل[21]

These verses attest to the many intertextual resonances between the two works, and the protagonist's meta-fictional awareness. Al-Ḥarīrī chooses the trickster as a symbol to argue that being the predecessor is not proof of originality, but mere "dew" announcing that "quenching rain" is coming next. To demonstrate the eminence of his trickster, al-Ḥarīrī borrows the motif of strangerhood from his predecessor, yet constructs a more complicated stranger, who is the sole protagonist of the narrative, as opposed to al-Iskandarī who is one protagonist among many. Furthermore, the uniqueness of al-Sarūjī is attested by the backstory al-Ḥarīrī gives him, which sets him apart from the free-wanderers of the *Hamadhāniyya,* who engage with their *ghurba* aloofly. Additionally, al-Sarūjī expresses contradictory emotions, altering between yearning and rootlessness, while the *Hamadhāniyya*'s strangers are permanently cynical and rootless. In other words, despite belonging to the same group, that of the Banū Sāsān, and occupying the same genre, that of *maqāmāt*, the two tricksters, Abū al-Fatḥ al-Iskandarī and Abū Zayd al-Sarūjī, hardly resemble each other, be it in their dominance over the narrative, dramatic impact, and their way of living their strangerhood.

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[19] Al-Hamadhānī constructs many tricksters besides al-Iskandarī, see below.
[20] al-Ḥarīrī, *Assemblies II*, 162.
[21] al-Ḥarīrī, *Maqāmāt,* 555.

2.1. The *Hamadhāniyya*'s Multiple Strangers

In the *Hamadhāniyya*, one encounters many kinds of strangers: the possessed (*al-Maqāma al-Iblīsiyya*), the mad (*al-Maqāma al-Māristāniyya*), the banished (*al-Maqāma al-Bishriyya*), the runaway (*al-Maqāma al-Adharbayjāniyya*, *al-Maqāma al-Aswadiyya*), the pilgrim (*al-Maqāma al-Qirdiyya*), the *mukdī* (*al-Maqāma al-Nīsābūriyya*), and of course, the collectors of language and *adab* (*al-Maqāma al-Balkhiyya, al-Maqāma al-Makfūfiyya*). One also comes across episodes in which Abū al-Fatḥ al-Iskandarī is replaced by other protagonists, who belong to different categories of strangers (See Chapter 7): a *ṣuʿlūk* named Bishr ibn ʿAwāna al-ʿAbdī (*al-Maqāma al-Bishriyya*), a nomadic poet named al-Nājim (*al-Maqāma al-Nājimiyya*), a *mugharrib*[22] called ʿIṣma ibn Badr al-Fazārī, who recounts his encounters with genie poets and their bizarre stories (*al-Maqāma al-Ghaylāniyya*), and Abū al-ʿAnbas al-Ṣaymarī, a scholar whose main occupation is to collect exotic and entertaining accounts (*al-Maqāma al-Ṣaymariyya*).

The common feature these strangers share is their positive attitude toward traveling. They never express or experience desolation, remorse, yearning, or strangerhood. For instance, *al-Maqāma al-Ādharbayjāniyya* concludes with Abū al-Fatḥ al-Iskandarī describing himself as "the spinning top of time" (*anā khudhrūfat al-zamān*), and "the everlasting inhabitant of the road" (*ʿammārat al-ṭuruq*).[23] As a spinning top, moved by the hand of time, al-Iskandarī implies that life is a game, where he has no affinities, no direction, and no home. Instead of lamenting his lost state, he embraces the playground, that is, the road, and calls it home. Accordingly, when asked about his homeland, al-Iskandarī aloofly replies:

> Verily, God has servants
> Who have adopted a manifold existence,
> In the evening they are Arabs
> In the morning Nabaṭīs[24]

> إنَّ لله عبيدًا
> أخذوا العُمر خليطًا
> فهُم يُمسُون أعْرابًا
> ويُضْحون نبيطًا[25]

[22] See *gharīb* list (8) in Chapter 7.
[23] al-Hamadhānī, *Maqāmāt,* 52. [my translation]
[24] al-Hamadhānī, *The Maqāmāt of Badīʿ al-Zamān*, 34-5
[25] al-Hamadhānī, *Maqāmāt,* 21.

The idea of home inspires only indifference in the trickster. He adopts whatever native land the context or the audience demands. To him, his attitude is utterly normal. God created both those who are tied to one place and the chameleons, who adapt their identities to situational dictates. Similarly, in *al-Maqāma al-Nājimiyya*, another trickster boastingly describes how he defeated *ghurba* and gouged its eyes out, saying:

> "I have tried the people that I might know them… and exile that I might taste it. No country has looked at me whose eye I have not plucked out"[26]
>
> عاشَرتُ الدَهْر لِأَخْبَرَه... والغُربة لِأذوقها. فما لَمَحَتني أرضٌ إلّا فقأتُ عينها.[27]

Instead of lamenting their strangerhood or yearning for stability, *al-Hamadhāniyya*'s strangers accept their *ghurba* as a fact and continue their journey freely and independently, rarely accompanied by kin,[28] and always reluctant to engage in camaraderie. For example, in *al-Maqāma al-Khalafiyya*, the narrator meets an interesting person whom he calls a friend. Suddenly, however, the anonymous companion vanishes. After searching for several days, Ibn Hishām finally finds the deserter and asks him why he left, a question to which the man answers starkly: "No snare catches the free-born like bounty … Now, thou didst not plant me for thy slave to uproot me, not didst thou buy me for thy servants to sell me"[29] (*al-ḥur lā yuʿliquh sharak ka-l-ʿaṭāʾ... wa-anta lam taghrisnī li-yaqlaʿanī ghulāmuk wa-lā ishtaraytanī li-yabīʿanī khaddāmuk*).[30] These words attest to the speaker's sentiments toward companionship and generosity. Instead of finding in them contentment and familiarity, the anonymous interlocutor of Ibn Hishām interprets them as deceptive traps threatening to undermine his independence, and as markers of possessiveness scheming to "plant" him in one soil and deny him freedom and movement. Thus, between friendship and autonomy, the stranger of *al-Maqāma al-Khalafiyya* abandons Ibn Hishām and at once takes the road, to join those who prefer wandering as "spinning tops" to being bound by the destination or companionship.

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[26] al-Hamadhānī, *The Maqāmāt of Badīʿ*, 157.
[27] al-Hamadhānī, *Maqāmāt,* 219-220.
[28] Only once Abū al-Fatḥ al-Iskandarī is accompanied by two wives, and even then, they both demand divorce, which means they are already in a state of separation. See *al-Maqāma al-Shāmiyya*, in Orfali & Pomerantz*, The Maqāmāt of Badīʿ al-Zamān*, 119-140. Also, in *al-Maqāma al-Waṣiyya*, al-Iskandarī speaks to his son. See al-Hamadhānī, *The Maqāmāt of Badīʿ*, 153-55.
[29] al-Hamadhānī, *The Maqāmāt of Badīʿ*, 149.
[30] al-Hamadhānī, *Maqāmāt,* 226.

Following this, one may ask: What is the point of all this roaming? Do the *Hamadhāniyya* strangers subscribe to the idea of "the road for the road's sake"? As tricksters, thieves,[31] *muk-addīs* (wandering beggars), and as Banū Sāsān in general, these strangers do not travel to see the world, nor seek new curiosities, but rather to gain wealth, or in Abū al-Fatḥ al-Iskandarī's words:

> I roam about the interiors of the countries, in order that I may light upon the dish of a generous man. I have a mind served by a tongue, and rhetoric which my own fingers record. My utmost desire is a generous person who will lower me one of his saddle bags and give me his wallet.[32]

أجُوبُ جُيوبَ البِلاد حتّى أقَعَ على جَفْنَة جَوّادٍ ولِي فُؤادٌ يَخْدُمُه لِسان وبَيَانٌ يَرْقُمُه بنان وقُصارِاي كَرِيمٌ يَخْفِضُ لي جَنِيبَتَه وينفُض إليَّ حقِيبَتَه.[33]

Consequently, *Hamadhāniyya* tricksters offer their eloquence and witticism in exchange for material profit, which can be obtained from generous patrons, or extracted from deceived audiences. To avoid punishment, they run away from the latter, and to avoid dependency and "implantation," they abandon the former. Regardless of the plot or the encountered audience, departure is foreseeable and favorable. Thus, al-Hamadhānī's strangers roam the dominion of Islam, from the west to the east, alone and unhindered, showing no interest in the homeland, their kin, or friendship. This is partially explained by the fact that tricksters are supposed to inspire laughter in their audience and not empathy. As for Abū Zayd al-Sarūjī, he emulates the cynicism of al-Hamadhānī's tricksters. However, al-Ḥarīrī makes his trickster character more nuanced and multifaceted, adding homesickness and yearning, which makes him an ambiguous and complex stranger.

2.2. *Ḥarīriyya*'s Tragic Stranger

Al-Ḥarīrī communicates a different agenda through his lonely and multifaceted trickster, constructing him to represent defeat, rejection, tragedy, and ambivalence. Defeat is already announced in his name. Abū Zayd al-Sarūjī refers to a city the Byzantines occupied (i.e., Sarūj),

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[31] See *al-Maqāma al-Ruṣāfiyya*, where al-Hamadhānī enlists different types of thieves and their tricks, only the opening of this *maqāma* figures in Muḥammad ʿAbduh's edition, the rest of the *maqāma* was deleted because Abduh thought it was not appropriate for the youth. See the full *maqāma* in Orfali & Maurice Pomerantz*, The Maqāmāt of Badīʿ al-Zamān al-Hamadhānī,* 158-161.

[32] al-Hamadhānī, *The Maqāmāt of Badīʿ*, 68.

[33] al-Hamadhānī, *Maqāmāt,* 83.

unlike al-Hamadhānī's trickster, who is named after two victorious conquering movements: the Islamic *futūḥāt* (Abū al-Fatḥ), and the long military campaign of Alexander the Great (al-Iskandarī).[34] Choosing Sarūj as a *nisba* for the trickster implies two things. On the one hand, it highlights a motivation to contradict[35] the victorious name of al-Iskandarī, to create a character who lost his home and family in the Crusades. On the other hand, and most importantly, it links losing the homeland to immoral conduct. This shows in al-Sarūjī's repentance from his trickery and deceptive ways the moment al-Sarūj becomes independent. The *Ḥarīriyya* tells the reader nothing about al-Sarūjī's conduct before the invasion. However, since all his trickeries occur in exile, and since his repentance coincides exactly with his city's independence,[36] one can infer that exile in the *Ḥarīriyya* is depicted as a state of exception that forces one to engage in deception and trickery. In other words, as a stranger who was forced out of his invaded home, al-Sarūjī has no choice but to deceive, but, once his home is liberated and the status quo is restored, he returns to being a good man, whose words and eloquence only serve God (M50). In this regard, al-Sarūjī's motivations for deception are more nuanced in the *Ḥarīriyya* than his predecessor in the *Hamadhāniyya*, whose reasoning is limited to the repetitive sentence: "Do not blame me, blame time."[37]

Besides defeat, military failure, and exile, or because of them all, al-Sarūjī's appearance or his entering the stage is usually met with distrust, disgust, and rejection, especially, in the episodes where he enters literary salons and encounters the educated elite. A case in point is *al-Maqāma al-Furātiyya*, in which al-Ḥārith ibn Hammām meets a group of bureaucrats who accept him and treat him as a "son of their intimacy."[38] They then invite him to travel with them on a ship where they later meet al-Sarūjī in a repulsive state. The narrator describes the encounter as follows:

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[34] For the full interpretation of Abū al-Fatḥ al-Iskandarī's name, see: Mohammed Birairi, "*al-Raḥīl fī maqāmāt Badīʿ al-Zamān al-Hamadhānī: al-īḥāʾāt wa-l-maghzā*," in *Alif*: Journal of Comparative Poetics, No. 26, (2006), 141-145.

[35] The Sarūjī name could also be an imitation of al-Iskandarī's narrative, in which he claims to be a refugee from the occupied land of Iskenderun. This interpretation is addressed in more detail in the Introduction, section "Creating an Ambivalent Trickster."

[36] The narrator recounts his hearing of the trickster's repentance and Sarūj's independence as follows: "then they told me that they had made a halt at Sarūj, after the wild asses had left it, and had seen there its renowned Abū Zayd, who had donned the wool cloth, and was leading the rows of the praying." *al-Ḥarīrī, Assemblies II*, 181-182.

[37] For example, see al-Iskandarī's envoys in the *maqāmāt*: *al-Qarīḍiyya, al-Azdiyya, al-Makfūfiyya.*

[38] al-Ḥarīrī, *Assemblies I,* 229.

> And when we had mounted our sable beast, and set ourselves in our cushion-saddle that moved on the water, - We found there an old man, on whom was a thread-bare coat and a worn turban.- Then the company loathed his presence, and found fault with whoever had brought him; and would have purposed to put him forth of the ship, but that their calmness returned to them.[39]

لمّا تَورّكْنا على المَطِّية الدَهماء وتَبَطّنّا الوَلِيَّة الماشِية على الماء، ألفَيْنا بها شيخًا عليه سَحْقٌ سِرْبال وسِبٌّ بال، فعافَتْ الجماعة مَحضَرَه وعَنَّفَت مَنْ أحضره وهمَّت بإبرازِه مِن السفينة لولا ما ثاب إليها من السَكِينة.[40]

Despite his recent encounter with the secretaries, al-Ḥārith ibn Hammām narrates the incident using the pronoun "we," which highlights his complete integration into the high-handed group, whose disapproval of a passenger can bring about his banishment from a moving ship. Loathed and endangered, al-Sarūjī decides to secure his place on the ship by proving his oratorical and rhetorical skills, trading an eloquent speech for admittance. Once al-Sarūjī proves his worth, the passengers' revulsion transforms into admiration, and they plead with al-Sarūjī to remain on board. Angry and offended, the trickster answers:

> Since you have hurt my honor on account of my worn garment, and cast a shadow on my soul for the threadbareness of my coat, - I will look upon you only with a heated eye; you shall have from me only a ship's companionship … then he delayed not to bid the sailors stop, and he ascended from the boat and made off.[41]

أمَا بعد أن سَحَقْتُم حَقِّي لأجلِ سَحْقِي وكَسَفْتُم بالي لإخلاق سِرْبَالي فما أراكم إلا بالعين السَخِينة ولا لَكُم مِنِي إلا صُحْبة السفينة (...) ثم ما عَتَم أن اِستوقَف المَلّاح وصَعَد مِن السفينة وساح.[42]

Curiously, this *maqāma* involves no trickery and no reward. It mainly emphasizes the substantial power of words in the *Ḥarīriyya*, as they save the trickster from rejection and imminent danger and reduce prominent people to pleading. This *maqāma* also demonstrates the tremendous difference between the narrator, whose admittance is automatic and unconditional, and the trickster, who is excluded until proven eloquent. Moreover, it illustrates the contradictory reasons which motivate the two main characters: while curiosity and a thirst for knowledge motivate the narrator, rejection and the need to survive motivate the trickster. This brings to

[39] Ibid, 230.
[40] al-Ḥarīrī, *Maqāmāt,* 211.
[41] al-Ḥarīrī, *Assemblies I*, 233-234.
[42] al-Ḥarīrī*, Maqāmāt,* 218-220.

mind Sara Ahmed's statement: "some strangers are stranger than others."[43] By extension, some strangers are more empathic than others.

To amplify Abū Zayd al-Sarūjī's empathic effect, the *Ḥarīriyya* highlights the trickster's problematic past, which involves war, destitution, and loss. In *al-Maqāma al-Ḥarāmiyya*, al-Sarūjī expresses his feelings about the hardships he suffered, saying:

> Once I had in Sarūj my home, seat of faith and of righteousness,
> Where obedience was paid to me for my wealth and my lordly state.
> …
> Till the Lord wrought a change in what through His favour had been my wont,
> For He settled the Greeks in our country after a feud that rose,
> And they seized on the households of all believers in one true God
> And deprived me of all my goods either hidden or free to view.
> Thus became I an outcast in distant lands and a fugitive,
> Who beseecheth men's bounty while ere it had been besought of me.[44]

Al-Sarūjī's verses portray him as a *gharīb*, suffering physical strangerhood, which manifests in forced displacement, and homesickness. This feeling *of ghurba* is heightened by the loss of faith, family, and wealth. In other words, the *Ḥarīriyya* depicts al-Sarūjī as a tragic character who inspires empathy in his audience, despite his misdeeds and recurrent deceptions. The combination of tragedy, poetic eloquence, and trickery provoked Ernest Renan to criticize al-Ḥarīrī, whom, he says, "does not have a serious word of criticism for him [trickster]; he makes him die an honest man; he gives him at times very delicate feelings, among others a tender memory of his homeland which inspires him with charming verses."[45] Such reproach would never be directed at al-Hamadhānī, whose tricksters are permanently cynical and frivolous, roaming the dominion of Islam to deceive and profit, never expressing remorse or homesickness. Conversely, al-Ḥarīrī's fascination with ambiguity drove him to combine "delicate feelings" with trickery and to complicate matters more, he also makes his protagonist alternate between rootlessness and homesickness. For example, in *al-Maqāma al-Marāghiyya*, al-Sarūjī describes his homeland as a lost paradise. Lamenting its loss, he says:

> Ghassân is my noble kindred, and Serûj my ancient land:
> There my home was like the sun in splendour and mighty rank;
> And my dwelling was as Paradise in sweetness and pleasantness and worth.

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[43] Sara Ahmed, *Strange Encounters*, 25.
[44] al-Ḥarīrī, *Assemblies II*, 167-168.
[45] Renan, "Les Séances de Ḥarīrī," 295.

Oh, excellent were the life I led there and the plenteous delights,

…

Now if grief could kill, surely, I should perish from my abiding griefs;

Or if past life could be redeemed my good heart's blood should redeem it.

For death is better for a man than to live the life of a beast.[46]

In *al-Maqāma al-ʿUmāniyya,* al-Sarūjī adopts an opposite approach, describing his homeland as a place of stagnation and invisibility. He says:

To a native place cling not where folks oppress and hold thee in scant esteem,

But depart the land that exalts the low above the high in dignity,

And take thy flight to a safe retreat, although it were on the skirts of Kāf.[47]

Rejected, impoverished, exiled, loathed, and complex, Abū Zayd al-Sarūjī overshadows his one-dimensional cynical predecessor, Abū al-Fatḥ al-Iskandarī. Al-Sarūjī also overshadows his follower, al-Ḥārith ibn Hammām. In other words, *ghurba,* ambiguity, and rejection are al-Sarūjī's resources for emphasizing his prominence in the *Ḥarīriyya,* as well as in the *maqāma* genre. As intriguing as it is to compare the two tricksters in either the *Ḥarīriyya* or the *Hamadhāniyya* (emulation, superiority, ambiguity), it is far more rewarding to study the relationship between trickster and narrator since they coexist in the same narrative and bring the best (eloquence) and worse (trickery) in each other.

II. Narrators and Tricksters: Basic Bounds

In *Maqāma: A History of a Genre,* Hämeen-Anttila favors al-Iskandarī over al-Sarūjī, because the first never deceived his companion, while the second tricks al-Ḥārith ibn Hammām on several occasions.[48] However, the relationship between the two protagonists in each work is far more complicated to be summarized as trickery or lack thereof. That relationship involves desire, communication, and participation, or what Todorov calls "*les rapports de base*," or basic relationships between fictional characters. From these three relations**,** others derive: one kind of relationship is derived according to the rule of opposition, i.e., hatred/disinterest stands in opposition to desire, miscommunication is in opposition to communication, and hindrance is in opposition to participation; the other kind follows the rule of passivity, or reciprocity, which

[46] al-Ḥarīrī, *Assemblies I,* 138.
[47] al-Ḥarīrī, *Assemblies II,* 100-101.
[48] Hämeen-Anttila, *Maqama,* 173.

entails that A desires B, and A is desired by B, A communicates with B, and B communicates with A, and A helps B, while B helps A.[49]

1. Desire as a Motive to Travel

Applying Todorov's "basic relations" to the two *maqāmāt* collections, we can see that the tricksters are always the narrator's object of desire. The latter cross countries and deserts just to meet their fleeting sources briefly, and to hear their deceiving, strange, yet abundant words. Fulfilling this desire is hardly possible with a beloved who "wanders abroad faster than the proverb, and swifter than the moon in her changes"[50] (*kāna asyara min al-mathal, wa-asraʿa min al-qamar fī al-naql*).[51] Thus, the journey in both the *Hamadhāniyya* and the *Ḥarīriyya* is triggered by a desire to grasp the slippery trickster who represents the curious and exotic.

The opposite of desire, meaning hatred or at least disinterest is expressed by the trickster in both works. Al-Iskandarī and al-Sarūjī depart as soon as money is exchanged for words, leaving the narrators longing for more, which in turn leads to yet another pursuit. In the *Ḥarīriyya*, disinterest is expressed in harsher terms: it is as if al-Sarūjī goes out of his way to push the narrator away, to teach him that they are not friends and that, to him, he is just another educated person to be cheated and used. In *al-Maqāma al-Karajiyya*, for instance, al-Sarūjī steals the narrator's coat and abandons him in the cold, saying:

> Knowest thou not that my nature is to pass from prey to prey, and to turn from ʿAmr to Zayd? – Yet I see thou now checkest me and resist me; thou makest me to lose double of what thou didst profit me. – Then spare me (God save thee), from thy vain talk; shut on me the door of thy earnest and jest.[52]

أما تَعلمُ أن شِنْشِنَتِي الانتِقال مِن صيدٍ إلى صيدٍ؟ والانعِطاف من عمرو إلى زيد. وأراك قد عُقْتَنِي وعَقَقْتَنِي وأفّتَنِي أضعافَ ما أَفَدتَنِي فاعْفِني عافاك الله من لَغْوِك واُسْدُد دوني باب جِدّك ولَهْوِك.[53]

To al-Sarūjī, al-Ḥārith is merely one prey among many others. He perceives the narrator's desire to be his companion as an obstacle to overcome, which he does by running away from him. The trickster's indifference may seem cold-hearted, but it is a direct consequence of the conflicting motivations between him and the narrator: al-Sarūjī seeks survival, but Ibn

[49] Tzvetan Todorov, "Les catégories du récit littéraire," in *Communications* 8, (1966), 125-151.
[50] al-Ḥarīrī, *Assemblies II*, 90.
[51] al-Ḥarīrī, *Maqāmāt*, 417.
[52] al-Ḥarīrī, *Assemblies I*, 257.
[53] al-Ḥarīrī, *Maqāmāt*, 256.

Hammām only follows his quest for the exotic. Given such a contradiction, it is no wonder that the rule of "passivity" or reciprocity does not apply in the *Ḥarīriyya*. A case in point is al-Sarūjī's envoi in the fourth *maqāma*, in which he says, "Hope not for affection from any who sees that thou art in want of his money"[54] (*lā tarju al-widd mi-man yarā annak muḥtāj ilā filsih*).[55] The class difference between the two protagonists stands in the way of any promise of companionship. To this material difficulty, the trickster highlights their opposing moral systems. In *al-Maqāma al-Shīrāziyya*, he says, "I am quarrelsome and thou art faint-hearted, so there is a wide gulf between us"[56] (*anā ʿirbīd wa-anta riʿdīd, wa-baynanā bawn baʿīd*).[57] Al-Sarūjī reiterates this sentiment in *al-Maqāma al-Wabariyya* when he says, "I am hasty and thou art sluggish, how then should we agree?"[58] (*anā tiʾq wa-anta miʾq fakayf natafiq*).[59]

Conversely in the *Hamadhāniyya*, despite al-Iskandarī's obvious cynicism, the trickster never denies the narrator company. Furthermore, on several occasions, al-Iskandarī treats him as he would his kin and considers him his companion in *ghurba*. For example, the following conversation takes place in *al-Maqāma al-Shīrāziyya*:

> "Proceed with thy story!" then he said: "I have suckled thee on the breast of covenant and shared with thee the rein of protection and in the opinion of the wise, acquaintance is sacred, and friendship is kinship." I then said: "Art thou a fellow-townsman, or a fellow-tribesman" (*baladiy anta am ʿashīriy*), he said: "Nought unites us save the land of strangerhood" (*mā yajmaʿunā illā balad al-ghurba*).[60]

As a consequence of harsh circumstances, al-Iskandarī's appearance changes but not his eloquence and oratory. He uses his charming words to refresh the narrator's memory, to remind him that they already traveled together and shared the hardships of strangerhood, which makes them closer than relatives and tribesmen. This exchange between the trickster of the *Hamadhāniyya* and its narrator is fitting in a collection of *maqāmāt* that gathers individual strangers, who are usually unaccompanied by family. In contrast**,** the *Ḥarīriyya* trickster is accompanied in numerous episodes by a wife, a son, and even by his entire tribe (M30), which explains why al-Sarūjī is usually uninterested in the narrator's companionship.[61] Indeed, why

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[54] al-Ḥarīrī, *Assemblies I,* 124
[55] al-Ḥarīrī, *Maqāmāt,* 38.
[56] al-Ḥarīrī, *Assemblies II,* 74.
[57] al-Ḥarīrī, *Maqāmāt,* 390.
[58] al-Ḥarīrī, *Assemblies II,* 7-8.
[59] al-Ḥarīrī, *Maqāmāt,* 281.
[60] al-Hamadhānī, *The Maqāmāt of Badīʿ*, 130.
[61] The few exceptions to this are discussed in Chapter 9.

would al-Sarūjī care for a companion who does not resemble him in character or belongs to his social class, when he can be with his *own people*? This is not the case in the *Hamadhāniyya*, where both protagonists are alone. The differences between them recede to the background, making way for transitory friendships and brief encounters that can be refreshed over and over, as is the case in *al-Maqāma al-Maṭlabiyya,* which the narrator concludes as follows:

> When that company dispersed, I sat after them for a while. Then I advanced towards him and seated myself before him and said- and verily I desired to make his acquaintance and my soul longed to converse with him: "it is as though I knew thy pedigree and had met thee," he said: "yes, a road united us and thou wast my travelling-companion.[62]

Similar to most scenes of recognition in the *Hamadhāniyya*, this one occurs in privacy, after the performance is over. The acknowledgment of companionship is not undermined by any ruse on the part of the trickster, but he embraces it as a marker of mutual affection. This companionship is shared by "the sons of the road" (*abnāʾ al-sabīl)*, whom "the only *pedigree* they can master is one that connects them to the road whence they come."[63] Despite the difference between the trickster and narrator, in class, education, and motives, their bond lies in the *ghurba* and the permanent mobility.

While friendliness is easier to detect in the *Hamadhāniyya*, where both protagonists share the simplicity of their histories, in the *Ḥarīriyya*, where the trickster has a far more elaborate history than the reader is told about his "companion," al-Sarūjī responds to Ibn Hammām's desire for companionship by hostility. Thus, no matter how hard al-Ḥārith ibn Hammām tries to communicate his fondness for al-Sarūjī, the latter remains unavailable and apathetic. The ir/reciprocity regarding the desire for companionship draws two opposite kinds of strangerhood: a relatively harmonious and empathic *ghurba* in the *Hamadhāniyya*, and an inharmonious relationship in the *Ḥarīriyya*. In other words, al-Hamadhānī depicts a friendlier *balad al-ghurba* (the land of strangerhood), while al-Ḥarīrī constructs an apathetic trickster who reduces communication to an exchange of words for money.

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[62] al-Hamadhānī, *The Maqāmāt of Badīʿ*, 184.
[63] Franz Rosenthal, "The Stranger in Medieval Islam," 756.

2. Communication in Temporary Stabilities

As opposed to the desire for companionship, which generates roaming, journeying, and "hunting,"[64] communication occurs during the tricksters' brief breaks from travel, when they perform their tricks or give eloquent speeches before running away again. In other words, desire is associated with movement and communication occurs during brief, passing moments of stability. Instances in which this act of communication occurs between the trickster and the narrators are omnipresent in the *maqāmāt*. This is a natural consequence of the genre itself, which is a series of encounters in which words are traded for money. For this exchange to occur, a miscommunication must take place, mostly in the form of trickery and deceit in the *Hamadhāniyya*, or as a result of unsolvable riddles and opaque wordplay in the *Ḥarīriyya.* In both works, communication (money for words) is a function of miscommunication (deceit and ambiguity).

To reconcile these opposites, al-Hamadhānī introduces the motif of recognition, or *anagnorisis*, in which the narrator reveals the trickster's true intentions and unveils his trick or wordplay. During this moment of recognition, after the trickster has traded words for money with the public, he meets the moral judgment of the narrator with apologies and cynicism, repeating over and over "don't blame me, blame time." Following this, therefore, a typical *maqāma* consists of two acts of communication: the first is material and based on miscommunication and ambiguity (rule of opposition), and the second is moral and based on mutual unveiling, whereby the narrator reveals the trickster's true identity, while the latter shares his motivations for becoming a trickster (rule of passivity).

Although al-Hamadhānī was the one to introduce this motif of recognition, by framing it with a moment of confrontation, he only used it partially in his *Maqāmāt*. Several of his tricksters remain anonymous and unidentified, such as those in *al-Maqāma al-Mighzaliyya*, *al-Maqāma al-Nahīdiyya*, *al-Maqāma al-Ṣufriyya*, *al-Maqāma al-Shiʿriyya*, and *al-Maqāma al-Khalafiyya*. Moreover, when the trickster is identified in the *Hamadhāniyya* it is usually in the form of a brief and comic scene. In contrast, al-Ḥarīrī constructs a trickster who never leaves the scene unrecognized. A case in point is *al-Maqāma al-Maghribiyya*. After al-Sarūjī completes his trick, which occurs at dawn, and receives his money without being identified, he asks for a lamp, so the audience can see who he is. He says:

[64] In M36, Ibn Hammām describes his motivation to travels, saying: "I frequent the places of entertainment, and hunt after rare pleasures" (*atawarradu mawārid al-maraḥ, wa-ataṣayyadu shawārid al-mulaḥ*). al-Ḥarīrī, *Assemblies II*, 75.

> The glooming has now set in, and the face of the highway is veiled;- And between me and my house is the dark night and a razed out path._ And have ye a lantern that will secure me from stumbling, and make plain the tracks? [65]

إن الغاسِق قدْ وَقَبْ وبيني وبين كِنّي ليلٌ دامِس وطريقٌ طامِس فهل مِن مِصْباح يُؤمِنُنِي العَثار ويُبَيّنُ لي الآثار؟[66]

The trickster's desire to be visible recalls al-Tawḥīdī's *ishāra*: nothing hurts a *gharīb* more than being unnoticed and invisible nobody.[67]

To summarize, communication and miscommunication are perpetually interconnected in both the *Ḥarīriyya* and the *Hamadhāniyya*. This is natural for a genre in which words and characters never seem to be what they claim. This conflict reaches a climax in the moment of *anagnorisis* when intentions and identities are revealed. In the *Hamadhāniyya*, this moment takes the form of a simple and infrequent confrontation between the two protagonists to identify the bad guy, but in the *Ḥarīriyya*, the moment of recognition is systematized to give the trickster a moment of familiarity and visibility and to make the narrator an active participant, sometimes even an accomplice, in the plot.

3. Participation in Trickery and in Moments of Stability

Todorov explains participation as a "helping" act that demonstrates desire.[68] Accordingly, since, in the above case, the narrators are the only ones professing desire, participation is expected to manifest on their side. In several episodes in the *Hamadhāniyya*, the narrator Ibn Hishām benefits from al-Iskandarī's tricks (*al-Maqāma al-Armaniyya*) and shares his punishment (*al-Maqāma al-Mawṣiliyya*). However, aside from witnessing and narrating the events, Ibn Hishām does not offer much help to the trickster. In contrast, al-Ḥārith ibn Hammām participates in al-Sarūjī's ruse on numerous occasions, by acting as a silent accomplice. At times, his silence is a response to the trickster's request, as in *al-Maqāma al-Karajiyya,* in which al-Sarūjī notices him among the audience and asks him for *satr* or concealment.[69] At other times, Ibn Hammām remains silent out of his own accord, as in *al-Maqāma al-Shirāziyya*, in which the narrator recognizes the trickster in the middle of his performance, but decides not to stand in the way of al-Sarūjī's reward by exposing him. Ibn Hammām says:

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[65] al-Ḥarīrī, *Assemblies I,* 198.
[66] al-Ḥarīrī, *Maqāmāt,* 156.
[67] See al-Tawḥīdī's *ishāra* and Ibn al-Sarrāj's anecdote discussed in Chapter 7.
[68] Tzvetan Todorov, "Les catégories du récit littéraire," 133.
[69] al-Ḥarīrī, *al-Maqāmāt,* 254.

> Now when I saw the mixture and tinge of Abū Zayd, and his wonted ways and manners of proceeding, I looked hard at the old man, with all his defacement of countenance and fulsomeness, and lo! It was himself. But I concealed his secret, as an internal disease is concealed … until when he ceased wailing, he blinked at me with an eye full of laughter.[70]

Accordingly, despite his common role as (1) the agent responsible for unmasking the trickster's identity and (2) the defender of morals who reproaches the trickster for his misdeeds, the narrator sometimes defies expectations and, through his silence or *satr*, makes himself an accomplice to the trickster's ruse. This the narrator does to persuade al-Sarūjī that he is worthy of his companionship, or perhaps to satisfy his own curiosity and hear more of the trickster's speech.

Though in the *Ḥarīriyya* al-Sarūjī seemingly functions only as a receiver (of desire, money, and help), implicitly he also acts as a sheikh to the narrator, offering him several lessons, not just in the form of words or speeches, but also by opening his eyes to the truth, reminding Ibn Hammām that "Adorned speeches satisfy not him who is a-hunger."[71] Al-Sarūjī, the exiled trickster who spends his days running away from the audiences he deceives, teaches the narrator the worthlessness of collected words and accounts by stealing from him (M27), deceiving him (Mt. 4, 7, 34, 44), leaving him behind in the cold (M25), and using him as bait to sedate a group of people (M29). These harsh teachings reach their climax in *al-Maqāma al-Bakriyya*, in which both protagonists travel together while starving, the narrator praising *adab* and the trickster trying to open his interlocutor's eyes to reality. As expected, al-Ḥārith ibn Hammām obstinately holds his fascination and shuts both his eyes and ears to the truth.[72] As a result, al-Sarūjī steals his sword and leaves him hungry and unprotected in the middle of the desert. Unsurprisingly, in the episode that follows, al-Ḥārith ibn Hammām continues his quest for *adab*, ignoring all the pains the trickster inflects on him, and keeps choosing words over food, even when he is starving (e.g., M26).

Unlike the *Hamadhāniyya*, in which desire never translates into participation, the *Ḥarīriyya* expresses a more complicated and ambiguous paradigm, in which the narrator, as an agent of truth and morality, acts as a silent accomplice in several ruses, to obtain more *adab*. To reciprocate, the trickster takes the role of a sheikh and tries to persuade his disciple of the meaninglessness of his quest. Al-Ḥārith ibn Hammām remains voluntarily blind to this lesson

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[70] al-Ḥarīrī, *Assemblies I,* 72-73.
[71] al-Ḥarīrī, *Assemblies II,* 131.
[72] This episode is addressed in more detail in Chapter 6. See subsection "Back to the Desert: Bedouin *Gharīb.*"

throughout the *Ḥarīriyya*, which is ironic, given his role as the only individual who can see through the veils of ambiguity and deceit.

Conclusion

The *Ḥarīriyya* and *Hamadhāniyya* share the element of desire: an emotion that initiates a quest and takes both protagonists across the dominion of Islam. However, while the undramatic *Maqāmāt al-Hamadhānī* allows its strangers to enjoy each other's companionship, al-Ḥarīrī insists that each *gharīb* must bear his own strangerhood alone. Regarding the brief moments of stability when communication, miscommunication, and participation occur, the two works become more distinctive. In al-Hamadhānī's *maqāmāt*, recognition is less permeant, and participation is absent. The two characters indifferently and casually meet and separate over and over. In the *Ḥarīriyya*, in contrast, every meeting reveals that the morally wise narrator is not any better than the trickster and that words are by default untrustworthy and meaningless. Consequently, while al-Hamadhānī focuses mainly on desire and communication, endeavoring to exchange money for words, al-Ḥarīrī amplifies all the possible rapports between his two protagonists to stress their perpetual ambiguity: the seemingly bad trickster acts as a didactic master in several instances and even repents in the last *maqāma*, while the seemingly good narrator acts frequently as an accomplice to have access to more *adab*.

The different ways of addressing *ghurba* in the *Ḥarīriyya* and the *Hamadhāniyya* are reflected in their language. Al-Hamadhānī, whose text was clearer and more easily understood, emphasizes only one type of strangerhood: rootlessness. Conversely, al-Ḥarīrī, who amplifies the ambiguity and obscurity of his text, creates an ambivalent stranger, who on the one hand depicts home as a lost heaven and, on the other, claims the road to be his only home. The one-dimensional cynical al-Iskandarī versus the ambivalent al-Sarūjī can also be interpreted using extrinsic material, such as the biographies of their authors. Al-Hamadhānī, the restless traveler, left Hamadhān when he was twenty-two years old, never to return home,[73] and never held a "regular position," being only a "free-lance secretary."[74] Al-Ḥarīrī, on the other hand, spent his life as "a minor civil servant (*ṣāḥib al-barīd*) in Basra, whose duties included reporting to the

[73] See al-Thaʿālibī, *Yatīma*, vol. IV, 293-5.
[74] Devin Stewart, "Professional Literary Mendicancy in the *Letters* and *Maqāmāt* of Badīʿ al-Zamān al-Hamadhānī," in *Writers and Rulers: Perspectives on Their Relationship from Abbasid to Safavid Times*, Ed. Beatrice Gruendler and Louise Marlowe (Wiesbaden: Reichert Verlag, 2004), 41.

government on every important or suspicious matter,"[75] exclusively in Iraq.[76] These two portraits suggest that al-Hamadhānī lived the way he thought one ought to live, moving between countries and positions that offered an opportunity, opting for rootlessness over yearning and homesickness, while al-Ḥarīrī was torn between following the conventions set by his processor, i.e., endless roaming, and his own stability as a local clerk, who hardly left home and could not understand a stranger not choosing to return to his native land. Moreover, as a clerk whose job was to watch and report, al-Ḥarīrī collected enough material that made him more capable to develop his characters, thus giving them more complicated emotions and affinities.

Studying the *Hamadhāniyya's* and the *Ḥarīriyya's* strangers and their relations proves that al-Ḥarīrī first emulates the conventions introduced by his predecessor, then adds their opposite. He emulates minimal strangers through his narrator al-Ḥārith ibn Hammām, then elaborates the dramatic and ambivalent (nostalgic/ rootless) personage of al-Sarūjī. al-Ḥarīrī also mimics the element of desire which drives the narrator after his source of curiosities, yet instead of casual companionship along the road, he creates two strangers who belong to two different economic and moral systems. The same situation applies to communication, which materializes in the *Hamadhāniyya* doubly: money for words, and masks for truth (infrequently). However, in the *Ḥarīriyya*, it is further developed to contain both exchanges plus a third reflective and didactic one (questioning the value of terms and vocabularies). Consequently, the *Ḥarīriyya*'s position towards the *Hamadhāniyya* can be simplified to *yes, but*: *yes*, meaning the outline skeleton which al-Hamadhānī created, and *but* meaning the ambivalence and ambiguity al-Ḥarīrī created to surpass the original *maqāmāt*. This is most clearly said on the tongue of al-Sarūjī, in whose envoi in *al-Maqāma al-Maltiyya*, he first emulates the cynical words of al-Iskandarī, then expresses his longing for Sarūj. He recites:

> Each mountain-path is path for me, and ample is my dwelling there,
> Save that for Sarūj town my heart is crazed with longing, mad with love.[77]
>
> كُلّ شَعْبٍ لي شَعْب وبه رَبْعي رَحْب
> غَيْرَ أَنِّي بِسَرُوجَ مُسْتَهام القَلْب صَبّ[78]

This is also clear in the episode in which al-Ḥarīrī abandons the motif of the journey and constant mobility and allows his trickster to settle and experience stability.

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[75] Hämeen-Anttila, *Maqama*, 148,
[76] Yāqūt, *Irshād*, 5/2203
[77] al-Ḥarīrī, *Assemblies II,* 81.
[78] al-Ḥarīrī, *al-Maqāmāt*, 402.

Chapter 9

Home at Last :On Staying, Weakness, and Closures

Chapter 7 has shown that *ghurba* is an ambivalent experience that one could experience physically elsewhere or spiritually at home. So far, I have addressed the physical manifestation of *ghurba,* which is a yielding choice considering the nature of the *maqāma* genre, in the sense that it revolves around seeking *gharīb* and rare vocabulary in remote lands (the narrator) and escaping deceived audiences (the trickster). In this chapter, I shift the focus to spiritual *ghurba* which one experiences in one's own place of residency, or at the homeland. To this end, I will limit my close reading to the unusual *maqāmāt* in which al-Sarūjī either has already settled down in some place or chooses to do so by the end of the episode, for numerous reasons, such as sickness, incapacitation *(inqiṭāʿ)*, death, and repentance. In *al-Maqāma al-Naṣībiyya* (M19), *al-Maqāma al-ʿUmāniyya* (M39), al-*Maqāma al-Sāsāniyya* (M49), and *al-Maqāma al-Baṣriyya* (M50), al-Sarūjī is not in "transit" but in a state of stability and familiarity.

The main point of this chapter is to highlight Abū Zayd al-Sarūjī's subjective and complicated experience of strangerhood. First, I emphasize how his stays are always intertwined with some kind of weakness, either physical as in *al-Maqāma al-Naṣībiyya* and *al-Maqāma al-Sāsāniyya*, or spiritual as in *al-Maqāma al-ʿUmāniyya* and *al-Maqāma al-Baṣriyya*. Second, I address al-Sarūjī's emotional reaction, which he expresses in the form of desolation, existential angst, and need for companionship. This is at least the case of the three *maqāmāt*, *al-Naṣībiyya*, *al-ʿUmāniyya*, and *al-Baṣriyya*. In *al-Maqāma al-Sāsāniyya*, however, al-Sarūjī is disconnected from his feelings and personal history altogether and acts as a typical trickster who belongs to *Banū Sāsān*: he is cynical, opportunist, and rootless. Incidentally, the trickster of the *Hamadhāniyya* does not display this nuanced relationship with places. As Monroe notes, the choice to stay does not occur in al-Hamadhānī's *Maqāmāt*. In fact,

> instead of being portrayed in their homes, among family and relatives, the characters are usually encountered *abroad*, in inns, mosques, taverns, caravans, and always in *strange* towns (there is in Hamadhānī no maqāma of Qumm nor of Alexandria) - in other words, in *public* places, or in *transit*: environments and situations where the individual is reduced to *social anonymity and alienation … emptied of all meaning*; minds

> with *defective memories*; *drifters,* who live only for and in the *present*, with no sense of the past, or of any transcendent purpose to their existences.[1] [emphasis added]

Unlike al-Hamadhānī's "transitory drifters," who have "defective memories," Abū Zayd al-Sarūjī often hearkens back to his past, which he exhibits through the many instances of recollection about his homeland (Mt. 6, 9, 14, 30, 36, 42, 44, 48).

Running away and traveling generate more storytelling and create more occasions for communication, reward, and deception, whereas hanging on in a place and settling down threatens the continuity of the narrative and announce a kind of closure. Noël Carroll defines closure as an end that inspires a "feeling of completeness," or a "sense of finality with which a piece of music, a poem, or a story concludes. It is the impression that exactly the point where the work does end is just the right point. To have gone beyond that point would have been an error. It would have been to have gone too far."[2] Al-Ḥarīrī is celebrated as the first *maqāma* author who gives his trickster closure. In this chapter, however, I argue that *Maqāmāt al-Harīrī* does not feature one closure but four different ones: piety after a critical illness (M19), isolation on an island (M39), dying as a trickster praising rootlessness (M49), and returning as a pious man to the liberated homeland (M50). These four contradictory scenarios suggest that al-Ḥarīrī never intended to simply "wrap things up,"[3] but rather multiply the ending of the trickster's story, which adds to the work's ambiguity. This agrees with Naima Benabdelali's argument that "trickery alludes more than it clarifies, and makes use of ambiguity and polysemy. As a result, it omits conclusion and details."[4] In this sense, one of al-Ḥarīrī's ongoing ruses is the semblance of closure that he gives the reader. Here, Carroll's understanding of closure is of little help. In order to assess the different scenarios of sickness, death, and failure, I instead employ Barbara Smith's term "closure allusions," meaning events that are associated with "closure effects," such as sleep, death, winter, home-coming, and farewell to convey to the reader the semblance of closure.[5]

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[1] Monroe, *The Art of Badīʿ al-Zamān al-Hamadhānī*, 116.
[2] Noël Carroll, "Narrative Closure," in *Philosophical Studies: An International Journal for Philosophy in the Analytic Tradition,* Vol. 135, No. 1 (August 2007), 2.
[3] Ibid, 3.
[4] Naima Benabdelali, *Fī al-badʾ kānat al-ḥīla* (Milano: Al-Mutawassiṭ, 2023), 19.
[5] Barbara Smith, *Poetic Closure: A Study of How Poems End* (Chicago & London: University of Chicago, 1968), 172-182.

I. *Al-Maqāma al-Naṣībiyya*

1. Summary

Aside from the typical beginning, in which the narrator explains his reasons for traveling and informs the reader of his destination, this *maqāma* does not resemble any other in the *Ḥarīriyya*. In it, al-Sarūjī falls critically ill. The narrator and other anonymous characters visit him in his house to check on his recovery. Instead of fooling them or asking for a reward, al-Sarūjī acts as a generous host. This *maqāma* breaks the usual convention, in which ornate and playful language is exchanged for a reward. Instead, it is Abū Zayd al-Sarūjī who provides both food and *adab* in exchange for companionship.

2. Title and Chronotope

The title of this *maqāma* includes a double entendre. *Al-Naṣībiyya* refers first to Naṣībīn, a town in upper Mesopotamia (modern-day Turkey) with plenty of water resources,[6] which explains why al-Ḥārith ibn Hammām chooses it as a second home, after fleeing Iraq's unfortunate climate. Unlike other episodes in which the narrator journeys to seek vocabulary, in this *maqāma* he adopts the pragmatic motivation to survive. This opening informs readers that they are not within the usual realm of *hazl*, but rather its opposite, *jidd* or seriousness. This assumption is confirmed by the second meaning of *Naṣībiyya* which is *naṣīb*, a contronym that means both good and bad fortune. The ambiguity of this word applies to al-Sarūjī's situation in this *maqāma*: he falls gravely sick and faces death, but he also recuperates.

Unlike most of the *Ḥarīriyya*'s episodes, in which the world is depicted as open for profit and discovery, this *maqāma* is set in the closed space of al-Sarūjī's house, which implies limitations: drought, sickness, and seriousness. In contrast to most *maqāmāt,* which occur during the night to provide al-Sarūjī with a cover to ask for charity (Mt. 5, 15, 16) or to run away (Mt. 29, 44), this *maqāma* takes place under the bright light of day. Interestingly, it does not include deception or begging.

3. Change I: Narrator

The central theme of this episode is change. In the case of the narrator, change first starts with the unfortunate climate which forces him to leave ("Iraq was barren in a certain year").[7] Once

[6] Al-Sharīshī, *Sharḥ*, Vol. II, 61.
[7] al-Ḥarīrī, *Assemblies I*, 215.

settled in the new place, al-Ḥārith ibn Hammām returns to familiarity and to his usual quest for words and chase after al-Sarūjī. The second change is enacted by the trickster falling severely sick: "I ceased not to follow his [Abū Zayd's] shadow wherever he sped, and to glean his utterance as often as he spoke, - Until there came on him a sickness whose term was prolonged, whose sharp knives bared his bone."[8] When denied his supply of words, the narrator's new home turns into a vacant space lacking in companionship and nourishment. Describing his state of heart, he says: "Then did I feel through the loss of his [al-Sarūjī] presence and the interruption of his teaching, as he feels that is put far from his desire, or the suckling at the weaning"[9] (*wajadtu li-fawt luqyāh wa-inqiṭāʿ suqyāh mā yajiduhu al-mubʿad ʿan marāmih wa-l-murḍaʿ ʿinda fiṭāmih*).[10] In this *maqāma,* therefore, al-Ḥārith ibn Hammām faces two modes of change: geographical and intellectual. In both cases, abundance turns into dryness. To challenge the first misfortune Ibn Hammām moves in space, following the saying "you are not genealogically related to a place, the best of lands is the one that accepts you" (*laysa baynak wa-bayn balad nasab, khayr al-bilād mā ḥamalak*).[11] However, while the narrator is able to replace his homeland, he cannot replace Abū Zayd al-Sarūjī. Therefore, learning about his sickness, the narrator feels obsolete, and in a way, homeless. To rectify the situation, the narrator visits al-Sarūjī, which gives way to an interesting aspect in *al-Maqāma al-Naṣībiyya*.

4. Change II: al-Sarūjī Seeks Companionship

Abū Zayd al-Sarūjī undergoes critical changes in this *maqāma*, both physically and spiritually. As in all the other episodes, he is lucid and eloquent (*yanthuru min fīh al-durar*).[12] However, he is also inexplicably wealthy, settled (*yaḥtalibu bi-kaffayh al-dirar*),[13] and more importantly, famous. This is most obvious in the news of his illness in which communication is associated with the verb *arjafa*, meaning to tell "exaggerated or false news which are supposed to cause *fitna* (distress)."[14] In other words, in this *maqāma* al-Sarūjī is not the usual unknown trickster who covers his identity to deceive, but a celebrated figure whose well-being or illness generates rumors, gossip, and distress.

[8] Ibid, 216.
[9] Ibid.
[10] al-Ḥarīrī, *Maqāmāt,* 185.
[11] Ibn ʿAbd al-Barr, *Bahjat al-majālis wa-uns al-mujālis,* 225.
[12] al-Ḥarīrī, *Maqāmāt,* 184.
[13] Ibid.
[14] al-Sharīshī, *Sharḥ*, Vol. II, 69.

While newly-found prosperity is al-Sarūjī's first change, illness is his second. Consequently, he shifts from being an active character who is "now stumbling with the crazed, now winning with the fortunate"[15] (*yakhbiṭu khabṭ al-muṣābīn wal-muṣībīn*)[16] to a person standing at death's door. Confronting death changes al-Sarūjī's character substantially. For the first time in the *Ḥarīriyya*, he is afraid of solitude and begs for companionship. When his visitors try to leave, he persuades them to stay using several tactics. First, al-Sarūjī emphasizes his desolation, saying:

> "Nay, but stay with me during the light of to-day that by your pleasantry ye may heal my sadness; - For your conversation is the food of my soul, the magnet of my friendliness."[17]

كَلَّا، بلْ اِلبَثُوا بَيَاض يومِكم عِندي لتُشْفوا بالمُفاكَهَة وَجْدِي، فإنّ مُناجَتَكم قُوتُ نفسي ومِغْناطِيسُ أُنْسِي.[18]

This plea highlights this turn of events, whereby al-Sarūjī who has always played the entertainer now seeks *uns,* conversation, and companionship. Throughout the *Ḥarīriyya*, Abū Zayd al-Sarūjī's interlocutors ask him to remain and amuse them some more, but he usually refuses the offer and simply flees with little apology, or none (e.g. M44). Unlike him, his visitors agree to stay and provide companionship. They amuse him for a while and divert his thinking until they run out of topics and grow tired of the unbearable heat. Consequently, they decide to leave. Here, al-Sarūjī resorts to his second strategy, fulfilling his guests' physical needs. He offers them to nap in his place, then provides them with food. According to al-Ḥārith Ibn Hammām:

> And we waked not until the heat was now abated and the day was old. – Wherupon we washed hand and foot for the two mute prayers [*al-ẓuhr* and *al-ʿaṣr*], and performed what loosed us of our debt. Then we stirred for departure to the place of our camel-saddles. -But Abū Zayd turned to his cub… and said: I fancy that the Father of indwelling has now lighted a coal in their stomachs.[19]

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[15] al-Ḥarīrī, *Assemblies I,* 215-216.
[16] al-Ḥarīrī, *Maqāmāt,* 184.
[17] al-Ḥarīrī, *Assemblies I,* 217.
[18] al-Ḥarīrī, *Maqāmāt,* 188.
[19] al-Ḥarīrī, *Assemblies I,* 218.

فما اِستَيقَظْنا إلّا والحَرّ قَدْ باخَ واليوم قد شاخَ، فَتَكَرّعْنا لِصلاة العَجْماوَين وأَدَّينَا ما حَلَّ من الدَّيْن، ثم تَحَثْحَثْنَا لِلْارتِحال إلى مُلْقى الرِحال، فالتَفَتَ أبو زيد إلى شِبْلِه.. وقال إنّي لَأَخَالُ أبَا عَمْرَة قد أضْرَم في أحْشائِهم الجَمْرَة[20].

Deciding to offer his guests food, al-Sarūjī describes to his son, using unknown *kināyāt* (metonymies), what he should prepare for them. Unlike the guests, the son can decode his father's metonymies. The temptation for the visitors is two-fold: they must stay for the food and for an explanation of the meaning of the metonymies. In this sense, al-Sarūjī is not only offering them a feast in exchange for the company but also a riddle, whose solution is the food itself. After the meal, the guests make another attempt to leave, but al-Sarūjī is able to counter it once again by composing beautiful optimistic verses on accepting one's *naṣīb* and misfortunes. Beguiled by the poem, the guests request to transcribe the verses and so they remain a while longer to carry out this task.

To summarize, in this episode, al-Sarūjī suffers both from illness and desolation. Consequently, he finds himself in desperate need of *uns* or companionship and is willing to offer anything in exchange for it. This urgent need for human company does not influence his scheming abilities, which he employs to guarantee companionship. Al-Sarūjī first addresses his visitor's emotions then their physical needs, and finally, their intellectual curiosity. Illustrating al-Sarūjī's desperate need for companionship, his reliance on these tactics also highlights his fear of death.

5. Closure Allusion: Sleep and Death

In several *maqāmāt,* al-Sarūjī uses sleep as a tool to deceive his audience. For example, in *al-Maqāma Wāsiṭiyya,* he sedates his public and steals their belongings. In *al-Maqāma al-Shatawiyya,* al-Sarūjī promises to deliver the solutions to numerous riddles in the following morning to his encounter with his audience. As one would expect, however, he runs away in the middle of the night. Curiously, the only addressee who does not sleep in these two *maqāmāt* is al-Ḥārith ibn Hammām, who remains awake to tell the tale. Conversely, in *al-Maqāma al-Naṣībiyya* sleep is not employed as a tool of deception, but rather as a teachable moment that provides the guests a glimpse of the ultimate sleep, meaning death. This is most obvious in the narrator's description of the long nap which lasts throughout *al-ẓuhr* and *al-ʿaṣr* prayers:

[20] al-Ḥarīrī, *Maqāmāt,* 189.

> We followed what he said, and we slept, and he slept; and God smote upon the ears, and poured out slumber on the eyelids, - Until we passed from the domain of Being, and by sleep were hindered from prayer.[21]

اِتّبَعْنا ما قال وقِلْنَا. فضَرَب الله على الآذان وأَفْرَغ السِّنَة في الأجْفَان، حتّى خَرَجْنَا مِن حُكْم الوجود وصُرِفْنَا بالهُجُود عن السُجُود.[22]

The first sentence of this statement is an *iqtibās* from *Sūrat al-Kahf*, verse 11. It describes the condition of *ahl al-kahf* who seek refuge in the cave to flee from an oppressive ruler and remain asleep for three hundred years. The story of *ahl al-kahf* is usually cited to prove the omnipotence of God, who provides life and saves from death. In this *maqāma*, al-Sarūjī oscillates between life and death and after being *in extremis* he recovers miraculously. As his guests sleep and leave for a brief period "the domain of being," they are made to experience part of what al-Sarūjī experiences. Thus, they can recognize their shared fragile state of existence as beings who can perish at any time and, consequently, empathize with al-Sarūjī. This is most obvious in *al-Naṣībiyya*'s first poem, which al-Sarūjī improvises for his guests. He says:

> God has saved me, thanks be to Him, from a sickness that went near to bolt me out;
> And has granted me recovery; though it must needs be that death will one day waste me.
> Death forgets me not; yet he gives me a delay to forget the end of my feeding.
> If it be decreed, then will no friend avail, nay, not even the guarded domain of Kolayb, to guard me from him.
> Nor care I if his day be near, or if death be put off for a season.
> For what boast is there in life, in which I behold afflictions, nay, they wear me out?[23]

عافاني الله وشُكرًا لهُ مِن عِلَّةٍ كادَتْ تُعَفِّينِي
ومَنَّ بالبُرْء على أنّه لابُدّ مِن حَتْفٍ سَيُبْرِيني
ما يَتَنَاسانِي ولكنّه إلى تَقَضّي الأُكل يُنْسِيني
إنْ حُمَّ لَمْ يُغْنِ حَمِيمٌ ولا حِمَى كُلَيْبٍ مِنْه يَحْمِينِي
ومَا أُبالِي أدَنَا يَومُه أم أُخِّر الحِينُ إلى حِين
فأَيُّ فَخْرٍ في حياةٍ أرى فيها البَلَايَا ثُمّ تُبْلِينِي[24]

These verses capture al-Sarūjī's preoccupation with his temporary state of being. Implicitly, death is depicted as a favorable state: it puts an to waiting, suffering, and looming oblivion.

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[21] al-Ḥarīrī, *Assemblies I,* 218.
[22] al-Ḥarīrī, *Maqāmāt,* 189.
[23] al-Ḥarīrī, *Assemblies I,* 217 [adapted].
[24] al-Ḥarīrī, *Maqāmāt,* 187-188.

Firmly holding on to life and continuously trying to survive are portrayed here as humiliating and laborious acts, which are ultimately pointless. Remarkably, keeping to the book's ambiguity and the central theme of change, this episode concludes on a more hopeful note. This is evident in the second poem, in which al-Sarūjī praises patience (*ṣabr*) and promotes hope over despair.[25] After all, as he said, time is the "father of wonders," capable of all changes. This puts to question al-Sarūjī's attitude toward life and death which. Is he an optimist who holds hope for positive change, or is he a pessimist whose main preoccupation is the unavoidability of death? The episode does not answer these questions, but one can infer that, by providing company, the visitors comfort al-Sarūjī and persuade him to shift from pessimism (1st poem) to hope and patience (2nd poem). However, this does not mean that the fragile state of being would cease preoccupying the *Ḥarīriyya*'s trickster. A case in point is the verses al-Sarūjī addresses to the fetus in *al-Maqāma al-ʿUmāniyya*.

II. *Al-Maqāma al-ʿUmāniyya*

1. Summary

This episode consists of two parts. The first follows the typical structure of the *maqāmāt*. It opens with the narrator describing his passion for traveling and discovering unknown places. Then he boards a ship where he meets the trickster Abū Zayd al-Sarūjī. In exchange for the ride, the trickster teaches the passengers a magical talisman (*ḥirz al-safar*) to protect them from the dangers of the sea. As usual, once the trickster finishes his speech, the narrator recognizes his identity, despite the fact that they are sitting in the dark. Faced with the stormy sea, al-Sarūjī's prayer proves useless. Therefore, the ship seeks refuge on an unnamed island, where the second part of the episode begins. Following their perilous journey in the sea, the passengers face hunger on the island. The two protagonists decide to discover the island and find some food. However, they discover a huge castle with heavy iron doors. A few guards meet them and inform them, as they weep, that the governor's spouse is going into a difficult labor, which could endanger both her life and the baby's. Hearing this, Abū Zayd al-Sarūjī offers to write a magical *ḥirz* to facilitate the birth. However, instead of the promised amulet, the trickster composes a poem in which he advises the fetus to remain in the womb and never be born, so that it may avoid life's miseries. The talisman works and the child is born. As a reward, the

[25] Ibid,191.

trickster is offered money and a governmental position, which he accepts and remains on the island. He asks the narrator to stay with him, but the latter refuses and resumes his journey.

2. Central theme: Doubles

Maqāmāt al-Ḥarīrī thrives on opposing doubles: an *adīb* versus a trickster, truth versus lying, *ẓāhir* (exoteric) versus *bāṭin* (esoteric) meaning, piety versus impiety, and running away versus staying, and open versus confined spaces. *Al-Maqāma al-ʿUmāniyya* follows the same example, highlighting all these doubles. However, it emphasizes two in particular: *ẓāhir* versus *bāṭin,* and open versus confined spaces.

2.1. *Ẓāhir* / *Bāṭin*

The dichotomy *ẓāhir* / *bāṭin* dominates in the *Ḥarīriyya*. The main plot of most episodes is to deceive the public with a double-sense speech, in which a fake appearance (*ẓāhir*) conceals the hidden meaning (*bāṭin*). In *al-Maqāma al-ʿUmāniyya*, *ẓāhir* and *bāṭin* are not used in a semantic or linguistic sense, but rather the supernatural sense, involving amulets that can influence nature (safe traveling talisman) and life (birth-facilitating talisman). Access to this aspect of the *bāṭin* is associated with the vocation of the *ʿarrāf* or seer. Keeping to his ability to take on different identities in *al-Maqāma al-ʿUmāniyya* al-Sarūjī introduces himself as a *ʿarrāf* who can protect and heal his audience. The method by which al-Sarūjī delivers either talisman differs. On the ship, the trickster delivers his protective talisman orally and in the open, but in the governor's castle writes it down. Al-Ḥārith ibn Hammām describes the process of writing the second talisman as follows:

> Abū Zayd bade them bring a mended reed-pen, and some meerschaum, and some saffron macerated in pure rose-water… then he prostrated himself, rubbing his cheeks in the dust, and said praise to Allah, whose forgiveness he craved, bidden those present to stand off, and keeping them at a distance. Then he took the pen with a mighty show of fuss, and wrote upon the meerschaum with the saffron-solution… Then he blotted out the writing unawares, besputtering it abundantly, and tied the meerschaum in a shred of silk, after having besprinkled it profusely with ambergris, and bade fasten it to the thigh of the laboring woman, but that the hand of none menstruous must touch it. [26]

[26] al-Ḥarīrī, *Assemblies II,* 100.

اِستَحْضَر قَلَمًا مَبْرِيًا وزَبَدًا بَحْرِيًا وزَعْفَرانًا قَدْ دِيفْ في ماء وَرْدٍ نَظِيف.. فَسَجَد أبو زيد واستغفَر وأبعَد الحاضِرين ونَفَّر ثم أخذ القلم واِسْحَنْفَر وكتب على الزَبَد بالمُزَعْفَر ... ثم إنّه طَمَسَ المَكْتوب على غَفْلَة وتَفَلَ عليه مائة ثَفْلَة وشَدَّ الزَبَد في خِرْقَة حَرِير بعد ما ضَمَّخَها بِعَبير وأمَرَ بِتَعْلِيقِها على فَخْذِ الماخِض وأنْ لا تَعْلَقَ بها يدُ حائِض.[27]

While the audience of the first talisman receives al-Sarūjī's protective words in person, the audience of the second is asked to leave the *ʿarrāf* in private while he writes his secret words. Al-Sarūjī, moreover, attaches a rule for the talisman to be effective, namely, that menstruating women shall not touch it. This is an allusion to the rules of handling the *Qurʾān* since only those in the state of *ṭahāra* (cleanness and purity) can hold it.[28] The talisman contains a poem addressed to the fetus, informing it about the cruelty of life, and encouraging it to remain where it is. Al-Sarūjī writes:

Child to come, list to one who warns thee beforehand, aye! And warning belongs to faith's foremost duties:
Thou art safe now within a home closely guarded, an abode from all misery well protected,
Nought thou seest there to frighten thee on the part of false a friend or a foeman frank in has hatred,
But as soon as thou salliest forth from its shelter though alight'st in a dwelling hurtful and shameful,
Where the hardship awaiting thee will betide thee drawing tears from thy eye fast-flowing down-pour.
So continue thy easeful life and beware of changing things proved with things that are all uncertain,
Being heedful of one who seeks to beguile thee, that he hurl thee the surer in sorry torment.
Now I give thee, upon my soul, fair advice, but sound advisers how often are they suspected.[29]

أيُّهَذا الجَنين إنّي نَصِيحٌ لَك والنُّصْحُ من شُروطِ الدِّين
أنتَ مُسْتَعْصِمٌ بِكِنّ كَنِين وقَرارٍ مِن السُكون مَكِين
ما تَرى ما يُرَوّعُكَ مِن إلْفٍ مُداجٍ ولا عَدُوٍ مُبِين
فمتى ما بَرَزْتَ مِنه تَحَولْتَ إلى مَنزِل الأذى والهُون
وتراءى لَكَ الشَقَاءُ الذي تَلْقَى فَتَبْكِي لَهُ بِدَمْعٍ هَتُون

[27] al-Ḥarīrī, *Maqāmāt*, 433.
[28] Al-Sharīshī, *Sharḥ*, Vol. III, 140.
[29] al-Ḥarīrī, *Assemblies II*, 99.

فاِسْتَدِم عَيْشَكَ الرَغِيد وحاذِر أن تَبيعَ المَحْقُوق بالمَظْنُون
واِحتَرِس مِن مُخادِعٍ لَك يَرْقِيكَ لِيُلْقِيكَ في العَذَابِ المُهِين
ولَعَمْرِي لَقَد نَصَحْتُ ولَكِن كَمْ نَصِيحٍ مُشَبَّهٍ بِظَنِين[30]

It is typical in the *Ḥarīriyya* for the *bāṭin*, i.e., the esoteric meaning of a speech or trick to be revealed at the end of each episode. This revelation comes after the scene of recognition and is given exclusively to the narrator. In the *ʿUmāniyya*, however, al-Sarūjī chooses to share his inner feelings with a fetus which likewise represents the *bāṭin*: invisible, non-speaking, and living inside a womb. In this episode, the trickster lies to everybody, including the narrator, but to the fetus, he reveals the truth. Perhaps because it would never tell on him, or perhaps, the trickster addresses the fetus following the example of the *ṣaʿālīk*, who address all kinds of non-speaking beings in order to articulate their desolation and ineffable thoughts (See Chapter 7).

2.2. Open versus Confined Spaces

Al-Maqāma al-ʿUmāniyya opens on a ship full of passengers. After the narrator and the trickster decide to part from the others to seek food, the number of focalized characters shrinks to two. While writing the magical talisman, al-Sarūjī orders everyone to leave and he remains alone, addressing the fetus that is also alone and isolated inside the womb. As the number of focalized characters decreases, space gradually narrows, becoming more confined. In the opening, space is depicted as limitless and full of unknown places. The narrator says: "I clung … to fare through the deserts on the backs of Mahrī camels … to explore the wilds whether trodden or trackless."[31] On the island, space becomes narrower and continues to do so until it becomes confined to the castle. Finally, it ends with a womb, the smallest space that can hold a human being.

Reducing the number of characters and making space gradually more confined prepare the readers for the moment of confrontation and truth. Instead of the typical recognition scene in which the narrator confronts the trickster, al-Sarūjī faces a fetus. While al-Sarūjī roams the world, using his charming words to deceive and gain a living, the fetus is silent, nurtured, and undisturbed inside its peaceful home. Facing his absolute opposite, al-Sarūjī asks that his amulet be handled as the *Qurʾān* would ("touched by no menstruating woman"), which gives his orders authority and protection, and expresses his existential angst and desolation, which ma-

[30] al-Ḥarīrī, *Maqāmāt,* 433-434.
[31] al-Ḥarīrī, *Assemblies II*, 94.

terializes in his fear of disgrace, crying, hypocrisy, enmity, and false friends. Instead of following al-Sarūjī's advice, the baby joins life, the house of pain and disgrace, and the trickster is rewarded for facilitating the birth.

3. Closure Allusion: Remaining on the Island

In the *ʿUmāniyya*, narrow and confined places are favored over open and limitless spaces. A case in point is the sea, which is open and wide, but also dangerous and risky. To save one's life, one must seek refuge on an isolated island that has very limited space. Similarly, life is big and overwhelming, but the womb is welcoming and comfortable. In other words, the island and the womb are comparable, as are life and the perilous sea. Accordingly, while the fetus disregards al-Sarūjī's advice and leaves the peaceful womb, the trickster chooses to heed his own advice, refusing to return to the open world and remaining on the isolated island.

Studying space in the *Thousand and One Nights*, Richard van Leeuwen defines the islands as

> symbols of a peripheral world which can only be reached by a *perilous journey* over the sea and which is *isolated* not only geographically, but also socially and culturally ... There is little structural interaction with other societies, unlike the situation on the mainland. On the other hand, however, because it is surrounded by precarious seas, the island society is *vulnerable* to the vicissitudes of fate, both in the positive and in the negative sense. Islands are places where heroes of tales end up by coincidence, not on purpose, in order to *meet their destiny*. It is the place where human society and social structures are at least partly shaped by the hand of fate.[32] [emphasis added]

This definition fits *al-Maqāma al-ʿUmāniyya*. Abū Zayd arrives on the island by accident, after escaping a dangerous voyage. The island's inhabitants are indeed vulnerable: the guards are weeping, the governor is in distress, and both the mother and the child face death. Furthermore, the trickster at last "meets his destiny": the new home, which is isolated geographically, socially, and culturally, promises al-Sarūjī the peace a fetus enjoys inside the womb and he embraces it. In this episode, therefore, al-Sarūjī is not the cynical trickster who treats places as harbinger of opportunity and profit, but rather an anxious human being trying to recreate the pre-birth state of security and safety.

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[32] Richard van Leeuwen, *The Thousand and One Nights: Space, Travel, and Transformation* (London & New York: Routledge, 2007), 67.

To emphasize his need for isolation and peace, al-Sarūjī composes a second poem addressed to al-Ḥārith ibn Hammām, who objects to his decision to remain on the island. Al-Sarūjī says:

Do not seek a home, where you will only suffer injustice and humiliation
Leave the house which elevates the mediocre over the honourable
Run towards whatever shelter (*kinn)* that can protect you, even if it is merely an embrace[33]

لا تَصْبُوَنَّ إلى وَطَنٍ فيه تُضَام وتُمْتَهَن
وإرحَل عن الدَّارِ التي تُعْلِي الوِهَاد على القُنَن
واهرُب إلى كِنٍّ يَقِي ولَو أَنّه حِضْنَا حَضَن

Interestingly, in these verses, al-Sarūjī uses the same term for shelter, meaning *kinn*, which he uses to describe the womb in his address to the fetus. By staying on the island, al-Sarūjī tries to reinstate a previous state of stability that he lost twice: first by being born, second by fleeing from the home of "injustice and humiliation." His strangeness is double. Half of it, however, is shared by all human beings. The other half, meaning exile, can be mended by finding a shelter, or even a mere embrace.

Finally, the episode ends as it starts, with al-Sarūjī alone on the shore. Instead of embarking on another journey, he remains on an isolated land. The penultimate *maqāma* in the *Ḥarīriyya*, *al-Maqāma al-Sāsāniyya* (M49), likewise situates the trickster between life and death. This time, however, life and strangerhood enjoy less focus.

III. *Al-Maqāma al-Sāsāniyya*

1. Summary

In this *maqāma*, al-Ḥārith ibn Hammām is not a participant in the episode but merely reports al-Sarūjī's testament, while on his death bed, to his son. Six sections constitute this episode. In the first, Abū Zayd alerts his son to the importance of the last testament. In the second, based on his personal experience, al-Sarūjī relates his two major findings in life: that people are judged by their earnings and not by their lineage and that *kudiya* or trickery is the best of all occupations. In the third, al-Sarūjī enumerates the advantages of being part of the Banū Sāsān tribe, such as freedom, rootlessness, independence, and resourcefulness. In the fourth, al-Sarūjī elaborates on the skills of *kudya*, mobility (*irtikāḍ*), agility (*nashāṭ*), intelligence (*fiṭna*), and

[33] al-Ḥarīrī, *Maqāmāt,* 436-437.

shamelessness (*qiḥa*). In the fifth, al-Sarūjī insists once again on the importance of roving and on the value of his advice. In the last, the narrator intervenes to inform the reader about the fame of this last testament, and how it was widely disseminated among the *Banū Sāsān*.

2. Intertextuality: Following or Breaking Tradition?

Whenever al-Sarūjī is accompanied by his son, the latter is usually used as bait to trick someone (Mt. 10 & 34) or to draw attention to the trickster's eloquence (Mt. 4, 8, 19, 29). In *al-Maqāma al-Sāsāniyya*, however, the son is not a tool or a lure, but rather an actual addressee who is supposed to learn the ethos of his tribe and their occupation, in order to succeed Abū Zayd al-Sarūjī as the head of the *Banū Sāsān* tribe.

To play the role of the advising father and the head of the *Banū Sāsān*, al-Ḥarīrī engages with three other texts in this episode, or more accurately, three fathers: the first is Luqmān the Sage, whose moral set of advice to his son is presented in the *Qurʾān*; the second is Khālid ibn Yazīd, who tackles the subjects of miserliness and *kudya* in his last will in the *Bukhalāʾ* by al-Jāḥiẓ; and the third is Sheikh Sāsān, the symbolic father of all the *Banū Sāsān*. Each of these three fathers influences a part of *al-Maqāma al-Sāsāniyya* and shapes an unprecedented Abū Zayd al-Sarūjī, turning him into a caring, sensible father (Luqmān), a dying man giving his last testament (Khālid ibn Yazīd), and a typical rootless trickster who lives on begging and roving (Sheikh Sāsān). Besides highlighting the texts with which this episode intertextuality engages, in what follows I aim to go further and analyze the extent to which this *maqāma* emulates other texts and how much this intertextual engagement prepares the reader for the death of the *Ḥarīriyya's* trickster.

2.1. Luqmān's Set of Advice

Al-Maqāma al-Sāsāniyya concludes by comparing al-Sarūjī's last testament to the pieces of advice of Luqmān gives his son. Al-Ḥārith ibn Hammām says:

> When the sons of Sāsān heard these beautiful mandates, they prized them above the mandates of Luqmān and learned them by heart, as the mother of the Koran is learnt, so they reckon them to this time the best that they can teach their children, and more profitable to them than a gift of gold.[34]

In the *Qurʾān*, Luqmān advises his son to follow ten orders: to worship no God other than Allah, to respect his parents, to perform prayers, to encourage good deeds, to advise against

[34] al-Ḥarīrī, *Assemblies II*, 175.

evil deeds, to have patience, to refuse submissiveness, to avoid arrogance, to live in moderation, and to speak in a low voice (Q31: 13-19). To emphasize the latter advice, he adds: "lower thy voice; the most hideous of voices is the ass's."[35]

In his last testament, al-Sarūjī composes a parody of this set of advice by twisting two elements: first, instead of instructing his son to be good toward God and to the community, he tells him to take risks and master the art of deception, to benefit himself alone. He says:

> "Beguile by the gilding of thy tongue and deceive by the sorcery of thy eloquence (…) sharpen thy sight for taking omen from the flight of birds, and train thy perception for drawing inferences."[36]

أخلُب بِصَوْغِ اللسان واخدَع بِسحر البيان (...) واشحَذْ بصيرتك للعِيافة وأنعِم نَظَرك للقِيافَة.[37]

Second, instead of using animals as negative examples (the ass in Luqmān's case), al-Sarūjī encourages his son to follow their model and learn from their power, trickery, and survival techniques. He says:

> "Travel swifter than the locust, be brisker than the gazelle by moonlight, and more aggressive than the tiger-wolf."[38]

كُنْ أسْرى من جُندُب وأنشطَ من ظَبْيٍ مُقمِر وأسلَط مِن ذِئبٍ مُتنمِّر.[39]

Al-Sarūjī's parody does not undermine Luqmān's ten pieces of advice but rather questions the insinuation, in the final piece of advice, that humans are superior to animals and that good conduct should benefit others (God and community) instead of oneself (self-serving profit). Here Abū Zayd argues that in matters involving survival and trickery, animals are far more beneficial as guiding examples than human morality. Abū Zayd's disapproval of human morality shows in his directing his son to seek profit and *qiḥa* or shamelessness.[40]

As a master of oratory, al-Sarūjī knows that a good parody is one that keeps the spirit of the original text. Thus, he constructs his argument following the structure of the Luqmān's advice, stating the advice first and then referring to animals. Al-Sarūjī also emulates the fatherly tone with which Luqmān addresses his son, calling him heir "*yā bunayya"* (my dear son!) and treating him as an equal throughout their conversation. This is most obvious in the opening of the testament, which al-Sarūjī phrases as follows:

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[35] Arberry, *Koran Interpreted*, 420.
[36] al-Ḥarīrī, *Assemblies II*, 173.
[37] al-Ḥarīrī, *Maqāmāt,* 577.
[38] al-Ḥarīrī, *Assemblies II*, 172.
[39] al-Ḥarīrī, *Maqāmāt*, 575.
[40] Ibid, 574.

> O my son, behold the time for departing from the threshold and for having my eyes anointed with the koḥl-pencil of demise has drawn nigh, and thou, praise be to Allah, art my heir apparent, and the leader of the flock of Sāsān after me, and for one like thee it needs no tapping with the staff, nor awakening him by the throw of pebbles.[41]

يا بُنَيّ إنّه قدْ دَنا اِرتِحالِي مِن الفِنَاء واِكْتِحَالي بمِرْوَد الفَنَاء، وأنتَ بِحَمْد الله وَلِيُّ عَهدِي وكَبْشُ الكَتِيبَة الساسانية مِنْ بَعْدِي، ومِثْلُكَ لا تُقْرَعُ له العصا ولا يُنَبَّهُ بِطَرْق الحَصا.[42]

The value of the fatherly tone is twofold. First, it emphasizes the playfulness of the parody, by emulating Luqmān's tone and twisting his warnings. Second, it distinguishes *al-Maqāma al-Sāsāniyya* from an earlier literary reference written by al-Jāḥiẓ, which includes a *mukdī* giving a last testament to his son, but addressing the latter as "*ibn al-khabītha*" (son of the wicked woman) on several occasions.

2.2. Khālid ibn Yazīd

In *al-Maqāma al-Sāsāniyya,* al-Ḥarīrī is not simply composing a parody on Luqmān's set of advice, he also emulates the oldest available literary text on *kudya,*[43] meaning the "Narration of Khālid ibn Yazīd" in al-Jāḥiẓ's *Kitāb al-Bukhalāʾ, or Book of Misers*. Unlike Luqmān, whose name is explicitly mentioned in the episode, al-Jāḥiẓ's miser is not mentioned once in *al-Maqāma al-Sāsāniyya*, despite the striking resemblance between him and al-Sarūjī.

In the *Bukhalāʾ* Khālid ibn Yazīd is likewise introduced as a *mukdī*, who masters all sorts of coning arts and the strangest of argot. When asked if he can identify the different kinds of mendicants, he answers:

> How shouldn't I be able to recognize them… seeing I was a *kājār-gypsy* in my young days? At that time there wasn't a rascal claiming to have suffered in the holy war *(mukhṭārānī)* nor one with a sob-story *(mustaʿriḍ)* left in the land whom I didn't outdo, nor importunate beggar *(Shaḥḥādh),* feigner of madness *(kāghānī),* faker of ulcerated limbs *(bānuwān),* hanger-on at gates *(qarasī),* a howler *('awwā'),* contriver of deformities in infants *(mushaʿʿib),* faker of afflictions to his private parts *(filawr* [sic]*)*, confidence trickster *(mazīdī),* shammer of blindness *(isṭīl)* but came under my hand.[44]

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[41] al-Ḥarīrī, *Assemblies II*, 170.
[42] al-Ḥarīrī, *al-Maqāmāt*, 569-570.
[43] Bosworth, *The Medieval Underworld*, 8.
[44] al-Jāḥiẓ, *Book of Misers*, trans. R. B. Serjeant (N.C.: Centre for Muslim Contribution to Civilization, 1997), 36.

Moreover, just as al-Sarūjī in *al-Maqāma al-Sāsāniyya*, Khālid ibn Yazīd is also depicted as a dying man who is about to give his last testament to his son, to teach him about miserliness and the value of money. He says:

> I leave you what you may eat if you are careful of it- who won't eat if you squander it. What I bequeath you by way of sound practice, the proper management … I have reached, on land, to where the earth ends and, on sea, the furthest extent to which vessels have reached.[45]

Both al-Sarūjī and Khālid ibn Yazīd master trickery and argot and share the urge to instruct their successors on their death-beds. However, the contents of their testaments are clearly different. Al-Sarūjī teaches his son to move lightly, unbothered by possession and property, saying: "make, my son, thy burden light, and little thy dalliance."[46] (*kun yā bunayy khafīf al-kall qalīl al-dall*).[47] And to live in the present, preferring "the day that is to the morrow that is to be"[48](*faḍḍil al-yawm ʿalā al-ghadd*).[49] As for Khālid ibn Yazīd, he instructs his son to do the opposite, namely, to collect money, preserve it, and avoid the temptation of spending it. To use his words:

> I don't pride myself so much on collecting it as I do on (managing to) keep it, because some of this money I did not obtain through prudence and smartness—I preserved it for you from the temptation of building, the temptation of women, the temptation to seek adulation, the temptation of ostentation and the hands of agents—for they are an incurable disease.[50]

Al-Maqāma al-Sāsāniyya borrows from al-Jāḥiẓ the motif of the last testament and that of the dying father, as a speaker, and his successor, as a receiver. The *Ḥarīriyya*, however, does not emulate the message of the miser, nor his strong attachment to money. Despite the differences between al-Sarūjī and Khālid ibn Yazīd or Luqmān, al-Ḥarīrī engages with the texts that feature them both in the same way: he imitates the exoteric aspect of their fatherly advice (tone, type of discourse, context), but discards the essence of their words, which brings us to the third father with whom al-Ḥarīrī engages, Sheikh Sāsān, whose instructions constitute the core of al-Sarūjī's testament.

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[45] Ibid, 37.
[46] al-Ḥarīrī, *Assemblies II,* 173.
[47] al-Ḥarīrī*, Maqāmāt*, 578.
[48] al-Ḥarīrī, *Assemblies II,* 173.
[49] al-Ḥarīrī*, Maqāmāt*, 579.
[50] al-Jāḥiẓ, *Book of Misers*, 39.

2.3. Sheikh Sāsān

After challenging the commands of both Luqmān and Khālid ibn Yazīd, al-Sarūjī elaborates on the laconic words which were once engraved on the cane of Sheikh Sāsān, which read: "He gets, he who begs, he who roves, makes sure of his loaves"[51] (*man ṭalaba jalab, wa-man jāla nāl*).[52] To elaborate on these words, al-Sarūjī focuses on the two commandments, begging and roving. Al-Sarūjī highlights the superiority of *talab* (requesting or begging) as an occupation that overshadows all others, including holding administrative office, which is temporary and insecure, being a merchant, which is risky and unpredictable, doing handicraft work, which is unreliable and insufficient, and finally, engaging in agriculture which is humiliating and ties people to one land.[53] After discarding all these professions, al-Sarūjī moves to the second commandment: *jawalān* (from *jāla*) or roving, dedicating the remainder of the testament to it. Al-Sarūjī portrays roving as *Banū Sāsān*'s major asset, allowing them to be

> the most powerful of tribes, and the luckiest of folks, no touch of oppression overtakes them, no drawing of the sword harasses them, they fear not the sting of biting vermin, nor submit they to anyone either near or far… wheresoever they alight, they pick up, and where they slip in, they strip off, they make no country their home and fear no king, and they differ not from the birds that are hungry in the morning and full at eventide.[54]

أهلُها أعَزُّ قَبِيل وأسعَدُ جِيل. لا يُرْهِقُهم مَسُّ حَيْفٍ ولا يُقْلِقُهُمْ سَلُّ سَيْفٍ ولا يَخْشَوْنَ حُمَّة لاسِعٍ ولا يَدِينُونَ لِدَانٍ ولا شاسِع ولا يَرْهَبُونَ مِمَّن بَرَقَ ورَعَد ... أيْنَمَا سَقَطُوا لَقَطُوا وحيثُما اِنْخَرَطو خَرَطوا. لا يتَّخِذُون أوطانًا ولا يَتَّقُون سُلْطَانًا ولا يَمْتَازُون عمّا تَغْدُو خِمَاصًا وتَرُوحُ بِطَانًا.[55]

The members of the Banū Sāsān tribe are autonomous and live independently from their surroundings. They are untroubled by injustice, war, debt, climate, companions, and rulers. They have no home, hold no allegiances, and belong to whatever place that offers them food and profit. They do not tolerate inconveniences, they simply move elsewhere, adjust, and find a living, until they have to move again. These words resonate with the literature on the *Banū Sāsān*, especially with the famous poem by Abū Dulaf al-Khazrajī, which describes them as perpetual wanderers who settle in places that provide convenience and sustenance, and leave once the situation changes, without feeling any attachment, regret, or homesickness (See Part

[51] al-Ḥarīrī, *Assemblies II*, 172.
[52] al-Ḥarīrī, *Maqāmāt*, 575
[53] Ibid, 571-2.
[54] al-Ḥarīrī, *Assemblies II*, 171-172.
[55] al-Ḥarīrī, al-*Maqāmāt*, 573-574.

II). The idea of absolute freedom and apathy to space recurs in *al-Maqāma al-Sāsāniyya* and takes different forms: encouraging the son to travel the world, not to surrender to *kasal* (laziness) and sedentariness, and to use *irtikāḍ* (mobility) and *nashāṭ* (agility) to earn a living. Al-Sarūjī finally concludes his testament by saying:

> And when a country disagrees with thee, or a trouble has befallen thee therein, cut off thy hope from it and speed away from it thy camel, for the best of countries is that which betters thy state, and deem not departure burdensome nor hate removal, for the chiefs of our sect, and the elders of our tribe have agreed thereon, that motion is a blessing and the change of places like a promissory note, whereas they blame him who holds that peregrination is a bore and migration an infliction, and they say that is an excuse of those who are contented with a paltry pittance and gratifies with poor fruit and bad measure.[56]

مَتَى نَبَا بِكَ بَلَدٌ أو نَابَكَ فِيه كَمَد، فَبُتَّ مِنْه أَمَلَك وأسْرِح عنه جَمَلَك. فَخَيْرُ البِلَادِ مَا حَمَلَك ولا تَسْتَثْقِلَنَّ الرِحْلَة ولا تَكْرَهَنَّ النُّقْلَة فإنّ أَعْلَام شَرِيعَتِنا وأشياخَ عَشَيرَتِنا أجْمَعوا على أن الحَرَكة بَرَكَة والطَّرَاوَة سُفْتَجَة وزَرَّوْا مَنْ زعَم أنّ الغُرْبَة كَرْبَة والنُّقْلَة مُثْلَة وقالوا هي تَعِلَّةُ مَنْ اِقْتَنَعَ بالرذِيلَة ورَضِي بالحَشْف وسُوء الكِيلَة.[57]

The common takeaway from all these instructions is that one should never rest or stop moving. One also should not develop an attachment to space, because lands are defined strictly by their usefulness and capacity to offer profit. Thus, attachment and homesickness are signs of weakness and a false pretext maintained by the lazy who lack agility and accept the humiliation of being sedentary.

While these pieces of advice align with the words of Sheikh Sāsān and the message of external texts, such as Abū Dulaf's *al-Qaṣīda al-Sāsāniyya,* and the account of Khālid ibn Yazīd, they do not align with al-Sarūjī's backstory, which is that of a refugee who runs away from Sarūj after its invasion, and who keeps expressing his homesickness throughout the *Ḥarīriyya*. At first glance, *al-Maqāma al-Sāsāniyya* strikes the reader as a text that adheres to tradition and follows in the steps of the fathers discussed above. However, al-Ḥarīrī undermines the essential aspects of the instructions the three fathers provide. In *al-Maqāmā al-Sāsāniyya*, al-Ḥarīrī constructs a set of advice that opposes Luqmān's moral set and Khālid ibn Yazīd's abundant emphasis on collecting possession and wealth. As for Sheikh Sāsān, whose words *al-*

[56] al-Ḥarīrī, *Assemblies II,* 174.
[57] al-Ḥarīrī, *Maqāmāt,* 579-580.

Maqāmā al-Sāsāniyya elaborates, al-Sarūjī challenges them through the ambivalent conduct that characterizes him throughout the *Ḥarīriyya*. Indeed, he follows the words of his sheikh in several episodes and acts as a rootless beggar and trickster. However, he also expresses homesickness, strangerhood, and existential angst, and even acts as a good person in several episodes (Mt. 19, 22, 31).

3. Rootlessness and Dying as an Ibn Sāsān

The discrepancy between al-Sarūjī's last testament and his backstory takes us back to the conclusion of the previous chapter, in which I summarize the logic of the *Ḥarīriyya* in the interjection, 'yes, but': al-Ḥarīrī emulates one aspect of the *Hamadhāniyya*, that is, al-Iskandarī's cynicism and rootlessness, but constructs another aspect which contradicts the first by giving al-Sarūjī a tragic backstory, involving homesickness, strangerhood, and existential angst (M39). In the present *maqāma*, only the aspects al-Hamadhānī supplies in his work is present: al-Sarūjī is cynical, rootless, and unambiguously adopts the ethos of *Banū Sāsān*. Thus, he is identical to al-Iskandarī, to Khālid ibn Yazīd in his past as a *mukdī*, and to all the tricksters described in Abū Dulaf's poem (Chapter 6). In other words, in *al-Maqāma al-Sāsāniyya*, the protagonist is not Abū Zayd al-Sarūjī who is forced to leave Sarūj, but rather an *Ibn Sāsān* who is not supposed to have a home in the first place.

The dissonance between al-Sarūjī's last testament and his character across the *Ḥarīriyya* is comparable to the conflict between ʿUmr ibn Abī Rabīʿa's physical shape as a large man and his description of himself, saying, "inside my garment is a bony body if you lean on it, it would fall."[58] The poet is not lying or exaggerating in this verse, but simply following the standard image of the sickly lover who cannot be fat or large, because he is consumed by his fondness for the beloved. Kilito cites ʿUmr ibn Abī Rabīʿa's example in the context of arguing that "every genre suggests an image of its speaker."[59] Correspondingly, the image which the literature on Banū Sāsān provides is the one engraved on Sheikh Sāsān's cane: rootless and shameless beggars. To speak as one of the Banū Sāsān and to die as one, Abū Zayd al-Sarūjī has to discard his strangerhood, his feelings of nostalgia, and his attachment to his homeland, and speak in his final hours as someone whose life revolves around moving and tricking. At this point, one may ask: Who dies in *al-Maqāma al-Sāsāniyya,* is it Abū Zayd al-Sarūjī the complicated tragic protagonist of the *Ḥarīriyya*, or the member of the *Banū Sāsān* tribe? In my

[58] ʿUmr ibn Abī Rabīʿ, quoted in Kīlīṭū, *al-Adab wa-l-gharāba*, 83.
[59] Ibid.

opinion, only one part of al-Sarūjī dies in the *Sāsāniyya*, meaning the 'yes' half, which echoes the typical characteristics of the trickster, as constructed by al-Hamadhānī. As for the 'but' half, al-Ḥarīrī's unique contribution to the genre, namely the tragic and ambiguous nuance with which he furnishes his trickster, it does not die, and the endings that fit it well are those of *al-Maqāma al-Naṣībiyya, al-Maqāma al-ʿUmāniyya,* and *al-Maqāma al-Baṣriyya.*

4. Closure Allusions: Did Abū Zayd al-Sarūjī Really Die?

In *al-Maqāma al-Sāsāniyya*, we are told that Abū Zayd "neared (number of years indicated by the) the clenched fist (ninety-three) and the fetter of old age robbed him of the power of rising"[60] (*nāhaza al-qabḍa, wa-ibtazzahu qayd al-haram al-nahḍa*),[61] which implies him approaching the end of life. Furthermore, al-Sarūjī delivers his last testament to his son, which means that he shall never speak again. However, this is not the case, once *al-Maqāma al-Sāsāniyya* ends, *al-Maqāma al-Baṣriyya* commences, and al-Sarūjī returns to open places to deliver yet another speech. What makes al-Sarūjī's death more problematic is that it happens off-stage. Unlike Khālid ibn Yazīd, whose death and burial are described in the text, Abū Zayd's death is never mentioned in *al-Maqāma al-Sāsāniyya:* once the testament is finished, the narrator tells the reader about the reception of the testament within the *Banū Sāsān* tribe, but not that of its owner. In other words, the narrator withholds or omits al-Sarūjī's death, thus, denying the reader a clear satisfactory closure. To rephrase, by omitting the scene of death, the narrator produces an ellipsis or a narrative gap, which remains open to all kinds of interpretations. These potential readings increase once *al-Maqāma al-Sāsāniyya* is compared to the last episode which includes *inqiṭāʿ* (incapacitation/ isolation), repentance, return, and farewell.

IV. *Al-Maqāma al-Baṣriyya*

1. Summary

Al-Maqāma al-Baṣriyya is one of the longest episodes in the *Ḥarīriyya*, mainly because, in a way, it includes two episodes and contains al-Sarūjī's lengthiest of speeches and the longest poem in the *Maqāmāt*. The first episode resembles most of the others in the *Ḥarīriyya*. It opens with the narrator communicating his desire to listen to an exhortation about piety, to soften his heart, when all of a sudden, he encounters a crowd gathered around an orator wearing tattered rags. As usual, al-Ḥārith ibn Hammām recognizes that he is once again in the presence of Abū

[60] al-Ḥarīrī, *Assemblies II,* 169.
[61] al-Ḥarīrī, *Maqāmāt,* 569.

Zayd al-Sarūjī. This time, however, the recognition is mutual and occurs even before the trickster utters a word. Al-Sarūjī commences his speech by describing Basra's superiority to all other places, then proceeds to praise its people. Unusually at this point, the trickster suffers an unprecedented block or *inqiṭāʿ* (incapacitation), which makes him unable to develop his description of Basra any further. He, therefore, shifts to talk about his past achievement and endless travels, which involve tricking people. At this point, al-Sarūjī realizes that these recollections represent the never-to-return youth. Struck by this moment of epiphany, the trickster expresses remorse and regret for his misdeeds and asks the audience to pray for his salvation. The audience answers his call, causing him to shed tears of repentance. Al-Sarūjī walks away immediately, and the narrator follows him, as usual expecting al-Sarūjī to confess to his trick and reveal the secret message. However, what for Ibn Hammām has the semblance of performance turns out to indeed be genuine repentance. The newly repentant trickster confesses that

> "truly, I had stood before them in the stead of a doubter, a deceiver, and lo, I have turned from them with the heart of the contrite, the devout."[62]
>
> لقد قُمتُ فِيهم مَقامَ المُرِيبِ الخَادِع، ثُمّ اِنقَلَبْتُ مِنهُم بِقَلبِ المُنِيبِ الخاشِع.[63]

After this confession al-Sarūjī departs, and the first half of the episode concludes. The second half, which takes the form of another episode, starts with yet another journey towards Sarūj, the newly independent city to which al-Sarūjī returns after his repentance. Once again, the narrator follows him, seeking to verify the authenticity of al-Sarūjī's repentance from trickery. In Sarūj, both conversation and language have a limited presence. The narrator finds that al-Sarūjī has confined himself to prayer, silence, and solitude. Observing him for an entire day, the narrator is finally convinced of repentance. He bids al-Sarūjī farewell and leaves him for his new life, thus, marking the end of the *Ḥarīriyya*.

2. Failure, Repentance, and Silence

Similar to the previous *maqāma*, this episode announces Abū Zayd al-Sarūjī's retirement from the vocation of the trickster. While it is death that renders al-Sarūjī silent in *al-Maqāma al-Sāsāniyya*, in *al-Maqāma al-Baṣriyya* it is *inqiṭāʿ* that renders him silent. While addressing the proper conduct of a disputant in a debate**,** Ibn Wahb al-Kātib (middle of 4th/10th century) defines *inqiṭāʿ* as follows:

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[62] al-Ḥarīrī, *Assemblies II,* 181.
[63] al-Ḥarīrī, *Maqāmāt,* 593.

> Incapacitation (*inqiṭāʿ*) does not only imply silence or answering insufficiently, but also being too proud [to admit defeat] … When one fails to answer back, then one is incompetent. When one answers yet fails to convince, cannot reply at one's turn, or is unable to build on the opponent's argument, then one is incapacitated.[64]

> والانقِطاعُ ليسَ بالسكُوتِ فقطْ، والتَّقْصِير عن الجَوَاب، لَكِن المُكَابَرَة...إِنْ لم يُجِبْ فقَدْ عَجَزْ، وإِنْ أَجَابَ فلَمْ يُقنِع، أو وَقَفَ الكَلام عَلَيهِ فلم يَرُدّ ولَمْ يَرجِعْ إلى قَولِ خَصْمِه فَقَدْ اِنْقَطَع.

In *al-Maqāma al-Baṣriyya*, Abū Zayd al-Sarūjī experiences all the above forms of *inqiṭāʿ* Ibn Wahb mentions. He fails to develop his description of Basra, he is incapable of beguiling his audience, and he is too proud to admit his defeat. The first two types of incapacitation are noted in brief by the narrator, who says that al-Sarūjī "checked his tongue and restrained his eloquence, so that the eyes of the people were directed upon him, and he was even suspected of inability to proceed; and accused of falling short"[65] (*khazana lisānah wa-khaṭama bayānah ḥatta ḥudija bi-l-abṣār wa-qurifa bi-l-iqṣār wa-wusima bi-l-istiqṣār*).[66] Furthermore, too proud to admit his failure, al-Sarūjī changes the topic of the conversation and talks about his past glories and former ability to charm, he says:

> ask the East and the West, the high and the low. Ask each company and assembly, each tribe and troop, or seek a plain account of me from those who report news. From those who are wont to recite in evening colloquies. From the guides of caravans, and from skilful diviners, that you may know how many a ravine I have traversed. How often I have overcome obstacles, and braved fatal perils, and fought fights.[67]

Evidently, all these achievements are a distant memory now that he is old and frail. Al-Sarūjī confesses:

> But all this was when I was as yet like a green bough. When my flowing locks were raven-black, and the garment of manhood was new upon me. But now my skin is withered, and my stature bowed, and the dark night of my locks bespangled with white, and nothing remains but regret.[68]

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[64] Ibn Wahb al-Kātib, *al-Burhān fī wujūh al-bayān*, edited by Ḥifnī Muḥammad Sharaf (Cairo: Maktabat al-Shabāb, 1969),194.
[65] al-Ḥarīrī, *Makamat,* 460. I use Preston's translation here, and in the two instances that follow, because this part of al-*Maqāma al-Baṣriyya* is missing from Steingass's translation.
[66] al-Ḥarīrī, *Maqāmāt,* 587.
[67] al-Ḥarīrī, *Makamat,* 461.
[68] Ibid, 462.

ولكن فَرَطَ ما فَرَطَ والغُصْنُ رَطِيب والفُؤاد غِرْبِيب وبَرْد الشباب قَشِيب، فأمَّا الآن وقد اِستَشَنَّ الأَدِيم وتَأَوَّد القَوِيم واِستَنَار الليل البَهِيم فَلَيْسَ إلّا النَدَم.[69]

In a way, these words can be described as a last testament, too. They announce the retirement of a trickster from his ways. From this repentance issues a new person, one who breaks with deception and asks for prayers and forgiveness instead of charity or reward. In this episode, the people of Basra are similar to the fetus in al-*Maqāma al-ʿUmāniyya*, in that they silence the trickster by not falling for his deception and force him into isolation (staying on the island or returning to Sarūj). The implication here is that every time Abū Zayd al-Sarūjī experiences failure and incapacitation, he cuts away social connections and chooses isolation. It is as if the trickster is incapable of being part of a social gathering where he cannot be eloquently superior to the others. In a way, he is similar to al-Khaṭṭābī and al-Tawḥīdī who opted for isolation when their contemporaries failed to notice their eminence and intelligence (see Chapter 7).

Of all the cities al-Sarūjī visits, only Basra and its people get a praising description, and it is the only city to render the trickster silent. This might be explained by al-Ḥarīrī's lack of traveling or by a desire on his part to pay homage to his homeland. In al-Sarūjī's speech, Basra is depicted as a vibrant metropolitan center, a crossroads where all kinds of people meet to exchange goods and knowledge. This explains why its people are immune to al-Sarūjī's trickery and deception, as they have already been exposed to numerous orators, to the point of building a tolerance against the words of Abū Zayd al-Sarūjī. Defeated by the Basrians and noticing his obsoleteness, al-Sarūjī declares his remorse for past deeds and returns to his newly liberated home city of Sarūj. He returns as a new person, a pious man who hardly speaks and whose words are limited to worshipping God.

3. Beyond Closure

In light of Noël Carroll's definition of closure as a moment that gives "the impression that exactly the point where the work does end is just the right point, [and that to] have gone beyond that point would have been an error,"[70] informs the present reading, in the sense that al-Ḥarīrī could have ended his *maqāmāt* with *al-Maqāma al-Sāsāniyya*, in which his trickster gives his last testament cynically and proudly. Instead, the author of the *Ḥarīriyya* goes "beyond the point" and presents the readers with yet another ending, one in which al-Sarūjī loses his tongue, curiosity, sense of humor, and gains a novel kind of peace of mind.

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[69] al-Ḥarīrī, *Maqāmāt,* 590.
[70] Carroll, "Narrative Closure," 2.

When al-Ḥārith ibn Hammām finally hears news about Abū Zayd al-Sarūjī, he travels to Sarūj and finds him in the mosque praying. Instead of welcoming him or inquiring about him or about how he managed to find him, al-Sarūjī "greeted him with his forefinger without uttering a word of talk, nor asking for tidings old or new. Then he proceeded with his recitation from the Koran."[71] In this new life, al-Sarūjī speaks to people only through signs. He saves all his words and rhetorical prowess for worshiping God. Instead of literary speeches, playful lipograms, and riddles, he shifts to *munājāt* (intimate prayers), *haynama* (murmuring softly), groans, sighs, and tears. The intimate nature of these pleas forces al-Ḥārith ibn Hammām to eavesdrop on al-Sarūjī to record his last verses. Similar to most envois in the *Ḥarīriyya*, Abū Zayd's last poem is about home. However, instead of Sarūj, which is now stable and independent, the newly repentant man looks forward to another home, meaning the grave, which he describes as follows:

Tomorrow will thy dwelling be
the bottom of a lonely grave;
Alas, that house of sore dismay,
the station, waste, disconsolate,
…
A house whose inmate will be seen
encompassed, after ample space,
Within the bond of cubits three,
to hold him in their narrow grip.
Who there alights, it matters not
if he a wit be or a fool.[72]

وأنّ مَثْواكَ غَدًا فِي قَعْرِ لَحْدٍ بَلْقَع
آهًا لَهُ بِيْتُ البَلَى والمَنزِل القَفْرُ الخَلا
…
بيتٌ يُرَى مَنْ أُودِعَه قد ضَمَّه واستُودِعه
بعدَ الفَضَاءِ والسِّعَة قَيْدُ ثَلاثِ أذْرُعٍ
لا فَرْقَ أَنْ يَحُلَّه دَاهِيةٌ أو أَبْلَه[73]

[71] al-Ḥarīrī, *Assemblies II,* 182.
[72] Ibid, 184.
[73] al-Ḥarīrī, *Maqāmāt,* 599-600.

Addressing his tormented self, al-Sarūjī portrays his future home as inevitable, narrow, and lonesome, but just and fair. Similar to *al-Maqāma al-ʿUmāniyya*, space shrinks gradually in this *maqāma*, from an open arena to the mosque, and finally to the grave. The shrinking prepares the reader for a different Abū Zayd al-Sarūjī, one who is pious, reflective, ascetic, and anxious for God's mercy and forgiveness. Observing his companion's new life, al-Ḥārith ibn Hammām realizes that al-Sarūjī's "heart was imbued with the love of seclusion"[74] (*ushriba qalbuh hawā al-infirād*).[75] Consequently, he decides to depart and leave the repentant to his incessant prayers. In *al-Maqāma al-ʿUmāniyya* and *al-Naṣībiyya,* Abū Zayd al-Sarūjī avoids desolation by insisting on companionship. In *al-Maqāma al-Baṣriyya*, however, he bids farewell to the narrator telling him briefly to "Keep death before thy eye, and this is the parting between me and thee"[76] (*ijʿal al-mawt nuṣb ʿaynayk, wa-hadhā firāq baynī wa-baynak*).[77]

Despite the piety of his new conduct and his solemn seriousness, al-Sarūjī seems unable to achieve tranquility or peace, due to unrecoverable remorse and guilt. Cooperson comments on the trickster's state of mind in *al-Baṣriyya,* saying:

> Whatever the case, Imposture 50, read on its own, does not appear to describe conversion to a state of mystical bliss. Abū Zayd prays almost incessantly, as if determined to power through to direct experience of God; and though he is supposed to reach the special state of consciousness characteristic of the Sufis, he never seems at peace, nor is he suffused with love for his fellow creatures. In the end the deficiency may be al-Ḥarīrī's. For all his cleverness—indeed, perhaps, because of it—he may have lacked the skill, or the will, to depict genuine religious feeling.[78]

In my view, al-Sarūjī's insistence on praying and his failure to achieve calmness are not signs of deficiency or lack of genuine piety, but rather a direct consequence of experiencing *inqiṭāʿ*. Throughout the *Ḥarīriyya*, al-Sarūjī always manages to express his mind and influence his public. Facing the Basrians, however, he fails to fully tap into his oratorical and rhetorical skills. As a result, he surrenders all modes of discourse for the single aim of developing a convincing pious discourse that brings about salvation. Another reason for the prayers could be al-Sarūjī's desolation and need for an interlocutor after he loses his public due to *inqiṭāʿ*, and his narrator due to repentance. However, the one thing that Abū Zayd does not seem to

[74] al-Ḥarīrī, *Assemblies II,* 185.
[75] al-Ḥarīrī, *Maqāmāt*, 601.
[76] al-Ḥarīrī, *Assemblies II,* 185.
[77] al-Ḥarīrī, *Maqāmāt,* 602.
[78] Cooperson, *Impostures*, 518.

lose at the end is his strangerhood (isolation, desolation) and his existential angst towards both life and death.

Conclusion: End of the Superhero

Despite their obvious differences, the four *maqāmāt* are associated through the themes of settlement, closure, stability, and weakness. Al-Sarūjī whose rewards and tricks occur on the road, suffers greatly whenever he decides to stay. His weakness manifests in different forms in the aforementioned episodes, both physically (Mt. 19 & 49) and spiritually (Mt. 39 & 50). In all these *maqāmāt*, Abū Zayd al-Sarūjī is overwhelmed by his lonesomeness and seeks safety. In the *ʿUmāniyya* he runs from the perilousness of life to the isolation of the island. Faced with looming death in the *Naṣībiyya,* al-Sarūjī holds to his guests and refuses to be left behind. In the *Sāsāniyya* he engages with all kinds of literature, putting forth the argument that his and his progeny's place is in the midst of the Banū Sāsān, living according to their ways. Finally, in the *Baṣriyya*, al-Sarūjī prays incessantly to seek some comfort in the presence of God. In all these episodes, al-Sarūjī is not a "superhero" who is "unbeatable in all senses,"[79] but rather a stranger suffering agony and desolation, as well as solitude and isolation. In the episodes in which he is on the road, he encounters people who scold and banish him, he lives in exile, and suffers from a constant feeling of longing, but at least he makes a living and enjoys his freedom. When al-Sarūjī gives this mobility away, however, he suffers desertion and remains alone. Even the narrator, who constantly begs for al-Sarūjī's companionship in the past, leaves once he realizes that his trickster is no longer a "trader of the strange." In the *Ḥarīriyya*, the experience of *ghurba* on the road is frustrating and loaded with misery, rejection, and homesickness, but at home, it is equally painful. In all cases, be it in exile or in the homeland, Abū Zayd al-Sarūjī remains a restless being. Stranger at home. Stranger elsewhere. Stranger everywhere.

[79] Hämeen-Anttila employs these two expressions in the course of studying the *Ḥarīriyya*'s hero. See *Maqama*, 167.

Conclusion

Of Readers and Strangers

Forty years ago, in 1983, Kilito describes the status of the *maqāma* genre in his PhD dissertation not so differently from the current characterization of the genre today: an object that "has been for a long time exhibited in a museum gathering dust inch by inch. Occasionally, tourists or local visitors come to contemplate it, shaking their heads in discontent, or puffing their chests in vainglory."[1] Kilito then continues: ''What are we to do with al-Hamadhānī or al-Ḥarīrī?''[2] This question which blends helplessness and irritation, summarizes in a way the main questions which initiated this project. How can we relate to premodern language and *adab* in the present day? What are we to do with a disinherited genre that is limited currently to belle-lettres and teaching Arabic? What are we to do with two literary figures who lost their strangeness and playfulness and settled in the permanent display of literary *turāth*, provoking a great deal of vanity and discontent and modest critical engagement?

Following the current shift in *turāth* scholarship that engages more critically and actively with the part of a literary heritage that has long been dismissed (See Introduction), I decided to address the *Ḥarīriyya* in this project by returning to premodern readers, who appreciated the genre for centuries, who shared al-Ḥarīrī's taste for strangeness, and who cooperated with the *Ḥarīriyya*'s game of riddles, allusions, masks, codes, and wordplay. This is to understand what charmed them in the genre in the first place, and to study the work through their eyes, emphasizing strangeness and strangerhood, and examining the literary and cultural context which gave birth to the *Ḥarīriyya*'s language and motifs.

The answer which the premodern readers of the *maqāmāt* and the *Ḥarīriyya* provided was that to them, the stranger and more cognitively stimulating a text was, the more valuable they regard it and the more engaged they were in reading it. Using strangeness, chameleonism, ambiguity, riddles, and *ghurba* the *Ḥarīriyya* met the premodern literary need for ambiguity and demonstrated a paradigm of cooperation between the receiver of strangeness and its composer. This cooperation ended between reader and oeuvre when the scholarship stopped understanding the work according to its own terms, *Zeitgeist*, and context of production and decided to read it within categories of fiction, morals, and language. The *Ḥarīriyya*'s complex structure, strangeness, and ambiguity were dealt a hand of invisibility and estrangement. From the 18th

[1] Kīlīṭū, *al-Maqāmāt,* 8.
[2] Ibid.

and 19th centuries on, *Maqāmāt al-Ḥarīrī* was no longer a collection of episodic journeys to collect rare accounts and curious language, but rather a strange work that is hard to understand or contextualize. Despite the perplexity and condemnation, the *Ḥarīriyya* did not disappear entirely from the scene, now and then playful readers, such as Rückert, al-Shidyāq, Bayram al-Tūnsī, and Cooperson, appeared on the literary scene offering interesting adaptations of the genre and al-Ḥarīrī's chameleon trickster.

Readership, premodern and modern, playful and serious, offered me a thread to find the central concepts of this project: strangeness, language, space, trickery, ambiguity, and stranger-hood. They have also provided me with the thread to develop the optimal approach to study an ambiguous work, which was once described as inimitable (*muʿjiz*) and later as perplexing and problematic. The approach has consisted in studying both the cultural context that gave birth to the genre's constituent literary elements and examining how the trickster used his linguistic erudition and strangeness to systematically deceive and ridicule the literati and also to express his own *ghurba* and outsiderness.

This double examination of the *Ḥarīriyya* and its context generated several important findings. The first is the double role of the educated elite as an object of mockery and the main audience of the work. Through the relentless chase after the unattainable chameleon trickster, al-Ḥarīrī represents the taste of his time and his contemporaries' fascination with everything exotic, transgressive, and marvelous. Shrewd and chameleon, he decided to mock the taste of his readers while contributing to it. Al-Ḥarīrī thus places the material that is most sought after in the mouth of Abū Zayd al-Sarūjī who constantly takes money from the educated literati, steals their possessions, manipulates them, and leaves them unfulfilled and wanting more. More than half of the episodes feature fictionalized literati who are always anonymous, naïve, and easily duped by words and lies. The narrator is relatively better, for he does recognize the truth of the trickster eventually, but he is as obsessed with *adab* and curious accounts as all the elite and cannot reflect on the uselessness of his collected material. In every encounter with the trickster, the educated audience fails, giving money, garments, and she-camels, to obtain so little of what they want or nothing at all. It is hard to determine al-Ḥarīrī's positionality towards his audience. Perhaps he wanted to ridicule their taste, perhaps he wanted to make use of their obsession with the rare and exotic, or perhaps he wanted to mess with them and show them their real faces in *adab*. In any case, just as his trickster, al-Ḥarīrī made a fortune from success-

fully selling the elite *adab* that mocked them. Once he published his *Maqāmāt,* al-Ḥarīrī transformed from a local clerk to a rich man who owned eighteen thousand palm trees.[3] The success of the *Ḥarīriyya* confirms that the educated not only did not mind the criticism but enjoyed and appreciated reading a work ridiculing them as long as it provides literary and linguistic curiosities. This is another proof of their playfulness and captivation with humor and ambiguity even at their own expense.

While al-Ḥarīrī's intentions are hard to decipher, his trickster's aims are more discernible, especially while confronting the educated elite, who scold, belittle, and banish him for his looks, then beg him to remain once they discover his encyclopedic knowledge of rare vocabulary, deceptive figures of speech, unsolvable riddles, and constrained compositions. Almost every encounter with the literati is a chance and opportunity for the trickster to use strangeness and ambiguity against those who are entirely occupied with appearance and embellishment to reflect on meaning. Strangeness is thus a double tool in the *Ḥarīriyya*: it incites the literati to listen to the trickster despite his miserable looks and to reflect on their attitude towards curiosities and usage of language. This Reflection, however, is never achieved within the *Maqāmāt*. The narrator stubbornly insists that *adab* is the best of vocations, regardless of how many times the trickster tries to teach him "that adorned speeches satisfy not him who is a-hunger"[4] (*innā al-asjāʿ lā tushbiʿ man jāʿ*).[5] Moreover, in the final *maqāma,* when the narrator realizes that Abū Zayd al-Sarūjī has repented and settled in Sarūj, and can no longer be a chameleon trickster who changes masks and adapts to any social context, nor a stranger who provides exotic material, he simply bids farewell to Abū Zayd al-Sarūjī and departs once for all.

There is a remarkable resemblance between the narrator of the *Ḥarīriyya* and the premodern readers of al-Ḥarīrī. Both were captivated by the strange, the wondrous, the unattainable, and the exotic. Both were drawn to what they cannot understand nor grasp and were both ready to chase it, metaphorically and physically. Postponing the recognition scene until the end of every episode, and delaying repentance and truth till the final *maqāma*, reveals that the *Ḥarīriyya* perceived revealing truth and providing clarity as putting an end to the pursuit, the narrative, and the reading. *Maqāmāt al-Ḥarīrī* is thus only possible as long as the feeling of strangeness, unfamiliarity, chameleonism, and ambiguity persists. The moment the trickster surrenders his chameleonism and becomes a good person is the moment he leaves exile and

[3] al-Qiftī, *Inbāh,* vol. III, 25.
[4] al-Ḥarīrī, *Assemblies II*, 131.
[5] al-Ḥarīrī, *al-Maqāmāt,* 494.

returns home and the moment he stops composing *adab* and turns to prayer; it is the moment at which the *Ḥarīriyya* ends.

The second main finding of this thesis is concerned with a second ending for the *Ḥarīriyya*, this time outside the text. While the audience inside the *Maqāmāt* desert the trickster/stranger when they exhaust his strangeness, the audience of the modern period abandoned him for the opposite reason: because he was too strange. In the 19th and 20th centuries, when the modernist readers who want to reduce "the heterogeneity of things and bringing it under control,"[6] encountered the *Maqāmāt,* they were overwhelmed with its elaborate form, laborious composition, and heavy veils. Thus, they decided to study it in pieces, through rigid categories such as language, form, and morality. They objected to the strangeness and ambiguity of the work and translated episodes that are less problematic linguistically and morally (see Chapter 2). In this sense, both the *Ḥarīriyya* and its history of the reception is a dramatization of the act of mis/reading strangeness. One cannot resist thinking: what would have been of the *Ḥarīriyya* in the modern period had al-Sarūjī repented a bit earlier in the narrative? Would the Orientalists and the *Nahḍawīs* cut him slack had he been less ambiguous?

Umberto Eco argues that every literary text is "a lazy machine asking the reader to do some of its work."[7] The *Ḥarīriyya* is an especially lazy text. Its complex combination of rare vocabulary, *adab*, rhetorical excess, masks, and journeys forces the readers to make a great effort to understand it, a cognitive process that involves deciphering the truth and playing with the possibilities of language. The *Ḥarīriyya* needs cooperative readers who can appreciate its tactics and plots and utilize them elsewhere; if not in life, then at least in the next literary text they encounter. The *Ḥarīriyya* presents to readers two possible modes of reception from which they can choose: first, the uncritical audience who is deceived and manipulated by the trickster, offering him praise and rewards, and second, the narrator who actively pursues strangeness, falls temporarily for the trick, but also speaks, discusses, and eventually reveals the truth. Through these two modes of reception, the actual reader of the *Ḥarīriyya* learns that ambiguity is unescapable, definitive meanings do not exist, and reading strangeness equals an unyielding and continuous process of learning and chasing knowledge. The readers have the choice between an uncritical and passive reception, which equals deception and being the object of mockery, and a critical and active reading which promises meaning yet never offers it. In both

[6] Bruns, ''Toward a Random Theory of Prose,'' ix.
[7] Umberto Eco, *Six Walks in the Fictional Woods* (Cambridge: Harvard university press, 2004), 3.

cases, grasping "the meaning" of the words, and revealing "the true" face and intentions of the speaker are impossible. This impossibility, however, is not a fault or a shortcoming, but rather the engine that keeps the acts of reading, interpreting, deciphering, and discussing alive. In this sense, the *Ḥarīriyya* is not just a literary text that makes use of strangeness, but also one that shows its readers that reading strangeness is a continuous act of chasing and traveling.

The third main finding of this dissertation concerns traveling, estrangement, and strangerhood. Traveling, as with all the other motifs and components of the *Ḥarīriyya*, is ambiguous. On the one hand, it is the medium through which one can find curiosities, strangeness, and marvels. On the other hand, it is a painful experience involving banishment, isolation, alienation, and punishment. The journey of the narrator is always on the positive side, it continues as long as rare and *gharīb* words, curious anecdotes, and unsolvable riddles are out there. The journey of the trickster, in contrast, is more complicated and ambivalent. He is a refugee whose homeland is occupied, and a rootless deceiving figure who runs the risk of identification everywhere. To him, the road equals survival and opportunity, yet also exile and isolation. The *Ḥarīriyya* emphasizes the trickster's experience of space and develops him as a round character with a rich history, recollections, and worries. In contrast, the narrator is described minimally and used strictly in his capacity as a narrator, and hardly as a protagonist who contributes to events. As for the reflections on arrival and journeying, they are more generic than personal, since they are attributed to whoever happens to narrate the episode.[8]

While al-Hamadhānī limits his strangers to the road and places of "transit,"[9] meaning hotels, bars, and plazas, al-Ḥarīrī allows his trickster to occasionally experience stability. This experience, however, is never reassuring, relaxing, or peaceful. It is at home where the trickster encounters spiritual *ghurba*, weakness, sickness, and existential angst. If there was one lesson to learn from *Maqāmāt al-Ḥarīrī*, it is that strangers are better off on the road. Correspondingly, one cannot call the final return home a happy end. In Sarūj, the trickster replaces the physical *ghurba* with a spiritual one. Settled at home, he leaves the dangers of the road and travels back and forth between his past misdeeds and possible future punishment in the grave and the afterlife. He agonizes about the end and lives in perpetual remorse. In the *Ḥarīriyya*, where strangeness, ambiguity, and trickery dominate, strangerhood equals survival and material gain, while

[8] See the section "*Al-Maqāma al-Ḥarāmiyya*" in Chapter 8.
[9] See Monroe's statement in the opening of Chapter 9.

residency represents a state of threat, torment, and weakness. Losing his journey and chameleonism, the trickster becomes similar to al-Tawḥīdī's stranger:[10] afraid, invisible, and unrecognized. In one word: a "nobody."

The motif of *ghurba* is more developed in the *Ḥarīriyya* than in previous *maqāma* works. *Ghurba* emphasizes the difference between he who chooses the journey and the quest for curiosities, which is to say, the narrator, and he who is forced into strangerhood and cannot but be the trader of strangeness, which is to say, the trickster. It also highlights the former's privilege and gullibility and the latter's shrewd use of a condition he cannot escape. Last, but not least, *ghurba* accentuates the preeminent element of strangeness which manifests in every aspect of the *Ḥarīriyya*, including its styles, discourses, compositions, vocabularies, protagonists, performances, and journeys.

One can appreciate the importance of *ghurba* in the *Ḥarīriyya* by imagining a *Ḥarīriyya* in which Abū Zayd al-Sarūjī is not a stranger, but an *adīb* who never left his home. In this case, al-Sarūjī would not be part of the *Banū Sāsān* tribe and *Maqāmāt al-Ḥarīrī* would lose two episodes in which al-Sarūjī displays the tribe's ethos and identifies as one of them (Mt. 30 & 49). The *Ḥarīriyya* would also drop all references to the different geographical locations and most of the envois in which the trickster expresses his *ghurba* and homesickness. The narrator would have to stop his quests since their main purpose is to encounter Abū Zayd al-Sarūjī and replace the description of the journey with another motif. As for al-Sarūjī, whose identity would be common knowledge, acting as a trickster would be almost impossible, his homesickness and blaming time for his misdeeds would also change in this context and adopt more home-friendly topics. In the absence of the journey, *Maqāmāt al-Ḥarīrī* would have to drop chameleonism, masks, deceit, and the *anagnorisis* scenes. By becoming one of the settled locals, Abū Zayd al-Sarūjī would lose his access to the outside and its exotic products and curious anecdotes, he would lose his role as ''the trader of the strange,'' and become one amongst many anonymous literati which the *Ḥarīriyya* mocks.

The readers of this alternative *Ḥarīriyya*, if anybody bothered to read such a work, would be left with a list of *gharīb* vocabulary, literary speeches, and lipograms. Accordingly, they would have no access to the realms of strangers and *maqāmāt,* but to a parallel one; perhaps that of didactic anthologies and writing manuals, or perhaps that of literary *majālis* in which intellectuals meet to discuss poetry and demonstrate erudition. In other words, the readers

[10] See Chapter 7.

would be left with the *adab*, learnedness, and rhetoric, and lose humor, chameleonism, empathy, fiction, and strangeness. In this case, *Maqāmāt al-Ḥarīrī* would be identical to its mainstream definition nowadays, a corpus of ornate language, archaic registers, learned styles, and rarest of vocabulary. If this had been the case, it would have been forgotten, never copied, never spreading.

In conclusion, the *Ḥarīriyya* is only possible as long as it features a bird of passage who passes through but never settles, a chameleon trickster who changes masks, registers, and rhetorical tools to make a profit and survive, and more importantly, a reader who is willing to follow and cooperate with both. A chameleon and playful work such as the *Ḥarīriyya*, critiquing stability, familiarity, and clarity, and making use of all kinds of strangeness and ambiguity can only be read by recipients who accept the pursuit of meaning, embrace ambiguity, and join the realms of strangers.

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