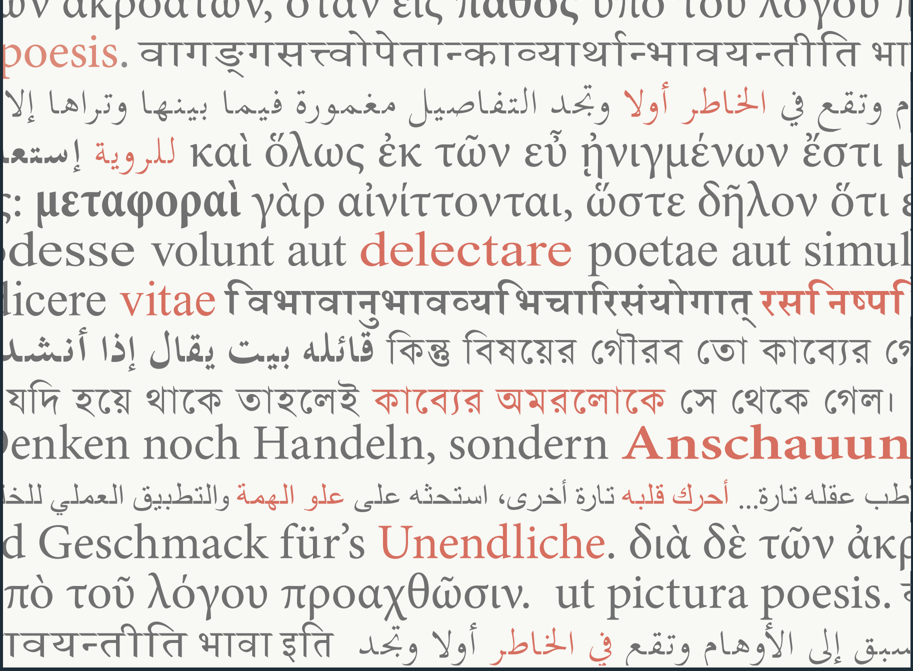

RELIGION AND AESTHETIC EXPERIENCE

Drama—Sermons—Literature

Sabine Dorpmüller, Jan Scholz, Max Stille, Ines Weinrich
Editors

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Religion and Aesthetic Experience:
Drama—Sermons—Literature

Heidelberg Studies on Transculturality – 4

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Bibliographic information published by the Deutsche Nationalbibliothek
The Deutsche Nationalbibliothek lists this publication in the Deutsche Nationalbibliografie. Detailed bibliographic data are available on the Internet at http://dnb.dnb.de.

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The electronic, open access version of this work is permanently available on Heidelberg University Publishing's website: https://heiup.uni-heidelberg.de.
urn: urn:nbn:de:bsz:16-heiup-book-416-3
doi: https://doi.org/10.17885/heiup.416

Text © 2018, by the authors.

ISSN 2365-7987 (Print)
ISSN 2365-7995 (eISSN)

ISBN 978-3-947732-02-9 (Softcover)
ISBN 978-3-947732-01-2 (Hardcover)
ISBN 978-3-947732-03-6 (PDF)

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Acknowledgements

This volume is the outcome of the international workshop “Aesthetics of the Sublime: Religious texts and rhetorical theory,” held in Cairo in December 2012. In this short time, stimulating ideas formed that influenced many of us well beyond our workshop and our joint excursion to a practitioner of rhetoric and religion. For this, we would first of all like to thank the intellectually stimulating and personally wonderful participants. Second, we express our gratitude to the Cluster of Excellence “Asia and Europe in a Global Context,” Heidelberg University, and the Orient-Institut Beirut, Max Weber Foundation, for supporting the workshop logistically and financially.

Once more, we thank the authors of this volume for staying with us even though we encountered unforeseen delays in the publication process. We are honoured and grateful that the editors of the series “Heidelberg Studies on Transculturality” included our volume in their series. We hope that we have duly implemented the suggestions of Andrea Hacker and the two anonymous reviewers. We owe thanks to Angela Roberts for her careful copy-editing, and to Russell Ó Ríagáin and his team for their meticulous work on the manuscript.

Ines Weinrich would like to thank the Käte Hamburger Kolleg “Dynamics in the History of Religions between Asia and Europe,” at the Ruhr-Universität Bochum for inviting her as a guest researcher during the academic year focusing on “Religion and the Senses.” A good part of the editorial work was undertaken during that year, and her own contribution has benefited much from the discussions with colleagues and fellows at the Käte Hamburger Kolleg.

Jan Scholz and Max Stille thank the Cluster of Excellence “Asia and Europe in a Global Context“ for including their mini cluster “Listening Communities: Islamic Sermons as a Transcultural Medium” and giving them the opportunity to conduct research in a dynamic research environment over a span of three years.

Jan Scholz would like to thank the Orient-Institut Beirut and its then director Prof. Dr. Stefan Leder for giving him the opportunity to prepare the workshop in Cairo and thus allowing him to start his research in Egypt.

Max Stille thanks the Center for the History of Emotions, directed by Ute Frevert at the Max Planck Institute for Human Development, Berlin, for being a new home during the last phase of this project.

Sabine Dorpmüller has accompanied our project from the first stage of planning. Unfortunately, her responsibilities as managing director of the Arab-German Young Academy of Sciences and Humanities (AGYA) did not allow her to continue the work in the project to its very end. We miss her

contribution on Ibn Nubāta, which complemented the section on Islamic sermons during our workshop.

We are particularly grateful that Annette Wilke completed her contribution despite her difficult circumstances. We dedicate this volume to her with our very best wishes.

Jan Scholz, Max Stille, Ines Weinrich

Introduction

When the Arab traveller Ibn Jubayr (d. 1217) visited Baghdad in 1184, he attended a preaching assembly of the famous scholar Ibn al-Jawzī (d. 1201). He was deeply impressed and thus attended no less than three preaching sessions during his short stay. Ibn al-Jawzī's preaching performances were true mass events at that time, carefully staged—including spatial arrangement, attire, props, and co-actors—and enthusiastically received by the audience who were willing to pay high prices for seats. Ibn Jubayr informs us about the remarkable talents of this preacher and the dramatic responses he evoked:

> On his [Ibn al-Jawzī] ascending the pulpit, the readers, who numbered more than twenty, began to recite the Koran. Two or three of them spoke a verse of the Koran in a moving and impassioned rhythm, and when they had done, another group of the same number recited another verse. So they went on, alternately reciting verses, from various chapters, until they had ended the reading. The verses they gave were so similar that even a man of ready mind could scarce tell the number or name the order; yet when they had finished, this great and remarkable imam, passing speedily into his disquisition and pouring into the shells of our ears the pearls of his utterance, punctuated his discourse at each paragraph with the rhyming opening words of the verses recited, giving them in the order of their reading without prematurity or deferment, and ending with the rhyme of the last. If anyone present at his sermon had thought to name what was recited verse by verse in the proper order he would have failed. What then of one who fits them rapidly and extemporarily to a fine sermon! [. . .]
>
> When he had ended his sermon, he offered some gentle exhortations and talked of some clear events in his memory, so that hearts were struck with longing, spirits melted with ardour, and the sobs of weeping resounded. The penitent raised loud their voices and fell on him like moths on a lamp. [. . .] Some fainted and he raised them to him in his arms. 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.[1]

This account by Ibn Jubayr emphasises the importance of aesthetic experience in the religious field. Ibn Jubayr does not tell us *what* the preacher says but instead *how* he says it and provides a meticulous account of the audience's response, as well as a variety of aesthetic experiences:[2] the overall staging, the quality of the Qurʾānic recitation, the memory and poetic mastery of the preacher, his ability to take up the rhymes of the Qurʾānic verses and to stir emotions with his exhortation.

This volume argues for the value of aesthetic experience as a category within transcultural studies. To illustrate this view, our introduction is organised into two parts: In the first part, our first step will be to define our approach to transculturality and hint at the potential of assessing aesthetic experience, a category that gained importance during the twentieth century chiefly in the field of literary theory, but also in the field of religious studies.[3] In a second step, we will argue that from a transcultural perspective, aesthetic experience is particularly important, since it focuses on the interaction between object and subject—that is, between artwork and recipient, poem and listener, or sermon and believer. Our interest lies with aesthetic experience in the religious field; thus, this volume assembles discussions about the interaction between aesthetic and religious experience, which takes place in and between different cultures and in many cases involves shared discussions. The third step in this first part of the introduction will discuss genres as constitutive of transcultural processes, and as transcultural contact zones where mutual influences and cross-fertilisations take place. Indeed, Islamic preaching provides a concrete example in which genres mediate transcultural processes.

The introduction's second part outlines in further detail the fundamental categories and traditions of analysis. We will emphasise the overlaps between aesthetic and religious experience and work out the relevance of emotions in the processes of religious mediation and performance. Finally, this introduction will outline the contributions and thematic structure of the volume as a whole.

---

[1] Ibn Jubayr, *Riḥlat Ibn Jubayr* (Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, n.d.), 197–198; Ibn Jubayr, *The Travels of Ibn Jubayr,* trans. Roland Broadhurst (London: Jonathan Cape, 1952), 230–231.

[2] The experience of preaching as a multi-sensorial event and its confluence with theatre has been addressed by Sabine Dorpmüller. Sabine Dorpmüller, "Preaching Performances Revisted: The Narrative Restaging of Sermons in the Travelogues of Ibn Jubayr (d. 1217)," in *Performing Religion: Actors, Contexts, and Texts. Case studies on Islam*, ed. Ines Weinrich (Würzburg: Ergon, 2016).

[3] Georg Maag, "Erfahrung," in *Ästhetische Grundbegriffe: Historisches Wörterbuch in sieben Bänden*, vol. 2, ed. Karlheinz Barck et al. (Stuttgart: Metzler, 2001); Jürgen Mohn, "Religionsaisthetik: Religion(en) als Wahrnehmungsräume,“ in *Religionswissenschaft*, ed. Michael Stausberg (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2012).

Transculturality: Two definitions

One main aim when focusing on the dynamics of transculturality is to question an outdated conceptualisation of culture in which a culture is characterised by three main elements: “social homogenization, ethnic consolidation and intercultural delimitation.”[4] Instead, the transcultural approach looks into the intertwinedness of cultures. Transcultural exchange is not a static quality, however; cultural difference and commonalities are instead continuously renegotiated. These processes involve dynamics of selective appropriation, mediation, translation, re-contextualisation, and re-interpretation.[5]

Roughly speaking, one can distinguish two understandings of transculturality. In a first understanding, transculturality can refer to the fact that an object or an artefact is constituted by different influences or traditions, thus transcending cultural borders. In addition to this first understanding, the term transculturality can be used “to signal that a topic is analysed across cultural borders.”[6] The topic of this volume—aesthetic experience—designates a central process of human apprehension of the world. Aesthetic experience constitutes a central concern of reflection in the realm of several religions and allows for drawing on theoretical approaches stemming from different cultural contexts.

Much of the discussion of transculturality focuses on its prefix. The differences between trans-, inter-, and multiculturality—in which manners are cultures transcended, connected, and entangled—and the dynamics of the new prefix have been reasonably established. However, as Flüchter and Grüner note,[7] the second part of the word transcultural figures less prominently in these discussions; the borderline, for example, between transculturality, transnationality, and transregionality is more difficult to define and is less discussed. Approaches from the perspective of disciplines concerned with the traditional fields of culture, such as literary studies, are not prominent within transcultural studies. With some notable exceptions from the disciplines of art history,[8] literary studies,[9] and philosophy,[10] many of the impulses for transcultural research do not stem from the field of aesthetic theory, but from economics and history.[11] When concerned with literature, transcultural approaches thus far have often formed general surveys that do not take into account the aesthetic processes but focus instead on circulations of books as objects and on the migration of their authors.[12] The present volume rests largely on the assumption that approaches from literary and rhetorical theory can make a meaningful contribution to the larger transcultural enterprise through their analytical grasp of cultural processes.

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[4] Wolfgang Welsch, “Transculturality—the Puzzling Form of Cultures Today,” in *Spaces of Culture: City, Nation, World*, ed. Mike Featherstone and Scott Lash (London: Sage, 1999), 194.

[5] Monica Juneja and Michael Falser, “Kulturerbe—Denkmalpflege: transkulturell. Eine Einleitung,” in *Kulturerbe und Denkmalpflege transkulturell: Grenzgänge zwischen Theorie und Praxis*, ed. Monica Juneja and Michael Falser (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2013), 19–20; Antje Flüchter and Jivanta Schöttli, “Introduction,” in *The Dynamics of Transculturality: Concepts and Institutions in Motion*, ed. Antje Flüchter and Jivanta Schüttli (Berlin: Springer, 2015).

[6] Wolfgang Welsch, “Transkulturalität,” in *Enzyklopädie Philosophie: In drei Bänden mit einer CD-ROM*, vol. 3, ed. Hans Jörg Sandkühler and Dagmar Borchers (Hamburg: Meiner, 2010), 2771. Our translation.

[7] Antje Flüchter and Frank Grüner, “Überlegungen zur Transkulturalität,” unpublished manuscript, Cluster of Excellence “Asia and Europe in a Global Context,” Heidelberg University 2010, 2.

Focusing on the aesthetic processes is a promising path for a transcultural approach to follow because the issue of aesthetic experience is linked to the issue of interaction. Aesthetic experience does not exist per se, but it does come into being through an interaction between an artwork and its recipient. This interaction between the artwork and its recipient can, of course, differ from one recipient to another, just as it can from one place to another. Within literary studies, for instance, the School of Constance has underlined this aspect. Furthermore, one has to keep in mind that within different traditions and at different points in time, different conceptions of aesthetic experience coexist. Therefore, we argue that a transcultural approach cannot be limited to analysing the different influences or traditions which constitute a given cultural artefact. One has to acknowledge that tracing certain elements of an artefact back to the originating traditions to which they belong perpetuates existing cultural categories to an extent.[13] In order to overcome a culture-bound view in favour of exploring cultural affiliations and cultural exchange, a transcultural approach emphasises common aspects or approaches in different cultural contexts without necessarily seeking to trace their origins. Doing so means acknowledging the simultaneous existence and importance of an artefact or a theory in different contexts, and eventually combining insights from different traditions.

We are thus operating with two dimensions of transculturality: first, the focus on the different influences which any given object is subject to, or which inform a given practice; and second, a dimension that highlights the existence of comparable concepts within different traditions. In the latter case, the researcher becomes a transcultural actor once he or she points to the potential of the different traditions of aesthetic theory that he or she combines. Each description is part of a transcultural process when it brings together tools from different traditions, trying to find the adequate tool for a given object of analysis. However, this does not endorse a researcher's use of universal categories without taking into account the cultural-historical actor's perspective. On the other hand, the approach in a transcultural setting cannot be limited to an "autochthonous" actor's perspective. Both need to engage in a hermeneutical dialogue. For example, it is not always helpful to contrast Greco-Roman and Arabic literary rhetorical theory (*ʿilm al-balāgha*).[14] Instead, depending on the aspects one wants to analyse, one can find useful tools in both traditions. In the present volume, Jan Scholz uses modern Arabic preaching manuals, which are influenced by Greco-Roman rhetorical theory, to analyse the dramatic staging in contemporary Islamic TV-sermons by ʿAmr Khālid. Analysing aspects of the aesthetic experience of the Qurʾān, Omaima Abou-Bakr bases her reflections on central concepts of *ʿilm al-balāgha* and draws on New Criticism as well. Max Stille discusses the overlaps of melodrama as an analytical as much as actor's term. And Tony Stewart employs the concept of the *imaginaire* to carve out the borders of the fictional in Bengali popular Sufi narratives.

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[8] Monica Juneja, “Can Art History be Made Global?,” Heinrich Wölfflin Lectures (University of Zürich, Zürich, Spring 2014).

[9] Hans Harder and Barbara Mittler, *Asian Punches: A Transcultural Affair* (Berlin: Springer, 2013).

[10] Welsch, “Transculturality.”

[11] For a historical approach, see Madeleine Herren, Martin Rüesch, and Christiane Sibille, *Transcultural History: Theories, Methods, Sources* (Berlin: Springer, 2012).

[12] Arianna Dagnino, “Global Mobility, Transcultural Literature, and Multiple Modes of Modernity,” *Transcultural Studies* 2 (2013).

[13] Jan Scholz, “Modern Arabic Rhetorical Manuals: A Transcultural Phenomenon,” in *Engaging Transculturality: Concepts, Key Terms, Case Studies*, ed. Laila Abu-Er-Rub, et al. (London: Routledge, 2018, in press).

TRANSCULTURALITY AND GENRE

As has been indicated by these examples, many of the volume's contributions are concerned with individual genres. The interaction of different genres constitutes a process not only comparable to transculturality, but, in many cases, also forms part of the transcultural processes themselves.[15] It is comparable in cases where previously separated genres are mixed, thus creating new trans-genres. Similar to transcultural processes, the transgression of genre boundaries is often accompanied by discussions regarding its permissibility and consequences. Genre-transgressions thus have to be regarded as explicitly transcultural in cases where the genre either stems from or is believed to stem from different cultural contexts or moves between the secular and the religious.

---

[14] The term Arabic rhetoric is usually used to distinguish the autochthonous Arabic tradition of literary rhetoric (*ʿilm al-balāgha*) from the Greek rhetoric tradition. One main difference between the two traditions is that while Greek rhetoric (in the following, the Greco-Roman tradition) includes performative reflections regarding the delivery of the speech, Arabic rhetoric is mostly a literary rhetoric that is more concerned with text-oriented aspects than with performative questions. Renate Würsch, "Rhetorik und Stilistik im arabischen Raum," in *Rhetorik und Stilistik: Ein internationales Handbuch historischer und systematischer Forschung (Rhetoric and Stylistics: An International Handbook of Historical and Systematic Research)*, vol. 2, ed. Ulla Fix, Andreas Gardt, and Joachim Knape (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2009), 2041; Scholz, "Modern Arabic Rhetorical Manuals."

[15] Hans Harder, "Migrant Literary Genres: Transcultural Moments and Scales of Transculturality," in *Engaging Transculturality: Concepts, Key Terms, Case Studies*, ed. Laila Abu-Er-Rub et al. (London: Routledge, 2018, in press).

In some of the case studies presented in this volume, the emotive power of more than one genre or aesthetic field are combined in order to achieve the utmost effect in the process of religious mediation. Theories of affects and the techniques on how to stir emotions move across genres and artistic traditions, and they are religiously encoded and decoded. Such examples in the present volume include the use of secular poetry in religious preaching, the musical delivery of religious poetry, the reflection of religious experience within the narrative structures of the novel, or the application of the theoretical framework of *rasa* in religious discourses.

The techniques and features of Arabic religious chanting (*inshād*) have entered global pop music and vice versa. Furthermore, strategies from (secular) music performances—for example, relying on musical connoisseurs or a behaviour codex for listeners—also apply to contemporary *inshād* performances, as some contemporary examples from Syria and Lebanon reveal. Ines Weinrich further demonstrates how one effect of the performed poetry builds on emotionally charged keywords which move across genres of poetry, prayer, and religious propositions.

The Egyptian author ʿAbd al-Ḥakīm Qāsim uses the genre of the novel—in modern times not a religious genre per se—to depict different types of religious experience. Susanne Enderwitz provides an analysis of his novel *Ayyām al-insān as-sabʿa* (The Seven Days of Man). In fact, the genre of the Arabic novel is itself the result of cultural contact: Arab authors who were well-acquainted with European literature introduced the Arabic novel to Egypt and the eastern Levant roughly at the turn of the twentieth century.[16] Writing in the 1960s, Qāsim makes use of a wide array of narrative techniques to make different religious experiences and life worlds manifest: language levels, chapter structure, and time arrangement.

Lore Knapp discusses shifts between religious and aesthetic experience in European aesthetic and more specifically in theatre theory and performance art. She claims that defining experiences as religious or aesthetic is rooted in culturally and historically specific understandings. Experiences called religious, she argues, can in other cultural contexts be understood as aesthetic. Similarly, but the other way around, Annette Wilke describes how schools of Indian aesthetics became models for devotional literature. Drama theory's terminology on aesthetic emotions, or *rasa*, was adopted in relation to aesthetic response and religious encoding, starting with the claim that theatre was the Veda for the common people. This later fed into religious discourse, most prominently in *Vaiṣṇava* theology. Transgressions between the religious and the aesthetic thus also occur within cultures.

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[16] Commonly, Muḥammad Ḥusayn Ḥaykal's *Zaynab* (published 1913) is credited with being the first Arabic novel; though this position is rivalled by a number of other authors and works. Hoda El Sadda argues that *Zaynab* prevailed because of its compatibility with the liberal national discourse on the modern nation. Hoda El Sadda, *Gender, Nation, and the Arabic Novel: Egypt 1892–2008* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012), xvii–xx.

Both examples reveal how transculturality can occur between a culture of theatre and religious culture.

In the case of the emergence of the Arabic poetic genre *badīʿiyya* in the fourteenth century, literary rhetoric (*ʿilm al-balāgha*) is combined with the act of composing praise poetry to the prophet Muḥammad. Suzanne Stetkevych analyses this case in depth. The most rhetorically powerful poem is also considered the most religiously effective poem and vice versa. Her example thus discusses the (ritual) efficacy of a poetic genre used within the religious field.

Tony Stewart shows how analysing Bengali popular narratives as a fiction genre allows us to look beyond the colonialist constructed notion that Muslim and Hindu are clear-cut political identities. He instead emphasises indigenous categories of identification (*musalmāni*, *hinduyāni*). Max Stille demonstrates that in contemporary popular preaching assemblies in Bangladesh, the preacher uses a special technique of chanting. This technique builds on a variety of aesthetical traditions that cross regions and cultural spheres—such as the Shiʿī mourning session (*majlis*), the Bengali story-telling tradition, or the Egyptian aesthetics of Qurʾānic recitation. Thus, both regional and supra-regional aesthetics are at work in shaping the style of popular preachers.

ISLAMIC PREACHING AND TRANSCULTURALITY

Against a backdrop of defining transculturality and considering the interaction between different genres, Islamic preaching can be understood as a transcultural practice from its very beginnings. It developed from the ancient practice of Arabian tribe spokesmen and is conceived as an oral and rhythmic performance. Tahera Qutbuddin has pointed out the importance of articulate speakers, whom Islamic societies revered and whose addresses were held up by later scholars as exemplars of eloquence.[17] In her contribution to this volume, Qutbuddin analyses the beauty and persuasive power of an early Arabic Islamic oration and its key aesthetic tools.

As a ritual, the Islamic Friday congregation was influenced by Christian and Jewish rituals, and it constituted itself as a particularly Islamic ritual over the course of the first Islamic years in acceptance of, but also in demarcation from, the Judeo-Christian tradition.[18] While these developments relate to the Islamic Friday ritual, of which the Friday sermon (*khuṭba*) is one element, Islamic preaching in a wider sense also offers interesting insights from a transcultural perspective. Islamic preaching is not just limited to the *khuṭba* as a part of the Friday prayer, it also includes non-liturgical preaching. In this volume, two examples of non-liturgical preaching are discussed: the Egyptian ʿAmr Khālid, an important representative of Islamic televangelism, and Bengali preaching assemblies (*waʿẓ maḥfil*s).

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[17] Tahera Qutbuddin, “Khuṭba: The Evolution of Early Arabic Oration,” in *Classical Arabic Humanities in Their Own Terms: Festschrift for Wolfhart Heinrichs,* ed. Beatrice Gruendler and Michael Cooperson (Leiden: Brill, 2008).

[18] Cf. Carl Heinrich Becker, “Die Kanzel im Kultus des alten Islam,” in *Orientalische Studien: Festschrift für Theodor Nöldeke zum siebzigsten Geburtstag*, vol. 1, ed. Carl Bezold (Gießen: Alfred Tölpelmann, 1906).

Transcultural processes shape both examples. ʿAmr Khālid's preaching style, discussed in depth by Jan Scholz, reveals the influence of Christian televangelist preachers, such as the American Billy Graham who became popular in the fifties.[19] It is in fact explicitly on the basis of such models of a new preaching style, with which ʿAmr Khālid was well acquainted,[20] that the phenomenon of the "Islamic televangelists" developed. This entailed different aspects, the most central of which was a break with traditional severe preaching where one major focus was to instil fear in listeners. The new preaching style, as represented by ʿAmr Khālid, is instead dominated by emotional techniques which often "function as emotional therapy."[21] This new style, however, is heavily medium dependent in that it relies on the crucial elements of a television broadcast—for instance frequent camera close-ups of the preacher's face—to meet the viewers' expectations.

Similar media-specific influences can be discerned in the case of the "24 hours Islamic International Channel" *Peace TV*, which was founded by the Mumbai-based physician Zakir Naik and currently broadcasts from Dubai in English and Hindi/Urdu. However, as Patrick Eisenlohr has convincingly argued, the influence of larger public culture and new media is never uniform or automatised but instead builds on prior aspects of religious mediation.[22] To understand this interplay beyond the influence of modern or even Western forms requires that we pay attention to the multiple forms of religious mediation in a field that has never been isolated or uniform. The transcultural dimensions of new media become evident only through constant exchange about and comparison of the impact new media has on the theory and praxis of Islamic preaching in different locations and among different actors.

Furthermore, medialisation encompasses traditional preaching genres more directly. New and cheaper techniques for audio-visual recordings are bringing to the fore oral genres which never made it into writing and are consequently part of an unknown history of popular forms that were faded out by the advent of modern print and, in colonial contexts, other dominant cultural forms. These include Bengali preaching traditions, which partly continue the configurations and aesthetic forms of Bengali story-telling traditions that shared trajectories with Indian melodrama. In form, Islamic preaching here connects to regional story-telling traditions and to the regional *imaginaire* that is shared with the popular narratives analysed by Tony Stewart as well as pan-regional aesthetic theories. The most influential among these, the *rasa*-theory, whose prehistory is outlined by Annette Wilke, emphasises the affective merging of song, drama, and poetry. This medialisation, apart from the officially broadcasted televangelists, is particularly important in linking migrants' places of origin with their destination, as it is these highly localised forms of preaching in specific dialects and from rural communities, which create a sense of belonging and home for the global diaspora.

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[19] The influence of televangelism is one among others. As Moll points out, Khālid's preaching programme "consciously located itself halfway between an American televangelist show and an American therapeutic talk-show, inviting participation from a live studio audience and viewers at home through call-ins." Yasmin Moll, "Islamic Televangelism: Religion, Media and Visuality in Contemporary Egypt," *Arab Media & Society* 10 (2010): 2.

[20] Patrick Haenni, *L'Islam de marché: l'autre révolution conservatrice* (Paris: Seuil, 2005), 35; Lindsay Wise, "Amr Khaled: Broadcasting the Nahda," *Transnational Broadcasting Studies* 13 (2004), accessed November 8, 2017, http://tbsjournal.arabmediasociety.com/Archives/Fall04/wiseamrkhaled.html.

[21] Haenni, *L'Islam de marché: l'autre révolution conservatrice*, 36 (our translation).

[22] Patrick Eisenlohr, "Reconsidering Mediatization of Religion: Islamic Televangelism in India," *Media, Culture & Society* 39 (2016).

Far from only promoting standardisation, small media adds to the variety of different genres that are placed into new forms of contacts and interrelations and therefore trigger new chances for cross-fertilisation. This takes place on platforms such as YouTube, where different actors, including ʿAmr Khālid, Zakir Naik from *Peace TV* and localised forms of preaching, meet. But despite new technology, an aesthetic understanding of phenomena such as new media and popular culture is able to provide fresh insights. Its analyses can profit from drawing on the basic categories that have developed in fields like aesthetics.

Aesthetic and Religious Experience

AESTHETIC EXPERIENCE

Alexander Baumgarten, the founder of the discipline of aesthetics in Europe, defined it as a science of sensual cognition (*sinnliches Erkennen*).[23] In this view, art theory aims at the notional mediation of this sensual encounter. One way of doing this is through theoretical analysis and description of the artwork. Literary criticism has engaged in such analysis since the very beginning of its establishment as a modern science. It has done so by means of formalist reflection on the making of the artwork and the specificities of poetic language; by a structuralist understanding of the artwork as a "verbal construction"[24] whose inner textual relations have to be explicated; or by a post-structuralist emphasis on the construction of meaning. Naturally, this reasoning is not limited to post-Enlightenment Europe but has its roots and parallels in other eras and cultural contexts, such as European antiquity and, significant for the disciplines assembled here, non-European philosophies of language and arts, particularly drama.

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[23] Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten, cited according to Wolfgang Welsch, "Die Aktualität des Ästhetischen," in *Das Ästhetische – eine Schlüsselkategorie unserer Zeit?*, ed. Wolfgang Welsch (Munich: Fink, 1993), 24.

[24] Tzvetan Todorov, *Qu'est-ce que le structuralisme?*, (Paris: Seuil, 1968).

The term aesthetic experience has gained attention in European literary theory, particularly in the second half of the twentieth century; the sociocultural basis for this new importance was laid at the turn of the nineteenth to the twentieth century.[25] Its theory draws on texts from Greek antiquity, as does aesthetic theory in a more general sense. Against this backdrop, one might perceive the theories of aesthetic experience as being grounded in the so-called Western tradition. But while it is true that a great number of theorists in the twentieth century stem from the West—due to its hegemonic position—reflections on aesthetic experience have a long and vital tradition in the Arabic, Persian, and Indian context as well. In the Arabic case, for instance, the early development of aesthetic and rhetorical reflections took place in close engagement with the Qurʾānic text. The different authors of Arabic rhetoric,[26] such as, to cite just a few of the most prominent names, al-Jāḥiẓ (d. 868/869), al-ʿAskarī (d. around 1009), al-Jurjānī (d. 1078), as-Sakkākī (d. 1229), and al-Qazwīnī (d. 1338), reflected upon the aesthetics of rhetorical devices. This can be linked to a Western conceptualisation of aesthetics insofar as the theory of *iʿjāz* (inimitability), for instance, is an attempt to grasp the beauty of the Qurʾān theoretically. Concerning India, Sheldon Pollock has recently achieved an overview "over a period of 1,500 years, between the third and the eighteenth centuries," in which Indian aesthetics "carried on an intense conversation about the emotional world of the story and its complex relationships to the world of the audience."[27]

When speaking of aesthetics, our focus rests on textual and literary aesthetics within the religious field. Analysing aesthetic effects and experience has gained increased importance over the last few years.[28]

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[25] Maag, "Erfahrung," 261.

[26] On the differentiation between Arabic and Greco-Roman rhetoric, see above, footnote 15.

[27] See Sheldon Pollock, "Introduction," in *A Rasa Reader: Classical Indian Aesthetics*, ed. Sheldon Pollock (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016), 1. The introduction is a case in point for transcultural research, as it stresses many categories that are central to our volume.

[28] Doris Behrens-Abouseif, "Aesthetics," in *Encyclopaedia of Islam, THREE*, vol. 2010–2012, ed. Gudrun Krämer et al. (Leiden: Brill, 2010); Navid Kermani, *God is Beautiful: The Aesthetic Experience of the Quran* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2014); Angelika Neuwirth, *Scripture, Poetry, and the Making of a Community: Reading the Qur'an as a Literary Text* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015); "Einleitung," in *Der Koran, vol. 1: Frühmekkanische Suren* (Berlin: Verlag der Weltreligionen, 2011); *Studien zur Komposition der mekkanischen Suren: die literarische Form des Koran—ein Zeugnis seiner Historizität?* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2007); Seyyed H. Nasr, "Islamic aesthetics," in *A Companion to World Philosophies*, ed. Eliot Deutsch and Ron Bontekoe (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997); Salim Kemal, "[Philosophy and its parts:] Aesthetics," in *History of Islamic Philosophy*, vol. 2, ed. Seyyed Hossein Nasr and Oliver Leaman (London: Routledge, 1996). A rich source on Arabic writing on sense perception and aesthetics, with extensive references, is José Miguel Puerta Vílchez, *Aesthetics in Arabic Thought: From Pre-Islamic Arabia through al-Andalus*, trans.

Focusing on the concrete ways in which a text operates or functions and interacts with its recipient, follows the basic assumption of theories of reception and aesthetic response.[29] From this perspective, many of the contributions centre on the means by which texts themselves engender the responses they evoke. The act of reading is never arbitrary, but we understand it—according to aesthetic response theory—as "a process of directed perception which can be comprehended from the motivations which constitute it and the signals which set it off and which can be described linguistically."[30]

Focusing on aesthetic experience carries innovative potential for transcultural studies. The emphasis on reception, which always takes place against different horizons of expectation, pluralises the perspectives on cultural phenomena and evades narrow confinements and the identification with particular traditions or cultural origins.[31] Our analysis will thus focus on the interaction between cultural artefacts such as religious and non-religious texts and their recipients. From this perspective, culture is crucially shaped by aesthetic mediation and individual appropriation, which is always to a degree assembling and unifying rather than disentangling cultural influences.[32] This somewhat solves the riddle of hybridity, which is continually used to propose different cultural origins as a starting point for activity.

Consuelo López-Morillas (Leiden: Brill, 2017). It covers the period until the fourteenth century with a focus on al-Andalus and investigates a broad corpus on rhetoric, poetics, manual art, calligraphy, and architecture. An interesting comparison between Kantian and Islamic aesthetics is offered by Omar W. Nasim, "Toward an Islamic aesthetic theory," *American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences* 15 (1998).

[29] A need to overcome the artificial gap between Western literary theory and Arabic texts has been formulated with regard to both older and modern literature; cf. Andreas Pflitsch, "The End of Illusions: On Arab Postmodernism," in *Arabic Literature: Postmodern Perspectives*, ed. Angelika Neuwirth et al. (London: Saqi Books, 2010); Beatrice Gruendler and Verena Klemm, "Introduction," in *Understanding Near Eastern Literatures: A Spectrum of Interdisciplinary Approaches*, ed. Beatrice Gruendler and Verena Klemm (Wiesbaden: Reichert, 2000).

[30] Hans Robert Jauss, "Literary History as a Challenge to Literary Theory," *New Literary History* 2 (1970): 12.

[31] For a case of reconstructing the reading experience from translation practices see Thibaut D'Hubert, *In the Shade of the Golden Palace: Ālāol and Middle Bengali Poetics in Arakan* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 213-218.

[32] In the early debates concerning intertextuality, Roland Barthes observed that: "a text is made of multiple writings, drawn from many cultures and entering into mutual relations of dialogue, parody, contestation, but there is one place where this multiplicity is focused and that place is the reader, not, as was hitherto said, the author." Roland Barthes, "The Death of the Author," in *Image—Music—Text* (London: Fontana Press, 1977), 148.

RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE

Religion is always mediated.[33] Mediation is thus one function of the literary, auditory, and visual art, spanning from antiquity to modernity and across different traditions, created in the religious contexts under consideration here. The mediation of religion follows—and shapes—aesthetic rules, and it thereby also shapes rhetorical and poetic traditions. Rituals, for instance, can be interpreted as artworks whose aesthetic design is of pivotal importance.[34] The confluence, particularly of ritual and drama with the centrality of the body and somatic experience, has been the subject not only of ritual but also of theatre studies.[35] Many of the volume's contributions demonstrate this entanglement of aesthetic and religious experience: Islamic sermons have, from their very beginning, relied on aesthetics shaped by the poetic forms of their respective context of performance; praise poems for the prophet Muḥammad are as much literary masterpieces as they are ritual enactments; devotional practice in Hindu India[36] is built on aesthetic categories; popular Sufi narratives evade religious doctrine by literary means; contemporary practices of Islamic chanting build on concepts rooted in the secular musical tradition; and some contemporary religious phenomena, including televised preaching, are better understood as part of a larger media history than as a purely religious development.

On a meta-level, the relationship between aesthetics and religion has become a pertinent question since the two were established as separate entities.[37] Most prominently, a functional perspective has emerged:

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[33] The mediation of religion and its related qualities and processes is currently the focus of the perspective of material religion. David Morgan, "Introduction: The Matter of Belief," in *Religion and Material Culture: The Matter of Belief*, ed. David Morgan (London: Routledge, 2010).

[34] Wolfgang Braungart, *Ritual und Literatur* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1996), 26.

[35] Beatrix Hauser, "Zur somatischen Erfahrbarkeit von Aufführungen," in Ä*sthetische Erfahrung: Gegenstände, Konzepte, Geschichtlichkeit,* ed. Sonderforschungsbereich 626 "Ästhetische Erfahrung im Zeichen der Entgrenzung der Künste," Freie Universität Berlin (Berlin 2006), 1-2, accessed November 8, 2017, http://www.geschkult.fuberlin.de/e/sfb626/veroeffentlichungen/online/aesth_erfahrung/aufsaetze/hauser1.pdf; Ron G. Williams and James W. Boyd, "Aesthetics," in *Theorizing Rituals: Issues, Topics, Approaches, Concepts*, ed. Jens Kreinath, Johannes A.M. Snoek, and Michael Stausberg (Leiden: Brill, 2006); Axel Michaels, ed., *Ritual Dynamics and the Science of Ritual, vol. 2: Body, Performance, Agency, and Experience, section IV: The Variety of Religious Experience*, ed. Jan Weinhold and Geoffrey Samuel (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2010); Erika Fischer-Lichte, *The Transformative Power of Performance: A New Aesthetics*, trans. Saskya Iris Jain (New York: Routledge, 2008).

[36] As the traditions and time span covered by Annette Wilke's remarks are incredibly large and complex, she situates them under the rubric of "Hindu India." This broad demarcation does not intend to submerge the productive roles of other religions or non-religious traditions. For essential reading into the canon of *rasa* theories, see the texts compiled in Pollock, *A Rasa Reader.*

[37] Hans-Georg Gadamer, "Ästhetische und religiöse Erfahrung (1964/1968)," in *Ästhetik und Poetik*, *vol. 1: Kunst als Aussage* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1993), 143.

do aesthetic responses take up functions of religion?[38] Like the question of ritual design, this perspective opens the religious field to questions posed by poetics and rhetoric. One prominent and productive example of combining both religious and aesthetic experience is the category of the sublime.[39] This category shares many of the fundamental assumptions made above: even the strong passion of awe associated with the sublime is not a quality of the object itself but lies in the subject observing it. Thus, the sublime is part of a subjective reception process, which can nevertheless be analysed by examining the rhetorical/poetic functioning of the object received. Rudolf Otto, one of the founding fathers of religious studies in Germany, organises religious feelings of the tremendous, overwhelming majesty, or the energetic moment,[40] into aesthetic categories—a process similar to the classification of religious feelings into aesthetic categories in Vaishnavism since the sixteenth century.[41] What is more, Otto implies a research programme made up of a poetologically and rhetorically informed science of religion. This notion has recently been revived in the aesthetics of religion, an approach that starts with the sensual consciousness of the receptive religious actor whose body takes up and processes the verbal and non-verbal messages transported by religious media.[42]

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[38] Religious feelings can be treated as aesthetic ones: "Aus der Perspektive kritischer Philosophie, so ließe sich Kants Satz interpretieren, sind religiöse Gefühle als ästhetische zu behandeln. [. . .] Bei Kant ist angelegt, daß der Ästhetik Funktionen zugewiesen werden, die traditionell Metaphysik (oder lebensweltlich die Religion) inne hatten." Ernst Müller, "Beraubung oder Erschleichung des Absoluten? Das Erhabene als Grenzkategorie ästhetischer und religiöser Erfahrung," in *Die Gegenwart der Kunst: Ästhetische und religiöse Erfahrung heute*, ed. Jörg Herrmann, Andreas Mertin, and Eveline Valtink (Munich: Fink, 1998), 147–148.

[39] Cf. Immanuel Kant, *Kritik der Urteilskraft* (Hamburg: Meiner, 2006 [1790]); Longinus, *On the Sublime*, trans. Donald Russell (Oxford: Clarendon, 1964). Already Boileau indicates this affinity in the preface to his translation of Longinus in 1764, where he uses a citation from the Bible in order to exemplify the sublime (Martin Fritz, *Vom Erhabenen: Der Traktat "Peri Hypsous" und seine ästhetisch-religiöse Renaissance im 18. Jahrhundert* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011), 186). He has given the impetus for the sublime as a category for the hermeneutics of the Scriptures. Ibid., 193.

[40] Rudolf Otto, *Das Heilige: Über das Irrationale in der Idee des Göttlichen und sein Verhältnis zum Rationalen*, ed. Jörg Lauster and Peter Schüz (Munich: Beck, 2014 [1917]) [Engl. translation *The Idea of the Holy*, trans. John W. Harvey, 6th ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, H. Milford, 1931)]. For the problematic perspective of Otto's conceptualisation of religion, especially his Christian-Protestant bias, see Annette Wilke, "Einführung in die Religionswissenschaft," in *Systematische Theologie*, ed. Karlheinz Ruhstorfer (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schoningh, 2012), 305–307, 327.

[41] John Corrigan, "Introduction: How do we Study Religion and Emotion?," in *Religion and Emotion*, ed. John Corrigan (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017) discusses important limits in the liberal Protestant tradition's conceptualisation of emotions. However, we focus here on the aesthetic tradition to which Otto refers, and contrary to Corrigan we believe that the tradition does provide approaches that can analyse feelings and religion rather than render them ineffable and irreducible. In fact, it is Corrigan's observation that "[e]motion in religion [. . .] has been cast as irrational and, as such, insusceptible to scholarly analysis" (ibid., 1) which has formed the base of Otto's approach comparing religious experience with aesthetic experience.

The papers assembled in this volume revolve around the structural analogies of aesthetic and religious experience; they ask questions about the changing interlinkages between the religious and the aesthetic and show the mutual dependencies and tendencies, such as the aestheticisation of the religious or religious interpretations of aesthetic phenomena. Where and how have aesthetic theories been used to describe religious experience? What is the role of aesthetic identification in religious (con) texts? Addressing these questions poses considerable philological challenges. The interpretation of experience is by nature always a reconstruction of the conditions of this experience from close textual and contextual analysis. If, to "*interpret* a *work* is *to tell* a story of *reading,*"[43] then this story includes the shifting positions of the religious and the aesthetic for the actors situated in specific contexts. The question of whether poetry, for instance, is valued for its aesthetic or religious efficacy, or both, has to be addressed.

The volume's sections deal with these questions from different perspectives. The chapters of the first section reveal the influence of traditions of interpretation, which guide the interpretation in the cases to follow. Sections two and three present applications of theoretical thought to religious and literary texts, teasing out the specific potentialities of religious and aesthetic practice.

EMOTION

Often, "the aesthetic use of language [. . .] implies an emotive usage of the references."[44] The codification of emotions varies in different historical and linguistic contexts. The term "cultural codification" is useful here, as it points to the cultural as well as to the historical variability of the "linguistic signs, images and elements of action."[45] The language-boundedness of emotions intertwines them with other cultural systems and makes them culturally and historically specific to a high degree. The fine conceptual differences and their translations between cultures are an expanding field of global conceptual history[46] and transcultural studies.[47] In this volume, emotions are particularly addressed as part of the aesthetic response of religious communication.

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[42] Hubert Cancik and Hubert Mohr, "Religionsästhetik," in *Handbuch religionswissenschaftlicher Grundbegriffe*, vol. 1, ed. Hubert Cancik, Burkhard Gladigow, and Matthias Laubscher (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1988), 132.

[43] Jonathan D. Culler, *Literary Theory*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 63, emphasis by the authors.

[44] Umberto Eco, *Opera aperta: Forma e indeterminazione nelle poetiche contemporanee*, 8th ed., vol. 21 (Milan: Bompiani, 2009), 83–84.

[45] Simone Winko, *Kodierte Gefühle: Zu einer Poetik der Emotionen in lyrischen und poetologischen Texten um 1900* (Berlin: Schmidt, 2003), 158 (our translation). This view builds on propositions made by Arlie Hochschild in his pioneering works of the 1970s and 1980s.

While the degree to which concrete texts appeal to emotions might differ in different texts, the presence of emotions in texts, or their importance within the reception of texts,[48] always plays a role.[49] This is also the case for religious texts. One of the most prominent examples is the Qurʾān. The earliest sources describe the effectiveness of the Qurʾānic message as resulting partially from its beauty. Accordingly, the faithful are conceptualised in the Qurʾān as "react[ing] with 'shivering' skin and 'trembling' heart."[50] In Muslim theology, the beauty of the Qurʾānic language serves as proof of its divine origin—not only the beauty itself, but also the beauty mediated by the emotional response it provokes. On many occasions, Qurʾānic quotations are used "in order to elicit emotional responses from their audiences."[51]

The emotional power of texts can be amplified through music. In Arabic and Persian philosophical, mathematical, and medical writings from the ninth century up to early modern times, the rhythmic and modal organisation of music—that is, the relationship between tones—is set in relation to the human body, the cosmos, and particular emotions. In one epistle by the tenth-century Brethren of Purity (*Ikhwān aṣ-Ṣafāʾ*), the origin of music is ascribed to "the sages" who would make use of its different emotive powers according to different contexts. For the devotional context, they state: "While praying, praising God, and reciting, they [the sages] would use a type of melody termed sorrowful. These are the ones which, when heard, soften hearts, cause eyes to weep, and instil in souls remorse from past sins, inner sincerity, and a cleansing of conscience. This is one of the reasons why the sages created the art of music and used it in temples, at sacrifices, and for invocations and ritual prayers."[52]

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[46] Margrit Pernau, "Introduction: Concepts of Emotions in Indian Languages," *Contributions to the History of Concepts* 11 (2016).

[47] Max Stille, "Emotion Studies and Transcultural Studies," in *Engaging Transculturality: Concepts, Key Terms, Case Studies*, ed. Laila Abu-Er-Rub et al. (London: Routledge, 2018, in press).

[48] Though von Koppenfels and Zumbusch argue that tendencies in literary theory during the twentieth century have sometimes sidelined emotive responses. Cornelia Zumbusch and Martin von Koppenfels, "Introduction," *Handbuch Literatur & Emotionen* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2016), 17.

[49] Also, the non-usage of emotions does not easily allow for an exclusion of emotions from the reflection.

[50] Anna M. Gade, "Islam," in *The Oxford Handbook of Religion and Emotion*, ed. John Corrigan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 37 referring to Q 19:58 and Q 39:23.

[51] Stephan Dähne, "Context Equivalence: A Hitherto Insufficiently Studied Use of the Quran in Political Speeches from the Early Period of Islam," in *Ideas, Images, and Methods of Portrayal: Insights into Classical Arabic Literature and Islam*, ed. Sebastian Günther (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 4. Tahera Qutbuddin's contribution in this volume shows a similar case: the incorporation of Qurʾānic citation as a key aesthetic feature in religious oratory.

When composing texts, whether written or oral, the stirring of emotions is not left to chance. Within the field of aesthetic theory, in fact, the interconnected disciplines of rhetorical and poetic theory address emotions.[53] Despite differences in conceptualisations, categorisations, and systematisations, this is a topic shared across different cultures. Whether in *rasa* theory's nine different emotions, which form the basis of all encounters with art, or in the Platonic guidance of the souls,[54] or Aristotle's analysis of affects, approaching the aesthetic always entails approaching emotions. One of the central aspects, therefore, is the question of how language transmits and evokes emotions.

A number of the case studies collected here address this problem. Rhetorical strategies for instance, be it within the medieval Arabic ode (*qaṣīda*), or within modern communicative strategies shaped by mass media, aim at evoking and directing emotions. Mimesis and bodily rhetoric re-emerge as central categories for this in the Islamic TV-preaching of contemporary Egypt. Islamic sermons furthermore employ rhythmic and musical markers to elicit emotions in different linguistic contexts, as the examples from the early Arabic and modern Bengali sermons reveal. Semantics, rhetoric, and music work together in contemporary religious chanting, too. In many devotional contexts, the roles between performer and audience merge in the joint goal of experiencing heightened emotions.[55]

Evoking emotions in religious texts is, last but not least, part of the way in which the larger public works. The observations made with regard to mass media, for example, show how rhetorical analysis of religious texts is part of larger transcultural processes that are studied completely only when they include religious actors. Analysing how emotions are evoked is therefore linked to the larger topics of religious and non-religious publics and mediation.

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[52] Owen Wright, *Epistles of the Brethren of Purity. On Music. An Arabic critical edition and English translation of EPISTLE 5,* ed. Owen Wright (Oxford: Oxford University Press in association with The Institute of Ismaili Studies, 2010), 17 (Arab.), 83 (Engl. translation).

[53] Sometimes rhetoric is understood as referring to prose, whereas poetics refers to poetry. However, this differentiation is misleading: the distinction between the categories of rhetorical and poetical theory goes back to Aristotle where the *Rhetoric* is concerned with public speech, and the *Poetics* with tragedy. The two disciplines are closely interlinked, as Aristotle emphasised. Aristotle, *On Rhetoric: A Theory of Civic Discourse*, trans. George A. Kennedy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), III, 1. It seems important to mention this here, as many of the considerations made within literary or aesthetical theory either explicitly or implicitly draw on this tradition, particularly (but not only) with regard to the field of emotions.

[54] Joachim Knape, *Was ist Rhetorik?* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 2000), 9.

[55] Max Stille, "Conceptualizing Compassion in Communication for Communication: Emotional Experience in Islamic Sermons (Bengali *waʿẓ maḥfils*)," *Contributions to the History of Concepts* 11 (2016).

MEDIATION

The stirring of emotions is often in the service of the transmission of a message. It might be the message of a concrete speech, such as a sermon, which addresses a certain topic or tries to convey a certain opinion. The speaker or the writer, the orator as the poet, will employ his or her techniques in order to achieve her or his goal. However, the function of a text, whether written or oral, is not necessarily always to convey a *concrete* message. Within the religious sphere, too, a text on certain occasions might serve rather to convey or create a certain atmosphere.[56] For example, a preacher does not speak in a given way because this is the only way to convey his message. He might choose a different form, less gravity, a simpler wording, more colloquial terms, or on the other hand, adopt a more sophisticated tone. However, in conveying his message he often chooses a concrete form, delimiting his speech from other forms, such as every-day-speech. Particularly within rituals, the form and the material quality of the delivery allows for the creation of a different space, one that is separated from everyday life.[57]

The articles in this volume approach these questions of mediation. Jan Scholz demonstrates that the preacher not only conveys a message, but that this message also provides an occasion for re-enacting through imagination. The events from the lives of the early Islamic actors emerge in the specific modes of experience that are allowed in the fictitious. The case Suzanne Stetkevych focuses on, the imitation of the *Burda* poem, enlarges this notion of mediation: the conveyance of a message and the creation of a particular atmosphere are central, but more importantly, the imitation of the *Burda* allows for a re-enactment of the Qurʾān's competitive character, combining it with a re-actualisation of the poem's positive power (*baraka*).

Regardless of whether the intention is to convey a message or create a ritual atmosphere, mediation follows rules.[58] A certain style, rhythm, tone, diction, metre, place, or clothing, for instance, allows the speaker to direct the effect of the text. Such rules, however, do not necessarily have to be explicitly available in the form of codified manuals that indicate techniques through which an aim is achieved. In many cases, the techniques for mediation are implicit and thus applied without being addressed separately on an abstract and theoretical level. However, in both cases it is possible to describe the specific techniques of mediation, such as the choice of wordings, the use of rhyme or rhythm, the different stylistic figures, and the concrete delivery.

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[56] Gernot Böhme, *Atmosphäre: Essays zur neuen Ästhetik* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1995).

[57] Dietrich Harth, "Rituale, Texte, Diskurse: Eine formtheoretische Betrachtung," in *Text und Ritual*, ed. Burckhard Dücker and Hubert Roeder (Heidelberg: Synchron Wissenschaftsverlag der Autoren, 2005), 36–37.

[58] See for general considerations in this regard, Thomas Anz, "Kulturtechniken der Emotionalisierung: Beobachtungen, Reflexionen und Vorschläge zur literaturwissenschaftlichen Gefühlsforschung," in *Im Rücken der Kulturen*, ed. Karl Eibl, Katja Mellmann, and Rüdiger Zymner (Paderborn: Mentis, 2007), 214–215.

While the examples mentioned thus far refer to ritual mediation, another type of mediation has yet to be addressed. Religion is not only represented within religious texts in the narrow sense, but texts which themselves are not religious per definition can nonetheless mediate religion as well. This is the case with literature addressing or describing religious experience or, in more general terms, religious practice. Susanne Enderwitz approaches this question in her analysis of a modern Egyptian novel, as does Tony Stewart in his study of popular Sufi narratives from Bengal.

PERFORMANCE

Performance is one precondition for the aesthetic and religious experience of the texts scrutinised in this volume; further, it often constitutes the framework for processes of mediation. Many of the volume's chapters deal with performance in one way or another: they either directly analyse performance practices or indirectly investigate performative elements that are inscribed in the text. However, the cases of performance studied in this volume involve not only the concrete delivery of texts but also its effect and the transformative potential of the enactment of a text—whether it's a work of drama, a sermon, or poetry.[59]

Performance implies an understanding of texts that are not merely written but also orally and often visually performed. Nevertheless, "oral" is in no way conceived as simply the opposite of "written," nor do we suggest that they constitute two separate entities. Within the complex dynamics and different stages of oral and written texts, there are cases of subsequent written fixation, of simulated orality, or model texts in the written mode, as well as cases of prior composition and of exactly repeated delivery in the oral mode.[60] Thus, oral and written forms of particular genres exist simultaneously and often serve complementary functions. The question of interest in our context is not where to place texts in the “orality-literacy continuum,”[61] but rather to reveal the many facets of their enacted form and to investigate the various means that are employed in the process of religious mediation.

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[59] Contemporary performance theories build on the speech act theory by John Austin, which was formulated in the 1950s; the structural confluences of ritual and drama inspired Richard Schechner and Victor Turner's theories in their respective fields of drama and ritual studies, which led to the performative turn in Cultural Studies during the twentieth century. Performance theory, with respect to performative arts and aesthetics, has been further developed by Erika Fischer-Lichte. John L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words* [1962] (New York: Oxford University Press, 1965); Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (Chicago: Aldine, 1969); Richard Schechner, *Performance Theory* (London: Routledge, 1988 [1977]); Erika Fischer-Lichte, *Ästhetik des Performativen* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2004) [Engl. translation *The Transformative Power of Performance: A New Aesthetics* (London: Routledge, 2008)].

[60] Karl Reichl, "Memory and Textuality in the Orality-Literacy Continuum," in *Orality and Textuality in the Iranian World*, ed. Julia Rubanovich (Leiden: Brill, 2015); Pamela Kalning, "Schriftlichkeit," in *Historisches Wörterbuch der Rhetorik*, vol. 10, ed. Gert Ueding (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 2012); Ruth Finnegan, "The How of Literature," *Oral Tradition* 20 (2005).

For performed texts, the category of “oral” is too narrow to convey all aspects of a text in its delivery to an audience. It is rather its acoustic materiality, produced by a voice, which brings the text into a sensually experienced form. In a similar vein, Paul Zumthor argues that the main characteristic of medieval poetry lies not in orality (*oralité*) but in vocality (*vocalité*).[62] A whole string of rhetorical devices rely on acoustic effects, such as rhythm, sonic parallelisms, or rhyme. Other effective devices are not inscribed into the text but become enacted in performance. Therefore, artistry and potential triggers for sensations lie not only in the verbal content but also in the way the performer voices the delivery of the text: the skilful use of voice modulation, the tempo of performance, moments of silence, vocal dynamics, intonation, or pitch. Max Stille, for instance, shows that the insertion of the chanting mode in Bengali sermons is a deliberate choice to emphasise a specific thematic and emotional message, a technique similar to strategies in other narrative genres. Finally, the enactment of texts may comprise more than the verbalisation of words but also include elements which lie further beyond the text. Next to acoustic features, bodily expressions like mimics, gestures, or postures; spatial movement or visual effects like dress, colours, light, and the use of props may also play a role. Therefore, a text’s performance is not only “oral,” it is closer to what Ruth Finnegan speaks of as a “multiform mode of existence.”[63]

Most of the time, religious texts are encountered as performed texts during religious practice; performance therefore has to serve as a central category of analysis if the goal is an understanding of religious practice. The focus on performativity not only necessitates a discerning of the facets of the enacted form of texts (in cases where they are enacted), but also addressing the performative implications where only the written text is available. Following its constraint in form, the vocally materialised word brings together form and content and offers an amplification of persuasive evidence. An additional question revolves around which reflections, originating in other textual genres, can fruitfully be applied to analyse the texts under consideration.

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[61] Reichl, “Memory and Textuality,” 35–36.

[62] German: “Stimmlichkeit.” Paul Zumthor, *Die Stimme und die Poesie in der mittelalterlichen Gesellschaft* (Munich: Fink, 1994), 13. Characterising the materiality of performance, Erika Fischer-Lichte uses the term “Lautlichkeit” (Fischer-Lichte, *Ästhetik des Performativen*, esp. 209–227; Fischer-Lichte, *Transformative Power of Performance*, 122–138).

[63] Finnegan, “The How of Literature,” 170.

The Volume's Chapters

TRAJECTORIES OF RELIGIOUS AND AESTHETIC INTERPRETATIONS

The volume opens by introducing categories which have been central to the theoretical reflections on aesthetics from Europe, India, and the Middle East from antiquity to contemporary times. The categories focus primarily on the overlapping of aesthetic and religious experience and its theoretical conceptualisations. They demonstrate how historically as well as contemporaneously, aesthetic and religious experience are in a state of mutual (sometimes tense) observation and interlinkage. One the one hand, the section will map the field of the topic broadly; but on the other, it will lay the groundwork for subsequent sections by considering specific points—namely, experience, emotion, presence, and rhetoric—which emerge as the guiding terms for what follows.

Lore Knapp provides a very modern example. Beginning with Pseudo-Longinos—and building on Kant, Lyotard, and Adorno as well as on Friedrich Schleiermacher and Rudolf Otto's reflections—she discusses religious experience as an aesthetic experience, and more particularly as a liminal experience. She emphasises the structural and functional similarities of aesthetic and religious experience and illustrates her point with the example of Christoph Schlingensief's performance *Immortality Can Kill: Learn to Die! Mr. Anderson Dies in 60 Minutes* (Zurich, 2009). Building on Erika Fischer-Lichte's differentiation between aesthetic and non-aesthetic experiences, which is based on the aim ascribed to the transformation process, she demonstrates that an experience may be interpreted either way.

Annette Wilke similarly outlines the interaction between aesthetic and religious experience in theoretical discussions from ancient to medieval India. *Rasa* theory is an aesthetic one, originating in drama theory; it was later applied to literature, and finally, used to structure theoretical reflections on religious experience. From this perspective, it is clear that religious and aesthetic experience overlap. Wilke particularly emphasises the importance of the vocal transmission of religious texts as well as the evocation of aesthetic emotions (*rasa*).

Omaima Abou-Bakr revisits the hermeneutical tradition initiated by Amīn al-Khūlī (1895–1966), namely, the literary approach to the Qurʾānic text. In doing so she combines the classical notion of literary rhetoric (*balāgha*) with modern concepts from literary theory in a structuralist tradition. She exemplifies her approach through a study of Sura ar-Raḥmān (Q 55) by proposing a reading which can yield an appreciation of its aesthetic characteristics and moral vision at the same time—an integration of textual, spiritual, and moral beauty.

AESTHETICS OF ISLAMIC SERMONS

The second section of the volume focuses on aesthetic experience on the basis of different examples from the realm of Islamic preaching. This transculturally interconnected field is illustrated by examples from the earliest Islamic times up to the twenty-first century, and it covers different linguistic configurations. The examples all focus on the rhetorical strategies used in the sermons and their impact on listeners. They specifically address the relation between the conveyed message and affective responses. The affective and bodily dimensions of Islamic sermons have been stressed in previous research, such as the studies of Charles Hirschkind and Linda Jones.[64] The case studies here particularly emphasise the relevance of aesthetic theory, rhetorical theory, linguistics, and narratology in approaching religion from the point of view of aesthetic experience.

Tahera Qutbuddin analyses the rhetorical devices used in a sermon by the fourth Sunni caliph and first Shiʿa imam ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib (d. 661). Out of five groups of key aesthetic features, she focuses on the effect of rhythm, which in the presented case is mainly created by parallelism (*izdiwāj*). Her analysis is not just limited to the semantic effects of parallelism but includes the acoustic effects as well. Acoustic features become occasionally augmented through rhyme, assonances, or repetitions. Together with other techniques of climax building which rely on bodily features—in fact the described sequences of tension and relaxation contain structural parallels with the recitation of poetry (Weinrich)—these features produce a palpable effect on the body and thus contribute significantly to what Qutbuddin calls tacit persuasion, which in this case study helps convince the audience to prepare for the hereafter.

Max Stille reflects about the trajectories and taxonomies of popular preaching (*waʿẓ*) in contemporary Bangladesh and questions the existing evaluations of heightened religious feelings. The use of chanting in the preachers' presentation of the Bengali text provide an entry point for a discussion of the criticism that such sermons are merely entertaining and rely on emotional excess, a critique that is shared by liberal Protestant thinkers such as Rudolph Otto and reformist preachers in Bangladesh. A structuralist analysis of the narrative role of chanted passages in the Bengali text of the sermons shows that they are crucial in illustrating dramatic salvific scenes and provide emotional evidence. Importantly, these narrative and performative structures can be linked to Bengali literary and performance history, and to other popular forms, such as South Asian melodrama. The rhetorics of the numinous and the melodramatic can hence not be perceived as two opposite poles; they rather call for a refined analytical framework of their evocation.

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[64] Charles Hirschkind, *The Ethical Soundscape: Cassette Sermons and Islamic Counterpublics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006); Linda G. Jones, *The Power of Oratory in the Medieval Muslim World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

Jan Scholz focuses on oratory delivery through discussion of ʿAmr Khālid, a famous and popular Islamic TV-preacher. Proposing a close reading of a short passage, Scholz suggests that the means of the delivery enables a particular form of dramatic experience. In order to contextualise this dramatic experience theoretically he draws upon Arabic rhetorical manuals and the question of affectation, as well as theories of identification of the spectator. Linking the latter back to neuropsychological research he argues that the responses of the spectator triggered by the performance lead to a particular aesthetic/religious experience. In this way, ʿAmr Khālid's preaching style becomes understandable from a rhetorical perspective not only as geared towards persuasion, but as a particular form of bringing the past to presence.

EXPERIENCING RELIGION IN AND THROUGH LITERATURE

The volume's third part sketches different configurations of the literary vis-à-vis the religious. The first two contributions treat two complementary cases, one where quasi-religious literature draws on the possibilities—and limits—of imagination to overcome sectarian boundaries; and one where non-religious literature depicts and supplants religious experience. Both, however, investigate the literary means of addressing questions of identity and hybrid cultural experiences. The last two contributions focus on poetry. Poetry has been the supreme discipline of Arabic literature, and throughout centuries preachers have made use not only of the rhetorical devices related to poetics but also frequently incorporated poetic lines into religious oratory to exploit its musical and emotional impact (although the latter has not gone entirely undisputed). The articles explore the material quality of the poetic text and its rhetorical devices and the material quality of its delivery to the listeners.

Tony Stewart translates and analyses popular Sufi narratives from Bengal, which were dedicated to holy men and women and have circulated widely over the last five centuries alongside the tales of their historical counterparts. The stories of Mānik Pīr, Baḍakhān Gājī, and Bonbibī do not fit in with dominant religious or aesthetic doctrines. Rather, they trigger imaginations of alternative worlds and offer critiques of religion and society. Stewart shows that we can understand their meaning and critique by studying their explicit and implicit intertextual references. Through subtle parodies, for example, the stories voice critique. Stewart also unpacks conscious aesthetic choices of language and sub-genres included in the narratives. In a paradigmatic exercise, he unpacks the complex coding of a religious world accessible only by knowing its literary conventions, while at the same time pointing to the limits of the stories' intervention.

In her analysis of the novel *Ayyām al-insān as-sabʿa* (The Seven Days of Man, 1968/69) by the Egyptian writer ʿAbd al-Ḥakīm Qāsim, Susanne

Enderwitz explores the aesthetic ways in which the author expresses the protagonist's search for his place in society. The book's seven chapters correspond to the seven days of the week, which culminate in the annual feast commemorating the local Sufi Shaykh Aḥmad al-Badawī (d. 1276). Each day is set in a different life stage of the male main protagonist, from little boy to student. The main social group described are the men of a Delta village, a circle around the protagonist's father who regularly meet in the evenings. Religious experience in this group is mainly created through recitation and ritual. Language, light, script, and voice serve as markers of different life worlds, rural/urban, day/night, religious/secular and, finally, the perception of time. Only in the last chapter, when the protagonist breaks with the collective that he no longer feels he belongs to, does calendrical time enter cyclical time.

Suzanne Stetkevych presents the case of the fourteenth-century Arab poet Ṣafī ad-Dīn al-Ḥillī who seeks to outperform the famous *Burda* poem by al-Būṣīrī by entering a type of (double) competition whose understanding is based on the concept of *iʿjāz* (inimitability of the Qurʾān). The *Burda* is conceived as a literary masterpiece; moreover, it is one of the most powerful poems, performatively. Not only did the poet receive the Prophet's mantle (*burda*) in a dream as a reward for the beauty of his poem, by composing and reciting this poem in praise of Muḥammad he was also cured of his sickness. Believers regularly sought to re-enact the positive power (*baraka*) of the poem through its recitation. However, al-Ḥillī chooses rhetoric: through the creation of a new poetic genre, the *badīʿiyya*, which demonstrates in each line a rhetorical figure composed as an imitation (*muʿāraḍa*) of the *Burda*, he seeks to co-opt the *baraka* of the original poem through his achievements of rhetoric. Meta-communicative poetic conventions signal the listener/reader that al-Ḥillī's poem is an imitation of the *Burda* so that his endeavour is understood. Following the model of "praise prompts intercession prompts salvation," the act of composing is simultaneously conceived as both rhetorical competition and religious devotion.

Ines Weinrich by contrast looks at how poetry is mediated within contemporary religious and ritual settings in Lebanon. She discusses the concept of *infiʿāl*, a basic concept within the Arab musical tradition, with respect to Islamic religious chanting. *Infiʿāl*, the state of being affected or involved, blends well with the religious concept that a performer—whether preacher, reciter, or chanter—should not only convey the content of a text but also produce an emotional impact (*taʾthīr*) on the listener. Taking some poetic verses from the ninth century as a case example, she analyses the mode of delivery and the rhetorical, semantical, and musical features that mark the process of reception. She also takes extra-textual factors into consideration and highlights the aspects of reciprocity in *infiʿāl*. Listeners enter an interactive process, one that is marked by verbal and bodily communication, with the performers and thereby shape both the process of delivery and of reception.

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PART I

Trajectories of Religious and Aesthetic Interpretations

Lore Knapp

Religious Experience as Aesthetic Experience

Abstract The starting point of this article is the observation that some definitions of aesthetic experience are based on metaphors from religion or ritual theory. One notable example is Erika Fischer-Lichte's definition of aesthetic experience as liminal experience. She divides experiences into aesthetic, where the journey itself is the goal, and non-aesthetic, where the experience is a route to faith and belief. Fischer-Lichte's theory is described here so as to reflect on how religious experience in general could be categorised as part of a broader concept of aesthetic experience. Furthermore, this paper describes how existing concepts of aesthetic and religious experience have many structural and functional parallels, and how distinguishing between aesthetic and religious experience becomes particularly difficult if art is seen as a transcendent principle, i.e. one that is barely distinguishable from the bases of monotheistic theologies. This view of art becomes relevant when the sublime is discussed as a feature of objects.

Aesthetic experience can be stimulated as much by the real lived environment as in connection with works of the traditional arts. It can be related to shapes and colours as much as to people and landscapes, to situations of joy as much as to mathematical conclusions. Even within narrower fields of art, conversations about aesthetic experience focus on the actual *impact* of works or events of art rather than on their concepts and forms.[1] Descriptions of aesthetic experiences may differ depending on one's social and cultural background.[2] This freedom and openness has led to a situation where the term itself needs to be clarified.

Current research, for example at the Max Planck Institute for Empirical Aesthetics, looks for somatic reactions and patterns in the reception of poetical texts or music. It builds on the question of who likes what, and why?[3] And it uses methods from psychology or neuroscience in addition to working with the language. When it comes to an analysis of the "functions of aesthetic practices and preferences for individuals and societies," different cultural, situational, and historical backgrounds are a factor.[4]

In this article I will point out that many of the scholars who looked for definitions and descriptions of aesthetic experience used metaphors that come from theological thinking and have also been used to describe religious experience. Religious writers have seen experiences in connection with music or nature as a means to an end, arguing that such intense feelings could only be caused by an extramundane reality symbolised by aesthetic or natural forms. The following interpretation of Erika Fischer-Lichte's definition of aesthetic experience as liminal experience tests the opposite hypothesis. According to her definition, most kinds of religious experience can easily be described as aesthetic experience as long as there is no belief in the existence of an extramundane reality.

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[1] See Erika Fischer-Lichte, *Ästhetische Erfahrung: Das Semiotische und das Performative* (Tübingen: Francke, 2001) as well as Joachim Küpper and Christoph Menke, "Einleitung," in *Dimensionen ästhetischer Erfahrung*, eds. Joachim Küpper and Christoph Menke (Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 2003).

[2] See Rolf Eberfeld and Günter Wohlfart, eds., *Komparative Ästhethik. Künste und ästhetische Erfahrungen in Asien und Europa* (Cologne: Edition Chora, 2000). The meaning of the notion of aesthetics (from ancient Greek *aesthesis*) differs quite significantly even within Europe. The argumentation used here works for many cultures, but mainly within monotheistic cultures that also have a tradition of discussing art or aesthetic experience. This is not the case in some African cultures for example, which do not distinguish between art and craft. See Koku G. Nonoa, "Christoph Schlingensief's Theatre and the African Opera Village. Rediscovery (of African artistic practices)," in *Art of Wagnis: Christoph Schlingensief's Crossing of Wagner and Africa*, eds. Fabian Lehmann, Nadine Siegert, and Ulf Vierke (Vienna: Verlag für moderne Kunst, 2017), 172.

[3] Max Planck Institute for Empirical Aesthetics, accessed June 6, 2017, https://www.aesthetics.mpg.de/en.html.

[4] Max Planck Institute for Empirical Aesthetics.

Aesthetic Experience as Liminal Experience

Theories of aesthetic and religious experience are similar especially when they describe transcendent, or transformative processes. In order to further narrow down aesthetic experience, and based on research on rituals, Fischer-Lichte arrives at a definition of aesthetic experience as liminal experience accompanied by a mostly temporary transformation of the spectator.[5] For her, aesthetic experience can be understood as liminal experience based on basic anthropological conditions. Within these conditions, the person experiences a state of constant transformation. In performances, the participants experience themselves more intensively and create themselves anew in shorter intervals than in real life.[6] As Fischer-Lichte explains, the term "liminal experience" was first used by Victor Turner in 1969 in his research on the processes of transformation that are caused by rituals. Turner refers to Arnold van Gennep's study *Les rites de passage* (1909), which describes rituals as liminal experiences with a highly symbolic charge. Van Gennep distinguishes three phases of *rites de passage*, or transitional rites: firstly, the separation of everyday life; secondly, the phase of transformation; and thirdly, the phase of incorporation that leads to a new role in society. In the second phase—the liminal phase—the participant enters a state between the applicable or valid norms and rules that enable him or her to create completely new and partly disturbing experiences.[7] Turner takes van Gennep's term "liminal experience" and applies it to a delicate "betwixt and between" state in which normative orders are rearranged and signs are interpreted with new meanings.[8] Ursula Rao and Klaus-Peter Köpping further refine this theory. They point out the similarity between eventful rituals and performances or artistic events. They further add that the liminal phase can lead to a transformation not only of the social status of the person involved but also to a new interpretation of symbols and a change in that person's perception of reality "in all possible respects."[9] Building on Rao, Köpping, and Fischer-Lichte, Matthias Warstat has made a distinction between liminal experiences in ritual and aesthetic processes. He suggests that in aesthetic processes unlike in traditional transitional rituals, liminal experiences are possible even if participants do not reach an irreversible change of status.[10] In both situations though, the liminal phase transforms participants' perception of reality and extends their field of experience as much as their system of meaning and sense.[11] The limits of a participant's reality or previous field of experience becomes a threshold. Even more than the comparison with rituals, the metaphor of the threshold signifies a close proximity to religio-philosophical considerations. In theology, as well as in the movements of aesthetic experience, transgression plays a key role. Both the liminal phase and the transgression of a border mark parallels between theological thinking and the aesthetics of performances, of which aesthetic experience as liminal experience is a part. They find their equivalents in concepts of transcendence and of transformation.[12]

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[5] Erika Fischer-Lichte, *The Transformative Power of Performance: A New Aesthetics* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 190.

[6] See Erika Fischer-Lichte, "Ästhetische Erfahrung als Schwellenerfahrung," in *Dimensionen ästhetischer Erfahrung*, eds. Joachim Küpper, and Christoph Menke (Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 2003); Fischer-Lichte, *The Transformative Power of Performance,* 205.

[7] See Fischer-Lichte, "Ästhetische Erfahrung als Schwellenerfahrung," 139. Based on fundamental experiences of mythological heroes, a similar model can be seen in Joseph Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968).

[8] See Fischer-Lichte, "Ästhetische Erfahrung als Schwellenerfahrung," 139.

[9] Klaus-Peter Köpping and Ursula Rao, "Die 'performative Wende': Leben—Ritual—Theater," in *Im Rausch des Rituals: Gestaltung und Transformation der Wirklichkeit in körperlicher Performanz*, eds. Klaus-Peter Köpping and Ursula Rao (Hamburg: LIT, 2000), 10.

Defining aesthetic experience as liminal experience is here based on the theory of rituals that are a part of most religions. Other theories use different religious metaphors. Many contemporary definitions of aesthetic experience draw upon categories that originate in a spectrum of religious forms. Martin Seel, for example, broadly defines aesthetic experience as appearance or manifestation (*Erscheinen*),[13] comparable to a secular form of an epiphany. The terms epiphany or presence are also used by Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht in a similar context.[14]

Erika Fischer-Lichte presents the concept of liminal experience as a definitional criterion, drawing on the notion within ritual theory of the "liminal" state—the feeling of intoxication or the ecstasy of being "betwixt and between" established norms[15] that arises through participation in rituals and resembles the sensation of being "outside oneself" in mystical awakening experiences. If aesthetic experience is interpreted as having religious significance, the recipient interprets the extension of his or her field of experience as though it offered a connection to transcendence as a separate reality because the borders of his or her reality have been expanded. Furthermore, the intensity of aesthetic feelings gives the recipient a reason to assume its divine character.

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[10] Matthias Warstat, "Ritual," in *Metzler-Lexikon Theatertheorie*, ed. Erika Fischer-Lichte (Stuttgart: Metzler, 2005), 277.

[11] Köpping and Rao: "Die 'performative Wende," 10; see Fischer-Lichte, *The Transformative Power of Performance*, 175.

[12] In dualist theological approaches, transcendence refers—as seen for example in the work of Karl Jaspers—to an outer-worldly reality. If a recipient who tends toward religiosity interprets his or her aesthetic experience as a religious one, then he or she will interpret the expansion of the realm of experience as though it offers a connection to transcendence, as though the limits of his or her reality could move beyond into some higher place or otherworldliness. The recipient would also attribute the intensity of his or her experience to an extrasensory or transcendental influence.

[13] Martin Seel, *Ästhetik des Erscheinens* (Munich: Hanser, 2000).

[14] Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht, *Diesseits der Hermeneutik—die Produktion von Präsenz* (Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 2004).

[15] Fischer-Lichte, "Ästhetische Erfahrung als Schwellenerfahrung," 158.

As has become clear, the moment aesthetic experiences are defined as liminal experiences with a transformative effect or response, they begin to have similarities with religious experiences such as awakening or revelation. Aesthetic experiences can be characterised by those forms of expansion and extension that prompt religious interpretations. We can therefore determine a structural kinship between specific forms of aesthetic and religious experience. In turn, this makes it even more difficult to find differences between them. In distinguishing aesthetic from non-aesthetic experience, Fischer-Lichte writes:

> While I will label those liminal experiences aesthetic which make the journey the goal, the liminal experiences which use the journey to reach "another" goal are non-aesthetic.[16]

This is a very useful definition. While religious experiences or religious art are a route to faith and belief, aesthetic experience is there for the sake of the pleasure or intensity it evokes. But separating aesthetic liminal experiences from religious liminal experiences is still a difficult proposition. Unexpected awakening experiences, for example, have no goal, but they do have an enduring outcome in that they effect a transformation of a non-believer into a believer. The predominantly unexpected transformation is credited as being the objective or purpose only through the religious interpretation of faith. Indeed, Fischer-Lichte introduces a second criterion of difference:

> It depends on the individual's perception whether they are concentrating on the liminal state into which their perception has led them or whether they are experiencing it as a transition to a specific goal.[17]

This suggests that experiences that occur in conjunction with artistic events, in that moment where religious interpretation is present, no longer constitute aesthetic experience because the experience in that moment is in the service of faith.

Furthermore, that aesthetic experiences can generally be interpreted as an epiphany or revelation or as a mystic, holistic experience of awakening is a statement about its quality. It clarifies the level of intensity that aesthetic experiences can have. Religious interpretations therefore affirm the definition of aesthetic experience as liminal experience. They affirm the exceptional state that can appear in connection with art-events and generates the search for metaphysical or supernatural explanations.

Beyond this, two forms of religious interpretations of aesthetic experience can be distinguished that minimise the difference between aesthetic and non-aesthetic. The religious interpretation of aesthetic experience is either a mediator or a substitute for faith. Understanding the state of liminality as the aim is very similar to understanding art as a substitute for religion. Thus, a point is reached at which experiences that are interpreted as religious can be referred to as aesthetic because the religious interpretations of aesthetic experiences become aesthetic functions, objectives, or purposes.

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[16] Fischer-Lichte, *The Transformative Power of Performance*, 199.
[17] Fischer-Lichte, *The Transformative Power of Performance*, 200.

Artistic, liturgical, and ritual acts can cause a permanent transformation of a person's worldview and of what they believe.[18] With knowledge of the aesthetic cause of this transformation, a personal art-religion can be the result of aesthetic liminal experience. The permanent character is realised either in a belief which draws impetus from aesthetic experiences, or in the social expression of an art-religion, as seen with the Romantic composer Richard Wagner and his work.

Just as individual, religious belief can lead to an ascetic way of life, a belief in the theatre or in music and the aesthetic ideal is often linked to excessive practice, rehearsal, or other artistic endeavours. A belief in autonomous art that can be distinguished from the end-in-itself of aesthetic experience becomes dangerous if it compromises or encroaches upon life. It is here that performances of self-harm become reminiscent of medieval practices of penitence or repentance.[19]

Drawing on Jan Mukařovský, Fischer-Lichte asserts that art distinguishes itself "from other objects to which an aesthetic function can be attributed through the dominance of the aesthetic function: while in other fields the aesthetic function might be subordinate to other functions [. . .], in a work of art these other functions are subordinate to the aesthetic function."[20] Aesthetic pleasure can thus be perceived variously as salvation, truth, meaning, intensity, togetherness, or as a sacred atmosphere. Moreover, the prioritising of aesthetic pleasure can become a transcendent principle and can fulfil the function of a reduction of contingency. If the absolute priority of the individual artistic work is based on a repeated experience of meaningfulness, the variety of possible ways to live and to behave is reduced. This function of transcendent principles will be explained in the following discussion.

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[18] In this way, performativity theory has also found its way into Catholic religious pedagogy. See Thomas Meurer, "Performative Religionspädagogik: Größe und Grenze eines Trends," in *Herder Korrespondenz—Monatshefte für Gesellschaft und Religion* 63 (2009), 375, as well as *Performative Religionsdidaktik: Religionsästhetik—Lernorte—Unterrichtspraxis*, eds. Thomas Leonhard and Silke Klie (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2008).

[19] Aesthetic experience in self-harm performances has also been traced back to the sublime. See Jaša Drnovšek, *Masochismus zwischen Erhabenem und Performativem* (Paderborn: Fink, 2014); Rosemarie Brucher, *Subjektermächtigung und Naturunterwerfung: Künstlerische Selbstverletzung im Zeichen von Kants Ästhetik des Erhabenen* (Bielefeld: transcript, 2013).

[20] Fischer-Lichte, *Ästhetische Erfahrung: Das Semiotische und das Performative*, 54. (Translation: Kate Davison)

Equivalences of Transcendence

Aesthetic and religious experiences whose descriptions closely resemble one another and only differ when connected with broader meanings and functions are transgressions of everyday life. Their aesthetic interpretations require a concept of art, and their religious interpretations require a concept of God or transcendence. In the dualistic approach of philosopher Karl Jaspers, for example, transcendence refers to an extramundane reality.[21] It becomes apparent that the abstract noun "art," as a romantic and historically unbound item, is no more explicable than religious concepts of the afterlife. The assumption of art as a unified concept becomes—according to Immanuel Kant—a transcendent principle of aesthetic thinking. In his introduction to the transcendental dialectic, Kant writes:

> All principles [of pure reason], the application of which is entirely confined within the limits of possible experience, we shall call *immanent*; those, on the contrary, which tend to transgress those limits, *transcendent.*[22]

Kant assumes that our reason can only work if it establishes transcendent principles to provide a framework. Those transcendent principles can, for example, refer to the beginning or the unity of the entity. Metaphysical assumptions or beliefs can form the transcendent principles of our thinking.

Some concepts of aesthetic experience are therefore based on the transcendent principle of the existence of art. Aesthetic thinking is bound to that principle, and thus experiences that could be called religious in other cultural contexts can be subordinated. This hierarchy is actually visible in contemporary aesthetic theories. For example, Gumbrecht, as mentioned above, chooses religious metaphors to describe the presence of texts.

Additionally, in many forms of art, aesthetic equivalences of transcendence that are influenced by religio-philosophical thinking can be observed. This is particularly true in Romanticism where they are distinctive of the form. For example, the musical harmonic progression that is typical of the Romantic style of composing can create the illusion of transcendence. In the visual arts, abstraction can perform this function or meaning, and in literary texts the endless web of references between single motifs can give a reader the impression of experiencing an aesthetic equivalence of transcendence.

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[21] Karl Jaspers, *Chiffren der Transzendenz* (Munich: Piper, 1984).

[22] Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason: In Commemoration of the Centenary of its First Publication,* trans. Friedrich Max Mueller (2nd revised ed., New York, 1922), 295f. <http://oll.libertyfund.org/titles/1442>, accessed December 20, 2014.

SACRED ATMOSPHERES AS AESTHETIC EFFECTS OF PERFORMANCES

It will have become clear that religiously interpreted experiences can theoretically be included in the system of aesthetics, especially if art has become a transcendent principle. In the following section I want to discuss an example in practice that leads us in a slightly different direction. The German performance artist Christoph Schlingensief has demonstrated in different contexts how sacred atmospheres have their origins in strategies of aesthetic effect. The large procession that featured in his staging of *Unsterblichkeit kann töten. Sterben lernen! Herr Anderson stirbt in 60 Minuten* (Immortality can kill: Learn to die! Mr. Anderson dies in 60 minutes) in Zurich, Switzerland, in December 2009 showed that the combination of sensual stimuli, music, and movement can cause an ecstatic effect. The second act was the performance of a ritual procession.[23] The whole audience followed the actors through the historic city of Zurich, with the lead actor carrying a cross at the front in the manner of Jesus. At a station of the cross, which was located at the Kunsthaus museum in Zurich, this same Jesus-actor played a mystic having an epiphany while two other actors playing Mary and a priest stood next to him. The audience watched in tense silence. They were part of an atmosphere of mystical inwardness. After a while the priest shouted: “Hey, that is really good! That should be done in an installation!” The priest’s reference to an installation reminded the rapt audience that this was a performance and part of a theatre evening. The audience members were made aware of the fact that they had transcended the usual modes of perception.

Schlingensief’s performance was the result of his real-life quest for faith in the face of life-threatening cancer. In this situation he demonstrated how religious experiences are often the result of an aesthetic performance. With this performance he emphasised his belief in art while simultaneously questioning it.

STRUCTURAL AND FUNCTIONAL SIMILARITIES OF AESTHETIC AND RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCES

After having shown how religious experience can be called aesthetic and how it can be created performatively, I want to describe further the structural and functional similarities of both terms. A religious service can be experienced as an artistic event just as much as an evening of musical theatre. In both cases, the entrances and exits of specially attired participants are stage-managed and the music has a particular expressive power that resonates throughout the carefully designed space of a church. Similarly, the liminal state after a concert can be perceived as fulfilling a beneficial or therapeutic function in and of itself, or alternatively, as a strengthening of one's faith. The institutional framework which normally determines whether performances are to be categorised as artistic or non-artistic can be subverted through personal experience. Performances within the institutional framework of religious organisations like the church can be purely aesthetic, just as the most autonomous art can be interpreted as religious, thereby acquiring a purpose external to its institution. Whether to describe an experience as aesthetic or religious—be it music, the perception of a room, a journey through nature, or witnessing a ritual—is an individual decision that is determined by the disposition or attitude of the recipient.

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[23] Sabine Felbecker*, Die Prozession. Historische und systematische Untersuchungen zu einer liturgischen Ausdruckshandlung* (Altenberge: Oros, 1995), 449. In the re-enactment of the Passion of Christ procession, the play serves to create a “tangible realization [of Christ] in the present.” For this reason, such processions are “fully equipped with numerous props and accoutrements that elevate their optical appeal” (ibid., 450, 447).

Both perspectives have been described in eighteenth-century writings. To explain religion both as a perception of the universe and as a feeling, Friedrich Schleiermacher adopted the language of the theory of perception as it was developed in eighteenth-century aesthetic writing, while his contemporary Novalis, with a background of similarly pietistic socialisation, describes poetic ideas using religious metaphors.[24]

Differences and overlaps between art and religion manifest depending on interpretation, framing, and the attribution of function. This means that the attributions of 'religious' or 'aesthetic' contain implicit statements about cultural belonging. Just as the labelling of one's own experience as religious can be indicative of social belonging or belief, the reflection and verbalisation of an experience as aesthetic can be indicative of a culturally specific educational and experiential background. It is mainly through the interpretation of experiences and sensations that their ordering within conceptual traditions takes place.

Furthermore, experiences that become empirical knowledge are generally processual and transient. In particular, descriptions of the aesthetic experience of art objects as being more passive in character than participating in performances often approximate the traditional descriptions of religious experience as being oriented towards concepts of revelation or epiphany. In addition, building on Novalis's likening of belief and imagination,[25] parallels can be drawn between the active processes of myth creation and performative faith or belief practices. The similarity between what is called either religious or aesthetic experience not only refers to perceptive behaviour but also to deliberate actions. Just as allowing oneself to enter the fictive world of a novel, an opera, a film, or a game requires a conscious decision, resolution and decision may also lie at the basis of religious experiences when, for example, deliberate rituals take place.

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[24] "Der Sinn für Poesie hat viel mit dem Sinn für Mystizism gemein. Er ist der Sinn für das Eigentümliche, Personelle, Unbekannte, Geheimnisvolle, zu Offenbarende, das Notwendigzufällige. Er stellt das Undarstellbare dar. Er sieht das Unsichtbare, fühlt das Unfühlbare etc." Novalis, "Fragmente und Studien 1799–1800," in *Schriften*, vol. 3, eds. Paul Kluckhohn et al. (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1960), 685. In his book *Die Vielfalt religiöser Erfahrung: Eine Studie über die menschliche Natur*, trans. Eilert Herms and Christian Stahlhurt (Frankfurt/ Main: Insel, 1997), William James uses language in a way that has many similarities with the poetic language of his brother, the writer Henry James. See also the series of three collected volumes edited by Wolfgang Braungart, Gotthard Fuchs, and Manfred Koch, *Ästhetische und religiöse Erfahrungen der Jahrhundertwenden*, 3 vols., (Paderborn: Schöningh, 1997, 1998, 2000).

Aesthetic experience within the intensity of a liminal experience can be knowledge-creating or it can re-order our moral values. If experiences such as delight in the beautiful and the creation of communities or the formation of a feeling of connectedness to another person are interpreted as potent aesthetic experiences, then they can also be seen as stabilizing the system of art in the same way that religiously interpreted experiences consolidate the system of religion. Beyond such internally systemic functions of aesthetic experience, it is common within diverse cultures to place aesthetic experiences at the service of economic, political, moral, religious, or therapeutic systems.

The Sublime

According to Rudolf Otto, the sacred, as distinct from the profane, can be experienced as *fascinosum* or *tremendum*, that is, as religious rapture or reverential awe.[26] These conceptual pairs have similarities with the concepts of the beautiful and the sublime in the aesthetic theories of Edmund Burke and Kant.[27] Likewise, both the pleasant and painful emotions typical of Christian contexts found their way into the poetic texts of the eighteenth century in order to strengthen the effect of literature, as seen for instance in Klopstock's *Über die heilige Poesie* (An Introduction on Divine Poetry) in his *Messias.* Whether experiences are referred to as religious or as aesthetic is a result of personal classifications that are rooted in culturally and historically specific understandings of religion and art.

The interleaving of aesthetic and religious experience is especially obvious in relation to the differing concepts of the sublime. In common usage the term ‘sublime’ means that which is overwhelming or large. According to Kant an object itself cannot be sublime. Only the mind can reach the sublime when it realises its own powerlessness to understand what it sees but can nevertheless sense a certain pleasure. Moments of being overwhelmed or full of admiration, in which the viewer experiences the limits of his or her capacity can be caused by unusual size, expanse, special formations, by the impression of perfection, or by meaningful utterances. If mind and judgement compensate for what sensual experience and imagination initially can’t conceive, the viewer will feel elevated. Again, drawing on Kant, it is not the object that is sublime, but rather the mood of the mind.[28]

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[25] Novalis, "Das Allgemeine Broullion," in *Schriften*, vol. 3, 421: "Vernunft ist directer Poët—direct productive Imag[ination]—*Glauben* ist indirecter Poët—indirect prod[uktive] Imag[ination]."

[26] Rudolf Otto, *Das Heilige: Über das Irrationale in der Idee des Göttlichen und sein Verhältnis zum Rationalen* (Breslau: Trewendt & Granier, 1917).

[27] Otto establishes the relationship to the sublime himself; Otto, *Das Heilige*, 54. John Dewey's theory of *Art as Experience* is also built upon the notion of an absolute: "Either our experiences [. . .] have ultimate meaning and worth, and the 'Absolute' is only the most adequate possible construing of this meaning; or else, having it not, they are not available to give content to the Absolute"; Josiah Royce: The World and the Individual" [1900], in John Dewey, *The Middle Works, 1899–1924*, vol. 2 (Carbondale: Siu Press, 1976), 137.

After the concept of the sublime had already been applied to questions of the elevation of the soul by way of language and stylistic means in the writing of Pseudo-Longinos,[29] it became a basic concept in eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century aesthetics. Since the concept was revisited in the twentieth century, an understanding oriented towards negative theology is striking in that it refers to Plato but also to some passages in Longinos.[30] The first comprehensive engagement with the sublime as Kant described it can be seen in the work of Theodor W. Adorno, who also took up the term art-religion (*Kunstreligion*).[31] For Adorno, the sublime is a pioneer of an aesthetics of the non-representable: “The legacy of the sublime is unassuaged negativity, as stark and illusionless as was once promised by the semblance of the sublime.”[32] Since Adorno’s development of the concept, and in contrast to Kant’s understanding of the perceiving and thinking person, the sublime has become a quality of aesthetic objects, which accords with the concepts of negative theology.[33] This turn to an art-religious understanding of the sublime in the twentieth century is the extension of a Romantic tradition.[34]

While religious devotion or endlessness were two isolated examples among many other ways to experience the sublime in the years around

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[28] See Immanuel Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgement*, ed. Paul Guyer, trans. Paul Guyer and Eric Mathews (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), §26.

[29] James A. Arieti, and John M. Crossett, trans., *Longinus. On the Sublime*, (New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 1985).

[30] Christine Pries, “Einleitung,” in *Das Erhabene: Zwischen Grenzerfahrung und Größenwahn*, ed. Christine Pries (Weinheim: VCH Verlagsgesellschaft, 1989), 3; Birgit Recki, “Das Erhabene,” in *Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, vol. 2, ed. Hans Dieter Betz (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1999), 1408.

[31] Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, ed. Gretel Adorno and Rolf Tiedemann, trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997).

[32] Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 199.

[33] Alois Halbmayr, ed., *Negative Theologie heute? Zum aktuellen Stellenwert einer umstrittenen Tradition* (Freiburg: Herder, 2008).

[34] The notion of the sublime as the non-tangible element that characterises the poetic can already be seen in the work of Romantic thinker Giacomo Leopardi, “Zibaldone di pensieri,” in *Tutte le opere*, ed. Francesco Flora, vol. 4 (Milan: Mondadori, 1938), 1300, which is quoted in Jörg Heininger, “Erhaben,” in *Ästhetische Grundbegriffe* vol. 2, ed. Karlheinz Barck et al. (Stuttgart: Metzler, 2001), 299.

1800, Jean-François Lyotard developed a primarily mystic understanding of the sublime that also comes from Romanticism.[35] Unlike Adorno, he does not link his discussion to musical virtuosity and literary forms but rather to the idea of colour-field painting in Barnett Newman's *The Sublime is Now*, or the abstract expressionist paintings of Mark Rothko, Robert Motherwell, Clyfford Still, Ad Reinhardt, or Jackson Pollock. Lyotard sees the abstraction of the pictures as the "negative presentation"[36] of the infinite.

> Negative presentation is the sign of the presence of the absolute, and it is or can only make a sign of being absent from the forms of the presentable. Thus, the absolute remains unpresentable; no given is subsumable under its concept. But the imagination can nonetheless signal its presence, in an almost insane mirage, through the emptiness it discovers beyond its capacity to comprehend. This gesture must be understood reflexively, however, for it is only through its sensation that the thought that imagines can be made aware of this presence without presentation.[37]

Lyotard describes what we could call aesthetic experiences of the sublime as being situated somewhere between imagining and understanding, between the presentation and the impression of emptiness. He also points out that the process of imagining and producing the presence of the absolute or the sublime can be rationally observed, but only as a reaction to what is being sensed. In his interpretation of Lyotard's text, Wolfgang Welsch emphasises the feeling of that which is beyond comprehension ("das Gefühl des nicht mehr Faßbaren.")[38] Following Lyotard, he highlights how in art something akin to the ban on images in the Old Testament is revived, not because it portrays God in the abstract but because the inarticulability of that which is represented is reminiscent of religious traditions. Iconoclasm becomes a metaphor, whereas the sublime is associated with the sensitive, subtle, unconscious, and transcendent.[39] Referring to Kant's notion of the feeling of the sublime, Christine Pries, who has translated Lyotard into German, describes a paradox between pleasure and pain, insanity and enthusiasm. She sees the sublime as a paradox itself.[40] That said, it is not surprising that the structural analogy between the aesthetics of the sublime and the theories of negative theology has been increasingly interpreted along theological lines.[41] It is no coincidence, for example, that in discussing the sublime in contemporary literature, Torsten Hoffmann, who highlights the aesthetic and poetic implications of the concept of the sublime, singles out the work of authors like Peter Handke, Christoph Ransmeyer, and Botho Strauß,[42] whose narratives can also be characterised by way of the mystical or mythical forms of art-religion.

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[35] Thomas Weiskel, *The Romantic Sublime: Studies in the Structure and Psychology of Transcendence* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976).

[36] Jean-François Lyotard, *Lessons on the Analytic of the Sublime: Kant's Critique of Judgment, § 23–29*, trans. Elizabeth Rottenberg (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994), 150.

[37] Lyotard, *Lessons on the Analytic of the Sublime,* 152.

[38] Wolfgang Welsch, "Die Geburt der postmodernen Philosophie aus dem Geist der modernen Kunst," *Philosophisches Jahrbuch* 97 (1990), 22.

[39] Welsch, "Die Geburt der postmodernen Philosophie," 22.

[40] Pries, "Einleitung," 10f. See also, *Ästhetik im Widerstreit: Interventionen zum Werk von Jean-François Lyotard*, eds. Wolfgang Welsch and Christine Pries (Weinheim: VCH Acta Humanoria, 1991). In light of Lyotard's emphasis on the idea that the "inexpressible does not reside in an over there, in another word, or another time, but in this: in that (something) happens" see Lyotard, "The Sublime and the Avant-Garde," in *The Inhuman: Reflections on Time*, trans. Geoffrey Bennington and Rachel Bowlby (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991, 1993). Christine Pries in her interpretation of Lyotard highlights that it takes similar shape in process-heavy performative art in the lead-up to every performance. The sublime, she argues,

Against the background outlined here, the re-interpretation and re-deployment of the concept of the sublime became part of art-religious concepts in contemporary theoretical aesthetics. Here, it is above all the concept of aura that is significant. Whereas for Kant the concept of the sublime sees the spectator reflected in the freedom of his or her own power of judgement, against which is set the overcoming of a feeling of powerlessness, Lyotard emphasises the limits of human perception in light of the sublime. The sublime is for him, therefore, a feature of art objects. Following up on considerations of an independent existence and the power of art, he even speaks of the "anaesthetizing effect" of art.[43] In a successful interplay between reason, sensory perception, and affect, it derives from the feeling that characterises the aesthetic—and originally, precisely the aesthetic of the sublime—of being sedated and of being powerless to grasp anything in either a sensory or spiritual sense. Insofar as Lyotard uses the concept of the sublime to describe the "contradictory feeling through which the indeterminate is enunciated and withdrawn,"[44] his clarification of the term comes very close to the art-religious concept of aura that is connected to Walter Benjamin's famous definition "We define the aura [. . .] as the unique apparition of a distance, however near it may be."[45]

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is not a metaphysics of transcendence; it is not to be vertically but rather horizontally understood, and it gains its critical function from the suggestion or insinuation of a range of possibilities (Pries, "Einleitung," 28).

[41] Christian Pöpperl, *Auf der Schwelle—Ästhetik des Erhabenen und negative Theologie: Pseudo-Dionysius Areopagita, Immanuel Kant und Jean-François Lyotard* (Würzburg: Königshausen und Neumann, 2007); Reinhard Hoeps, *Das Gefühl des Erhabenen und die Herrlichkeit Gottes: Studien zur Beziehung von philosophischer und theologischer Ästhetik* (Würzburg: Echter, 1989); Maurice Tuchmann, *The Spiritual in Art: Abstract Painting 1890–1985* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1986).

[42] Torsten Hoffmann, *Konfigurationen des Erhabenen: Zur Produktivität einer ästhetischen Kategorie in der Literatur des ausgehenden 20. Jahrhundert* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2006).

[43] Jean-François Lyotard, *L'inhumain: Causeries sur le temps* (Paris: Galilée, 1988), 200, quoted in Welsch, "Die Geburt der postmodernen Philosophie," 22. The German translation of Lyotard's text appeared shortly before the publication of Welsch's work.

[44] Jean-François Lyotard, "The Sublime and the Avant-Garde," 106.

[45] Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility" (Third Version), in Walter Benjamin, *Selected Writings*, vol. 4, 1938–1940, ed. Howard Eiland, and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2003), 255. This is strengthened in Katharina Bahlmann, *Können Kunstwerke ein Antlitz haben?* (Vienna: Passagen, 2008).

These two different concepts of the sublime are linked to the two different ways of thinking outlined above. Aura can be the feature of an object or it can be an aesthetic experience in the combination of an overwhelming sensual impression and its rational observation. It can be a word for the description of an equivalence of transcendence in art or nature and it can also describe an experience that can be interpreted either in a frame of religion or in a frame of aesthetics.

Conclusion

What people with specific backgrounds or beliefs call a religious experience can generally be interpreted equally as aesthetic. While Schleiermacher and Otto represent two examples of a long theological tradition in which aesthetic experience is a mediator to a belief in God, the aesthetic concepts of theorists like Kant or Fischer-Lichte demonstrate that it is possible to reverse the hierarchy in order to see the liminal experience or experience of the sublime as an end in itself.

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Annette Wilke

Classical Indian Aesthetics and *rasa* Theory: Observations on Embodied Rhetoric, Reader Response, and the Entanglement of Aesthetics and Religion in Hindu India

Abstract The chapter investigates the historical effectiveness and theoretical power of *rasa*, one of the key terms of Indian aesthetic theory, denoting here “dramatic effect,” “expression,” “aestheticised emotion,” “emotional flavour,” “mood,” and “aesthetic sentiment.” *Rasa* aesthetics refer to a theory of affect and effect, and as argued in the chapter may also be viewed as “embodied rhetoric.” The continuities and subtle transformations of *rasa* aesthetics as embodied rhetoric will be discussed from a historical and systematic perspective starting with its inception in the drama theory of the *Nāṭyaśāstra*, through to Ānandavārdhana’s poetics of suggestion, Abhinavagupta’s philosophy of aesthetic immersion, Śārṅgadeva’s musical yoga, Vaiṣṇava devotional *rasa-bhāva* theology, and finally to everyday speech. Particular emphasis is given to the manifold dovetailing of aesthetics and religion in India, and to two major shifts in perceiving *rasa*: (a) a shift from production aesthetics to reception aesthetics, reader response, and aesthetic immersion; and (b) (under the influence of the adoption of *rasa* in devotional religion and theology) from a strict separation of (transpersonal) aesthetic mood (*rasa*) and (personal) real world emotion (*bhāva*) to understanding *rasa* itself as real world emotion—for which, previous to *rasa* aesthetic theory, no separate term existed.

Introduction

> *Drink, o you connoisseurs* (rasika) *on earth who have*
> *a taste for the beautiful [or: who have a poetic taste,*
> *a taste for a language full of feeling]* (bhāvuka)*,*
> *drink again and again this Bhāgavatam, this store-*
> *house [of] aesthetic mood* (rasa) *(Bhāgavatam 1.1.3b).*[1]

These persuasive words are found in the invocation verse at the very beginning of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* (ninth century AD). This great Sanskrit work of emotional Kṛṣṇa devotionalism (*bhakti*) enjoyed exceeding popularity through the centuries. The initial phrase appeals to the reader (i.e. reciter or orator) and the listener to relish the religious text aesthetically and to participate in it almost corporally, to "drink its sap" and "enjoy the flavour of the nectar-like stories."[2] Metaphors of food and drink also abound elsewhere in *bhakti* literature. The "reader response" of the pious is often to "drink," "eat up," "devour," "chew," and "digest" the sacred text, to "taste the sweetness" of the divine name and immerse themselves in singing and listening to God's glories. The *Bhāgavatam* narrating Kṛṣṇa's life on earth became a script for establishing a close relationship to God and for achieving intensity of feeling by perceiving him as a child, master, friend, lover, or even hated enemy. Most of all, the work was supposed to incite a deep and affectionate "love of God" (*bhakti*). Indeed, the tenth book narrating Kṛṣṇa's "love games" with the *gopīs* (cowherdesses) inspired an Indian bridal mysticism.

The very diction and rhetoric of the source—not forgetting its audible dimension in actual performance—feeds the recipients' imagination and evokes strong images and emotions. The quote speaks of "aesthetic mood" (*rasa*), which in the case of religious literature is primarily the sentiment of devotion (*bhakti rasa*), peace of mind (*śānta rasa*), and sweetness (*mādhurya rasa*). However, the aesthetic experience goes beyond noetic content. Very much in consonance with European conceptions of aesthetics—Baumgarten's sensory cognition and Kant's synthesising intuitive knowledge, for example—the *rasa* refers to pre-reflexive, sensory-affective, non-notional experience triggered by sensory mediation. In the *bhakti* traditions, and the Hindu context at large, the spoken and sounding word, song, and music are invariably important sensory mediators used to produce aesthetic immersion. We are repeatedly advised to "drink" the religious text "with the cups of the ears."[3] Merely hearing it is held to be auspicious, purifying, and liberating. Thus, *rasa* is about the reader's response and also about the text's own agency and performance—its power to bring auspiciousness and to evoke and channel emotion.

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[1] *Pibata bhāgavataṃ rasa ālayam muhuraho rasikā bhuvi bhāvukāḥ* || (Bhāgavatam 1.1.3b). Quoted in James D. Redington, *Vallabhācārya on the Love Games of Kṛṣṇa* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1990), 3. It is the third benedictory verse before the main body of the text starts and also appears in the *Śrīmad Bhāgavata Māhātmya* the "Glorification of the Bhāgavatam" ascribed to the *Padma-Purāṇa*, 6.10. See C. L. Goswami and M. A. Shastri, ed. and trans., *Śrīmad Bhāgavata Mahāpurāṇa*, Sanskrit text and English translation, Part I (Gorakhpur: Gita Press, 2014), 44–45. Similar expressions are found within the *Bhāgavatam* itself, e.g. 1.1.10.

[2] *Bhāgavatam*, ed. and trans. Goswami and Shastri, 1, see also 2–3, 15, 45, 48.

Moreover, it is important to note that not only the religious idea behind calls for emotional and aesthetic identification, but also the very standards of literary theory dealing with "worldly," profane literature demand that truly artistic literature (*kāvya*) should not only produce meaning but also embody emotion and make it perceptible. *Rasa*, in the literary discourse is first of all "the linguistic production of an emotion in the text,"[4] but this production aesthetics—which was never lost from sight in the actual writing of literature and poetry—shifted its major locus to reception aesthetics and reader's response around the time the *Bhāgavatam* was composed. This religious text adopts the literary paradigm; it proudly intrudes into the space of worldly literature and breaks the genre's boundaries by demanding to be enjoyed not only as a *Purāṇa* ("ancient story" with religious content, mythical lore), but also as a *kāvya*, artistic literature or poetry.[5]

Remarkably, and truly outstanding in the sacred lore of *Purāṇa*s, the *Bhāgavatam* suggests, self-consciously and reflexively, the entanglement and merger of aesthetics and religion. It does not speak of devotees but rather of art lovers or "connoisseurs" (*rasika*) who, according to Indian aesthetics, must be *saḥṛdaya*, "of equal heart," with the artwork. They become its co-producers through deep listening, text participation, and aesthetic response—or, in the diction of the quote, by their "taste for the beautiful" (*bhāvuka*). Similar to *rasika*, the term *bhāvuka* does not relate to the beauty of content or the sublime in a religious sense, although it encompasses the semantic field of auspiciousness, blessing, and happiness. Beauty refers instead to literary beauty and ornamentation (*alaṅkāra*) (i.e. expressive forms, tropes, figures of sound and sense), which along with *rasa* belong to the very definition of literature and poetry.[6] Thus, "taste for the beautiful" is here synonymous with taste for poetry and literary beauty (*alaṅkāra*) and for a language full of feeling (*rasa*). Indeed, the *Bhāgavatam* is known for its beautiful language and poetic power full of *rasa*.

The original meaning of *rasa* was "sap (of a plant)," but there are many more lexical meanings in classical Sanskrit: starting with "taste," above all "a wholesome taste," and therefore also "essence" both in a technical and metaphorical sense. In addition, *rasa* connotes "condensate" and

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[3] This metaphor appears, for instance, in the Hindi *Rāmāyaṇa* of Tulsīdās (sixteenth century), the famous *bhakti* work of Northern India known and publicly recited and orated as Rāmkatha ("the story of God Rām"). The earlier *Bhāgavatam* contains quite similar expressions and oral-aural practices and originated in the South.

[4] Sheldon Pollock, "Sanskrit Literary Culture from the Inside Out," in *Literary Cultures in History: Reconstructions from South Asia*, ed. Sheldon Pollock (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 47.

[5] Pollock, "Sanskrit Literary Culture," 60, 61.

[6] Pollock, "Sanskrit Literary Culture," 40.

"concentrate," and can therefore also suggest "drug" or "medicine"; so, *rasa* can also cover the semantic field and actual literal meaning of "sap, nectar, taste, flavour, essence." In fact, it became a key term for many aesthetic theories in South Asia. Here it denotes "dramatic effect," "expression," and "aestheticised emotion," referring to "emotional flavour," "mood," and "aesthetic sentiment." This chapter explores the history, the shifting reflexive appraisal, and the oscillating relation to religion of *rasa* aesthetics, which made its first appearance in theatre studies many centuries before the *Bhāgavatam*.

I want to suggest that *rasa* aesthetics may be understood as embodied rhetoric and the art of sensuous and emotional persuasion. This suggestion will need more elaboration, of course, for I do not mean to suggest that these aesthetic formations are strict equivalents or structurally equal to European rhetoric, but rather to introduce an alternative perspective by looking at how other cultures deal with similar questions and offer new insights through their different focus.[7] Instead of intellectual persuasion, it is auratic, emotional and sensory persuasion, feeling and embodiment—including affective body language—that are crucial to this Indian alternative. Notwithstanding historical transformations and a broad spectrum of evaluations, the common thread remains the corporal presence of non-corporal affect associated with the *rasa*—that is, its relation not only to emotion and interiority, but also to mediality and expressive form. The reflexive appraisal of *rasa* deeply influenced not only the understanding of art and religious experience, including its triggers, for instance song and music which emotionalise the message and are traditionally defined as "colouring the mind," *rasa* aesthetics also left traces on the whole cultural system. *Rasa* became the key for conceptualising affect and determined the cultural evaluation of feelings and emotionality[8]—and in fact, it has become a major term for "emotion."

This chapter investigates the implicit and explicit entanglement of aesthetics and religion and the continuities and shifts in understanding *rasa* aesthetics in the domains of theatre, poetry, philosophy, music, religion, and everyday life. The first section will set the framework for the investigation that follows. It will draw attention to the cultural matrix in which *rasa* aesthetics developed and discuss the concepts of "embodied rhetoric" and Indian aesthetics from a comparative perspective. The second section discusses Bharata's *Nāṭyaśāstra*, the foundational text of Indian aesthetics and of what I call "embodied rhetoric," both of which first appear in drama theory and theatre studies. The following sections explore the continuities and transformations of *rasa* aesthetics (as a theory of affect and effect and of embodied rhetoric) in poetics and literary theory (section 3), and in metaphysics, musicology, and religion (section 4). The concluding section 5 summarises the shifts within *rasa* theory, in particular the shifting locus of *rasa*, which engendered lasting effects in understanding emotion in daily life. Particular consideration will also be given to the multiple functions of *rasa* aesthetics as embodied rhetoric and its power of forming collective and subjective identity within and beyond religion.

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[7] Although no precise equivalent to the term and concept of European rhetoric exists in India (see also below, section 1), M. Monier-Williams, *A Dictionary English and Sanskrit* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 41992), 690, includes nevertheless the lexeme "rhetoric" and identifies it with *alaṅkāravidyā* (the "knowledge of ornamentation" referring to the poetics school of ornate poetry) and also with the art of *pravacana* (eloquent proclamation, public discourse). Both certainly contain rhetorical elements but are neither identical to European rhetoric, nor with each other. My suggestion that we may understand *rasa* aesthetics as "embodied rhetoric" also tries to connect European and Indian data but goes in another direction. It builds on the insight that no exact equivalent to European rhetoric theory was developed in India and stresses a possibly unique Indian form of rhetoric that is based on the sensory and the emotional as central features. Although I will also include poetics, it is not the older school of Ornamentalists which will provide my basic material, but the later school of suggestion.

[8] June McDaniel, "Chapter 3: Hinduism," in *The Oxford Handbook of Religion and Emotion*, ed. John Corrigan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 51–71.

1. Indian performance culture and rasa aesthetics as embodied rhetoric

The corporal trope of drinking the sacred text with the cups of the ears is an important hint of the contextual frame of this chapter's contents. The wider background is a cultural matrix in which text, ritual, and sound belong together. Since ancient times and even after the introduction of writing, the vast lore of sacred literature in Hindu India—and even profane texts—have always been embodied in the voice: they are performed, memorised, declaimed, taught face-to-face from teacher to student, preached in public, recited, sung, staged, and danced, but hardly ever silently read. The spoken *and* the sounding word are highly esteemed in the cultural system of symbols.[9] This feature persists even today, particularly in the religious field. Orality and literacy have never been mutually exclusive; texts are there to be heard and they are composed with that in mind. Readings are thus performances and texts are aesthetic events. They are not restricted to semantic information but speak just as strongly to the senses, the body, and the emotions. Many discourses in the past have attached great importance to a careful audible realisation and were often also very sensitive to the emotive contents and the communication of moods. This cultural fabric of common conditions for aesthetic/aisthetic and religious experience gave way to manifold relations and to a dovetailing between art/poetry and religion/sacred literature. It is noteworthy, however, that in the past the sensory-aesthetic dimensions in the production and reception of texts was not restricted to the religious sphere. Even mathematicians made use of sonic codes, the most complex metres, and double encoding (*śleṣa*). They chose the diction of the poets and of liturgical literature to convince and persuade the readers.

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[9] Guy L. Beck, *Sonic Theology: Hinduism and Sacred Sound* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1993); Annette Wilke and Oliver Moebus, *Sound and Communication. An aesthetic cultural history of Sanskrit Hinduism* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2011); Annette Wilke, "Sound," in *Brill's Encyclopedia of Hinduism*, vol 5, ed. Knut A. Jacobsen (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 134–149; Annette Wilke, "Sonic Perception and Acoustic Communication in Hindu India," in *Exploring the Senses*, ed. Axel Michaels and Christoph Wulf (New Delhi: Routledge, 2014), 120–144.

In India too, and perhaps most pronouncedly in this cultural area, this book's overarching question about religious texts, rhetorical theory, and aesthetic response must be tackled from the standpoint of aesthetics. Remarkably, within the highly performative cultural framework, which also includes sophisticated hermeneutics, early scientific linguistics, and a long culture of debate, no exact equivalent to European rhetoric was developed. Instead we find at a very early age an aesthetic theory of affects and effects and their means of expression and stimulation, which may be termed (perhaps) "embodied rhetoric." This theory of sensory (non-verbal) rhetoric and emotive persuasion and its key-term *rasa*, "aesthetic sentiment," appear for the first time in the *Nāṭyaśāstra* ascribed to Bharata, the famous textbook for the theatre, which was compiled from the second/third century BC to fourth/fifth century AD.

The *Nāṭyaśāstra* remained the foundational work for classical Indian aesthetics due to *rasa* retaining its role as the most important element. It had a deep and long-term impact on poetics, musicology, religion, and the culture at large. It is important for the argument of embodied rhetoric to see the *rasa* aesthetics as both rooted in and spilling over to India's pronounced performance culture and its predilection for orality. It is likewise vital to keep in mind that literature was functionally aligned to memorising, oral-aural performance, public staging, and sensory-affective effectiveness and persuasion beyond the semantic meaning aspect, rational argument or mere delivery of information. Theatre, aesthetics, performance, orality, and emotion may thus be seen as a larger unity whose common denominator is an embodied rhetoric aiming at sensory-affective persuasion. This chapter's aim is to understand the *rasa* aesthetics' history of success and the processes of semiosis attached to different forms of mediality in their own right and context. But I also wish to occasionally draw attention to the structural resemblances (beyond obvious divergencies) with European rhetoric and aesthetic theories, starting with Greco-Roman rhetoric's prime model of face-to-face oration rather than textual rhetoric. In some ways similar to Indian theatre, European Greco-Roman rhetoric—understood as the orators' art of persuasion—included a theory of affects which in turn also became fundamental for poetics. Like European rhetoric, Indian *rasa* aesthetics includes questions of style and figures of speech, although these were never its basic elements.

From the European perspective, *rasa* aesthetics only partly overlap with European rhetoric, in so far as it shares the important theoretical realm of classifying emotions. As already outlined, it is strictly speaking more a theory of affect and effect and less a theory of intellectual persuasion, style, clarity of speech, or of convincing and logical argument, as it developed in Europe (let alone the charge of moral corruptness).[10] *Rasa* aesthetics does not refer to politics, (i.e. to public speech to attain political power) or to education in the first place, but instead to complex poetical systems of drama and literary theory, which of course infiltrated many other cultural segments—from the tandem of poetry and polity[11] and theatre's educational programme (see below section 2) to everyday speech and, most profoundly, religion. What makes it still meaningful to speak of rhetoric is not merely that oral and public performance and the art of brilliant speech belong to the *rasa* aesthetics, just as they do to the European concept of rhetoric, it is the very centre of *rasa* aesthetics—the emotional flavour and atmospheric mood—which makes it an excellent candidate for the art of persuading and convincing. Good speech (like good story) happens only when the orator manages to touch the emotions of the audience. One might even suggest that these emotions are the very engines of persuasion and efficacy. Thus, emotions are fundamental particularly where persuasion is pursued, and this is what *rasa* is all about. Indian thinkers pondered very deeply the verbal and non-verbal means of evoking emotional response. Unlike European rhetoric, *rasa* aesthetics surmount the linguistic framework. *Rasa* is about atmospheres, that which touches in and beyond the language, and also about the *rasa*'s media of expression which include not only figures of speech, but also modeling the voice, bodily gestures, etc. This is why I speak of *embodied* rhetoric. Aesthetic-aisthetic expressions enhance and colour effective speech beyond the verbal message and have strongly emotionalising effects. Since human understanding and knowledge production is more encompassing and pervasive than intellectual conviction, there is also something akin to emotional and body knowledge[12] or emotional intelligence. Indeed, the discussion of *rasa* in various Indian contexts amounts to understanding feeling as its own category of knowledge. Indian theatre studies probably rightly proclaim that nothing exists outside the realm of *rasa*, and in this sense, embodied rhetoric indicates a concept of rhetoric which surpasses mere intellectual persuasiveness and conviction but includes body, mind, and intellect in a holistic manner. *Rasa* aesthetics as embodied rhetoric and the art of sensuous and emotional persuasion may be an innovative stimulus for an enlarged concept of rhetoric within and beyond Europe. But even if we do not want to go that far, the surprising and daring proposition of *rasa* aesthetics as “embodied rhetoric” tries to conceptualise rhetoric from an alternative angle and add to intercultural understanding and exchange.

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[10] The art of argumentation can be seen in India in a pronounced debating culture (expressed in writing in commentaries and hagiographies) and in exegetical rules developed in the Vedic Mīmāṃsā schools.

[11] According to Sheldon Pollock, *The Language of the Gods in the World of Men: Sanskrit Culture and Power in Premodern India* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006; Delhi: Permanent Black, 2007) the tandem of poetry and polity brought about a "Sanskrit cosmopolis" from Java to Afghanistan in the first millennium and spread a common vision of state and ethos. He attributes a vital role in this process to the epic *Rāmāyaṇa*, the first great *kāvya* work of India.

[12] A strong argument for body knowledge and the physiological conditions of all our knowing has been forwarded by Anne Koch, *Körperwissen, Grundlegung einer Religionsaisthetik* (Habilitationsschrift University of Munich, 2007, Open Access University of Munich) (urn:nbn:de:bvb:19-epub-12438-7). She seeks, not least, to overcome the Cartesian body-mind split.

One might object that European rhetoric theory and its classification of emotions was aware of some of the aspects that were central to Indian embodied rhetoric, whereas the latter lacked the explicit rhetoric instruction that was so central in Europe. However, at least in part, a structural equivalent to European rhetoric instruction can be found in the instructions for the actors in Indian theatre studies. Since every act of rhetoric is a form of staging and pathos, the instructions for the actors in Indian drama theory are of particular interest. They concern primarily paralinguistic, nonverbal, and performative means of communication, which are particularly relevant in a situation where voice dominates letter. A special property of any oral communication and orator’s performance are a number of transrational and metalinguistic elements which contribute substantially to the success of persuasive effects, for instance, the constitution and “language” of the body, the timbre of the voice, the gestures of the hands, and most of all the very presence of the performer and his/her skill of staging and interacting.[13] It is precisely the reflection on these kinds of data which led to the development of *rasa* theory and aesthetics-aisthetics in early Indian theatre studies, whereas in European rhetoric theory they were counted among the secondary, “peripheral routes” of communicative persuasion in contrast to the “central route” of notional impact and rational argumentation.[14] As argued above, emotionalising strategies are central to an art of persuasion and more generally for any personal conviction, affective bonds, moral decisions, and shared spaces of imagination. Perhaps European rhetoric was blinkered in this aspect or too biased in favouring the intellect and discursive mind over feeling and emotions. Either way, it is important that *rasa* aesthetics focus not on the *what* but on the *how* of communication and its effects. It is a rhetoric theory of aesthetic articulation, stimulation, and response.

I will show that Indian aesthetics and *rasa* theory is also very much about completeness and claims of universality,[15] and not just about the beautiful and sublime. These terms have been central to European aesthetics and theories of art and the popular understanding of aesthetics since the eighteenth century. The term “aesthetics” itself was coined at that time by Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten (1714–62) who initiated aesthetics as an academic discipline concerned with sensory perception or aisthetics (Greek *aisthesis*), recollection, beauty, and the arts; whereas Immanuel Kant's (1724–1804) critical aesthetics (re-)introduced the category of the sublime in addition to beauty—not as properties of objects, but as judgements of taste relying on emotional cognition and response. According to Kant, while the beautiful attracts, the sublime affects the recipient in a deeper way. It shares affinities with religion and may be also fear-inspiring. The sublime connotes something boundlessly great and mighty which excels everything and transcends all limitations and ordinary daily life—a power which lifts up everything base, vulgar, and lowly and inspires virtuousness. Perhaps the closest proximity to European aesthetics of the beautiful and sublime can be seen in the *bhakti* aesthetics relating to the divine absolute, the infinite and wonderful, and subjectively to surrender, devotion, ecstasy, awe, and the refinement of emotional sentiment and spiritual life. Of course, the changing European theories of the sublime make it a very complex category and not at all necessarily related to religion.[16] Many aspects of it have been covered by Indian *rasa* aesthetics since its inception, and without ever actually using the term "sublime." These include and stretch from the artwork's world- and time-transcending power and the elevation of the soul by poetic speech to the aesthetic responses sense of wonder, heroism, fear, and terror, which in Europe fell under the category of sublime but in Indian theatre studies belong to the most basic *rasas*. Similar to Kant's idea of the sublime, the *rasas* issuing from theatre play were thought to have uplifting power regarding moral life (*dharma*).

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[13] Joachim Knape, *Was ist Rhetorik?* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 2000), 99.

[14] Knape, *Rhetorik*, 96.

[15] Aesthetic theorists, such as Bhaṭṭanāyaka, attribute to poetry (and any art) two major functions besides creating meaning (*abhidā*), namely that of producing ineffable relish and pleasure (*bhojakatva*) and the power of universalisation (*bhāvakatva,* i.e. *sādhāraṇīkaraṇa*) which strips ordinary emotion(s) “of their individual and personal aspects and generalizes them in the minds of the spectators endowed with the power of imagination”: K. Kunjunni Raja, *Indian Theories of Meaning* (Chennai: Adyar Library and Research Centre (1969) 2000), 287–288.

Likely, it was not only the *rasa*'s birth in theatre, but also India's performance culture that assured that *rasa* theorists never lost sight of the fact that aesthetics and aisthesis go together and that aesthetic moods need suggestive sensual stimulation. This remained stable even though a move becomes detectable from the objective (the actors' representations of *rasa*) to the subjective (the recipients' relish of *rasa*)—that is, from production to reception aesthetics. When *rasa* theory reached its peak with Abhinavagupta (tenth–eleventh centuries), the sublime was found in the aesthetic immersion itself. Abhinavagupta, the famous aesthetic theorist, Kashmir philosopher, and proponent of non-dual Śaiva Tantra, declared aesthetic immersion and self-forgetfulness to be the only central *rasa* underlying the plurality of *rasas* and pointed out its resemblance to the religious peak-experience of mystical oneness.

There have since been many shifting functions of *rasa* and aesthetic immersion. The relationship of art and religion was likewise changing and very complex, ranging from demarcation and boundary-work to interface and dovetailing, and finally even identification. The following chapters record some paradigmatic shifts while expounding the *rasa* theory in theatre, poetics, philosophy, musicology, and religious settings. As Bharata's *Nāṭyaśāstra* was foundational for all later discourses, it will be treated more elaborately. I will also give particular weight to Ānandavārdhana (ninth century), who explored poetics as an art of suggestion. His *Dhvanyāloka* and new school of poetics became very influential. The *Nāṭyaśāstra* and the *Dhvanyāloka* contain most of the material for what I call embodied rhetoric. Both works were commented on by Abhinavagupta who is thought to have brought the *rasa* theory to perfection with his philosophy of aesthetic identification. This had an impact on musicology, and *rasa* was also adopted in religious discourse, most prominently in Vaiṣṇava theology; however, this very rich later tradition will be treated in a more summary fashion. Particular consideration will be given to the shifting functions of aesthetic response and religious encoding, starting with the theatre's claim to be the Veda for the common people.

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[16] Jörg Heininger, "Erhaben," in *Ästhetische Grundbegriffe. Historisches Wörterbuch in sieben Bänden*, ed. Karheinz Barck et al., vol. 2 (Stuttgart: Metzler, 2001), 275–310.

2. Bharata's *Nāṭyaśāstra*: Theatre as a Veda for the common folk and the theory of aesthetic moods

> *Students of the Veda are forbidden to play dice,*
> *read books, chase women, sleep all day long or go to*
> *the theater.*[17]

This quotation is from the *Nāradīyā-Śikṣā*, a handbook of Veda phonetics. In it theatre is something that Veda students should avoid, as it is improper behaviour to mix with the low and common folk, and actors were of very low social status. But some seem not to have obeyed the prohibition, evidenced by the texts on theatre studies containing quotations from the works of the Vedic phoneticians and the passages on scale theory in certain works of Vedic phonetics that seem to have been taken from theatre studies. In fact, theatre studies apply very similar methods to those used in phonetics, which is not surprising since ultimately both disciplines are dedicated to the sensory aspect of signs and sound: Indian theatre comprises speech, play, dance, song, and instrumental music; strictly speaking, theatre is often dance drama or music drama.

Just like the Vedic recitation manuals, theatre studies also provide detailed technical instructions about how one should recite texts. A distinction is made between presentations that use the voice, gestures or facial expression (*abhinaya*). Theatre studies, however, are not limited to the instruction of acting techniques, but relate them to a metalinguistic category which tries to cover the sensory emotive content of the actors' voices, gestures, and faces—the *rasa.* What is more characteristic of theatre studies and later aesthetic theory than anything else is this central term *rasa*—that is, mood, expression, dramatic effect.

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[17] *Nāradīyā-Śikṣā* 2.8.30, ed., trans., and annot. by Usha A. Bhise (Pune: Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, 1986), 73. A more literal translation would be, "The six obstructions to attaining [Vedic] knowledge are dice, love of the theatre, reading books, women, and sleepiness": *dyūtaṃ pustakavādyaṃ ca nāṭakeṣu ca saktikā* [*saktatā*?] | *striyastandrā ca nidrā ca vidyāvighnakarāṇi ṣaṭ* || See Wilke and Moebus, *Sound and Communication*, 504 and fn. 70.

The main source for theatre studies is Bharata's *Nāṭyaśāstra* ("Textbook for the theatre").[18] For simplicity's sake, I will speak of "Bharata" and *Nāṭyaśāstra* interchangeably, although the work must have had more than one author. The compilation of an early, now-vanished version was probably available in the second century AD,[19] which will have contained much more ancient material and been further reworked. The treatise covers all the arts that are important for musical theatre: poetry, prosody, dance, music theory, singing and the study of instruments, drama theory, stage construction, costumes and make-up, and also techniques for directing.

As mentioned, the *Nāṭyaśāstra* 1.12–18 claims the theatre to be the "fifth Veda," a Veda for the common folk. This symbolic appropriation of the most authoritative and sacred text of normative Brahmanical Hinduism, which was restricted to the three higher castes and in practice known only to the Brahmins, is remarkable considering the despised status of theatre and actors, as well as the fact that the only thing theatre shares with the Veda is its claim to universality. While this claim is founded in the belief of the Veda's timelessness and eternal validity, the universality of the theatre lies in the notion that the whole of reality is represented: "Everything that occurs in the three worlds [earth, air and heavens], is the subject of the theatre."[20] Theatre seeks to impart extensive knowledge about the world, it describes humans' behaviour in happiness and misery, and points out the consequences of doing right and wrong. Thus it is not only entertaining, but also educational and comforting (*Nāṭyaśāstra* 1.112–120). Bharata's theatre is trying to be "universal theatre" in the truest sense of the word, and this is expressed not least in his metalinguistic *rasa* theory. The search for completeness may explain why (unlike in classical Western aesthetics) even revulsion and disgust belong to states of mind that are eligible for treatment in the arts. Indian aesthetics has a characteristic striving to integrate all the diverging states of the soul and therefore quite a different programme than that of classical European aesthetics. The Indian theatre aims to harmonise the many and varied fields of meaning in life, which exist in everyday life separated and conflicting with one another:

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[18] *Nāṭyaśāstram of Bharatamuni*, ed. Manavalli Ramakrishna Kavi, 4 vols. (Baroda: Oriental Institute, 21956); R. S. Nagar and K. L. Joshi, eds., *Nāṭyaśāstram of Bharatamuni: With Sanskrit Commenary Abhinavabhāratī by Abhinavagupta and English Introduction*, 4 vols. (Delhi: Parimal Publications, 1994); Lyne Bansat-Boudon, *Poétique du theatre indien: Lectures du Nāṭyaśāstra* (Paris: École francaise d'Extrème-Orient, 1992); Paul Thieme, "Das indische Theater," in *Fernöstliches Theater*, ed. H. Kindermann (Stuttgart: Kröner, 1966), 21–120; Wilke and Moebus, *Sound and Communication*, 504–524. This chapter's discussion of the *Nāṭyaśāstra* is largely based on Wilke and Moebus.

[19] Pollock, "Sanskrit Literary Culture," 42.

[20] . . . *trailokyasyāsya sarvasya naṭyaṃ bhāvānukīrtanam* | (Nāṭyaśāstra 1.107, trans. by Wilke and Moebus, *Sound and Communication*, 505)

> Sometimes we show *dharma* (noble deeds with high morals), sometimes comedy and games, sometimes striving for riches, sometimes a peaceful soul. Sometimes people laugh, sometimes they fight, sometimes they make love and sometimes they commit murder.[21]

There are two prerequisites for the theatre's claim that it portrays all aspects of our world: (a) that all objects and events must be surrounded by *rasa*—they must have a dramatic power and inexorably bring about emotional participation; and (b) that all objects and events in the world can also be represented in this atmospheric form of aesthetic mood. The reality of the theatre does not reflect phenomenal reality—otherwise it would not be theatre. However, in contrast to a literary work, the objects and events of everyday reality (*lokadharma*) are not only named, but also occur in quite a real way on the stage (*nāṭyadharma*). The reality of the theatre should provide both elements: sensory immediacy in the gesture, plus artistic communication of moods. In the actors' instructions every mood is painstakingly described in a phenomenological elaborate manner. The result is a profound systematic exploration of the spectrum of human feelings and their bodily expressions. Not least, the early Indian theatre studies inspired this paper's fundamental term "embodied rhetoric."

2.1 THE *RASA* THEORY OF AFFECTS

In theatre studies *rasa* refers to the sensory emotive content of the actors' voices, gestures and faces, and denotes dramatic effect. There is emphasis on production aesthetics which are intended to evoke specific moods in the audience during a performance. One can neither see nor hear the *rasa*, according to Bharata, one can only "taste" it—we might say "feel" it. The *Nāṭyaśāstra* classifies eight fundamental moods (*rasa*) based on eight basic types of emotions (*sthāyi-bhāva*) known to everybody:[22]

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[21] *kvacid dharmaḥ kvacit krīḍā kvacid arthaḥ kvacicchamaḥ | kvaciddhāsyaṃ kvacid yuddhaṃ kvacit kāmaḥ kvacid vadhaḥ* || (Nāṭyaśāstra 1.108, trans. by Wilke and Moebus, *Sound and Communication*, 507).

[22] It is noteworthy that the multi-semantic term *bhāva* ("existence, being," "condition," "state of being," "state of mind," "disposition," "opinion," but also "meaning," "meditation," "love," "amorous gesture," "will" and many other denotations) takes on, only in aesthetic theory—starting with drama theory—the explicit meaning of "emotion." Otherwise there is no separate term for emotion, or only very general terms like "movement of the mind" are used to connote "emotion," among other things (e.g. agitation etc.). As seen below, aesthetic theory makes a distinction of (eight) dominant or "primary" (*sthāyin*) and (thirty-three) accessory or subordinate (*vyabhicārin*) *bhāvas* or emotions.

1. erotic romantic mood (*śṛṅgāra*) is based on pleasure of love, passion, and joie de vivre (*rati*);
2. comic mood (*hāsya*) is based on the subjective emotions of laughing and cheerfulness (*hāsa*);
3. tragic, pitying and compassionate mood (*karuṇā*) is based on sorrow and suffering (*śoka*);
4. tremendous, terrifying or terrible mood (*raudra*) is based on irritation and anger (*krodha*);
5. heroic mood (*vīra*) is based on will, stamina, effort and strength (*utsāha*);
6. mood of horror, or creepy mood (*bhayānaka*) is based on fear and anxiety (*bhaya*);
7. revolting and disgusting mood as an aesthetic quality (*bībhatsa*) is based on repugnance, antipathy, and hatred (*jugupsā*), i.e. on revulsion in a psychological sense;
8. fantastic and wonderful mood (*adbhuta*) is based on astonishment (*vismaya*).[23]

Later, a ninth *rasa* was added, the mood of peace (of mind) and tranquillity (*śānta*), which was based on detachment (*nirveda*) and represented by yogis, ascetics, and saints. This mood, however, always remained a matter of dispute and was never fully accepted amongst the sophisticated art critics and literary theorists. They sharply distinguished religious literature (the unauthored Veda and the seers' Purāṇas) from their own literary culture (*kāvya*), which was viewed as a purely human discourse based on expressive and indirect language, and the intentional use of imagination suiting the *rasa*,[24] as well as on real-world emotions and aesthetic moods.[25]

Indeed, the *Nāṭyaśāstra* already makes a strict distinction between emotions (e.g. jollity) and aesthetic moods, in this case the comic mood. According to Bharata's theory, the representation, for instance, of pleasure of love and lust for life (*rati*) through certain gestures and descriptions creates an erotic romantic mood (*śṛṅgāra-rasa*). This mood is not the desire for an individual person, but an aesthetic experience which must not be equated with the actual emotion of someone in love. According to Indian aesthetics, art has an ontology of its own. Later theorists even use the term "*alaukika,*" "unworldly" or "otherworldly," and *lokottara*, "transcending the world." It is held that feelings, such as pain and pity or sexual desire, always appear in works of art in a de-personalised form (*sādhāraṇīkṛta*). For this reason, they are able to arouse the same feeling in different people and are capable of expressing universal features about life. The *Nāṭyaśāstra* laid the groundwork for this claim of an intersubjective universality of *rasa*. Whereas one's emotions (i.e. real-world states of mind) are subjective and personal, *rasas* are transpersonal and relate to life as such. The notion of a transpersonal aesthetic sphere of pure feeling, which can be cognised and shared by all, was vital to the educational programme of theatre, which was to bring everything in life to the stage, to account for all emotions, harmonise the different sectors of life, and offer ethical guidance and moral upliftment.

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[23] See also T. P. Ramachandran, *The Indian Philosophy of Beauty*, 2 vols. (Madras: University of Madras, 1979–1980), here vol. 2, 52, and Paul Hacker, *Grundlagen indischer Dichtung und indischen Denkens* (Vienna: Institut für Indologie, 1985), 31.

[24] Pollock, "Sanskrit Literary Culture," 45–61, in particular 45–52. These men of letters were very self-conscious about producing fiction and proud of their skills in indirect, suggestive language, metaphors, and tropes.

[25] See Hacker, *Grundlagen indischer Dichtung.*

The fundamental idea of *rasa* aesthetics can be illustrated best by the famous *krauñca* episode, which initiates the epic *Rāmāyaṇa.* This episode describes how the author, Vālmīki, witnessed a female bird shot by a bird-catcher's arrow, and the pain of its mate. This experience, it is said, caused Vālmīki to write his famous work in the same fundamental mood—the aesthetic sentiment of pity and compassion. According to later art theorists it is not the particular pain of the bird, nor is it the subjective feeling of the poet that found expression in the first verse, but pain and pity in general. The *Nāṭyaśāstra* already understands the dramatic effect or mood of, for instance, eroticism (*śṛṅgāra,* literally "shining adornment," but also "erotic love") as a metalinguistic symbol which is separated from all actual occurrences of being in love and of sexuality and which has a purely aesthetic meaning. For this reason, although one can feel the erotic atmosphere of a scene, one cannot actually define it—at most one might find other ways of describing and interpreting it.

What remained essential to the *rasa* theory was that the *rasas* can be experienced in the same way, and although referring to feeling or an interior state of relish, they can be expressed and evoked. *Rasas* can be embodied, vocalised, and visualised, and this is precisely what happens in the theatre. The *Nāṭyaśāstra* contains clever considerations on body language, the modulation of voice, and psychosomatic gestures. It is this theory of aesthetic articulation, stimulation, and response, for which I have coined the term "embodied rhetoric," which, as outlined above, I understand as a theory of sensory (non-verbal) rhetoric and emotive persuasion. Bharata categorises the possible representations of *rasa* as follows:

- representation by gestures performed with the limbs (*āṅgika*) or the body;
- representation by the description of situations in the monologues and dialogues of the actors, and also by the character of the expression of the declamation (*vācika*), i.e. by vocal gestures or expressive vocalisations;
- representation by psychological or psychophysical gestures (*sāttvika*), such as one's hair standing on end or weeping, as an expression of strong emotions and feelings (*bhāva*);

— representation by other things, such as costume, jewellery, make-up and musical accompaniment.

The greatest influence in the development of the *rasa* theory was probably the need to provide specific instructions for the *sāttvika* or psychophysical gestures, whose execution required the performer to immerse himself in the mood of a scene. To describe the realisation of the *sāttvika* gestures, one also had to describe the moods. This necessarily led to the creation of an early phenomenology of affects and the formation of an extensive and subtle language of gestures.

2.2 ELABORATION OF THE AESTHETIC SENTIMENTS AND THEIR EMBODIMENTS

The eight basic types of emotions or fundamental states of the soul (*sthāyibhāva*) are condensed in the artistic expressions of the drama, which incite the corresponding eight aesthetic moods (*rasa*). Both the dominant emotional states and their corresponding *rasas* are elaborately described. This very detailed and exact phenomenological description includes also thirty-three transitory emotions (*vyabhicāribhāva*) (see below ch. 2.3). In the *Nāṭyaśāstra*'s phenomenological exploration of the spectrum of human feelings, every (aesthetic) mood (*rasa*) and the affect or fundamental emotional state (*bhāva*) on which it is based, is described along with the sensory indexes—suggestive images, tangible symbols, and corporal signs. To every mood a deity and a colour are allocated as well as certain sceneries and bodily gestures which evoke or directly express the mood and its specific atmosphere.

As an illustration of this, I will discuss the moods of the terrifying (*raudra*) and the wonderful or fascinating (*adbhuta*). These two sentiments are of particular interest because they correspond to Rudolf Otto's major terms for the numinous or holy—the contrast-harmony *mysterium tremendum* and *mysterium fascinans*.[26] In Otto's phenomenology of religious feelings and the sublime, the "*tremendum*" or terrifying mystery refers to feelings of wholesome dread, terror, and awe in reaction to a "wholly other," which ranges from gruesome demons and spirits that cause one to shudder and freeze, to the overwhelming divine majesty and energetic power that inspire complete surrender and the mystical death of the ego. The *fascinans*, on the other hand, denotes absolute attraction, fascination, and delight in something utterly wonderful (*mirum*), gracious, and charming that causes elation, rapture, and bliss. To Otto this "double character" of the numinous—that is, its "harmony of contrasts" (*Kontrastharmonie*)—is the foundational data of all religion(s). Emotions are at the centre of his definition of religion. The numinous, according to him, cannot be grasped rationally nor explained or defined, but only felt. In the non-religious field, he finds closest approximation in the aesthetic sublime.[27] His ultimate model, however, is mysticism in which he sees a "theology of the *mirum*"; the *mirum* (and its semantic field of mystery, astonishment, and wonder) denoting the ineffable wholly other.[28] Within this model the contrast-harmony of the holy, its double nature of repelling and attracting, becomes a mystical *coincidentia oppositorum*.

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[26] Rudolf Otto, *Das Heilige. Über das Irrationale in der Idee des Göttlichen und sein Verhältnis zum Rationalen* (Munich: Beck 1997, Original 1917). The book was so much read in his time that by 1927 it was already in its 22nd edition.

Otto's phenomenology received critique in contemporary religious studies for many reasons: for being ahistorical, blind to the social, far too focused on feeling, theologically biased (in favour of the Judeo-Christian tradition) and for going beyond a description of empirically sound data. Yet it is remarkable how much some of his ideas resonate with Indian data. The *tremendum* and *fascinans* belong not only to the list of basic *rasas*, Otto's thesis of a contrast-harmony is also quite suitable for Indian deities who are likewise classified into *ugra* (wild, awesome, and terrifying) and *saumya* (mild, gracious, and attractive), whilst all the great universal deities encompass the contrast-harmony of both features—with a clear dominance of the mild, gracious, utterly attractive and *mirum*. The Kṛṣṇa devotionalism discussed above fits precisely into this pattern: Kṛṣṇa has a cruel side (in killing the demons), but for his worshippers he is characterised by his exceedingly attractive sides (the flute-playing young cowherd inspiring mystical longing and *unio* experience). Indian *rasa* aesthetics, absorbed in Kṛṣṇa devotionalism, rests on the epistemological function of feeling as a category of knowledge. Similar to Otto's numinous, the Indian *rasa* can only be felt and not explained or grasped in rational terms. Otto saw the *mysterium tremendum* as the most fundamental and basic religious emotion. Even this is partly reflected in the Indian pantheon, for instance, in the terrifying Vedic god Rudra who was the protoform of the benign universal Lord God Śiva ("the auspicious one") of classical Hinduism. The theology of Śiva (in the Śaiva Āgamas as well as the Purāṇas) likewise bears many features of mystical *coincidentia oppositorum*.

Otto's psychological theory of the holy also finds correlation in the aesthetic moods of *raudra* (the terrifying) and *adbhuta* (the fascinating). However, *rasa* aesthetics are clearly not restricted to the supra-mundane and "wholly other"; in this sense one can also voice a critique of Otto.[29] Yet it is of interest that precisely *raudra* and *adbhuta* are the two *rasas* with the greatest affinity to religion in the *Nāṭyaśāstra* (where *śānta* and *bhakti rasa* do not yet exist)—whether it is in name, as in the case of *raudra,* meaning literally "the state of the god Rudra," or in religious associations and images, as in the case of *adbhuta*, a sense of wonder, attraction, and the wonderful.

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[27] Otto, *Das Heilige*, 56 (edition 1927, 58).

[28] Otto, *Das Heilige*, 31 (edition 1927, 39).

[29] See also Annette Wilke, "'Stimmungen' und 'Zustände'. Indische Ästhetik und Gefühlsreligiosität," in *Noch eine Chance für die Religionsphänomenologie?* ed. A. Michaels, D. Pezzoli-Olgiati and F. Stolz (Berne: Lang, 2001), 103–126.

What interests me here in particular are the precise phenomenological and psychophysical descriptions of aesthetic sentiments and their embodied expressions. The instructions of the actors begin with a deity and a colour, which provide a mental map for the specific *rasa* in a condensed and metaphoric form. The terrifying (*raudra*), for instance, is associated with the awesome god Rudra and the colour of this mood is [blood] red. The *Nāṭyaśāstra* elaborates:

> The fundamental state (*bhāva*) of the terrifying mood is anger and outrage *(krodha*). It has the character of a demon, of a wild giant or of an arrogant human being. It leads to war. It arises (*vibhāva*) when somebody is angry and outraged, mistreated, offended, deceived, attacked or abused, when he is being threatened or chased. These expressions (*anubhāva*) reveal it: the person lets fly with his fists, he causes hurt on purpose, destroys things, seizes things violently for himself, takes up weapons, injures others, and draws blood. And it can also be expressed in this way: the eyes turn red, the eyebrows are drawn together, he presses his lips together and grinds his teeth, while his cheeks flap and he clenches his fists. The temporary states (*vyabhicārin*) are these: sometimes one has a clear head, sometimes one is brave or aroused, something eats one up, sometimes one becomes brutal and violent, and then indecisive again, merciless and arrogant. One sweats, shakes, one's hair stands on end and one stutters.[30]

In contrast to this, fascination or *adbhuta*, literally the "wonderful, marvellous, extraordinary, supernatural, a (good) omen," is associated with the creator-god Brahmā and canary or lemon yellow as its colour. It is something utterly attracting like Otto's *fascinans*, although it is not primarily associated with mysticism but instead with astonishment and certain experiences, literary tropes, and material culture related to the supernatural and the body's reactions (possibly akin to mystical rapture):

> The fundamental state of the mood of the fantastic and wonderful is astonishment. It arises when one sees heavenly beings, when a long-standing wish is fulfilled, when one enters a grove or a temple,

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[30] *Atha raudro nāma krodhasthāyibhāvātmako rakṣodānavoddhatamanuṣyaprakṛtiḥ saṃgrāmahetukaḥ | sa ca krodhādharṣaṇādhikṣepānṛtavacanopaghātavākpāruṣyābhidrohamātsaryādibhir vibhāvairutpadyate | tasya ca tāḍanapāṭaḍanapīḍanacchedanabhedanapraharaṇāharaṇaśastasaṃpātasaṃprahārarudhirākarṣaṇādyānikarmāṇi|punaścaraktanayanabhrukuṭīkaraṇadantoṣṭhapīḍanagaṇḍasphuraṇahastāgriniṣpeṣādibhiranubhāvair abhinayaḥ prayoktavyaḥ | bhāvāś cāsyāsaṃmohotsāhāvegāmarṣacapalataugryagarvasvedavepathuromāñcagadgadādayaḥ* | (Nāṭyaśāstra 6.64, trans. by Wilke and Moebus, *Sound and Communication*, 508).

> when one imagines heavenly hordes, heavenly palaces, supernatural phenomena or “magic” illusions, or when one sees or hears of these things. These expressions reveal it: the eyes are wide open and immovable, one has gooseflesh, the eyes water, there is sweat on one’s brow, shivers of joy run down one’s back, one calls “O, O” and “bravo,” makes spontaneous gifts, makes uncontrollable movements with one’s arms and face, and one’s robe flaps about. One experiences states of being spellbound, of arousal, confusion and surprise, or one collapses in a faint.[31]

For Bharata, the moods are invariably expressed in body language and are brought about by certain circumstances, sceneries, and images. He defines the aesthetic sentiments primarily in a literary way—that is, he describes them via certain scenarios and tropes (such as in the *adbhuta* the religious tropes “heavenly hordes” and “heavenly palaces”), which generate these moods and harbour them within themselves. I have suggested that one can speak of embodied rhetoric, which in this case seeks to bring about not so much an idea or an opinion, but a feeling and emotional flavour enhanced by multisensory embodiment. The forms of aesthetic expressivity in the *Nāṭyaśāstra*, in particular the literary images, figures of speech, and tropes, were regarded by later literary theorists, such as the famous Daṇḍin, as rhetorical elements (he spoke of the art of “ornamentation” or artistic devices). However, for Bharata the literary tropes are in fact only signals and indexes, examples that are known to everyone. What he actually seeks is a corporal and synaesthetic metalanguage of signs or symbols. He strives for classification of universal feelings and their aesthetic forms of embodied expression. What is most important to him is universal aesthetic categories. The scenarios and gestures, for instance “flapping cheeks” to reveal inner tension (“being under pressure”), are never anything other than signs. They point to something which is not inherent: a flavour or an atmospheric mood. It is therefore not an abstract metalanguage or merely literary rhetoric and it is less concerned with ideology and content. Instead it is about aesthetics-aisthetics and thus concerned with sensory things that exist in participation and with direct experience in a sensory-emotive way. Although one can feel the erotic or repulsive atmosphere of a scene, one cannot actually define it—at most, one can find other ways of describing and interpreting it. What I call embodied rhetoric and corporal metalanguage rests on a semanticisation of psychosomatic gestures rather than on actual language. It is about performativity, about performances and their suggestive power to invoke particular emotional flavours in audiovisual fashion.

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[31] *Athādbhuto nāma vismayasthāyibhāvātmakaḥ | sa ca divyajanadarśanepsitamanorathāvāptyupavanadevakulādigamanasabhāvimānamāyendrajālasaṃbhāvanādibhirvibhāvair utpadyate | tasya nayanavistārānimeṣaprekṣaṇaromāñcāśrusvedaharṣasādhuvādadānaprabandhahāhākārabāhuvadanacelāṅgulibhramaṇādibhir anubhāvair abhinayaḥ prayoktavyaḥ | bhāvāś cāsya stambhāśrusvedagadgadaromāñcāvegasaṃbhramajaḍatāpralayādayaḥ |* (Nāṭyaśāstra 6.75, trans. Wilke and Moebus, *Sound and Communication*, 508–509).

2.3 EMBODIED RHETORIC AND SEMANTICISATION OF GESTURES

Bharata describes the audiovisual communication of the *rasas* as having many stages. He begins with the most precise phenomenological description of thirty-three accessory and transitory subjective emotional states (*vyabhicāri-bhāva*), added to the eight dominant and more permanent emotions (*sthāyi-bhāva*). This also includes states such as depression, doubt, tiredness, worry, jealousy, certainty, joyful arousal, and madness. These supplementary emotional states encompass psycho-physical ones such as dreaming, agony, illness, and amnesia. Just like the *rasas*, these feelings are defined according to the *conditions* under which they arise and the ways they can be communicated audiovisually. For example, according to Bharata, madness can be triggered by separation from loved ones, by the loss of one's good reputation, or by illness. It is expressed by laughing without any reason, weeping or screaming, speaking a continuous stream of nonsense, singing, dancing, reciting, smearing oneself with ashes or dirt, and carrying a skull. Interestingly, the latter indicators are found amongst early Śaiva ascetics who pretended to be insane as part of their religious practice. Bharata puts the emotional expressions of madness in the *rasa* categories of tragedy and love(-sickness). Consequently, one and the same subjective state can figure in several *rasas*.

The detailed catalogue of affects added in the *Nāṭyaśāstra* to the eight basic ones, shows how intensely emotions and mental states have been explored in a culture in which no semantic equivalent to "emotion" exists.[32] We find only the word *manas*, "mind," which may also denote intellect, or very general terms like "movement of thoughts" (*vṛittvikāra*). The theatrical *rasa* and *bhāva* became themselves the common terms for feelings and emotions.[33] Indeed, it is interesting that they appear in theatre never in their pure, intangible form, but by means of corporal and sensory communication, physical signs, and iconic images. Just as there are no clear demarcation lines between emotion and intellect in the actual language, there is no mind-body split in performative activities and actual everyday practice.

As already discussed, the *sāttvika* gestures—that is, the embodiments of feelings—are systematically to be distinguished from the emotional states. In practice, however, they are often confused with them. The psychosomatic or *sāttvika* gestures include weeping, shaking, quivering, blanching, sweating, etc. Ideally, these phenomena can only be represented correctly if the actor is able to enter into the emotional states which trigger these symptoms. Hence the name *sāttvika*, derived from *sattva*, something “that really exists.” But it is unlikely that this idealistic requirement can be fulfilled. Therefore, instructions are provided about how the *sāttvika* gestures can be simulated by use of the body and the voice. The major media of communicating a *rasa* utilises sense perception, or audiovisual signs: well-defined stylised gestures performed by the limbs (*aṅgā-‘bhinaya*), and “vocal gestures” or expressive speech (*vāg-abhinaya*). The concept of the theatrical *rasa* is always realised in a multimedial and synaesthetic fashion.

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[32] See also McDaniel, "Hinduism," and this chapter, n. 22.

[33] See Monier-Williams, *Dictionary English and Sanskrit*, 224, who typically refers in the first place to *rasa* and *bhāva* to mean "emotion," and then adds terms like *manovikāra, cittavṛtti, cittavikāra*, which simply denote a movement (*vikāra*) of the mind.

When Bharata speaks of *nāṭya-dharma*, he links this with the requirement that theatre should be like a reality that opens itself up to sensory impression. At the same time, theatre should also fulfil the demand for artistic form. Bharata’s catalogue of gestures contains a differentiated body language that plumbs the whole field between simple imitation (such as falling to the floor to portray the *sāttvika* gesture of fainting) and symbolic communication (complex quasi-lexemes), thus complementing verbal communication and taking on the role of a sensory rhetoric and art of suggestion. Some symbols are highly technical and can only be decoded by a connoisseur of the theatre. For example, there are manual gestures for “deer” (the fingers form two little horns and a snout), “lotus,” and “elephant.” Even “heavens,” “love,” and “liking,” and abstract ideas such as “charity” and “decision” can be represented by the positions of the hands and body. Such quasi-lexemes often have a function that we expect to be fulfilled by the scenery. For instance, a dancer can indicate that there is a tree without the need for a tree on the stage.

Other “gestures” impress the senses and emotions in a more direct way. The vocal expressions, which function quite differently to mimesis and technical symbolism, are important for the communication of mood. The mimetic gestures communicate via similarity and recognition, while the symbolic gestures communicate via symbols and signals that must be decoded. In contrast, the sonic aspect is purely expressive, does not call things by their names, and works on a sympathetic and less a conventional level. This purely sonic aspect occurs primarily through the harp music that is played as background music to create an atmosphere. With the exception of a rather loose allocation of certain musical styles to certain *rasa* groups, the music remains strangely vague—quite atypical of the *Nāṭyaśāstra* which is otherwise overflowing with detailed instructions. Music is tellingly associated with special gods and spirits, while the theatrical language, gestures and feelings are the province of human beings (the author Bharata).[34]

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[34] This is made clear in the framing story and the “overture” (*pūrva-raṅga*). The function of the overture is primarily religious rather than to put the audience

Despite this, the audible aspect is not totally detached from the dramatic aspect and its theatrical *rasas*. For example, for every class of character there is a rhythm on the drums which "describes" the characteristics in sound. Most importantly, the *rasas* are strongly manifest in the *kāku*, the musical modulation of the voice of the actor. Interestingly, however, the moods which might be differentiated at the semantic level and even appear to be contrary, create partly identical sonic forms of expression. For example, the terrifying and the fascinating can be found in the same group as the heroic—a group characterised by bright energetic sounds and rhythms of tension.[35]

Bharata differentiates six categories of vocal expression, four of which are relevant to the *rasa,* namely its representation in music, in recital, in tempo, and in phrasing a sentence. It is precisely in this refined and subtle voice model that we find what great attention Indian aesthetics has paid to exact phenomenology. In the phenomenology of speech and voice there is an attempt to define the *rasas* in a very precise way at a purely psychophysical level and to develop an audible representation of them. Representation in recital includes, for instance, speaking in a shrill or deep voice, rapidly and hastily, or slowly. Each indicates certain moods; for instance, speaking slowly indicates something wonderful. Representation through phrasing (*aṅga*) a sentence is another important means of expressing and evoking *rasa*. The *rasa* depends on whether the sentences are pronounced fluently or falteringly, whether the speaker makes pauses or continues without any breaks, and whether a sentence is spoken with a rising or falling intonation, or in a monotonous manner.[36]

Theatre may thus be seen as a "*Gesamtkunstwerk*" of embodied rhetoric, in which the most dominant expressive forms are the gestures of the body and the voice. A stage representation, or putting what is meant into sensory form, is only possible via gestures. This transfer of meaning into direct sense perception, which is realised using gestures, is missing

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in the right mood for the play. All the gods, spirits and demons have to be honoured and "pacified," if only to prevent the performance from being disrupted. The demons possess a specific affinity for anything that is non-semantic. Their songs use words that do not belong to any comprehensible language, whereas the songs of praise to the gods are semantically lucid. Before these start, the orchestra dominates the singers. As in the Sāma-Veda, "pure music" is believed to have a tendency towards the world beyond.

[35] Comedy and eroticism can also be grouped together, expressing themselves in a smooth, melodious vibration of the voice. The opposite is shock and revulsion that demand dark, hidden timbres and broken, irregular rhythms. Only tragedy stands alone. It is characterised by a monotonous voice that lacks energy and sinks in lamentation.

[36] Eroticism and comedy are expressed through a well-formed manner of speaking and in either a sing-song intonation or a playful one. A voice that falters or gives up is characteristic of horror and disgust. The typical feature of the moods of the heroic, the terrifying, and the fascinating is that a whole sentence is uttered without the speaker taking a single breath anywhere in the middle. And finally, monotony and the absence of pauses identify a tragic mood.

in language. Language always develops at a distance from that which it describes, as Cassirer notes:

> [. . .] not in proximity to the immediately given but in progressive *removal* from it, lie the value and the specific character of linguistic as of artistic function [. . .]. Language, too, *begins* only where our immediate relation to sensory impression and sensory affectivity *ceases.*[37]

Language can only speak about a thing—but it cannot also be that thing. It can fulfil the demand for artistic representation, but it does not open itself up to immediate sensory perception. This is where the "language of gestures" becomes important—the bodily gestures and the sound gestures in the theatre. An actor who comes on stage with his hands casually stuffed into his trouser pockets and announces in the voice of a newscaster that a terrible demon is pursuing him and wants to eat him up, is not especially credible and will not create a *rasa*. If, however, he follows Bharata's instructions, he will speak the same sentence with his eyes wide open, an unsteady gaze and shaking limbs, intoning the same sentence with a dark and quivering voice, he *is* the fear that is to be represented. The mimetic gestures of the actor are material signs (in Cassirer's words "Dingzeichen") of immaterial moods. Imitation has a quality going beyond language: it is more sensory, more direct and less conventional, but will always require an act of imagination—that is, it will involve a creative and formative activity on the part of the actor and the spectator:[38]

> [. . .] the apparent "reproduction" (*Nachbilden*) actually presupposes an inner "production" (*Vorbilden*).[39]

Most of the gestures of the *Nāṭyaśāstra* are located between imitation and symbolism and are highly suggestive and persuasive. The eyes and eyebrows are a good example. The eyes are regarded as one of the most powerful means of expression, especially for the *rasas,* which are never represented by the technical manual gestures. Thus, over one hundred verses are dedicated to the eyes alone. One thing that is clearly mimetic are the eyes when depicting the sentiment of horror: the eyelids are wide open and rigid, the pupils quivering. This simply represents the physiological reaction to whatever type of threat is imminent. In the case of the erotic-*rasa* the eyes are more symbolic. For example, a furtive look from the corner of the eye (*kaṭākṣa*) plays a significant role: it signals erotic interest. The deliberate ambiguity of the signal because of its volitional state of suspense, the desire being “hidden, but unmistakable” in contrast to the unequivocal rigid gaze of fear, receives great elaboration. The suggestive ambiguity as a topic occurs again and again in scenes and poems and has inspired some of the most beautiful verses:

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[37] Ernst Cassirer, *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms. Volume 1*, trans. John Michael Krois (New Haven: Yale University Press, (1955) 1998), 189. German original: *Philosophie der symbolischen Formen, Erster Teil: Die Sprache* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft (1953), 1998), 138.

[38] Cassirer, *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms 1*, 182–183 (German original, 130).

[39] Cassirer, *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms 1*, 183 (German original, 131).

> Like an arrow that is touched with both poison and ambrosia, it has penetrated me deeply—the glance from the corner of your eye.[40]

This is a good example of the power of language in poetic diction. As the signal is transferred here into a metaphor, the message—which is not mentioned explicitly with words—becomes condensed and replete with atmospheric flavour, colour, and fragrance. Only poetic language is capable of doing this. It contains the power of suggestion and implication, and it activates the imagination of the recipient to perceive meaning and atmospheric flavour which cannot be perceived via the senses. For although ultimately no arrow is shot, in the fictional world of poetry everything is possible. In the realm of imagination not only do looks of love become sweetly poisoned arrows, but the reader also finds the image particularly apt even though there is no mimesis here at all. The poetic exaggeration gives the gesture of the eyes an emotional immediacy and density that go beyond its original signal function. And it is precisely this art of suggestion found in poetic language that was plumbed in later poetics.

3. Ānandavardhana’s *Dhvanyāloka*: The new school of suggestion in poetics and the theory of aesthetic response

The refined, highly artistic poetry and its theoretical reflection emerge in a different milieu to that of theatre and performing artists: the world of courtly poets, an elite of wealthy literati and sophisticated connoisseurs of art. Poetry evolved, like Indian classical music, at the royal courts. In contrast to Bharata, the court poets and art critics—such as Daṇḍin (seventh century AD), the fountainhead of the so-called school of ornamentation—do not identify with the Veda, nor is there an interest in the new lord gods of classical Hinduism. Their self-understanding was often utterly profane. In their works of art criticism, religion is explicitly put outside the sphere of art. The whole range of what is sung, unwritten, and oral in popular religion is regarded as uncourtly and “uncultured.” Even Vedic hymns (i.e. very traditional forms of religious expression characterised by special poetry and a particular style of chanting) are regarded as having no real aesthetic dimension because they are outside the realm of *kāvya*.[41] *Kāvya* ("literature") refers to literature rich in metaphors and tropes: the courtly epics and a literary style of highly ornate poetry in difficult, extravagant language often with double encoding so that the same verse can have two quite different meanings. This so-called *śleṣa* style (literally "fused verse"), was introduced by the famous court poet Daṇḍin in the seventh century and was seen as the masterpiece of the school of ornamentation. This older school of poetry was challenged and exceeded in the ninth century, however, by the school of suggestion, in which the *rasa* came to the fore.[42] There was a decisive move within literary theory between the seventh and tenth century "away from an original ideal prescriptivism toward an analysis of actually existing texts."[43] Ānandavardhana (820–890), who was instrumental for this new (*navīna*) school, ended his epoch-defining work *Dhvanyāloka* with the following verse:

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[40] Quoted in Abhinavagupta’s commentary *Abhinavabhāratī* on *Nāṭyaśāstra* 14.1.

> What one calls poetry, is the origin of all [earthly] happiness, a garden of the gods. If the brilliant style and the gorgeous ornamentations suit one another and an unfalsified *rasa* resides in it, everything is found there that the perfect ones [= art-lovers, art-connoisseurs] can desire. We have now shown the *dhvani*, which contains [all] this, with its wondrous power of delight that can only be compared with the magnificent wish-granting tree [of paradise].[44]

This eulogy of *rasa*-filled poetry and its "wondrous," "delightful," and "magnificent" power of suggestion (*dhvani*) is an interesting document for a non-religious, purely aesthetic sublime in India. Ānandavardhana emphasised more than the earlier poetic theory that the important thing about an artistic piece of poetry was not its well-constructed and embellished form (*alaṅkāra*) or the beauty (*śobha*) of its representation, but the emotion and mood (*rasa*) it imparts. According to Ānandavardhana this does not come about through the immediate meaning of the words, but through *dhvani*. *Dhvani*, literally "individual / expressive sound," is commonly used in colloquial speech when a fine, almost inaudible sound is perceived that one nearly misses altogether. Ānandavardhana adopts this term in the sense of allusion, accompanying undertone, associative field, and suggestion (*vyañjanā*).[45] He means the metalinguistic, psychological content of words and sounds. They contain more information than the literal meaning alone, and this information is always heard along with the literal meaning. Thus, it is clear that the *dhvani* is not quite the same thing as figurative meaning, allegory, metonymy or metaphor (used lavishly in *kāvya* compositions). Stylistic figures like these can certainly reveal the *dhvani* of a sentence or poem, but they are not the *dhvani* itself. Ānandavardhana uses the term for both the suggested psychological, cognitive, and emotional content of speech figures and for the suggestive power of poetic language that is able to incite moods and affections.

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[41] Pollock, *Language of the Gods*, 5. According to Pollock, "Sanskrit Literary Culture," 45–61, it is primarily the use of language which is seen as major difference to religious literature.

[42] *Rasa* was also acknowledged previously by Daṇḍin, but not put at the centre of discussion. Daṇḍin was not replaced by the new school, as it is often maintained. Daṇḍin's standards and rules of literary composition were still observed, as Pollock, "Sanskrit Literary Culture," 42–47, 52, convincingly argues, but literary theory changed to such an extent that what was formerly counted as "brilliant literature," i.e. śleṣa, was devalued.

[43] Pollock, "Sanskrit Literary Culture," 43.

[44] *Ity akliṣṭarasāśrayocitaguṇālaṅkāraśobhābhṛto yasmād vastu samīhitaṃ sukṛtibhiḥ sarvaṃ samāsādhyate | kāvyākhye 'khilasaukhyadhāmni vibudhodyāne dhvanir darśitaḥ so 'yaṃ kalpatarūpamānamahimā bhogyo 'stu bhavyātmanām ||* (Dhvanyāloka 4.17, Vṛtti 15, trans. Wilke and Moebus, *Sound and Communication*, 541–542).
The quotations and translations in this section are based on the critical edition of K. Krishnamoorthy, *Dhvanyāloka of Ānandavardhana* (Dharwar: Karnatak University, 1974), here 298. The late ninth-century work includes a commentary (*vṛtti*) on the *kārikā* verses. The question of whether Ānandavardhana was the composer of both, or only of the Vṛtti, has been hotly debated. See Edwin Gerow, *Indian Poetics* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1977), 253.
My discussion of Ānandavardhana draws from and expands Wilke and Mobus, *Sound and Communication*, 541–548.

By means of the *dhvani* concept and with recourse to the *Nāṭyaśāstra*, Ānandavardhana offered the first explicit account of the *rasa* in poetry. In doing so he linked *rasa* (sentiment) and *alaṅkāra* (ornamentation) in a synthetic and coherent theory of literary aesthetics, and thus founded a general theory of linguistic signification.[46] In this theory we find, perhaps most clearly, the interface between rhetoric and aesthetic immersion.

Although the *dhvani* can reside in a single word, it is usually the mode of description which evokes it, as in the following verse:

> *gaaṇaṃ mattamehaṃ dhārāluliajjuṇiāiṃ a vaṇāiṃ* |
> *ṇirahaṅkāramiaṅkā haranti ṇīlāo vi ṇisāo* ||
> *gaganaṃ mattameghaṃ dhārālulitārjunāni ca vanāni* |
> *nirahaṅkāramṛgāṅkā haranti nīlā api niśāḥ* ||
>
> The clouds tumble about in the sky,
> the [tall] Arjuna forests waver in the roaring rain,
> and although the nights are [so] dark that the [timid] moon
> becomes despondent,
> [their beauty] steals [all my] thoughts.[47]

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[45] Harold G. Coward, "Bhartṛhari's Dhvani: A central notion in Indian aesthetics," in *Revelation in Indian Thought*, ed. H. Coward and K. Sivaraman (Emeryville: Dharma Publishing, 1977), 66–70, assumes that Ānandavardhana picked up the term *dhvani* from Bhartṛhari's *Vākyapadīya* 1.47 and Vṛtti in 1.5, and expanded its meaning from manifested sounds to both the suggestive power of spoken words and the thing suggested, i.e. the principle poetic mood and the unitary idea of the poem.

[46] Gerow, *Indian Poetics*, 253; Ambasamudram Sankaran, *Aspects of Literary Criticism in Sanskrit or The Theories of Rasa and Dhvani* (Chennai: Madras University, 1929).

[47] *Dhvanyā*loka 2.1, Vṛtti 5, trans. Wilke and Moebus, *Sound and Communication*, 543.

Here the *dhvani* resides in the words “tumbling” (*matta,* which also means “drunk” or “crazy”) and “despondent” (*nirahaṅkāra,* more literally “ego-less,” and also connoting “without assertiveness” and “intimidated”), which precisely because of their rather negative connotations especially emphasise the ambivalent beauty of the monsoon and its dark, overcast nights. These associations exceed the literal meaning and surround the whole verse with their suggestive power. “Tumbling” not only means the rainclouds that roll across the sky in the sense of a naturalistic description, it also evokes the wild and uncurbed power of the monsoon with its rain beating down, its thunder, its floods, and the beauty of the natural world, which becomes lush again after the heat and drought of the summer. “Despondent” not only refers to the moon hidden behind a thick blanket of clouds, but also alludes to a particular theme that occurs frequently in Indian poetry: the topic of the lovers separated by the storm, who become all the more despondent when they see the peacocks performing their courtship dance in a frenzy of delight that the rain has arrived. The Indian connoisseur of literature can thus see in his mind’s eye a homogeneous image of moods with a strong impact on affect and emotions.

The allusions within a *dhvani* verse often use literary fields of meaning that superimpose particular tropes on colloquial semantics. For example, the “poetic monsoon” of the verse quoted above is based on the physical meteorological event, but it is also constituted from the classical monsoon scenes in Indian literature, including religious texts, which have sprung up around the natural event. Every monsoon poem evokes the grief of Rāma over the loss of his beloved Sītā, and the god Kṛṣṇa’s love-affair with the beautiful Rādhā; a connoisseur of Indian literature will constantly have these well-known popular images in the back of his mind. The *dhvani* is saturated with real and imagined worlds that meet within it.

Similar to the modern theory of aesthetic response (“Theorie ästhetischer Wirkung”) of the German literary theorist Wolfgang Iser,[48] Ānandavardhana’s *rasa* and *dhvani* theory is less a theory of the aesthetics of reception and more a theory of aesthetic effect or aesthetic response. His *rasa* denotes precisely such an effect or response (“Wirkung”) and his *dhvani* may be compared to Iser’s qualification of aesthetic texts as “open texts,” containing undefined “blanks” that give space to the reader. Indeed, the *dhvani* is about what is not said within the said. The meaning is directed, but at the same time it is kept in suspense. The reader’s imagination is necessary to complete the text by combination, that is, by realising the blank as “giving rise to a whole network of possible connections” and associations “which endow each segment or picture with its determinate meaning.”[49] Of course, the text itself must in the first place provide the potential, or in the words of Iser: "Effects and responses are properties neither of the text nor of the reader; the text represents the potential effect that is realised in the reading process."[50]

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[48] Wolfgang Iser, *The Act of Reading. A Theory of Aesthetic Response* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980); German original *Der Akt des Lesens: Theorie ästhetischer Wirkung* (Munich: Fink, 1976, reprint 1990).

[49] Iser, *Theory of Aesthetic Response*, 196; *Theorie ästhetischer Wirkung* (1990), 303.

Ānandavardhana's *dhvani* harbours both undefined openness as well as a channelling function and inherent potential effect. It is precisely those key lexemes, which are indeterminate, ambivalent, indirect, full of semantic oscillation—that is, open or "blank"—that produce the *rasa* by directing the reader's imagination to cognise a network of mutual projections and entangled meanings. And it is precisely the said in the unsaid and the unsaid in the said that makes good poetry in the eyes of Ānandavardhana. He would not speak of "gaps," but of "suggestiveness" and "allusion," and in place of Iser's "mutual projection" and "connectivity" there is the aesthetic *rasa*, the sensing of the holistic "*gestalt*," which in the *dhvani* is contained in condensed and potential form. Although one can say, following Iser, that while perceiving and relishing the allusion or suggestion, the reader at the same time realises and relishes the effect, the wealth of relations "hiding" in the verse, it is essential for Ānandavardhana that this connectivity is achieved less by an intellectual process and more by using "sensing" and "feeling" to decipher the allusion. More than determinate meaning—which certainly may also be there—suggestive poetic and literary language leaves first of all a fragrance or emotional flavour and atmosphere. This is what the *rasa* as aesthetic effect and reader response is all about. The *rasa* refers here to a synthesising as well as emotionalising effect and the knowledge function of feeling. The primary thing in this typical Indian aesthetic category *rasa* has always been a non-notional, sensual-affective aesthetic experience.

Ānandavardhana ushered in new aspects of embodied rhetoric and here we move into rhetoric's own field: language. Ānandavardhana is of particular interest here, as he explored the complexities and multiple communication aspects, strategies, and functions of language—and not just of poetic language, which was his primary field. It was essential to Ānandavardhana that the function of language does not exhaust itself in denoting, describing, and informing, but gains its richness from language's capacity to allude, suggest, and indicate. Indeed, Indian art theory does not consider "plain" ordinary language, which bluntly states what is to be communicated, as appropriate for literature. This is because *rasa* is missing; that is, indirect language is seen as more refined, more artistic, and more effective in emotionalising the content and the reader's response. Surely, as the art of persuasion it is preferable that rhetoric uses allusion, hidden messages, and emotionalising strategies to convince the addressees.

Embodied rhetoric and persuasive power in the field of language manifest, according to Ānandavardhana (if we dare to connect him with these foreign terms), in expressive speech forms that do not communicate directly, such as Bharata's gestures or in simple denotation, but instead use deliberate ambiguity and suspense (important devices according to Iser to create blanks and evoke reader response). Good poetry—and, we might add, effective rhetoric—lies in the well-chosen and well-presented triggers which tap not only the individual imagination, but also the literary and cultural *imaginaires*. The *rasa* is thus embodied not only in a richly figurative speech, in tropes and in expressive language, but also in a conscious play of hiding and revealing which allows a network of associations and combinations. The sensory-affective persuasion in the *rasa-dhvani* aesthetics is about the power of (not only) poetic language to communicate more than what is actually said. It is precisely in this space where the *rasa* is produced, evoked, and relished. The real thing happens for Ānandavardhana therefore not so much in verbal understanding, but in intuiting the text's allusions, in mentally seeing anew, in sensing what is unsaid, anticipating a holistic *gestalt*, and thus fully enjoying the *rasa*. More than anything, the aesthetic experience of *rasa* is getting into the aesthetic mood of the text, tasting its flavour and immersing oneself in its atmosphere—an atmosphere which suggestive-persuasive poetic images in particular have the potential to impart. Ānandavardhana distinguishes between an outer and an inner *dhvani;* the outer refers to the suggestive power and function of uttered words, alliterative forms, etc., whereas the inner refers to the thing suggested—the principle aesthetic mood and the unitary idea of the poem.[51]

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[50] Iser, *Theory of Aesthetic Response*, ix; *Theorie ästhetischer Wirkung* (1990), 7.

In principle, any linguistic material can trigger suggestions of aesthetic atmospheres. Older theoreticians of poetics, such as Daṇḍin, considered sound and sense, word (*śabda*) and meaning (*artha*)*,* to be the fundamental linguistic categories. Daṇḍin founded his entire poetological system upon the difference between the terms *śabda* and *artha*. This system does not hold for Ānandavardhana, however, since *dhvani* is a unique type of *artha* ("meaning"). Meaning for him includes not only the cognitive, logical content, but also the emotive elements and the socio-cultural significance of utterances. The question of meaning must be approached in a holistic manner. To formalists like Daṇḍin, beauty exists in the beauty of the individual parts: a beautiful woman is beautiful because all her limbs are exquisite and decorated with costly jewellery. For Ānandavardhana, by contrast, real beauty lies not in the individual parts, but in a quite different dimension, namely, in the overall impression.[52] The woman herself is beautiful and the holistic image of her beauty is what is relished. In poetry this holistic image corresponds to the *dhvani*. *Dhvani* is always present primarily in the whole verse or the whole poetic work, but a single word can also flood a verse with *dhvani*. Even individual phonemes can bear *dhvani* and be "flooded with *rasa*." Whereas it was important to Daṇḍin that poetry sounds good, having one's emotions touched and immersing oneself into the mood—the aestheticised emotion—should also be conveyed.

This is why it was not Daṇḍin's sophisticated, embellished art that became a model for devotional literature, but instead Ānandavardhana's

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[51] Coward, "Bhartṛhari's Dhvani," 71.

[52] *Dhvanyāloka* 1.4, Vṛtti 5.

dhvani, which fuses notions of aesthetic moods and imageries of refined embellishment, and thus values affective stimulation as more important than brilliant technique. As we shall see, this interiorisation (i.e. the focus on aesthetic response and aesthetic immersion) was further developed by Abhinavagupta (tenth/eleventh century). The aesthetics of the two Kashmiris Ānandavardhana and Abhinavagupta outbalanced—at least according to often heard modern judgements in India—the ornamentalists and became the most influential aesthetic theories in the history of reception. For both, the *Nāṭyaśāstra* was foundational.

While Bharata was interested in the creative techniques of the actor which generate *rasa*, Ānandavardhana reflects on the creativity of the poet. Since the *dhvani* pertains to the verse or the composition as a whole, there cannot be any provision or instruction for the aspiring court poet on how to construct it. Whereas ornamentalists like Daṇḍin envisioned poetry as an artistic patchwork and provided a large set of ornate literary building blocks for the construction of brilliant masterpieces (which in fact was followed in actual practice until at least the seventeenth century),[53] to Ānandavardhana there were no techniques of craftsmanship that one could learn and apply to produce a real *dhvani*-poem or work. Daṇḍin sees *rasa* as arising mainly through perfect technique and tasteful arrangement, while in Ānandavardhana's opinion *rasa* only appears when the "tone" is right and when a totally unique mood is expressed and evoked by the poetic diction. In keeping with this view, the poet needs what we might call genius. Ānandavardhana speaks, when referring to the poet, of *pratibhā* or "inspiration," of something that "intuitively enlightens." He sees the capacity of the poetic genius' spontaneous ideas as the reward for earlier lives, and asserts that the very source of poetic inspiration is Sarasvatī, the goddess of language, music, and wisdom. However, here Sarasvatī is only a metaphor in the sense that the actual core and cause of poetic utterance ultimately remain inexplicable.

4. The *rasa* Theory in Philosophical Aesthetics, Musicology, and Religion: Variants of merging aesthetics and religion

Ānandavardhana's poetic theory on suggestion as the major cause for *rasa* was immensely influential in many fields and it was multifunctional. *Dhvani* literature was the expression of as well as the stimulus for atmospheric moods, sensuously emotive sentiments, social values, and metonymic associations, and both profane and religious circles made use of the multifunctional power of the *dhvani* to embody feelings and to stimulate them. Their literary *dhvani* productions shaped cultural perceptions by evoking, creating, and (re-)embodying collectively shared sentiments and cognitive worlds, both within and beyond the elite cultural milieu of art critics. Not least, *Dhvani-rasa* aesthetics deeply inspired different forms of metaphysics and theology.

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[53] This important point was made by Pollock, "Sanskrit Literary Culture," 45ff., who sees Ānandavardhana and Abhinavagupta as generally overestimated.

It certainly informed the work of the philosopher Abhinavagupta who wrote his famous commentaries on the *Nāṭyaśāstra* (called *Abhinavabhārati*) and Ānandavardhana's *Dhvanyāloka* (called *Locanā*) a good century after Ānandavardhana. Today, Abhinavagupta (ca. 950–1020) is regarded as one of the greatest philosophers and theologians of India, who revolutionised the Śaiva Tantra and brought *rasa* theory to perfection. The view that he was the most important and most influential theorist of Indian aesthetics may be disputed, but he certainly gave the discourse on *kāvya* ("literature") a significant and very radical new turn. In Abhinavagupta we find a decisive move towards the subject and towards aesthetics as an inner experience of the sublime. He shifted the emphasis almost completely to what Ānandavardhana called the "inner *dhvani,*" which for Abhinavagupta constituted the very "soul" of the aesthetic experience—or the *rasadhvani* as he also used to call it.[54] Abhinavagupta advanced a new *rasa* theory by ultimately accepting only one *rasa*: the delightful aesthetic immersion in the taste of *dhvani*. Analytical emphasis shifted from the textual processes of meaning production (how literature embodies emotions and makes them perceptible) to a theory of aesthetic reception based on aesthetic identification and immersion—that is, a radicalised theory of aesthetic response. The recipient is not passive; he or she must be one "with an equal heart" (*sahṛdaya*), which makes him or her part of the creative process. This means the recipient, too, has the ability of *pratibhā*, intuition, sudden insight, and the creative power of imagination. The fundamentally creative role of the art-lover as *sahṛdaya* and the idea that it is the recipients who produce a work of art as much as the artist himself is congruent with modern Western theories of art.

What separates Abhinavagupta from modern theories, however, is his essential step of discerning ultimately only one *rasa*: the self-forgetful immersion in which subject and object become one. He regards this state of mind as the aesthetic experience at its highest level and likens it to yogic absorption (*samādhi*).[55] Abhinavagupta thus conceives potentially the complete fusion of the sacred and profane spheres and of aesthetic and religious experience. What is important to him is immersion for immersion's sake. According to Abhinavagupta, the self-forgetful, pleasant state of mind in art experience, which is qualified by a complete merger with the object, has the quality of religious experience because it allows for awareness of one's innately blissful nature and the non-dual nature of reality.

Abhinavagupta's central term was *sāmarasya*, which means "that which is of or expresses the same, similar, equal (*sama*) flavour, juice, or essence (*rasa*)."[56] This denotes for him the highest aesthetic enjoyment (*rasa*). As Abhinavagupta states: The experience of *rasa* is "a resting (*viśrānti*) in one's essential nature (*saṃvit*), which . . . is pervaded by bliss (*ānanda*) and light (*prakāśa*), and is similar to the tasting (*āsvāda*) of the supreme Brahman."[57] Note here that the great theorist of non-dual Śaiva-Tantra says "similar" and not "identical." However, he nonetheless nurtured the idea of identification between art experience and religion, and he clearly regarded them as structural equals. Indeed, he uses the term *sāmarasya* not only for the highest level of aesthetic experience but also for "the highest spiritual state, where the essence (*rasa*) of the Divine is perceived as all-pervading, and where Self and universe fuse into One in perfect harmony."[58]

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[54] Coward, "Bhartṛhari's Dhvani," 71.

[55] For further references, see Raniero Gnoli, *The Aesthetic Experience according to Abhinavagupta* (Rome: Is.M.E.O., 1956), xxiv f., 100–101 fn. 4.

This fusion of aesthetic *rasa* and religion was completed in the thirteenth century by the musicologist Śārṅgadeva,[59] who was definitely inspired by Abhinavagupta. Śārṅgadeva presented music as a pleasing yoga for everybody, and simply listening to music could be seen as a religious act. Just as the theatrical and poetic *rasas* are seen as something transpersonal, so too is the notion of the Rāga music. Śārṅgadeva's central term was *nāda*, "sound," and he picked up the notion of cosmic sound (*nāda*) from the Śaiva Tantra. Fusing this idea with the Brahman, the ultimate godhead of the late Vedic Upaniṣads, he coined the term Nāda-Brahman, "Sound-Brahman" or "Sonic Absolute," connoting that the whole world is pervaded by sound. Thus, music to him was a direct expression of universal sound and listening to music amounted to a direct participation in the cosmic sphere. Furthermore, it is interesting to note that unlike yoga and Tantra, the very notion of musical Rāga is pure emotion and mood. Rāga—from *rañj*, "colouring"—is something which colours the mind. A specific Rāga will always be connected with a specific mood, and according to Indian musicology, this association is not by convention but is a cosmic fact. Music and musical moods are therefore seen as something pertaining to the divine or cosmic sphere. The better the performing artist, the better he or she "awakens" the Rāga and the mood inherent in it. The more the listener is one of equal heart, the more he or she is coloured by precisely this mood. It is decisive in this conception of musical experience that the *rasa* or emotional colouring is seen as something transpersonal, and in the case of music, even as a cosmic truth. Hence, songs do not have to have a religious content in order to have a functional or "unseen" religious function, and indeed they often do not in Hindustani (North Indian) music. In contrast, much of Carnatic (South Indian) Music is religious. In this context, in particular, Śārṅgadeva's contention could easily take a religious turn. The famous Carnatic composer and musician Tyāgarāja (1767–1847), for instance, holds that listening to music means tasting the bliss of Brahman.[60] Tyāgarāja composed devotional hymns with beautiful Rāga melodies.

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[56] Sadananda Das and Ernst Fürlinger (ed.), Editors' Preface to *Sāmarasya. Studies in Indian Arts, Philosophy and Interreligious Dialogue—in Honour of Bettina Bäumer* (New Delhi: D. K. Printworld, 2005), xi.

[57] *Abhinavabhāratī* on Nāṭyaśāstra 6.31, quoted by Das and Fürlinger, Preface *Sāmarasya*, xi.

[58] Das and Fürlinger, Preface *Sāmarasya*, xi.

[59] For a more elaborate discussion, see Wilke and Moebus, *Sound and Communication*, 830–847.

Another powerful fusion of aesthetic and religious experience can be discerned in later Sanskrit poetry, which became strongly "devotionalised" and vice versa in the religious field itself. Ānandavardhana's new *dhvani* theory of *rasa* (ca. 850) and the idea that poetry must be "filled with rasa" had a major impact on the religious literary production and hymnology.[61] The *rasa* aesthetics were highly suitable for devotional hymns, and songs and were used to explain their function of expressing and stimulating religious feelings and moods. Only a few devotional hymns, however, reached the high literary standard of classical "profane" *kāvya* literature, but those who did are held in high esteem up to the present day and became much more popular than the profane *kāvya* poems. Jayadeva's *Gītagovinda* in the twelfth century and the Great Goddess hymn *Saundaryalaharī* of uncertain date (latest sixteenth century) are probably the most famous examples of highly ornate and *rasa* inflated religious poems, and both were also set to music, that is, they were sung in different Rāgas verse by verse. However, the major idiom used for the highly emotional *bhakti* lyrics has always been the vernacular languages (which adopted the literary standards of the Sanskrit), and the usual *bhakti* text was song.

In this situation the *Bhāgavatam* (ninth century), discussed at the beginning of this chapter, stands out. This is an early Sanskrit text that took up the literary *rasa* standards and explicitly called upon the reader to drink the sweet nectar (*rasa*) of its beautiful words. The *Bhāgavatam* was to be relished as a religious as well as an aesthetic work and was appreciated for both its beauty of poetic diction and the spiritual depth of its semantic content. It is famous in particular for its narrative of the childhood and youth of the pastoral god Kṛṣṇa and his play with the Gopīs, the cowherd women who leave their husband and children to be with their sweet Lord Kṛṣṇa. This work became immensely successful. Its hidden and open eroticism (tenth chapter) made it easy for profane poets and musicians to compose erotic poems under the cover of religion, while in the religious field a bridal mysticism developed. Its major *rasa* was *mādhurya*, "sweetness," which was seen as the very peak of loving devotion and the total immersion in God Kṛṣṇa. *Mādhurya*, sweetness, was the erotic *rasa* sublimated and transformed into a religious *rasa*. It was seen by the Vaiṣṇava theologians of the sixteenth century as the highest form of the *bhakti rasa*. The *Bhāgavatam* was the first Sanskrit text based on highly emotional and ecstatic Kṛṣṇa *bhakti*, and it reached its peak with the poets Mirabai and Jayadeva as well as the Vaiṣṇava theologians of Bengal in the sixteenth century. These theologians wrote works on religious aesthetics that reflected the aesthetic stimulation, response and immersion of religious experience. They used the *Nāṭyaśāstra* as a model for classifying and elaborating equally painstakingly the ritual and devotional gestures and the corporal and sensory-emotive expressions of the *bhakti rasa*—including weeping, laughing, and fainting. These theologians not only gave *rasa* an explicit religious bent, but also *bhāva. Bhāva* came to denote an "ecstatic state," which refers to the total loving immersion in God and spontaneous or ritual ecstatic rapture as expressed in the passionate feelings of the agony of separation and the bliss of union manifested in visions of Kṛṣṇa and his mate Rādhā, as well as in "divine madness" (unpredictable laughing, weeping, crying, dancing, singing etc., including being abrupt, impolite, childish, and irritable).[62]

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[60] See William J. Jackson, ed., *The Power of the Sacred Name: V. Raghavan's Studies in Nāmasiddhānta and Indian Culture* (Delhi: Satguru, 1994), 224.

[61] The incorporation of aesthetic standards and *rasa* can, however, be discerned already in the early ecstatic devotional poetry of the saint-singers of Tamilnadu (from the seventh/eighth century) who used the vernacular idiom.

Thus, over the course of time many forms of aesthetic-religious blending took place, and typically religious *rasas* were discerned: tranquillity (*śānta rasa*), devotion (*bhakti rasa*),[63] and sweetness (*mādhurya rasa*). These religious *rasas* became tremendously important in religious and popular discourse, but they were also looked upon by traditional art critics with suspicion. The *śānta rasa,* for instance*,* has been constantly debated in poetics, and the more recent *bhakti rasa* was never really accepted. The Vaiṣṇava theologians on the other hand, propounded it as the very peak of all *rasas*, and in the Kṛṣṇa *bhakti*, *mādhurya* (sweetness) became the peak of peaks. Embodied rhetoric within this discursive field embraced the persuasive objective of creating—by repeating, chanting, and singing Kṛṣṇa's name and *mantra* and intensely visualising his story—a pure body of emotion, that is, a "perfected, spiritual body" (*siddha deha*) filled with divine presence and absorbed in the service of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa and the bliss of Kṛṣṇa's paradise.[64]

Something very interesting happened to the *rasa* in this merging of aesthetic theory and religion: in everyday speech it became a word used to describe real-world emotion. The religious reflection on the *rasa* and its application to religious emotions instead of aesthetic moods was apparently decisive for this development, as it brought about the breakdown of the classical distinction between reality/real-world personal emotion (*bhāva*) and fiction/transpersonal aesthetic sentiment (*rasa*).

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[62] June McDaniel, *The Madness of the Saints. Ecstatic Religion in Bengal* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 6, 7, 9, 20–25, 43–45.

[63] *Bhakti rasa* was further subdivided into peace/tranquillity (śānta), obedience/servantship (*dāsya*), friendship (*sākhya*), tenderness/fond affection (*vātsalya*), and passion (*rati*). See Axel Michaels, *Der Hinduismus: Geschichte und Gegenwart* (Munich: Beck, 1998), 285.

[64] See McDaniel, "Hinduism," and McDaniel, *Madness of the Saints*, 3, 41, 43, 45–53. The ritual creation of a spiritual body goes along with a total change of identity; the person (including males) wants to assume the identity of a handmaid (*mañjari bhāva*) of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa to become non-different from Rādhā "by being her female servant and thus experience[ing] her emotions" (McDaniel, ibid. 80).

Classical literary theory had always drawn a sharp line between literature (*kāvya*) and the sacred lore of the Veda ("knowledge"), the Purāṇas ("ancient lore"), and Itihāsas (narratives about the past "how it really was") in terms of function and language usage.[65] Whereas *kāvya* was understood as a purely human domain and as fiction in which fine linguistic expression was enjoyed for expression's sake and for the perfect merger of sound and sense, word and meaning, denotation and implication, beautiful form and *rasa*, religious literature was seen as a fundamentally different type of text and was excluded from the realm of *kāvya*. There were several reasons for this, among which the following very traditional views stand out: The Veda was acknowledged as the realm of "authorless" revelation and eternal sound with inherently magic efficacy. Moreover, the Veda was the source of commandments and moral action. The post-Vedic religious lore (*purāṇa* and *itihāsa* consisting of mythical and sectarian narratives) was, on the other hand, attributed to the ancient seers whose "pure" and infallible knowledge revealed the world as it really was. In contrast to the Vedic sound, their primary linguistic feature was semantic meaning—plainly communicated in ordinary everyday language; that is, directly expressing what was meant. This was in contrast to *kāvya*'s indirect and metaphorical language and lacked the *kāvya*'s linguistic discrepancy to reality. In this interesting classification of texts, the Veda was attributed to be a master, while the seers' texts were like a friend, and the *kāvya* like a seducing mistress.

This classification sheds some light on why art in classical literary discourse was given its own degree of ontology as being "beyond this world," and as a fictitious reality or a virtual reality of beauty, perfection, and refinement. This also explains why the *rasa* as aestheticised emotion formed a different category to the corresponding emotions experienced in everyday life. Even in the "modern" theory of "inner *dhvani*" or aesthetic mood, *rasa* was still set apart, and in some ways more than ever by defining the aesthetic mood as "depersonalized emotion," which explained why even sad stories could be enjoyable. But once the genres were mingled together and the aesthetic rules applied to religious texts, it was also logical that *rasa* moved from fiction to reality and became a term for emotion in the ordinary world of daily transaction.[66] The bridge between the two domains was created by the religious *rasas,* including *bhakti rasa,* which was more than an aestheticised flavour, since loving surrender and affection has always been at the centre of *bhakti*, "love of God." *Rasa* denoted here rather an enforcement and deepening of feeling. It also served as a category to systemise and classify devotional acts as "gestures" of *bhakti*: embodied by worship, hearing God's stories, repeating his holy name, and singing songs of praise, such gestures of devotion were seen as direct participation in the religious sublime.

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[65] For the following, see Pollock, "Sanskrit Literary Culture," 45f., 49–52, containing many references and quotations.

[66] It should be noted, however, that Vaiṣṇava theologians tried to maintain the classical *rasa-bhāva* distinction by explaining *rasa* as empathy with somebody else's experience and as pure, impersonal consciousness-bliss (representing Kṛṣṇa, the impersonal Lord of *rasa*) and *bhāva* as very personal feeling of intensive love (represented by Kṛṣṇa's beloved Rādhā, "the Lady of Great Emotion, who is the essence of personal feeling"). See McDaniel, *Madness of the Saints*, 81. Individuality is vital to Vaiṣṇava theology. Therefore, *rasa* needs *bhāva*: "Without *bhāva*, it runs risk of depersonalization" (McDaniel, ibid.).

I hope it has become clear in this section that *rasa* theory and aesthetics were immensely important in different forms of religious piety and could even take the form of functional religion (such as in music). *Rasa* aesthetics allowed the accommodation of different visions of the religious sublime—from non-dualist (Abhinavagupta) to dualist (Vaiṣṇava theology). Perhaps most importantly, religion's *rasa* reception was likely the most important trigger in the movement of *rasa* as a word meaning "emotion," thus transcending the *rasa-bhāva* distinction of classical aesthetics where *rasa* was restricted to (transpersonal) aesthetic sentiment and emotional flavour, in contrast to *bhāva* whose meaning in aesthetic theory became (real-world personal) emotion, feeling, sentiment or affect (such as fear, suffering, love, or joy). For the religiosi and theologians, this "worldly understanding" of *rasa* and *bhāva* is of course superseded by the religious, spiritual understanding—which itself was powerful enough that even in everyday speech *bhāva* became primarily related to deep absorption in God, ecstasy, and divine madness.

5. Conclusion

Aesthetics in India have a long and colourful history. I have coined the term "embodied rhetoric," and it can be extended beyond the theatre where it is seen in the dramatic gestures of the actors. Embodied rhetoric is also found in the phrasing of verses, in onomatopoetic sound- and meaning figures, in suggestive language pictures and metaphors, in melodies and song, and in religious readings—that is, in declaiming, reciting, chanting, singing, staging and dancing religious texts, and in other forms of ritual acts, which were understood by theologians as gestures of devotion. The fundamental category of aesthetics, however, is the dramatic effect and mood stimulated and enhanced by these gestures—the *rasa*, or invisible emotional flavour that transcends the body and senses while at the same time is made manifest by them and thus remains part of them.

In Indian art theory and *rasa* aesthetics we can discern a move away from the aesthetics of production (i.e. a theory of affects and aesthetic sentiments and the devices of their dramatic expression) towards the poetic art of suggestion and the creativity of the artist, which involves an Indian theory of aesthetic response. There is likewise a move towards the aesthetics of reception, which stresses the experience of the recipient who is also a co-creator and towards theories of immersion in the aesthetic and religious sublime—be it the consumption of one's own bliss, merging with cosmic sound, or an intensive love of God. In other words: while the major category in classical art theory remained the *rasa*, reflection on the locus of *rasa* changed from experienced to experience and experiencer.

There was also a shift towards subjectivity and inner relish without ever giving up the transpersonal claim which correlates with *rasa* theory and religion. Hence, the *rasa* was not restricted to the arts, it spilled over to religion, and enhanced and deeply imprinted the cultural understanding of emotion. The "other-worldly" character of art (i.e. its own ontology) was conveniently streamlined with religion, but the distinction of real-world emotion and aesthetic sentiment was also consciously blurred in religious discourse, which spilled over into the popular reception of *rasa*. Starting with theatre's claim to be the fifth Veda, there was a constant dovetailing of aesthetics and religion and with related experience, to the extent that it effected a total merger. As mentioned, in the religious sphere, as well as in every day usage, *rasa* became a term for real world emotion (although some theologians maintained a distinction between *rasa* and *bhāva* for impersonal and personal feeling). We should not forget, however, that even *bhāva* defined as "emotion" was an innovation of Indian aesthetics—developed, as it was, within the *Nāṭyaśāstra*'s new *rasa* theory. The original and more general meaning of *bhāva* is much broader and confusingly multisemantic, starting with "existence, being, becoming" "(true) condition," "state of being," "(engaging) state of mind," "innate property, inclination, disposition," etc.[67]

The *rasa* conceptions, theories, and pragmatics make clear how much a cultural system that had no separate word for emotion nonetheless valued it deeply. Moreover, and equally remarkable, *rasa* aesthetics not only generated a classification of affects, but also new influential separate words for emotion (including affect, sentiment, and feeling)—*rasa* and *bhāva.* While we owe the latter's existence to the creativity of Indian drama theory, religion had a major share in the *rasa's* coinage as "ordinary" emotion—and in coating *bhāva* with notions of devotional absorption and rapture.

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[67] Whereas these meanings can easily be related to emotion (although more generally, *bhāva* as a state of being can also be applied to the state of childhood), this is less so for other meanings, such as "purpose," "meaning, sense," "living creature," "behaviour," "abstract meditation," "dalliance," "instruction," "a venerated man." For the great variety of denotations and connotations of the term, see V. S. Apte, *Sanskrit-English Dictionary* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, rev. and enlarged ed. 1978), 716–717; M. Monier-Williams, *Sanskrit-English Dictionary* (Delhi: Motilal 1979, first ed. Oxford UP 1899), 754; Otto Böhtlingk and Rudolph Roth, *Sanskrit Wörterbuch*, 7 vols. (Delhi: Motilal 1990, repr. of first ed. St. Petersburg 1855–1875), vol 5, 257–260. Apte, for instance, lists thirty-one different meanings of *bhāva.* On the other hand, most conjunct terms with *bhāva* have to do with sentiment and "the heart." The aesthetics' coining of *bhāva* with emotion (and rapture) became extremely influential, although other meanings did not disappear. Moreover, it is very typical that Bengali-English Dictionaries (less so the Sanskrit ones) include "ecstasy, outburst of emotion, passion, mental confusion, possession trance, and rapture" among the definitions of the term *bhāva*. See McDaniel, *Madness of the Saints*, 21.

The religious appropriation of *rasa* had (almost naturally) profound effects. In particular, the specific religious *rasas—śānta* (peace of mind), *bhakti* (loving devotion), and *mādhurya* (sweetness), have never been seen as mere aesthetic moods, but as a direct experience of the sublime and as real personal emotion, a deep feeling of human-divine relationship and merger. Indeed, real feeling is all that counts in *bhakti* devotionalism. The same pertains to music. Here the pretension is that music will always naturally colour the mind in an emotive way and lift one up to a divine sphere of pure musical moods. It is thus easy to understand that *bhakti* and music joined forces and that the major expressive means for *bhakti* became song and music. In music theory it becomes clear how much the mood, expressed and stimulated by music, is seen as personal relish and as a transpersonal, cosmic truth—an experience of terror or peace of mind etc.—that is shared by all human beings. Although classical art theory discerns a clear demarcation between aesthetic sentiment (*rasa*) and emotion (*bhāva*) and between religious and profane spheres, the notion of *rasa* allowed for mergers and entanglements in the religious and nonreligious spheres of society. The relationship between art/poetry and religion/religious expression was a complex and pluriform one.

Aesthetic expression, response, and immersion took collective and individual forms and had multiple functions. One of the important functions of *rasa* aesthetics was to give a feeling of completeness, spanning from theatre's claim that it covered all possible emotions, all *rasas*, and the entire world to the *Bhāgavatam,* allowing one to see God in everything and to establish an intense relationship with him that could even include bitter enmity. Different forms of completeness, which were at the centre of *rasa* theories, included Ānandavardhana's claim that *dhvani*, verbal "suggestion," always aims at giving a sense of a unitary whole, and that Abhinavagupta's single *rasa* is an embodied experience of the blissful unity between self, world, and divine reality.

There are, of course, a number of other major functions of *rasa*. The following will outline how it shaped collectivity and became a "technology of the self" (Foucault);[68] that is, it formed subjectivity by training certain states of mind, spiritual attitudes, and the moral subject:

1. The social function of the theatrical *rasa* is narrated in the framing story of the *Nāṭyaśāstra*: in a rotten world of egoism, the old Veda does not work anymore. A new Veda is needed: the theatre, the major function of which is joyful education of *dharma* values and providing even the dullest person an entertaining learning through watching a play. In a similar way the epics and Purāṇas are conceived as a new Veda. These are now explicitly religious

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[68] Michel Foucault, "Technologies of the Self," in Luther H. Martin, Huck Gutman, and Patrick H. Hutton, *Technologies of the Self: A Seminar with Michel Foucault* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1988), 16–49.

texts (though the epics did not start off this way) where the major function is moral and spiritual upliftment and even liberation. Such results are invariably attributed to the act of merely listening to epic and mythical narratives and watching their dramatic staging. Such cultural performances had great impact in channelling and disciplining behaviour, identity and belonging, and in creating shared fields of imagination and emotion. According to the Indologist Sheldon Pollock, it was the courtly epic *Rāmāyaṇa*, the first *kāvya* work, in particular which enhanced a tandem of polity and poetry, and which spread through writing, wandering bards, and dramatic staging a certain vision of state, justice, and morality in Greater India, from Afghanistan to Java.[69] Thus, even politics and education, which have been very central to the European rhetoric tradition, fall into the sphere of *rasa* aesthetics and its collective persuasion.

2. A second important social function was a persuasive framework for aesthetic and spiritual appreciation of the whole of reality in which horror and disgust turned into aesthetic categories, transpersonal aesthetic moods, or even something divine (e.g. in musical Rāgas). The *rasa* discourse in this context nurtured an aesthetic vision of reality in which the ugly became beautiful, the demonic became part of the divine, and the tight social grids of norm and hierarchy were surrounded by an aura of harmony. Religious persons could even understand atrocities as a divine expression or the play of God (*līlā*). But just as importantly, also for non-religious persons, aesthetic relish could easily amount to functional religion, one that was supported by the claim of holism surrounding the classical theory of eight or nine *rasas* and enhanced by the individualistic shift of classical aesthetic theory to aesthetic immersion and identification. Subjectivity and immersion is innate to the *rasa* concept, and Abhinavagupta in particular stressed this aspect. In his theory, immersion was there for immersion's sake and clearly had a functional religious aspect. With Abhinavagupta, absorption in a play, a poem, or music became a powerful technology of the self. He presented it as a delightful technique of self-cultivation and self-perfection, producing an experience of internal bliss and the "equal flavour" of the all-pervading Divine.
3. Perhaps the most important function of *rasa* was its synthetic quality, which achieved various fusions: the superseding of the word and meaning (*śabda-artha*) opposition, the merger of sensory and emotional appeals of poetry, the linking of the inner and outer worlds, and the blending of art and religion. *Rasa* aesthetics supported a typical Indian love of integration, merger, and a holistic, non-dual worldview. This brings us back once again to the subjective sphere of aesthetic identification. Aesthetic immersion was likened to yogic

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[69] This is one of Pollock's major theses in *Language of the Gods*.

absorption, and importantly, to a particularly pleasant form of yoga without hard asceticism, as the musicologist Śārṅgadeva argued. As outlined above, Indian aesthetics is very much about completeness or holism, and immersion. Typically, post-Bharata, the *sānta rasa*—the "aesthetic mood of peace and tranquillity," which was a typical Indian notion of the sublime—was added to the list of eight. *Śānta* was a *rasa* that was closest to religion and the search for final liberation (*mokṣa*), and characteristically represented by yogins and ascetics. However, its debate among the hard-core poeticians demonstrates that the relationship of art and religion ranged from separation to competition and could even encompass a complete merger.

4. Aesthetic immersion collapsed the boundaries of sacred and profane—most pronouncedly in music: merely listening to music turned into a religious experience. On the other hand, there was also a rich adoption of music in religion. Song and music had been the major medium of *bhakti* religiosity since the thirteenth century, which was often expressed in vernacular hymns and simple Bhajans. After the thirteenth century, with the rise of vernacular poetic and religious expression overriding the globalised Sanskrit culture, *bhakti* devotionalism became the mainstream religious habitus. The Muslim rule in Northern India not only diminished temple culture and ritualism, but also led to intercultural exchange and mutual inspiration, for instance in the development of Rāga music at the courts, or in Sufi and *bhakti* traditions. This cultural situation spurred highly interiorised forms of religion and the *bhakti* religiosity of feeling in particular. This is also the field in which Ānandavardhana's *dhvani* and *rasa* theory enjoyed everlasting success, and in which we can discern mutual borrowing between poetics and religion. Poetry became devotionalised, while devotional hymnology adopted the art of suggestive, *rasa*-saturated poetry. The *rasa* theory was strengthening devotionalism (*bhakti*) and provided a systematic ground for the theological reflection of devotional gestures, subjective religiosity, and ecstatic religion. What the Vaiṣṇnava Kṛṣṇa devotionalism seeks as its most cherished goal is the encounter with God and the creation of a body of emotion: the whole person in all her limbs should be filled with the sentiment of love for Rādhā and Krisna and saturated with the Lord's sweetness. Technologies of the self in this context include chanting the divine name and visualising oneself as maidservant of Rādhā and Krisna.
5. A more general function of *rasa* theory was the profound traces it left in the subjective and collective social body as a means of understanding and conceptualising emotion. As already outlined, it was not only the *Nāṭyaśāstra* but also the religious reflection on *rasa* that were instrumental for this.
6. I have suggested a further general function. The *rasa* aesthetics, involving elaborate description of affects and moods, as well as a

deep reflection of the sensory and linguistic stimuli, and suggestive means evoking certain affects and moods, brought forth an implicit theory of embodied rhetoric (i.e. a rhetoric relating to dramatic, poetic and other sensory-aesthetic stimuli and emotional effect). In other words, it is the good and convincing performance which is persuasive, for it evokes, stimulates, and trains certain feelings and convictions (e.g. in the religious sphere that everything is God's play, or that mind-absorbing devotional practises are techniques of the self through which one is able to transform his/her personality). Although (the art of) persuasion may not be deliberately sought, and although *rasa* is not about contents but about form, sensation, and dense atmospheres, *rasa* does strengthen the messages conveyed and has a major role in making them effective. Persuasiveness and efficacy are two sides of the same coin. Furthermore, I underline my initial claim that aesthetic theory and embodied rhetoric may be seen as the natural outcome or logical result of a pronounced performance culture in which the spoken *and* sounding word never lost its value and appeal.

7. Regarding religion and everyday life, we do not have to go as far as Vaiṣṇava theology to find the importance of *rasa* in religious and non-religious popular and scholarly milieus. One might argue that the widespread cultural notion of merely listening to a religious text, such as Purāṇa reading, is already purifying and auspicious, and can be particularly well explained by the holistic conception of *rasa*. As most people would actually not understand the content of Purāṇa reading (it is in Sanskrit) the *rasa* concept can explain why a word-for-word understanding is not really necessary. It is enough to know that "this is a religious text" to bring the gods to mind; in other words, it is enough to have the *rasa* of the text's religious and soteriological power. Powerful speech in Hindu India is first of all liturgical speech and poetic expressivity, starting with Vedic chant (the Veda was always orally transmitted). This liturgical model of powerful, authoritative speech, but also the sophistication and fame of poetics, may explain why even mathematicians wrote their scientific treatises as though they were liturgical texts, and made use of sound codes instead of numerals and of the most complicated metres of classical poetry. The mathematicians are perhaps the most striking example of *rasa* aesthetics as embodied rhetoric and art of persuasion. Their aesthetic style of science was not only to allow for easier memorisation and identifying with the abstract scientific subject in a more emotional way, this way of communicating astonishing scientific results was also a way to legitimate, authorise, persuade and draw attention; it sought to suggestively communicate the brilliant content through an equally brilliant form—or in other words through an embodied rhetoric. This embodied rhetoric

> stimulated a flavour beyond the words, a *rasa* of intellectual brilliance and authority.

We can thus conclude that *rasa* aesthetics served different and shifting functions besides those of enjoying and reflecting on art: education, legitimation, persuasion, and also worldview formation, deep experience, self-perfection, and enhancement of religious belonging and morality. It provided an aesthetic vision of the wholeness of the world and a non-dual perception of reality and of a tranquil state of mind, complete absorption, immersion for immersion's sake. Perhaps most importantly as regards religion, it intensified religious feeling and devotion. In Hindu India the interface and dovetailing of art and religion was particularly dense and complex and altogether highly pluriform and multifunctional. Within this plurality, one can determine a common thread which pervades the whole cultural fabric: powerful speech is first of all liturgical speech and aesthetic/aisthetic poetic expressivity. Both generate aesthetic identification by speaking to the senses and emotions and by invoking atmospheric flavours.

This may explain why sophisticated theories of aesthetics and poetics exist, but not in exact equivalence to European rhetoric. I began the first section by drawing attention to the Indian performance culture in which the vast lore of sacred literature—and even profane texts—have always been embodied by the voice, performed, memorised, declaimed, recited, sung, staged, and danced. The high valency of the spoken *and* sounding word in the cultural system of symbols in Hindu India from ancient times to today has left traces on textual understanding and apparently also on the way rhetoric is conceptualised in a highly aesthetic-sensory way. We find the art of sensory-affective persuasion in use in fields as disparate as theatre and poetic diction or mathematics and religion. This embodied rhetoric, its working, its media, and the emotional effects were made explicit in classical aesthetic theory. If my suggestion is correct that rhetoric in India is basically aesthetic and aesthetic theory, at least in part, is about embodied, sensory non-verbal rhetoric and emotive persuasion, then we can form a different concept of rhetoric to Europe. Rhetoric in India is less about ideas and ideologies than it is about the stimulation of moods and sentiments and the production of emotional, aesthetic-sensory, and corporal knowledge—reinforcing intellectual conviction and transcending it by producing its own realms of meaning.

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Omaima Abou-Bakr

“Bride of the Qurʾān”: An Aesthetic Reading of *Sūrat ar-Raḥmān*

Abstract This chapter consists of three main parts: first, a revisiting of the trend initiated by Amīn al-Khūlī (1895–1966)—that of the literary approach to the Qurʾānic text—as well as the religious and intellectual debates it sparked at the time around the issue of the divine inimitability (*iʿjāz*) of the Qurʾān and the legitimacy of moving from the basic classical notion of rhetorical analysis (*balāgha*) to the modern concept of literary criticism and aesthetics. Three examples of that early modern school of interpretation will be mentioned: the controversial 1947 PhD thesis (Cairo University) by Muḥammad Aḥmad Khalaf Allāh entitled “Narrative Art in the Qurʾān;” ʿĀʾishaʿAbd ar-Raḥmān’s (d. 1999) *At-Tafsīr al-bayānī li-l-Qurʾān* (The Rhetorical Interpretation of the Qurʾān, 1962); and Sayyid Quṭb’s *At-Taṣwīr al-fannī fī l-Qurʾān* (Artistic Illustration in the Qurʾān, 1945). Second, another brief revisiting of the critical school of New Criticism and its emphasis on form is presented. Third, there will be an attempt at an application of New Criticism’s mode of analysis to *Sūrat ar-Raḥmān* (Chapter 55: The Compassionate), a reading which can yield an appreciation of its aesthetic characteristics and metaphysical vision at the same time—an integration of textual, spiritual, and moral beauty.

1. Literary Criticism and the Sanctity of the Qurʾān

Particularly in the modern Egyptian context, the literary approach to the Qurʾān—meaning the application of modern tools of literary criticism to the Qurʾān, hence treating it as a literary text—was first pioneered by Amīn al-Khūlī (1895–1966), as an approach that develops, not contradicts, the classical concept of the divine *iʿjāz*. The justification in his major critical work, *Manāhij at-tajdīd fī n-naḥw wa-l-balāgha wa-t-tafsīr wa-l-adab* (1961), was as follows: One of the main reasons that convinced early Arabs of the miracle of the Qurʾān as a divine revelation and pronouncement was its supremacy and uniqueness, which surpassed all human literary or poetic productions known at the time. It was therefore natural to use literary criticism as a means of fathoming this textual beauty. In other words, early Arabs based their acceptance of the new religion on a form of literary evaluation of the Qurʾānic text. However, when his graduate student Muḥammad Aḥmad Khalaf Allāh (1916–1998) submitted his PhD thesis *Al-Fann al-qaṣaṣī fī l-Qurʾān al-karīm* (Narrative Art in the Qurʾān), to Cairo University's Department of Arabic in 1947, it raised objections: to analyse the Qurʾān as a literary art (*fann*) is to suggest that it is a human composition—which of course amounts to blasphemy. The crux of the slippery slope that has created and still creates deep-seated unease around this kind of analysis is this: the potential of de-sanctifying the Qurʾān under the pretext of 'scientific' study. In Khalaf Allāh's work, for example, the controversy surrounding it was mainly due to his results or the conclusion that he reached as a consequence of applying this 'literary-critical' methodology: Quranic stories are primarily literary narratives employed to serve ethical, didactic, and allegorical purposes, and not necessarily, wholly or purely, historical facts or reliable historical sources.

Interestingly, the history of the classical linguists and rhetoricians who studied and elaborated the concept of *iʿjāz* and its features have progressively developed and increasingly emphasised the literary nature of the Qurʾān. In his 2003 article, for instance, Naṣr Abū Zayd traces the roots of this tradition from the Muʿtazilites, al-Jāḥiẓ (d. 869), al-Bāqillānī (d. 1013), al-Qāḍī ʿAbd al-Jabbār (d. 1024), up to the famous philologist and literary critic ʿAbd al-Qāhir al-Jurjānī (d. 1078) and his well-known book *Dalāʾil al-iʿjāz* (Proofs of Inimitability).[1] They all discussed and analysed the Qurʾān's eloquence and the features of this miracle of divine speech—what constitutes *iʿjāz*; but it was al-Jurjānī's significant emphasis on the laws of syntax (*naẓm*) in particular that introduced the dimension of the literary nature of the Qurʾānic text. His theory was based on studying the science of rhetoric (*balāgha*), linguistics, and eloquence (*bayān*) and their laws through the study of poetry, as a means of examining the features of the Qurʾān's perfection and supremacy.

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[1] Nasr Abu-Zayd, "The Dilemma of the Literary Approach to the Qur'an," *Alif* 23 (2003): 8–47.

What was then al-Khūlī's new contribution? He took this tradition to the next level, and he developed it further as an approach that is appropriate to the critical knowledge of the age and its modern tools. He moved the focus of study from the classical domain of language and rhetoric to a wider domain—that of literary criticism—by making a new connection to the fields of psychology and aesthetics. Further, he proposed a method of studying the Qurʾānic text that analyses literary style and its emotional impact on the recipient/reader as a way of evoking the aesthetic awareness or response of both commentator and reader.[2] He used the term *fann al-qawl* (the art of discourse)[3] to explain that the literary approach to the Qurʾān through modern theories of literature could further uncover its *iʿjāz*. To underscore this he added a new dimension to its definition: *iʿjāz nafsī*, meaning highly expressive and emotionally impactful.[4] Although Abū Zayd only mentions in this regard what he perceives as the influence of the movement of Romanticism and its critical ideas, he does not see a more specifically relevant connection: how this view reflects the strong influence of the contemporaneous (1930s and 1940s) Anglo-American critical schools of Practical Criticism and the New Criticism trend.

In addition to Khalaf Allāh, ʿĀʾisha ʿAbd ar-Raḥmān or Bint ash-Shātiʾ (d. 1999) was another major disciple of this modern literary method in Qurʾānic studies. Her selective commentary *At-Tafsīr al-bayānī li-l-Qurʾān* (Rhetorical Interpretation of the Qurʾān) (1962) introduced the method of a literary/textual approach that looks at all the verses dealing with one single subject or topic and examines the usages of words, terms, tropes, and expressions as they occur in different rhetorical and semantic fields. She differentiated this method from the classical linear method of chapter-by-chapter and verse-by-verse commentary, as she was focused on outlining divergences, convergences, and stylistic analysis across verses and *sūras*, highlighting eloquence and effectiveness.

Whereas al-Khūlī, Khalaf Allāh, and Bint ash-Shātiʾ were mostly critics and scholars of Arabic who were interested in applying new literary theories that would modernise Qurʾānic studies, Sayyid Quṭb (d. 1966) and Muḥammad al-Ghazālī (d. 1996) intended to produce works of theology contributing to the traditional field of Qurʾānic *tafsīr* (interpretation), albeit by using different methodologies. Both attempted a thematic approach that emphasises structures of meanings and issues as they are generally presented in *sūras.* In his comprehensive exegesis of the Qurʾān, *Fī ẓilāl al-Qurʾān* (In the Shade of the Qurʾān) (1952), Quṭb begins by introducing the general thrust or main argument of a *sūra*, paraphrasing whole units or passages within and not verse by verse. He was more interested in themes and issues, not minute individual verses or a linguistic analysis of terms and expressions, and he focused on analysing the discourse of a *sūra* by dividing it into sections and sub-topics. In al-Ghazālī's work, which was aptly and significantly titled *Naḥwa tafsīr mawḍūʿī li-suwar al-Qurʾān al-karīm*, 1995, (Towards a Thematic Interpretation of the Qurʾān's Chapters), the introduction treats the "*sūra*, all of it, taking an overall picture from beginning to end, considering the subtle links that tie it together, making its beginning a preparation for its ending, and its ending a fulfilment of its beginning."[5] He also mentions that he was careful to demonstrate the "unity of subject" in every chapter.

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[2] Amīn al-Khūlī, *Manāhij at-tajdīd fī n-naḥw wa-l-balāgha wa-t-tafsīr wa-l-adab* [Innovative Methodologies in Grammar, Rhetoric, Interpretation, and Literature] (Cairo: GEBO, 1995), 144, 175, 182, 185.

[3] This is the title of his 1947 book published in Cairo.

[4] Al-Khūlī, *Manāhij,* 203.

These twentieth-century attempts at methodological innovation and the new interest in literary/thematic perspectives have been analysed by present-day Qurʾānic scholars as both a revival and a further development of relevant classical treatments. The terms used are "coherence-related" or "holistic" Qurʾānic approaches, and are traced and explained by Nevin Reda:

> In general, "holistic" is related to holism and is often used synonymously with "as a whole." It conveys the idea that the properties of a given system cannot be fully determined or explained by the sum of its component parts alone, and is predicated on the assumption that there is an added value gained when looking at how all the component parts work together, as a totality. In the case of the Qurʾān, it typically implies looking at its *sūra*s as whole compositional units, as opposed to the individual verses alone. It can also refer to the Qurʾān as a whole, the added value usually taking the form of central themes or qualities.[6]

In her article, Reda provides a very useful review of the medieval roots and modern scholarship of this attention to the compositional qualities and stylistic features of whole *sūras.* She refers to the contributions of Theodor Nöldeke, Angelika Neuwirth, Jacques Jomier, Navid Kermani, and Devin Stewart among others, but particularly highlights the works of Amīn Aḥsan Iṣlāḥī and Mustansir Mir, who dedicated his studies to the identification of structural and thematic unity in the Qurʾānic text. Reda further explains this '*sūra*-centric' analytical approach: "Ideally, a holistic approach would begin with analysing the relationships between the various components of each *sūra*, identifying its central idea, and then move on to study the relationships of the various *sūra*s to each other, and how they too form a whole." Furthermore, "there are two prevalent types of holistic approaches today: *sūra*-centric and generic. In the *sūra*-centric approaches, *sūra*s are divided into parts and the relationship between the various parts is examined, usually tying them together by identifying a common theme. In the generic approaches, the focus is on the distinctive characteristics that hold the Qurʾān together as a whole and set it apart from other texts, such as its rhythms and rhymes, central themes, and other literary features."[7]

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[5] Muḥammad al-Ghazālī, *Naḥwa tafsīr mawḍūʿī li-suwar al-Qurʾān al-karīm* (Cairo: Dār ash-Shurūq, 1995), 5.

[6] Nevin Reda, "Holistic Approaches to the Qur'an: A Historical Background," *Religion Compass* 4 (2010): 1. See also her recent study of the topic in Nevin Reda, *The al-Baqara Crescendo: Understanding the Qurʾan's Style, Narrative Structure, and Running Themes* (Montreal: McGill University Press, 2017).

2. New Criticism and Aesthetic Reading

From a literary and critical point of view, the above hermeneutical approaches that highlight inner links in *sūras* and textual integrity point, in fact, to the kind of textual criticism and 'close reading' advocated by the school of New Critics, as exemplified by its well-known representative figures and works: Ivor A. Richards' *Principles of Literary Criticism* (1924) and *Practical Criticism* (1929), William Empson's *Seven Types of Ambiguity* (1930), and Cleanth Brooks' *The Well Wrought Urn* (1947). Close textual reading treats a poem or a literary composition as a self-sufficient verbal artefact with aesthetic specificity and identifies patterns of formal and thematic coherence. Form and structure uniquely embody meaning, and analysing their operation ultimately aims at unpacking and resolving opposites or contraries, which in turn creates an effect of aesthetic experience due to the perception and contemplation of harmony in the text. Moreover, this kind of imaginative, aesthetic engagement with the literary text can provide insight into a form of truth.

A text's central aspect is its form, which carries the chief characteristic of 'organic unity,' meaning coherence or interrelatedness, when "all parts of a poem are necessarily interrelated, with each part reflecting and helping to support the poem's central idea," "allow[ing] for the harmonization of conflicting ideas, feelings, and attitudes and results in the poem's oneness."[8] This is achieved through paradox, irony, and ambiguity—all of which speak to the basic human experience of tensions/incongruities in everyone's life. New Criticism sees a literary text as initially structured around the often confusing and sometimes contradictory experiences of life. The text is crafted in such a way that it stirs its readers' emotions and causes them to reflect on the content and its embedded truth. In the end, the text will have created an overall, unified effect—upon the recipient—that yields aesthetic pleasure.

Hence, aesthetic reading or aesthetic criticism is often used to refer to this school's critical perspective, as well as, to later critical views that developed the reading/interpretive process further as an "aesthetic transaction," between text and reader.[9] In this regard, I want to consider the suitability of New Criticism's basic critical principles—textual orientation, interest in form that embodies meaning, and the notion of uncovering coherence/symmetry in the text as a reflection of the search for harmony in life[10]—to apply to an aesthetic reading of sūrat ar-Raḥmān. I am borrowing here from New Criticism's focus on how a literary text/poem specifically works: Because of its internal organisation and structural features, a poetic text creates harmony out of opposites and tension. In creating coherent wholes out of the incongruent and contradictory complexity of life, poetry can transcend the chaotic flux of life and so can become itself—as a text—an aesthetic experience of harmony. As was previously mentioned, critics like Ivor A. Richards and Cleanth Brooks were pre-occupied with the tropes of paradox and irony (resolving contradictions) and with the effects of poetry on its reader on the psychological level. Close reading is directed at the techniques and strategies that poems use to deliver the effect of diversity in unity that we experience.

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[7] Reda, "Holistic Approaches," 9.

[8] Charles Bressler, *Literary Criticism: An Introduction to Theory and Practice,* 4th edition (New Jersey: Pearson, 2007), 61.

[9] Louise Rosenblatt, "Towards a Transactional Theory of Reading," *Journal of Reading Behavior* 1 (1969): 31–47.

Seeking beauty and the aesthetic dimension in religious practice and thought has been part of the human experience across religions and spiritual systems throughout the centuries, but—according to Frank Burch Brown—it has been many years since formal theologians and religious scholars have seriously considered them to be a fruitful field of inquiry.[11] It is only in recent years that scholars of religion have increasingly turned to theories of art, narrativity, and poetic metaphor to interpret religious modes of thought and expression. In his *Religious Aesthetics: a Theological Study of Making and Meaning,* Brown strongly argues for an area of study that can combine the realms of the aesthetic and the religious, basically "the idea that part of religious experience simply *is* a kind of artistic and aesthetic experience," and so both aspects can be pondered and studied in conjunction as a form of "theological aesthetics."[12] One can employ criteria that is distinct from those used by academic theologians, religious scholars, or philosophers in order to formulate certain aesthetic principles to be integrated into the mainstream study of religion. In fact, the essence of Brown's argument and discussion regarding the importance of aesthetic sensitivity to fathom "the kernels of truth carried by the husks of aesthetic form," meaning "the truth disclosed aesthetically is not entirely separable from the aesthetic form itself,"[13] recalls the discussion of form and meaning in New Criticism's approach.

In the present Islamic context, it is Khaled Abou El Fadl, a contemporary Islamic scholar and thinker, who adopts and articulates a unique perspective that identifies and conceptualises 'beauty' as integral to the Qurʾānic moral vision. It is an approach that begins and ends with aesthetic appreciation of the totality of the Revelation and its framing ethical principles, transcending the merely 'literal' or 'atomistic literalism' of separatist readings. His 2006 spiritually insightful collection of reflective essays, *The Search for Beauty in Islam*, was, he states "inspired by a single compulsion: the search for what is beautiful in Islam or about it . . . wrestling with understanding the beauty of the Divine as well as the divinity of beauty."[14] Abou El Fadl also highly values the worth and beauty of both intellectual and spiritual endeavours to fathom God's ultimate Text whose moral outlook he equates with beauty, as much as he equates evil and injustice with ugliness.

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[10] Leroy Searle, "New Criticism," *The Johns Hopkins Guide to Literary Theory and Criticism,* ed. Michael Groden, Martin Kreiswirth, and Imra Szeman (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005), 691–698.

[11] Frank Burch Brown, *Religious Aesthetics: A Theological Study of Making and Meaning* (London: Macmillan, 1990).

[12] Brown, *Religious Aesthetics,* 114, 185.

[13] Brown, *Religious Aesthetics,* 41.

His most recent comprehensive work, *Reasoning with God*, develops more specific formulations of his vision of a Qurʾān-based theology of aesthetics merged with religious ethics: "In engaging the text of the Qurʾān, one often feels as if reconnecting to something primordial, sensible, and beautiful within oneself."[15] In a powerful passage, he compares the emotional effect of reading the Qurʾān to the ecstatic feeling of balance and beauty he experiences when listening to classical music: "The Qurʾān is like a message that aims to ignite in its audience an aching for greater fulfilment and a fuller achievement of emotional and intellectual beauty." The Qurʾān opens the door "to venues of moral achievements that in their essence are conditions of beauty." Like a perfect musical composition that takes its listeners to new thresholds of beauty every time, the Qurʾān "is powerful because it creates trajectories of beauty—each one reaching a different level and point—with infinite possibility for continuous growth."[16]

3. Beauty in *ar-Raḥmān*

The total effect of beauty here is the result of a number of interrelated levels: unifying compositional elements, symmetrical structure, tropes, and themes. Initially, the Prophetic *ḥadīth* that describes the *sūra* metaphorically as "*ʿarūs al-Qurʾān*" (bride of the Qurʾān) characterises it in the tradition as a beautiful, aesthetically-pleasing text, perhaps similar to a bride in her ultimate feminine adornment and beauty (*ḥusn*). In fact, one could read the two references to maidens of paradise who are likened to rubies and coral—the "*khayrat ḥisān*"—within this framework of exquisiteness that permeates the *sūra*. The name of the *sūra* itself, of course, recalls the *ḥadīth qudsī*: "I am the *Raḥmān* [Compassionate], created the womb and derived its name from mine," which associates divine compassion with a feminine element of beatific nurturing.[17] Yet the most obvious and unique stylistic feature of the *sūra*, which might have formed the traditional basis of its perception as textually beautiful, is the recurrent refrain-verse, rhyming with the rest of the verses, which enhances the melodic, rhythmic aspect from beginning to end in a way that makes its recitation a highly poetic and almost a hypnotic experience. Musicality is a general feature of the whole of the Qurʾān, of course, yet it is more intensified here and uniquely integral to the basic 'aesthetic-spiritual' experience of this particular *sūra*. The refrain, as a compositional element in itself, encapsulates the essence of both the meaning and structure of the whole *sūra*.

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[14] Khaled Abou El Fadl, *The Search for Beauty in Islam: A Conference of the Books* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006), vii.

[15] Khaled Abou El Fadl, *Reasoning with God: Reclaiming Shari'ah in the Modern Age* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015), 11.

[16] Abou El Fadl, *Reasoning with God,* 283–284.

[17] The Arabic word for 'womb' is *raḥm.*

In terms of the direct meaning of the repeated question, "So which of your Lord's boons do you two deny?"[18] the refrain addresses and challenges the two groups of created beings—humans and *jinn*—and so is the structural marker of the principle of duality or binary ordering that informs the *sūra*'s composition. Grammatically, the terms for the noun and possessive pronoun "*your* Lord" and the verb "deny" use the dual form throughout, an obvious textual reflection of duality. The overall content of the *sūra* is divided between the created world—itself composed of the twin earth and skies (the first has rivers and seas, the second sun and moon)—and the hereafter, also divided between the blessings of Heaven and the punishment of Hellfire.

Yet the text begins with a verse consisting of a single word, "The Compassionate," the One from which all things generate. *Ar-Raḥmān*, the first among the ninety-nine Divine Names—described as "*asmāʾ ḥusnā*" (beautiful names) in the Qurʾān, Q 17:110—is differentiated from the second and closely-related Name of *ar-Raḥīm*, the Merciful, because 'compassion' here denotes an unqualified and boundless aspect of mercy in existence prior to the created realm and infinitely and unconditionally bestowed upon all beings. In this regard, it is commonly known that this particular Name applies only to God and cannot be used as an attribute or description for a human being who might be simply kind and merciful: "For it is one of the Names by which existence itself is made manifest, a universal blessing or mercy (*raḥma*) that cannot be attributed to anyone other than God."[19] In Sufi thought, all of creation is brought forth through "the Breath of the Compassionate," since the Qurʾān speaks of *nafas* (breath) that is infused into Adam and into Mary to create a new being, and so *ar-Raḥmān* relates more directly to the Divine Essence rather than the Divine Attributes or Qualities (the Names) through which God manifests Himself:

> These Names are the Divine possibilities immanent in the Universe; they are the means by which God manifests Himself in the world just as He describes Himself in the Quran through them. The Names

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[18] All translations of Qurʾānic texts are taken from: Seyyed Hossein Nasr, ed., *The Study Quran: A New Translation and Commentary* (New York: HarperOne, 2015), 1310–1318.

[19] Nasr, *Study Quran,* 1310.

> are thus the pathways leading toward God and the means by which one can ascend to the unitive knowledge of the Divine Reality. Since they are fundamental aspects of knowledge as well as of being, they manifest themselves in the Universe and in the spiritual life in which they become the object of contemplation.[20]

According to Sufi metaphysics, the Essence or Reality is a unity, a oneness, encompassing yet resolving and transcending all oppositions, polarities, and contradictions evident in the world of multiplicity. Moreover, the ninety-nine Names are perceived as divided into two groups: Names of *jalāl* (that describe the attributes of majesty, might, and power, and inspire awe and fear) and Names of *ikrām* (that describe kindness, benevolence, and mercy). Indeed, two verses located at significant points of the *sūra* mention the twin name of *dhī l-jalāl wa-l-ikrām* (Possessed of Majesty and Bounty): Q 55:27 marks the turn from a section (Q 55:10–25) that speaks of the blessings or boons of this world to blessings of the Hereafter, and the last verse Q 55:78 ends the description of heavenly blessings. It is in God and through Him alone that all dualities and binaries merge in a single Oneness.

It is this implied synthesis or holism that eventually characterises the spirit of the *sūra* in its entirety, though—paradoxically—structured around pairings and binaries. Yet this structural and thematic duality is an illustration of the multiplicity and diversity of creation, which emanates from the Divine One and is a visible sign of His ‘creative Breath,’ but also eventually returns unto Him. In this regard, creation is compared by Ibn ʿArabī (d. 1240) to the articulation of sound from the human mouth when words use human breath to be uttered:

> In the same manner that the human breath goes through the cycle of contraction and expansion, the Universe undergoes the two complementary phases of the same cycle. It is annihilated at every moment and re-created at the next, without there being a temporal separation between the two phases. It returns back to the Divine Essence at every moment while in the phase of contraction and is remanifested [*sic*] and externalized in that of expansion. The Universe is thus a theophany of the Divine Essence, which is renewed at every moment [. . .].[21]

Hence, the whole *sūra* is framed by the *Raḥmān* at the very beginning and the God of Majesty and Bounty at the end, as a reminder—after having gone through this world and the other—that the Absolute Oneness of God is indivisible, the only Reality through which all polarities are ultimately undone.

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[20] Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Three Muslim Sages* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1964), 109.

[21] Nasr, *Three Muslim Sages,* 112.

Immediately following the first verse with its single word that gives the *sūra* its title, pairings begin with the second verse, "taught the Qurʾān," and the third, "created human being[s]." In other words, God is the source of the ultimate revelatory, primal Text and Creator of humans. This is the primary duality—divine text versus humankind—yet the fourth verse follows, "taught him speech/*bayān*," which is the intermediary dynamic that brings God and human together. *Bayān* is not simply speech, but intelligent speech and expressiveness that reflect the capacity to understand clearly, a discriminating faculty that is a combined clarity both of understanding and articulating. It is human understanding that interprets God's Text. Moreover, this is a signal of a 'self-conscious' *sūra* that calls attention to its own textuality and eloquence. This is the only instance in the Qurʾān that the word *al-bayān* as a separate grammatical noun with the definite article is used (with no attached pronouns or in other derived forms), thus indicating a generic term and highlighting it as a focal symbol of this particular *sūra*. It is also the noun given later to one branch of Arabic rhetoric, namely, the branch treating clearness in expression (*ʿilm al-bayān*). The *sūra*, therefore, invites textual interpretation of its own rhetorical and stylistic features, not just the expected religious and spiritual meanings to be culled from any sacred text.

The 'creative' and nurturing compassion of God in the first four verses merge, by association, with another divine attribute as a sub-text, since the Divine Name *al-ʿadl* (the Just) is not explicitly mentioned but is implicit in the word *mīzān* (balance) of verses Q 55:7, 8, and 9, hence uniting compassion with justice. More dualities include references to the "sun" and the "moon," ground stem-less "shrubs" and hard-stemmed "trees," the "sky" held up and the "earth" laid out and spread, the cosmic "Balance" that holds up the sky and the worldly balance of fairness, merging the macrocosm with the microcosm world of human life.

This powerful beginning establishes the key dual structural element which also embodies the thematic essence of the *sūra*: a juxtaposition based on a perfect balance that is not characterised by conflict or strife, but by a certain ordered, complementary wholeness. At this point, the refrain-verse in Q 55:13 comes for the first time in the text, the double challenge to man and *jinn*, "So which of your Lord's boons/blessings do you two deny?" The above unit, therefore, comprises the basic thematic U-turn movement of the whole *sūra*, from oneness to bifurcation and multiplicity and then back to the One Lord, the Creator. It is this particular stylistic and structural feature of the Qurʾān as a whole that Norman Brown notes and comments on when analysing *Sūrat al-Kahf* (*sūra* 18, The Cave), terming it "simultaneous totality," when the whole appears in every part:

> Hence, it does not matter in what order you read the Koran: it is all there all the time; and it is supposed to be all there all the time in your mind or at the back of your mind, memorized and available for appropriate quotation and collage into your conversation or your

> writing, or your action. Hence the beautiful inconsequentiality of the arrangement of the suras: from the longest to the shortest. In this respect the Koran is more avant-garde than *Finnegans Wake*, in which the over-all organization is entangled in both linear and cyclical patterns which it is trying to transcend.[22]

In this respect, Brown recalls Umberto Eco's analysis of the unique literary quality of *Finnegans Wake*'s text as "an infinite contained within finiteness" and thinks that the description in fact applies to the genius of the Qurʾān, which was only appreciated by Western aesthetic sensibility the day it understood and appreciated *Finnegans Wake.* He also quotes Hodgson on the same feature of the Qurʾānic text in its entirety, "Almost every element which goes to make up its message is somehow present in any given passage,"[23] which is a reference to the holistic and coherence-related trend of Qurʾānic studies previously mentioned, as well as to the critical principle of 'organic unity' that embodies harmony according to the school of New Criticism.

The verse-refrain occurs thirty-one times in places that mark the end of a series of paired bounties, as Muhammad Abdel Haleem noted in his verse-by-verse paraphrase and explication of the *sūra.* He attempted its examination particularly in light of what he called the textual elements of "context and internal relationships," with roots in a few classical insights by medieval scholars such as Ibn Taymiyya (d. 1328) and ash-Shāṭibī (d. 1388) and expressed by the prevalent view that *"al-Qurʾān yufassir baʿḍahu baʿḍan"* (different parts of the Qurʾān explain each other).[24] Significantly, Abdel Haleem claims that such medieval roots and the modern revival of interest in coherence in Qurʾānic studies are similar to the modern literary theories of intertextuality.[25]

The binary images continue with verse Q 55:14: man was created from clay and *jinn* from fire; God is the Lord of the two 'easts' and the two 'wests' (of winter and summer), encompassing the farthest point of each rising and setting of the sun and encircling both limits of the earth's spectrum, which in itself implies the whole. Further, the "two seas," meaning the two bodies of salty and non-salty waters, "meet" yet are kept distinct without "transgression" of one over the other and are therefore in equal balance; the seas have depths that contain gems, and also spacious surfaces that carry sailing ships. Within the special context of this *sūra* and its thematic unfolding, the two seas can also be interpreted metaphorically as the two worlds of humans and *jinn*, or as a further allusion to earth and sky, land and sea, this world and the Hereafter, Heaven and Hell, or God and man—that is, as a figure of speech it encapsulates all the dualities mentioned so far.

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[22] Norman Brown, "The Apocalypse of Islam," *Social Text* 8 (Winter, 1983–1984): 167.

[23] Marshall G.S. Hodgson, "A Comparison of Islam and Christianity as Framework for Religious Life," *Diogenes* 32 (1960): 61, quoted in Brown, "The Apocalypse," 167.

[24] Muhammad A.S. Abdel Haleem, "Context and Internal Relationships: Keys to Qur'anic exegesis—A Study of *Sūrat al-Rahman,*" in *Approaches to the Qur'an,* ed. Gerald R. Hawting and Abdel-Kader Shareef (London: Routledge, 1993), 73.

[25] For a relevant and important read in this field of literary approaches to the Qurʾānic text, see also Issa Boullata, ed. *Literary Structures of Religious Meaning in the Qur'an* (Richmond: Curzon, 2000).

Yet this encompassing and integrated wholeness of the macrocosm paradoxically carries within it the seeds of *fanāʾ* (disintegration and mortality) in the face of *baqāʾ* (immortality of the Divine). These are verses Q 55:26 and Q 55:27 which mark the shift from describing the blessings and beauties of this world's creation to speaking about the blessings/punishment of the Hereafter. The twin-concepts of *fanāʾ* (self-annihilation) and *baqāʾ* (subsistence in the Divine) figure prominently in Sufi thought as the two main states or stages sought and worked hard for by a Sufi in order to reach the supreme experience of union with the Divine Beloved—that is, to 'die' to one's worldly identity and feel immersed in the permanence of His Light and Beauty.

In the following section until just before the final verse, hell's boiling water and paradise's cool gardens and springs are juxtaposed: two Heavenly Gardens for the believers who have done good deeds each contain two flowing water springs, and in each are two kinds of every fruit, accompanied by beautiful maidens who are likened to rubies and corals. Once again, the same principle applies: the dual as a supposedly defined number in describing Heavenly bliss paradoxically implying a range of the limitless/infinite. In the middle of this section, verse Q 55:60 is also of significance: "Is the reward of goodness aught but goodness?" For goodness, the word *iḥsān*, derived from the root *ḥusn* (to be beautiful, handsome), is used here: to convey the reality and truthfulness of Heaven, its bliss is indeed expressed in concrete and sensuous images of sheer beauty. It also links with *ḥisān* (beautiful maidens created in Heaven) in verse Q 55:70. The *iḥsān* granted by God is in reciprocity to the *iḥsān* of human beings on earth: goodness is met with goodness, and beauty is the reward of beautiful faith. Inversely, the verse can also refer to human beings' goodness and loving obedience to God as a response to God's preceding primal compassion and blessings. In this sense, the verse operates like the Sufi metaphorical mirror of contemplation between God and human:

> God is the mirror in which you see yourself, as you are His mirror in which He contemplates His Names and their principles; Now His Names are not other than Himself, so that the reality [or the analogy of relations] is an inversion.[26]

The tempo/rhythm of the final section (Q 55:62–77) increases as the intermittent verses between the verse-refrain become shorter to the extent

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[26] Ibn ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam,* ed. Abū l-ʿAlāʾ ʿAfīfī (Cairo: ʿĪsā al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī, 1946), 62 quoted in Nasr, *Three Muslim Sages,* 116.

of one-word verses (e.g. Q 55:64: *mudhammātān*/deep green [gardens]), until it reaches the repose and ultimate tranquillity of God, of "Majesty and Bounty" (Q 55:78). Additionally, this last section repeats the components of the two Heavenly Gardens, with the description of dark green (Q 55:64) in parallel to the previous multiplicity of branches "*afnān*" (Q 55:48); the two springs pouring forth (Q 55:66) in parallel to the previously-mentioned flowing/running springs (Q 55:50); the date-palms and pomegranates (Q 55:68) in parallel to the preceding mention of two kinds of every fruit (Q 55:52); the good and beautiful companions "*ḥisān*" (Q 55:70) also echo the previous maidens likened in their fairness to rubies and coral (Q 55:58); their exquisite eyes "*ḥūr*"(Q 55:72) pairs with "*qāṣirātu ṭ-ṭarf*" (Q 55:56) (of chaste glances); and then finally the same description in Q 55:56 is repeated verbatim in Q 55:74 to conclude this parallelism or echoing: "*lam yaṭmithhunna insun qablahum wa-lā jānn*" (haven't been touched by man or *jinn*). In other words, this final segment creates inter-penetration or dovetailing as a textual embodiment of synthesis and resolving of oppositions. It is also of significance that Heavenly bliss in this particular *sūra* is deliberately tangible, visual, pictorial, and aesthetically sensual (different from other references in other *sūras* to the spiritual and psychological rewards of Heaven), as a reflection of the emphasis on 'beautiful' form, style, and textual organic unity.

In the end, all this richness and textured multiplicity, all this sensuous bliss and vividness, has, paradoxically, to be understood as a manifestation of the Oneness of God: the final verse, "Blessed is the Name of thy Lord, Possessed of Majesty and Bounty." In his study of the literary/apocalyptic nature of the Qurʾānic text as a whole, Todd Lawson has identified the elements of duality, opposition, and symmetry as characteristic of its overall conceptual and figurative structure. He notes that the Qurʾān is distinguished from other scriptures and holy books by the degree to which it is suffused with and informed by a preoccupation with duality: "The interplay of conceptual and substantive oppositions and dualities is a prominent feature of both the form and content of the Qurʾān," yet this does not always indicate antagonism: "rather its first meaning is 'two things facing each other, or being compared with each other.'"[27] As shown in the analysis above, it is this circulating principle that "enhances and emphasizes the message of oneness that is the focus and task of *tawḥīd*."[28] Lawson calls it the Qurʾān's special "text-grammar" that covers the spectrum from abstraction to the concrete, from divine attributes to elements of the natural world, hence structurally and semantically lending coherence to the whole text.[29] From this literary perspective, he perceives the highly aesthetic quality of the Qurʾānic text to the point that he deems it worthy to be studied and analysed in the manner of a classical epic like Homer's works.[30]

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[27] Todd Lawson, "Duality, Opposition and Typology in the Qur'an: The Apocalyptic Substrate," *Journal of Qur'anic Studies* 10, no. 2 (2009): 27.

[28] Lawson, "Duality," 29.

[29] Lawson, "Duality," 28, 29, 31.

Conclusion

Ultimately, a reading that analyses and interprets aspects of symmetry, proportion, pattern, and balance as the formal embodiment of an equally holistic worldview and doctrine (form and content as mirrors of each other) creates a unique aesthetic experience of harmony and wholeness. The literary/artistic pleasure that the text provides interacts simultaneously with the religious/spiritual message. Hence, the above has been an experimental venture that sees in textual literary analysis, not a lessening of the sanctity of the Qurʾān or an implication that it is similar to literature in being a human product, but rather a confirmation of its divinity and miraculousness. Discovering its textual beauty/*ḥusn* and responding to its aesthetic effect is part of an overall integralist religious and spiritual experience, of the belief in God's ultimate and perfect Beauty and of His combined compassion and justice. Although the humanistic basis or premise of New Criticism has long been transcended by 'political' readings and the socio-cultural critical schools of the end of the twentieth century (beginning with deconstruction/post-structuralism, new historicism, post-modernism, feminism, cultural studies . . . etc.), this approach may be the most suitable and inspiring one to apply to the Qurʾānic text in the field of 'religious aesthetics' or a 'theology of beauty' as discussed by Frank Brown; both the aesthetic realm and theological concepts "exist in mutually transformative, dialogical relationship: aesthetic perceptions give rise to thought, and thought modifies aesthetic perceptions in such a way as to give rise to further aesthetic creation and insight."[31]

I would like to end with a quotation from Khaled Abou El Fadl that captures the unique, paradoxical experience of Muslims reading, reciting, understanding, responding to, and fathoming the depths, mysteries, and aesthetics of this central Text:

> "The *Rahman* taught the Qurʾan, created humans, and taught them discernment." (55: 1–4) The Qurʾan is the embodiment of this divine ability—the ability to discern, comprehend, judge, and intelligently express that which is believed. Tonight I sit with you in my lap. In your presence I am ashamed to exist. But where can I go? I am not so luminous or so pure as to dissolve into you. So I try to integrate your divinity within my human soul. Do I succeed? Do I ever succeed? My Qurʾan, my beloved Reading, The Reading that

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[30] Lawson, "Duality," 31.
[31] Brown, *Religious Aesthetics,* 42.

> started all readings, the Reading that preceded all readings and that inspires all readings. What a privilege it is to have you and what a burden! The actual word of the Divine Essence, the tangible presence of The Divine in our midst. What a privilege and what a burden! How can I, with all my weaknesses, anxieties, and fears, understand you? But I love you too much to stop trying to understand. Yet, I love you too much to dare think that I do, in fact, understand.[32]

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[32] Abou El Fadl, *The Search for Beauty,* 14.

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PART II

Aesthetics of Islamic Sermons

Tahera Qutbuddin

A Sermon on Piety by Imam ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib: How the Rhythm of the Classical Arabic Oration Tacitly Persuaded

Abstract Early Islamic society revered its articulate speakers, and later scholars held up their addresses as exemplars of eloquence. But wherein lay the power of the classical oration (*khuṭba*)? Did orators randomly pick and choose stylistic features, or were there certain characteristics they privileged? More importantly, what were the conscious and unconscious impetuses for their choice of aesthetic mode? It is well known that the orator employed logical argumentation based on ideas to convince his audience. I argue that in tandem with this rational argumentation, the early Arabic orator also used a stylistic mode of persuasion to sway his listeners in a subtler way, one which relied primarily on rhythm. Elsewhere, I have divided the fundamental aesthetic features of the oration into five groups: vivid imagery, audience-engagement elements, rhetorical or real questions, testimonial citation of Qurʾānic and poetic verses, dignified yet straightforward language, and most prominently, and the focus of this article, rhythm. Through a granular textual analysis of a sermon on piety by the first Shiʿa imam and fourth Sunni caliph, ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib (d. 40/661), the article demonstrates how the entire piece is formulated rhythmically: rooted in parallelism, augmented by repetition and rhyme, and sharpened by antithesis, the sermon’s pulsing beat contributes to its aesthetic and persuasive success.

The oratorical “*khuṭba*” texts found in the medieval sources include some of the most beautiful expressions of the Arabic literary canon.[1] Early Islamic society revered its articulate speakers, and later scholars held up their addresses as exemplars of eloquence. But wherein lay the power of the classical oration? Did orators randomly pick and choose stylistic features, or were there certain characteristics they privileged? More importantly, what were the conscious and unconscious impetuses for their choice of aesthetic mode? It is well known that the orator employed logical argumentation based on ideas to convince his audience. I argue that in tandem with this rational argumentation, the early Arabic orator also used a stylistic mode of persuasion to sway his listeners in a subtler way, one which relied primarily on rhythm. Elsewhere, I have divided the fundamental aesthetic features of the oration into five groups: vivid imagery portraying abstractions as observable, desert phenomena, which give physical form to theoretical concepts; audience-engagement elements such as direct address, emphatic structures, and rhetorical or real questions, which involve the audience in the speech act; testimonial citation of Qurʾānic and poetic verses, which anchor the orator’s words in the sacred or semi-sacred literature of pre-Islamic Arabia and early Islam and bestow divine or quasi-divine authority to them; dignified yet simple language, which renders the oration formal and at the same time comprehensible to its large, public audience; and the fifth and most prominent stylistic feature of the early oration, rhythm.[2] Analyzing a sermon on piety by the first Shiʿa imam and fourth Sunni caliph, ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib (d. 40/661),[3] this article highlights the rhythm of classical Arabic oration. Analysis of ʿAlī's sermon shows that the entire piece is formulated rhythmically. Its measured flow of phrases is acoustically oriented and involves patterns of word-movement and time. Rooted in parallelism, augmented by repetition and rhyme, and sharpened by antithesis, the sermon's pulsing beat contributes to its aesthetic and persuasive success.

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[1] On the *khuṭba* of the early, oral period, see Tahera Qutbuddin, *Arabic Oration: Art and Function*, in the series *Handbook of Oriental Studies*, Section 1: *Near and Middle East*, series ed. Maribel Fierro et al. (Leiden: Brill, forthcoming); idem, “*Khuṭba*: The Evolution of Early Arabic Oration,” in *Classical Arabic Humanities in their Own Terms*, ed. Beatrice Gruendler (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 176–273; idem, “Khoṭba,” in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, ed. Ehsan Yarshater (online edition: http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/kotba-sermon, 2013); idem, “Qur’an Citation in Early Arabic Oration (*khuṭba*): Mnemonic, Liturgical and Testimonial Functions,” in *The Qurʾan and* Adab*: The Shaping of Literary Traditions in Classical Islam*, ed. Nuha Alshaar (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 315–340; and Arabic monographs including: Iḥsān al-Nuṣṣ, *al-Khaṭāba al-ʿarabiyya fi ʿaṣrihā adh-dhahabī* (Cairo: Dār al-Maʿārif, 1963); Īliyā l-Ḥāwī, *Fann al-khaṭāba wa-taṭawwuruhu ʿinda l-ʿarab* (Beirut: Dār ath-Thaqāfah, n.d.); and Muḥammad Ṭāhir Darwīsh, *al-Khaṭāba fī ṣadr al-islām*, vol. 1: *al-ʿAṣr ad-dīnī ʿaṣr al-biʿtha al-islāmiyya* (Cairo: Dār al-Maʿārif, 1965).

[2] Qutbuddin, *Arabic Oration*, ch. 3.

[3] On ʿAlī and his literary oeuvre, see Tahera Qutbuddin, “ʿAli b. Abi Talib,” in *Arabic Literary Culture, 500–925*, ed. Michael Cooperson and Shawkat Toorawa (Detroit: Gale Research, 2005), 68–76; idem, “The Sermons of ʿAli ibn Abi Talib: At the Confluence of the Core Islamic Teachings of the Qur’an and the Oral, Nature-Based Cultural Ethos of Seventh Century Arabia,” *Anuario de Estudios Medievales*, monograph vol. *La predicación medieval: sermones cristianos, judios e islámicos en el Mediterráneo,* ed. Linda G. Jones, 42/1 (2012): 201–228; idem, Introduction to *A Treasury of Virtues: Sayings, Sermons, and Teachings of ʿAli*, by al-Qāḍī al-Quḍāʿī, (New York: New York University Press, in the series *Library of Arabic Literature*, 2013), xiii–xxiv; idem, “ʿAlī’s Contemplations on This World and the Hereafter in the Context of His Life and Times,” in *Essays in Islamic Philology, History, and Philosophy*, ed. Alireza Korangy, et al. (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2016), 333–353; and idem,

Aesthetics of Orality and Persuasion

Pre-Islamic and early Islamic society was largely oral. Although writing was known in this period, it was minimally used and severely limited by, among other things, a lack of adequate tools. Until paper was introduced to the Islamic world around 132/750, the art of penning letters was rare, and the overall culture was dominated by the spoken word.

The orality of the milieu raises questions about the authenticity of the corpus, for there is no doubt that errors and fabrications made their way into the written sources. However, we should not underestimate the significance of continuous oral transmission for this culture. Many scholars have produced studies that speak to this issue. Walter Ong has shown that orally produced artistic verbal materials are anchored in mnemonic techniques that aid their memorization and transmission, and demonstrated that members of oral societies have succeeded in transmitting their verbal products effectively over long periods of time.[4] Mary Carruthers has assessed the ethical and literary values attached to memory training even in medieval culture.[5] In the early Islamic world, there was just such a system in place, in which materials were transmitted orally, without a break, over several generations. There were differences in the mode of transmission for materials of different genres, and the manner of oratorical transmission can be said to fall somewhere between the paraphrasing approach used for transmission of prosaic historical reports (*riwāya bi-l-maʿnā*), and the verbatim method used in the transmission of the artistically elevated and sacred or quasi-sacred forms of the Qurʾān and poetry (*riwāya bi-l-lafẓ*). As Gregor Schoeler has established, moreover, the oral transmission of historical and literary material in our period was supplemented by gradually increasing amounts of scholarly note-taking. What is more, the thousands of reports in the medieval Arabic sources that cite or mention speeches and sermons, point to a dynamic genre of oratory operating among the early

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"Piety and Virtue in Early Islam: Two Sermons by Imam Ali," in *Self-Transcendence and Virtue: Perspectives from Philosophy, Psychology, and Theology*, ed. Jennifer Frey and Candace Vogler (London: Routledge, 2018), 125–153.

[4] Walter J. Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* (London: Routledge, 1982), passim.

[5] Mary Carruthers, *The Book of Memory*: *A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), passim.

Muslims. For all these reasons, it is conceivable that our texts are genuine remnants—albeit imperfect ones—from that period.

The orality of the society also has implications for its verbal aesthetics, which are essentially rooted in mnemonic techniques. Leading these mnemonic techniques is rhythm. Ong has further demonstrated that verbal expression in an oral culture is essentially rhythmic.[6] He argues that to retain carefully articulated thought you have to do your thinking in cadences shaped for ready recurrence. Additionally, scholars have shown that our speech rhythms are a physiological phenomenon deriving from our breathing patterns. In the mid-1900s, the French anthropologist Marcel Jousse demonstrated the close connection between oral tempo, the breathing process, gesture, and the bilateral symmetry of the human body.[7] Because of its grounding in human physiology, rhythmic speech heightens emotional response in the audience, forming a crucial tool of oratorical persuasion. And modern neuroscientists have explained the process of memory formation (called 'neural entrainment') through the propensity of the brain to organize information in patterns.[8] Rhythm is present in many forms even in a society which communicates through writing, but in the artistic expressions of an oral society it is a fundamental characteristic. The early Muslims assiduously cultivated the art of the spoken word, and each of their major speech genres was highly rhythmic. To some degree, these genres shared rhythm-generating components, but their rhythmic loci were different: rhyme and meter for poetry, assonance for the Qurʾān, and parallelism for oratory. Although we know that ʿAlī was literate—he was one of the scribes of the Prophet who wrote down verses of the Qurʾān as they were revealed[9]—his use of orthographic notation would have been limited within the writing practice of the society he lived in, a society whose use of language was overwhelmingly oral.

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[6] Ong, *Orality and Literacy*, 34–36. Ong argues further that orally based expressions also include short sentences, repetition, additive rather than subordinating phrases—that is, phrases connected with the word "and" rather than "which" or "that"; aggregative rather than analytic expositions; an agonistic, struggle-based tone; and closeness to the human lifeworld. The features he outlines are observable in Biblical psalms and sermons, Greek and Balkan epics, and Zulu panegyrics; they are prominent also in classical Arabic orations.

[7] Marcel Jousse, *L'Anthropologie du geste* (Paris: Resma, 1968), passim. See also two affirmations of the physiological basis of rhythm from the *Encyclopædia Britannica* entries on "rhythm" and "dance" (*Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, 29 July 2007 <http://search.eb.com/eb/article-64627>): (1) "Although difficult to define, rhythm is readily discriminated by the ear and the mind, having as it does a physiological basis. It is universally agreed to involve qualities of movement, repetition, and pattern and to arise from the poem's nature as a temporal structure. . . . The presence of rhythmic patterns heightens emotional response and often affords the reader a sense of balance." (2) "Nearly all physical activity is done rhythmically, as in the beating of the heart, the flow of the breath, and the actions of walking and running. Work activities such as digging, sawing, scrubbing also tend to fall into a regular rhythm, because that is the most efficient and economical way of working the muscles and pacing the effort."

[8] Aniruddh Patel, "A New Approach to the Cognitive Neuroscience of Melody," in *The Cognitive Neuroscience of Music*, ed. Isabelle Peretz and Robert Zattore (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 338–342; Michael H. Thaut, *Rhythm, Music, and the Brain: Scientific Foundations and Clinical Applications* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 4–5, 16–17, 43, 54–57; Adam Tierney and Nina Kraus, "Neural Entrainment to the Rhythmic Structure of Music," *Journal of Cognitive Neuroscience* 27:2 (2005): 405–406.

Orality has dominated human existence for tens of thousands of years. The rhythmic nature of classical Arabic oratory is one shared by speakers from oral cultures across the globe over a multitude of languages and ethnicities through most of human history. Arabic orations did not, however, simply reproduce the set of characteristics that scholars have identified in other forms of oral discourse. Instead, we find a selective emphasis on those features most conducive to fulfilling their primary purpose of persuasion within the religious and political culture from which they sprang. In early Islamic times, oration was the primary mode of negotiating religio-political leadership. The orator spurred men to battle, legislated on civic and criminal matters, warned of the immediacy of death and exhorted his audience to lead a pious life; he called to Islam, and his sermons even formed part of its ritual worship. Some prominent characteristics of other forms of oral discourse, such as the recurring epithets of Greek epic poetry, did not figure at all in the Arabic oration. The orator was not recording history or providing entertainment by telling a story, performing an epic, or reciting an ode. Instead, he aimed to make his listeners believe in the validity of a course of action, a mode of behavior, a way of thought, or a type of doctrine. Together with rational argumentation, he achieved much of this stirring of hearts and prodding of minds through literary techniques of tacit persuasion.[10]

Sermon on Piety by Imam ʿAlī

ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib is one of the master models of Arabic oratory. The foremost medieval litterateurs considered his speeches to be the benchmark of high style. When the preeminent Umayyad scribe ʿAbd al-Ḥamīd al-Kātib (d. 132/750) was asked: "What enabled you to master the science of eloquence, what formed your training in it?" he replied: "Memorizing the words of ʿAlī."[11] The well-known collection of ʿAlī's words compiled by ash-Sharīf ar-Raḍī (d. 406/1015) is aptly titled *Path of Eloquence* (*Nahj al-balāgha*), from which this famous sermon on piety typifies many of the finest aesthetic qualities of the classical oration. The sermon is one of the most widely attested from among ʿAlī's oeuvre, and is found in at least seventeen other early sources, including the works of Ibn al-Mubārak (d. 180/797), Naṣr ibn Muzāḥim al-Minqarī (d. 202/818), Ibn Ḥanbal (d. 240/855), Jāḥiẓ (d. 255/869), Ibn ʿAbd Rabbih (d. 328/940), Ibn Shuʿba al-Ḥarrānī (fl. 4/10 c.), and Bāqillānī (d. 403/1013).[12] The different versions reveal minor differences which arise from discrepancies in oral transmission as well as textual variants; yet they all display the same rhythmic patterns.

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[9] Ibn ʿAbd Rabbih, *al-ʿIqd al-farīd* (Beirut, Dār Iḥyāʾ at-Turāth al-ʿArabī, 1999), 4:144.

[10] On the case for and techniques of 'tacit persuasion,' see Richard Lanham, *Analyzing Prose* (New York: Charles Scribner, 1983), 1–12, 122–139, and passim.

[11] Literally: ". . . the words of the bald one (*al-aṣlaʿ*), meaning ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib." al-Jahshiyārī, *Kitāb al-Wuzarāʾ wa-l-kuttāb*, ed. Muṣṭafā as-Saqqā et al. (Cairo: Muṣṭafā al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī, 1980), 82; and following him several authors including ath-Thaʿālibī, *Thimār al-qulūb fī-l-muḍāf wa-l-mansūb* (Cairo: Dār al-Maʿārif), 197; az-Zamakhsharī, *Rabīʿ al-abrār wa-nuṣūṣ al-akhbār*, ed. Salīm al-Nuʿāymī, (Baghdad: Wazārat al-Awqāf, 1980), 3/238; aṣ-Ṣafadī, *al-Wāfī bi-l-wafayāt*, ed. Aḥmad al-Arnāʾūṭ and Turkī Muṣṭafā (Beirut: Dār Iḥyāʾ at-Turāth, 1420/2000), 18:23.

Text and Translation

The following is the text and translation of the sermon from the *Nahj al-balāgha.*[13] A translation cannot quite capture the full beauty of the sermon, for its aesthetic effect is intrinsically connected with its language. Still, it can bring us part of the way toward understanding its stylistic mechanisms.

The world has turned back and declared its farewell. The hereafter has approached and announced its arrival. Today is the day of training and tomorrow is the race: its goal paradise or its end hellfire. Is there one among you who would repent from his sins before his death? Is there one among you who would perform good deeds for his soul before his day of adversity? These are your days of hope—coming behind them is death. Truly, those who perform good deeds during their days of

فَإِنَّ الدُّنْيَا قَدْ أَدْبَرَتْ وَآذَنَتْ
بِوَدَاع وَإِنَّ الاْخِرَةَ قَدْ أَقْبَلَتْ
وَأَشْرَفَتْ بِٱطِّلاَعَ أَلاَ وَإِنَّ
اليَوْمَ المِضْمار وَغَدًا السِّبَاق
وَالسَّبَقَةُ الجَنَّة وَالغَايَةُ النَّار
أَفَلاَ تَائِبٌ مِنْ خَطِيئَتِهِ قَبْلَ
مَنِيَّتِه أَلاَ عَامِلٌ لِنَفْسِهِ قَبْلَ
يَوْمِ بُؤْسِه أَلاَ وَإِنَّكُمْ فِي أَيَّامِ
أَمَل مِنْ وَرَائِهِ أَجَل فَمَنْ
عَمِلَ فِي أَيَّامِ أَمَلِه قَبْلَ

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[12] Al-Minqarī, *Waqʿat Ṣiffīn*, ed. ʿAbd as-Sallām Muḥammad Hārūn (Cairo: Maktabat al-Khānjī, 1981), 3–4; al-Jāḥiẓ, *al-Bayān wa-t-tabyīn*, ed. ʿAbd as-Sallām Muḥammad Hārūn (Cairo: Maktabat al-Khānjī, 1985), 2:52–53; Ibn al-Mubārak, *Kitāb az-Zuhd*, ed. Ḥabīb ar-Raḥmān al-Aʿẓamī (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, n.d.), 1:86; Ibn Abī Shaybah, *al-Muṣannaf*, ed. Kamāl Yūsuf al-Ḥūt (Riyadh: Maktabat ar-Rushd, 1988), 7:100; Ibn Ḥanbal, *Faḍāʾil aṣ-ṣaḥāba*, ed. Waṣī ad-Dīn Muḥammad ʿAbbās (Beirut: Muʾassasat ar-Risāla, 1983), 1:530; Ibn Qutayba, *ʿUyūn al-akhbār*, ed. Yūsuf ʿAlī Ṭawīl (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, n.d), 2:256; Ibn Abī d-Dunyā, *Qiṣar al-amal*, ed. Muḥammad Khayr Ramaḍān Yūsuf (Beirut: Dār Ibn Ḥazm, 1997), 1:26, 50; ath-Thaqafī, *Ghārāt*, ed. Jalāl ad-Dīn al-Muḥaddith (Tehran: Anjuman-i Āthār-i Millī, 1975), 1:633; Ibn Abī ʿĀṣim, *Kitāb az-Zuhd*, ed. ʿAbd al-ʿAlī ʿAbd al-Ḥamīd al-Aʿẓamī (Cairo: Dār ar-Rayyān, 1987), 1:130; al-Yaʿqūbī, *Tārīkh* (Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, Dār Bayrūt, 1960), 2:208–209; Ibn Shuʿba al-Ḥarrānī, *Tuḥaf al-ʿuqūl ʿan āl ar-rasūl* (Beirut: Dār al-Murtaḍā, 2007), 113; Abū Jaʿfar an-Naḥḥās, *ʿUmdat al-kātib*, ed. Bassām ʿAbd al-Wahhāb al-Jābī (Beirut: Dār Ibn Ḥazm, 2004), 348–349; Ibn ʿAbd Rabbih, *al-ʿIqd al-farīd*, 4:65; al-Masʿūdī, *Murūj adh-dhahab wa-maʿādin al-jawhar*, ed. Saʿīd al-Laḥḥām (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 2000), 2:414; al-Bāqillānī, *Iʿjāz al-qurʾān*, ed. Aḥmad Ṣaqr (Cairo, Dār al-Maʿārif, 1964), 1:146; Ibn Ḥamdūn, *at-Tadhkira al-Ḥamdūniyya*, ed. Iḥsān ʿAbbās (Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, 1996), 1:63; Abū l-Muʾayyad Muwaffaq ibn Aḥmad al-Khwārizmī, *Manāqib al-Khwārizmī* (Najaf: al-Maktabah al-Ḥaydariyyah, 1965), 262.

[13] Ash-Sharīf ar-Raḍī, *Nahj al-balāgha*, ed. Husayn al-Aʿlamī, comm. Muḥammad ʿAbduh (Beirut: Muʾassasat al-Aʿlamī, 1993), 93–94.

hope before the arrival of death will benefit from them; death will not cause them harm. Those who fall short in performing good deeds during their days of hope before the arrival of death will have squandered their chance; death will cause them harm. Perform good deeds from hope, not fear. Listen. I have never seen those who seek paradise or flee hellfire sleeping. Listen. Those whom right does not benefit are harmed by wrong. Those whom right-guidance does not put on the straight path are dragged by error to destruction. Listen. You have been given the command to begin your journey, and direction as to how you may gather provisions. Truly, I fear your pursuit of whimsical desires and lengthy yearnings. Take provisions in this world, from this world, with which you can nourish your souls tomorrow.

حُضُورِ أَجَلِه فَقَدْ نَفَعَهُ عَمَلُه
وَلَمْ يَضرُرْهُ أَجَلُه وَمَنْ قَصَّرَ
فِي أَيَّامِ أَمَلِه قَبْلَ حُضُورِ
أَجَلِه فَقَدْ خَسِرَ عَمَلُه وَضَرَّهُ
أَجَلُه أَلَا فَٱعْمَلُوا فِي الرَّغْبَة
كَمَا تَعْمَلُونَ فِي الرَّهْبَة أَلَا
وَإِنِّي لَمْ أَرَ كَالجَنَّةِ نَامَ طَالِبُهَا
وَلاَ كَالنَّارِ نَامَ هَارِبُهَا أَلَا وَإِنَّهُ
مَنْ لاَ يَنْفَعْهُ الحقّ يَضْرُرْهُ
البَاطِل وَمَنْ لا يستقمْ بِهِ
الهُدٰى يَجُرُّ بِهِ الضَّلاَلُ إِلَى
الرَّدٰى أَلَا وَإِنَّكُمْ قَد أُمِرْتُمْ
بِالظَّعْنِ وَدُلِلْتُمْ عَلَى الزَّاد
وَإِنَّ أَخْوَفَ مَا أَخافُ عَلَيْكُمُ
ٱتِّبَاعُ الهَوَى وَطُولُ الأمَل
تَزَوَّدُوا فِي الدُّنْيَا مِنَ الدُّنْيَا
مَا تَحُوزُونَ بِهِ أَنْفُسَكُمْ غَدا

Line-numbered text and literal translation

The following is the text of the sermon translated literally to show the workings of the parallel structure. The lines are numbered to facilitate referencing in the subsequent analysis

1.	Then truly! The world has indeed turned back and proclaimed its departure.	فَإِنَّ الدُّنْيَا قَدْ أَدْبَرَتْ وَآذَنَتْ بِوَدَاعٍ	١
2.	And truly! The hereafter has indeed come forward, and announced its arrival.	وَإِنَّ الآخِرَةَ قَدْ أَقْبَلَتْ وَأَشْرَفَتْ بِٱطِّلاَعٍ	٢
3.	Listen, truly! Today is the day of training	أَلاَ وَإِنَّ اليَوْمَ المِضْمار	٣
4.	and tomorrow is the race.	وَغَدًا السِّبَاق	٤
5.	The goal is paradise	وَالسَّبَقَةُ الجَنَّة	٥
6.	and the end is hellfire!	وَالغَايَةُ النَّار	٦
7.	Is there no one who would repent from his sin before his death?	أَفَلاَ تَائِبٌ مِنْ خَطِيئَتِهٖ قَبْلَ مَنِيَّتِه	٧
8.	Is there no one who would perform good deeds for his soul before his day of hardship?	أَلاَ عَامِلٌ لِنَفْسِهٖ قَبْلَ يَوْمِ بُؤْسِه	٨
9.	Listen! These are your days of hope, right behind them is death.	أَلاَ وَإِنَّكُمْ فِي أَيَّامِ أَمَل مِنْ وَرَائِهٖ أَجَل	٩
10.	Whosoever performs deeds during his days of hope, before the arrival of his death—his deed[s] will benefit him, and his death will not harm him.	فَمَنْ عَمِلَ فِي أَيَّامِ أَمَله قَبْلَ حُضُورِ أَجَلِه فَقَدْ نَفَعَهُ عَمَلُه وَلَمْ يَضرُرْهُ أَجَلُه	١٠
11.	Whosoever falls short during his days of hope, before the arrival of his death—his deeds he will lose, and his death will harm him.	وَمَنْ قَصَّرَ فِي أَيَّامِ أَمَلِه قَبْلَ حُضُورِ أَجَلِه فَقَدْ خَسِرَ عَمَلُه وَضَرَّهُ أَجَلُه	١١

12.	Listen! Perform good deeds from fondness, as you perform them from fear.	أَلاَ فَٱعْمَلُوا فِي الرَّغْبَة كَمَا تَعْمَلُونَ فِي الرَّهْبَة	١٢
13.	Listen, truly! I have not seen the like of paradise, one who desires it sleeping,	أَلاَ وَإِنِّي لَمْ أَرَ كَالجَنَّةِ نَامَ طَالِبُهَا	١٣
14.	nor the like of hellfire, one who flees it sleeping.	وَلاَ كَالنَّارِ نَامَ هَارِبُهَا	١٤
15.	Listen truly! Whomsoever right does not benefit, wrong will harm.	أَلاَ وَإِنَّهْ مَنْ لاَ يَنْفَعْهُ الحقّ يَضْرُرْهُ البَاطِل	١٥
16.	Whomsoever guidance does not put on the straight [path], error will drag to destruction.	وَمَنْ لا يستقمْ بِهِ الهُدٰى يَجُرُّ بِهِ الضَّلاَلُ إِلَى الرَّدٰى	١٦
17.	Listen! You have been commanded to depart	أَلاَ وَإِنَّكُمْ قَد أُمِرْتُمْ بِالظَّعْن	١٧
18.	and directed toward provisions.	وَدُلِلْتُمْ عَلَى الزَّاد	١٨
19.	And truly! The most fearful thing I fear for you is following of desires and length of yearning.	وَإِنَّ أَخْوَفَ مَا أَخافُ عَلَيْكُمُ ٱتِّبَاعُ الهَوٰى وَطُولُ الاْمَل	١٩
20.	Take provisions in the world, from the world, with which you can nourish your souls tomorrow.	تَزَوَّدُوا فِي الدُّنْيَا مِنَ الدُّنْيَا مَا تَحُوزُونَ بِهِ أَنْفُسَكُمْ غَدا	٢٠

Analysis

In this sermon, ʿAlī urges his audience to contemplate their imminent death, and to prepare for the hereafter by performing good deeds. The style of the sermon is dominated by rhythm, an intense rhythm that complements, even sustains, all its other aesthetic features.

The rhythm of the sermon is endowed most prominently by a consistent, almost relentless use of parallelism (*izdiwāj*). Except for the final line of the sermon, the entire twenty-line text is constructed of parallel pairs, where two or more adjacent lines possess identical or near-identical syntax. Their syntactical units often also display morphological equivalence. The parallel lines are configured additively, that is they are glued together with conjunctive ‘and’s (*wa-*), rather than subordinators. They are concise, mostly limited to two to six words—another characteristic feature of orally based expression.

In 1983, the Arabist Alfred Beeston demonstrated in a brief but illuminating study that parallelism formed a key feature of early Arabic prose, similar to the patterning of the Hebrew Bible.[14] However, he argued that the effect of parallelism in these texts is semantic and not acoustic. I contend that it achieves both these effects. Beeston downplays the role of acoustic effect in the oration, because he limits aural effects to strict meter and rhyme, but sound patterns clearly also exist outside of poetic structure.

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[14] A. F. L Beeston, “The Role of Parallelism in Arabic Prose,” in *Cambridge History of Arabic Literature*, vol. 1: *Arabic literature to the End of the Umayyad Period*, ed. Beeston et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 180–185. Beeston based his argument on Otto Eissfeldt’s analysis of Hebrew Bible ‘poetry’ [= orations].

Parallel patterning in the classical Arabic oration creates an auditory rhythm by repeating sounds at regular intervals within the parallel phrases. The following are some of the sounds that are commonly repeated:

- the nominal case indicators; e.g. the *ḍamma* ‘*u*’ sound in lines 5–6 *sabaqatu* and *ghāyatu*
- the definite marker *al-* ; e.g. in line 15 *al-ḥaqq, al-bāṭil*
- pronouns, such as the subject suffix ‘*tum*’ with the perfect verb in lines 17–18 *umirtum bi-ẓ-ẓaʿn wa-duliltum ʿalā z-zād*, and
- identical sequences of long and short vowel sounds resulting from parallel placement of matching morphological forms; e.g. in lines 1–2 the identical vowel sequence in *adbarat* and *aqbalat*

All these repeated sounds arising from parallel structuring together create an acoustic rhythm.

Occurring simultaneously with this fundamental auditory aspect, the syntactical parallelism of the oration incorporates an essentially semantic element. As with the example we have just seen of *sabaqatu* and *ghāyatu* in lines five and six, repetition of sounds based on such things as case markers are dependent on the meaning. In these lines “The *goal is paradise and the end is hellfire!*” (وَالغَايَةُ النَّار وَالسَّبَقَةُ الجَنَّة) the *u* sound of the nominal marker of *sabaqatu* and *ghāyatu* comes from their being the subjects of the two sentences. Also, the parallel positioning of words in the same structural slot produces a semantic rhythm. Let’s say that an orator pronounces a sentence, as seen in the sentence just cited, in this word order: subject, followed by predicate. If his next sentence repeats that word order, the arrival of the predicate after the subject—where the listener expects it to arrive based on his recent memory of the earlier line—creates a resonance in his mind. If the same word order is repeated a third time, the resonance deepens yet further.

Both acoustic and semantic resonances are apparent in the parallel patterning of lines one and two in ʿAlī’s sermon: “Then truly, the world has indeed turned back and proclaimed its departure. And truly, the hereafter has indeed come forward and announced its arrival.” (فَإِنَّ الدُّنْيَا قَدْ أَدْبَرَتْ وَآذَنَتْ بِوَدَاع وَإِنَّ الآخِرَةَ قَدْ أَقْبَلَتْ وَأَشْرَفَتْ بِاطِّلَاعَ). The table below illustrates that each of these lines is in two parallel segments: except for the initial particle *fa-* (“then”), which is replaced in the second line by the conjunction *wa-* (“and”), all the prepositions—the prepositions of emphasis *inna* (“truly”) and *qad* (“indeed”), as well as the conjunction *wa-* (“and”), and the preposition *bi-* (here a transitivising preposition for the verb it follows)—are repeated in the same structural position, thus producing a recurring sound. All the substantives too are in identical syntactical positions. For example, the subjects of the two sentences, “the world” and “the hereafter,” *ad-dunyā* and *al-ākhira*, are placed right after the particle of emphasis *inna* (“truly”). The verbs in both sentences, *adbarat* (“has turned back") and *aqbalat* ("has come forward"), are placed at the end of the two sentences, and so on and so forth. The entire sermon may be analyzed for parallelism in the same manner. To explain the beat, each of the first two lines (*fa-inna d-dunyā qad adbarat and wa-inna l-ākhirata qad aqbalat*) may be rendered as follows: da-dum-dum-dum-dum-dum-dum-da-dum.

	transliteration	text	translation	pattern
1i.	*fa-inna d-dunyā qad adbarat*	فَإِنَّ الدُّنْيَا قَدْ أَدْبَرَتْ	Then truly, the world has indeed turned back	xyAzB
2i.	*wa-inna l-ākhirata qad aqbalat*	وَإِنَّ الآخِرَةَ قَدْ أَقْبَلَتْ	And truly, the hereafter has indeed come forward	wyA′zB′

	transliteration	text	translation	pattern
1ii	*wa-ādhanat bi-wadāʿ*	وَآذَنَتْ بِوَدَاع	and proclaimed its departure	wCvD
2ii	*wa-ashrafat bi-ṭṭilāʿ*	وَأَشْرَفَتْ بِٱطِّلاَع	and announced its arrival	wC′vD′

Notations:
- AA′, BB′, CC′, DD′ are repeating, antithetical syntactical units
- xyzwv are particles repeated verbatim

The parallel structure of the sermon aids in guiding the audience toward its punch line. Within the sermon, some parallel pairs are short and some are slightly longer. The alternating brevity and length build to the climax then relax it, then build it again, and relax it again until we reach the last, the twentieth line, which, after nineteen straight parallel lines, is neither short nor parallel. Being thus clearly distinguished from what leads to it, the final line crescendos in the concluding climax: "Take provisions in the world, from the world, with which you can nourish your souls tomorrow" (تَزَوَّدُوا فِي الدُّنْيَا مِنَ الدُّنْيَا مَا تَحُوزُونَ بِهِ أَنْفُسَكُمْ غَدَا).

The parallelism is intensified by a further semantic element, namely antithesis (*ṭibāq*). Two adjacent phrases contain pairs of words with opposite meanings, the second phrase contrasting with the first. The text of ʿAlī's sermon contains no less than thirteen antithetical pairs, and the first two lines in the table above showcase three of these antithetical pairs: the world and the hereafter, turning back and coming forward, departure and arrival.

The parallel rhythm of ʿAlī's sermon is enhanced by sporadic consonant-rhyme (*sajʿ*). *Sajʿ* was an important, though less common, feature of the classical oration. It was created when the last words of two or more succeeding lines ended in the same consonant (such as the L in *amal* and *ajal* in line nine): (أَلَا وَإِنَّكُمْ في أَيَّامِ أَمَل مِنْ وَرَائِهِ أَجَل). The critics tell us that the *sajʿ* rhyme word was to be pronounced in pausal (*sākin*) form, with the final consonant dropping any following vowel.[15] This pausal pronunciation preserved the acoustic effect from being diluted by differing end-vowel suffixes. It placed the vocal stress squarely on the rhyme letter, thus ensuring full auditory benefit. In most types of early orations (except for the quasi-orations of the pre-Islamic soothsayers), the full oration was never *sajʿ*-rhymed, and the irregular and unforced use of *sajʿ* kept the oration relatively unstylized. The consonant-rhyme (*sajʿ*) in ʿAlī's sermon is intermittent and keeps changing. In each of the pairs, the rhyme is limited to two words, after which another rhyme letter takes over, or a few lines follow in which there is none. The last words of lines one and two end in the letter "*ʿayn*" (*wadāʿ, iṭṭilāʿ*), and additionally the lines have an internal rhyme of T (*adbarat, ādhanat, aqbalat, ashrafat*): (فَإِنَّ الدُّنْيَا قَدْ أَدْبَرَتْ وَآذَنَتْ بِوَدَاع وَإِنَّ الآخِرَةَ قَدْ أَقْبَلَتْ وَأَشْرَفَتْ بِٱطِّلَاع). Lines three through six are not rhymed. Lines seven through fourteen all contain rhymes, either internal or at the end of the phrase. For example (to pull out just a couple), line twelve rhymes in B (*raghba, rahba*), and lines thirteen and fourteen rhyme also in B, with an additional pronominal *radīf* "*hā*" (*ṭālibuhā, hāribuhā*).

Rhyme and parallelism were not mutually exclusive; the phrases which culminated in the rhyme were frequently parallel as well. Indeed, authors of medieval chancery manuals praised the combination and had a special name for it: *taṣrīʿ*.[16] Consonant-rhyme teamed with parallelism is featured in several lines of ʿAlī's sermon.

Assonance (*muwāzana*) also adds to the rhythm here, although it is not a big part of this particular sermon, which contains just one pair in lines three and four (*miḍmār* and *sibāq*), the penultimate long vowel of each of these two words is "*ā*". (أَلَا وَإِنَّ اليَوْمَ المِضْمار وَغَدًا السِّبَاق).

Further enrichment of the rhythm of ʿAlī's oration is achieved through recurrences of various kinds. Parallel lines of an oration commonly included verbatim repetition of a part of the line. Repetition usually adds emphasis, but it can also serve to highlight not the repeated phrase in the following line, but rather, to throw into sharp relief the other, distinct verbiage couched within. In ʿAlī's sermon, lines thirteen and fourteen underscore the contrast between two opposite entities by repetition of surrounding phraseology. *I have not seen the like of paradise, one who desires it sleeping, nor the like of hellfire, one who flees it sleeping*. (إِنِّي لَمْ أَرَ كَالجَنَّةِ نَامَ طَالِبُهَا وَلاَ كَالنَّارِ نَامَ هَارِبُهَا). Part of the two clauses is identical—the negation, the comparative particle 'like,' the prepositions, and the verb indicating the act of sleeping. The word pairs that are different—paradise and hellfire, desire and flee—are placed within the identical verbiage in an antithetical parallel construction, drawing the listener's attention to the contrast between them.

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[15] Al-Qalqashandī, *Ṣubḥ al-aʿshā fī ṣināʿat al-inshāʾ*, ed. ʿAbd al-Qādir Zakkār (Damascus: Wizārat ath-Thaqāfa, 1981), 2:280. For a detailed medieval account of *sajʿ*, see al-Qalqashandī, *Ṣubḥ al-aʿshā*, 2:279–292; Ḍiyāʾ ad-Dīn Ibn al-Athīr, *al-Mathal as-sāʾir fī adab al-kātib wa-sh-shāʿir*, ed. Aḥmad al-Ḥūfī and Badawī Ṭabāna (Cairo: Maktabat Nahḍat Miṣr, 1959–1962), 1:271–337; and Abū Hilāl al-ʿAskarī, *Kitāb aṣ-Ṣināʿatayn al-kitāba wa-sh-shiʿr*, ed. ʿAlī Muḥammad al-Bijāwī and Muḥammad Abū l-Faḍl Ibrāhīm (Sidon: al-Maktaba al-ʿAṣriyya, 2004), 260–265. There is significant overlap between the *sajʿ* of the early *khuṭba* and Qurʾānic *sajʿ*. A detailed analysis of the latter, based on medieval critical discussions, can be found in Devin Stewart, "*Sajʿ* in the Qurʾān: Prosody and Structure," *Journal of Arabic Literature* (1990) 21:101–139. Another analysis is provided by Rina Drory, "Rhyme in Rhymed Prose," in *Models and Contacts: Arabic Literature and its Impact on Medieval Jewish Culture* (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 104–121.

[16] Al-Qalqashandī, *Ṣubḥ al-aʿshā*, 2:282.

Another kind of repetition seen in the sermon is the recurrent usage of four key terms: "deeds," "world," "death," and "hope." Each of these terms is repeated several times over the course of the sermon. Note that three of the four terms—*ʿamal*, *amal*, and *ajal*—also rhyme, doubling the acoustic effect. Moreover, the deliberate recurrence of these terms over the course of the oration not only enhances the rhythm of the piece, but it also drives home the main point of the sermon, which, putting together the four terms in a one-point sentence, may be paraphrased as follows: Perform good deeds in the world in preparation for the hereafter, before your time of hope ends with your death.

Conclusion

Stemming from its oral nature and function of persuasion, the intense rhythm of the classical Arabic oration is a hallmark characteristic. Framed in antithetical parallelism and enriched by the rhyme and repetition of key terms, Imam ʿAlī's sermon on piety displays the essential mnemonic characteristics of orally based expression. Its parallelism brings a strong acoustic resonance into a semantic frame of antithesis. Moreover, the stylistic features of the sermon are all harnessed to serve the goal of convincing the audience to prepare for the hereafter. Concurrently with the logical content of the sermon, and alongside its vivid horse imagery, emphatic verbiage, elevated linguistic register, rhetorical questions, and evocation of Qurʾānic themes, ʿAlī's tacitly persuasive aesthetics of rhythm skillfully delineate a contrast between this world and the next, today and tomorrow, good and evil, guidance and error, leaving the audience starkly reminded of the transience of the world and the necessity for each individual to utilize his or her time in it to the fullest in order to ensure salvation in eternity.

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Max Stille

Between the Numinous and the Melodramatic: Poetics of Heightened Feelings in Bengali Islamic Sermons

Abstract This chapter analyses a rhetorical technique that is decisive for the aesthetic experience of Islamic sermons in contemporary Bangladesh. I show how the performance of narratives in sermons relies on musical-bodily as well as imaginative expectations and expertise to evoke heightened emotions. I furthermore sketch a historical trajectory that demonstrates that the chanting in the sermons is part of the history of Bengali literature—from epics performed at regional courts to folk ballads—and of the history of South-Asian melodrama. This trajectory interlinks “secular” and “religious” aesthetics and has repercussions for the analytical terms we use to describe rhetorical phenomena. For this conceptual discussion, I take up the often pejoratively used term “melodrama.” Rather than cast it as a low variant of excessive emotions juxtaposed with the sublime, I argue that the concept can be useful for historicizing and contextualizing the evocation of religious feelings.

MAX STILLE

Chanting and Dramatic Presentation in Sermon Gatherings in Bangladesh

Chanted prose narratives are a key feature in Bengali sermons held at nightly sermon gatherings (Bengali *oẏāj māhˈphil*, equivalent to the Arabic *waʿẓ maḥfil*), which constitute the devotional and entertaining counterpart to ritual Friday prayers.[1] There are two key facets of the chants' composition: their sonic texture and relations to other sounds, and their alternation with spoken parts of the sermon. In order to illustrate these key facets of the chants, I will undertake a structuralist analysis of a sermon. I argue that chanting gives listeners audible markers that help guide their reception of the dramatic scenes narrated in the sermons. In particular, I will show how the use of chanting guides listeners' reactions to decisive turning points and emotionally charged parts of the narrative.

In *waʿẓ maḥfil*s, the voice of the preacher has a directly perceived bodily effect on everyone in hearing range of the highly amplified loudspeakers that are put up all over the congregation. This amplification gives preachers the opportunity to use both characteristic melodies and a quiet, conversational voice. It thus partakes in the general mechanism of mass media in which ever greater anonymity is accompanied by intimate communication styles.[2] Amplification makes audible the broadcasting of the "grain of the voice"[3] and helps transmit nuanced emotions.

The chanting featured in Bangladeshi Islamic sermons is most often called, in Bengali, "speaking melodically" (*sure balā*). There seems to be a limited number of dominant melodic contours to the chanted passages, each of which is identified with one region or famous preacher and is then emulated. The fact that all of the melodies employed in *waʿẓ maḥfil*s are recognized as belonging to the genre of sermons in question here seems to rely on their close relation to particular sets of text and on their being "word-centred."[4] The special diction of the sermons, with their reliance on tripartite repetitions of synonyms from different languages, greatly influences the speech rhythm.[5] Furthermore, there is a discernible melodic contour with a number of characteristic features, including a division of the melody and sentences into three parts of equal length, a gradual decrease from the main upper tone to the lower key followed by a sudden ascension—thus creating a specific form of tension-release—and a specific quality of voice. Such similarity between the melodies of different preachers establishes the genre's melodic coherence, while at the same time allowing individual differentiation in a competitive and creative preaching scene.[6]

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[1] For an introduction see Max Stille, "Islamic Non-Friday Sermons in Bangladesh," *South Asia Chronicle/Südasien-Chronik* 4 (2014): 94–114. For readability, I used the Arabic transliteration instead of the Bengali *oẏāj māh'phil*.

[2] John Durham Peters, *Speaking into the Air: A History of the Idea of Communication*, paperback ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 214.

[3] Roland Barthes, *Image, Music, Text* (London: Fontana Press, 1977), 179–189.

[4] Regula B. Qureshi, "Islamic Music in an Indian Environment: The Shi'a Majlis," *Ethnomusicology* 25, (1981): 47.

[5] Max Stille, "Communities of Code-switching Connoisseurs: Multilingualism in Islamic sermons in Bangladesh." *South Asia Multidisciplinary Academic Journal* (2018), accessed 5 March, 2018, http://journals.openedition.org/samaj/4485.

Neither the melodies, nor the text of Bengali *waʿẓ maḥfil*s are written down. They seem to blend together a variety of traditions, such as the Shi'i sermons and story tradition (*majlis*[7] and *jārigān*[8]), devotional praise chants about the Prophet Muhammad's coming to humankind (*mīlād*), Bengali story-telling traditions (*pũthi pāṭh*),[9] songs of praise for the Prophet (*naʿt*), and Quranic recitation. A specific example is the characteristic melody of a very influential preacher that came to be emulated by many other preachers to the extent that it even came to be called "common *sur* (melody)." The melody shares enough parallels with the final cadence of a "classic" Egyptian Quran reciter to draw a genealogical line.[10] In other words, the melodies are an example of the transcultural creation of an Islamic soundsphere[11] through the dissemination of technically reproduced media (the global advent of Egyptian Quranic recitation in the 1960s), which are then incorporated into regional aesthetic regimes.

With these general qualities of the chanting voice in mind, let us move towards the use of chanting over the course of a typical sermon. Melodic and rhythmic qualities are key, synchronizing the audience experience and the timed fulfilment of shared expectations.[12] The rhythm is constructed by alternating between spoken and chanted voice, both of which are used to render the sermons' mainly Bengali text. These shifts are not arbitrary; I propose that they are generated by a deliberate strategy. I will look at select passages from a sermon by the popular preacher Tophājjal Hosen Bhairabī, who makes his living as an independent preacher, traveling to a different sermon congregation nearly every night. At the time of my research, the sermon in question was available on video CD and on YouTube, media formats which are important for distributing and spreading the fame of the preacher and which help enable his economic independence.

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[6] Anwar Chowdhury, interview by Max Stille, May 5, 2015, Dhaka.

[7] For the many structural similarities between majlis and *waʿẓ maḥfil* see Qureshi, "Islamic Music," 44–47.

[8] See Sāimana Jākāriẏā and Nājamīna Martujā, *Phokalora o likhita sāhitya: Jārigānera āsare "Bishāda-Sindhu" āttīkaraṇa o paribeśana-paddhati*, 1st ed. (Ḍhākā: Bāmlā Ekāḍemī, 2012) in Bengali or Mary Frances Dunham, *Jarigan: Muslim Epic Songs of Bangladesh* (Dhaka: University Press, 1997) in English.

[9] For the musical aspects of this performance tradition as practiced today see David M. Kane, *Puthi-Pora*: *'Melodic Reading' and Its Use in the Islamisation of Bengal* (London: Sylheti Translation and Research, 2017).

[10] While it is not possible to "prove" this, the resemblance between the final cadence of Shaykh Muhammad Siddiq al-Minshawi to the melody of the chant of Delwar Hossain Sayeedi does strongly suggest that the latter adopted it from the former; see the transcription by Kristina Nelson, *The Art of Reciting the Qur'an* (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 2001), 129.

[11] The dynamics of this important process have been described in relation to Indonesia by Anna M. Gade, *Perfection Makes Practice: Learning, Emotion, and the Recited Qur'ān in Indonesia* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2004).

[12] David Brian Huron, *Sweet Anticipation: Music and the Psychology of Expectation* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2006), 167, 184.

This particular sermon deals with parents' (and particularly mothers') pains and tribulations (*Mā Bābār Duḥkha Kaṣṭa*), and forms one of the most common themes of Tophājjal Hosen's sermons. The sermon connects narratives about the pains of the parents with the commandment to honor one's parents[13] and, more prominently, with the topic of Allah's mercy. Tophājjal Hosen turns the mother's mercy into an allegory for Allah's mercy by stating that every instance of a mother's boundless and excessive mercy demonstrates Allah's even greater mercy. However, there is a limit to these analogies; if we look at the entailments of the initial proposition, it becomes clear that Allah does not suffer as the mother does. The role of the suffering being is often assumed by Muhammad, who is not only compassionate, but also endures the kind of pain towards which he is compassionate. From this perspective, the sermons' narratives become means of affecting preacher and audience so that they can reach, within the confines of the sermon congregation, the pains that trigger Muhammad's compassion.[14]

The first longer chanted passage of the sermon is devoted to Muhammad's compassion towards his *umma*. It tells the story of the suffering that Muhammad endured as a child in order to demonstrate how his mercy exceeds his personal human worries. At the outset of the passage, the preacher states clearly that the pain of the Prophet is the foundation of Muslims' well-being. He does so by speaking in a "normal" speaker's voice: "That is what you call 'anticipatory bail'. That we got anticipatory bail has one sole reason: that we are the *umma* of the last Prophet! Because throughout the 63 years of his life, the Prophet didn't sleep sound for one single night, out of pain for the *umma*. Only tears."[15]

The preacher then continues, elaborating on Muhammad's pains by citing the speech of Aisha:

> Mother Aisha says: "Why should the *umma* of that Prophet not be forgiven? On one day I asked for permission to enter the Prophet's room (*hujra*) after he had a bath: 'Oh Messenger of God! Allow me to oil your holy figure!' After I got permission and started to oil him I see that the figure of my Prophet is so beautiful that it is impossible to look away. But on this beautiful form there sometimes are deep black spots on the Prophet's figure."[16]

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[13] Q 29:08.

[14] Max Stille, "Conceptualizing Compassion in Communication for Communication: Emotional Experience in Islamic Sermons (Bengali *waʿẓ maḥfil*s)," *Contributions to the History of Concepts* 11, Special Issue Concepts of Emotions in Indian Languages, (2016): 81–106.

[15] *Āgām jāmin peẏe gela śudhu mātra kāran hala āmrā ye ākheri nabir ummat. kāran ei nabir jibani teṣaṭṭi bachar paryanta śudhu ummater byāthaẏ ekdin o nabi rātre bhare ghumāẏ nā, śudhu kāndā.*

[16] *Mā Āẏeśā Siddikā balen, ei nabir ummat kena kṣamā pābenā. āmi nabijir ekdin gosal kare hujrāẏ ḍhukte anumati cāilam. yā rasūl Allah, anumati den āpnār cehārā*

It is at this point that the preacher adopts the chanting voice:

> Mother Aisha says: "I asked the Prophet: 'Oh Messenger of Allah! I want to know: what are the deep black spots on (your) beautiful figure!'" My Prophet turned his face towards Mother Aisha. He let his tears flow, their drops covering his cheeks: "Oh Aisha, don't ask about this thing, Aisha! My, the Prophet's, liver cannot bear the mention of these spots!" "Huzur, I want to know where these spots come from. Are these from chicken pox?" "No, Aisha, these are not from chicken pox, no, Aisha, that's not it." "Then what are the spots from?" "Oh Aisha, these spots are not chicken pox, they are not scabies or itches—these spots are spots from the attacks of the youth on the park of Taif [town close to Mecca]! Oh Aisha, not once, not twice—without any mistake, without any reason, they hit me so hard that I passed out three times. It is the spots from their stones that stay on my figure." Mother Aisha Siddiqa says: "Oh Messenger of God! If these spots are from the attacks on the earth of Taif, I feel pain and sorrow when I see them. Huzur, I know that my Allah accepts your prayer (*doẏā*). Please pray so that Allah will clear the spots." My Prophet cries: "Oh Aisha, no, no, don't ever say this, oh Aisha! I won't clear off these spots. On the day that the field of *Hāshar*[17] will be set up, the sun will come down half a hand above (everyone), the skullcaps will burst because of the heat, and the brains will melt and drop out of the nose. On that day my sinful community members (*ummat*s) will take the burden of their sins on their heads and run around like crazy. Oh Aisha, they will cry like orphans and call: 'where is the Prophet, where is the Prophet!' On that day I the Prophet won't be able to bear hearing these calls. Then I the Prophet will claim, for each of the spots, the redemption (*nājāt*) of millions of sinnful *ummat*s!" My Allah says: "Oh my friend, you saved the spots from the attacks of the youth on the earth of Taif, come on, friend, I give you my word—do you know how much I love you? I Allah have, during the 63 years of your life, have not allowed one fly or mosquito to sit on your beautiful figure, not allowed one bug to bite you, my friend—and you have saved the spots of stones on this figure for the redemption of the *umma*. Come, I Allah gave you my word that those who will be your *umma*, those who will live according to your ideal, those who will live in your love, those who will give you love, friend, those who will stay on your side, if I Allah will only get a little chance, I Allah will forgive them."[18]

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mabārake tail māliś kare dei. anumati pāiẏā tail māliś karte yāiẏā dekhi āmār nabir cehārā eta sundar cokh pherāno yāẏ nā. kintu ei sundar cehārār mājhe mājhe kālo kālo dāg. nabijir cehārāẏ.

[17] Ar. *Ḥashr*, the field where the Day of Judgement will take place.

[18] *Mā Āẏeśā balen, āmi praśna kare baslām "yā rasūl Allah, eta sundar cehārāẏ kālo kālo dāggulo kiser āmi jānte cāi." Āmār nabi mā Āẏeśā Siddikār dike mukhṭā ghurāiẏā*

The argumentative point that Muhammad shows mercy to his *umma* is proven by the evidence of the narrative told by Aisha. The following elaboration of the Prophet's pain moves from external facts (the description of black spots on the Prophet's body) to the dialogue between Aisha and Muhammad, which is only interrupted by short indications of who is speaking. The direct speech is emphasized by the extensive use of vocative particles (*yā rasūl Allah*, *Āẏeśā re*, *Hujur*, *nāre Āẏeśā*, *bandhugo*) with which the three characters repeatedly address each other.

A key aspect of the shift to chanted speech is the accompanying shift in the addressee and addresser of the sermon. Put more concretely, the communication articulated here between preacher and audience is displaced; it shifts to the conversation between the characters in the narrative. Consequently, the preacher as a narrator is first substituted by Aisha when she tells her story, but then Aisha withdraws too and only the characters' dialogue within the dramatic scene remains.

This reorientation of the deixis[19] from the here and now of the sermon to the then and there of the scene is also supported by the demonstratives "this thing" and "these spots" directed at something seen within the story. In narratological terms, we find here a dramatic scene which is inserted into the narration. Of course, the preacher is always present as a mediator and thus there is never "direct" communication between the dramatic character (such as the Prophet experiencing pain) and the sermon's recipients. Nevertheless, the effect of the dramatic scene is much more immediate

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gāl beẏe beẏe cokher pāni gulo jhar jhar kare cheṛe dilen. "Āẏeśāre e dāger kathā jijñāis nā re Āẏeśā, ei dāger kathā mane haile āmi nabir kalijā mane nā." "hujur, ei dāgguli kiser āmi jānte cāi, eguli ki basanta haẏechila āpnār." "nāre Āẏeśā, khājli peñcṛā haẏechila, nāre Āẏeśā, tā nā." "tā hale dāggulo kiser?" "ere Āẏeśā, ei dāgguli basanta naẏ, khājli peñcṛā naẏ, ei dāggula hala Tāẏepher maẏdāner yubakder pātharer āghāter dāg. Āẏeśāre ek bār naẏ, dui bār naẏ binā aparādhe binā doṣe binā kārane āmāke mārte mārte tin bār kare bēhuś kareche. oi pātharer āghāter dāggulo āmār cehārār madhye lege āche." mā Āẏeśā Siddikā balen "yā rasūl Allāh, ei dāggula yadi Tāẏepher jaminer āghāter haẏ, dāggulo dekhle āmār kaṣṭa haẏ, byathā haẏ. hujur āmi jāni āpnār doẏā āmār Allāh kabul karen. ekṭu doẏā karun dāggulo yena āmār Allāh pariṣkār kare den." Āmār nabi kānde, "Āẏeśāre nā nā ei kathāṭā ār konodin balbi nā re Āẏeśā, ei dāg āmi doẏā kare pariṣkār karba nā. Hāsarer jamin ye din kāẏem habe, ādh hāt upare sūrya neme āsbe, sūryer tape māthār cār pheṭe yābe, magajgulo gale gale nāk diẏe bāhir habe. oi din āmār gunā(h)gār ummaterā gunār bojhā māthāẏ laiẏā pāgaler mata dauṛābe. etimer mata kāndbe 'nabi, kai, nabī kai' bale ḍākbe re Āẏeśā. oi din āmi nabi ḍāk gulo śune sahya karte pārbanā. takhan āmi nabi ek ekṭa dāger binimaẏ kaṭi kaṭi gunāgār ummater nājāter dābī karba." āmār Allah balen "bandhugo Tāẏepher jaminer yubakder pātharer āghāter dāggulo ummater nājāter janya rekhe dilā, yāo bandhu kathā dilām, tomake ye āmi kata bhālobāsi tumi ki jāno? teśaṭṭi bachar jindegīr madhye tomār sundar cehārāẏ āmi Allah ekṭā maśā māchi baste dei nāi, ekṭā pakā mākaṛ dite dei nā go bandhu, oi cehārār pātharer āghāter dāg ummater nājāter janya rekhe dilā. yāo āmi Allah kathā dilām tomār ummat yārā habe, tomār ādarśe yārā calbe, tomār bhālobāsāẏ yārā calbe, tomāke yārā bhālobāsā dibe bandhu, tomār pakṣe yārā thākbe, āmi Allah tāderi ekṭu suyog pāilei āmi Allah tāderke māph kare diba."

[19] On the different deictical functions in language, perception and fantasy, see Karl Bühler, *Sprachtheorie: Die Darstellungsfunktion der Sprache,* Reprint of 3rd ed. (Stuttgart: Lucius und Lucius, 1999).

than if the same events were told by a narrator, be it in indirect speech or even in a s*umma*ry of events (e.g. just stating “the Prophet was sad”). This opposition between the narrator’s depiction of events and the characters’ speech is captured by what the narratologist Gérard Genette calls the “mode” of narration.[20]

It is no coincidence that in describing what Genette calls the mimetic mode of narration as opposed to the diegetic mode, narratology has often taken recourse to spatial and visual metaphors such as distance and closeness or “showing” and “telling.” We could say that a mimetic mode of narration—passages of scenic presentation in which characters’ speech is quoted—draws the listeners into the scene. And not only the listeners: Aisha is moved by the visual impression of the black spots, Muhammad by the pains of the *umma* on the Day of Judgement for Muhammad, and Allah by seeing the suffering Muhammad.

Tophājjal Hosen’s vocal techniques continue to parallel his narrative techniques over the course of the sermon. The chanting and dramatic presentation in the following mark a scene that is somewhat ironic, for it breaks with the expectations of the compassionate mother. As most Bengalis would likely attest, the mother would rather be beaten herself than allow anyone to beat her child, but in the narrative Hosen suggests just the opposite. As a polytheist strongly opposed to her son’s association with Muhammad, Abu Bakr’s mother does *not* respond to Abu Bakr’s call “Oh, mother! (*mā go*).” On the contrary, she hits her child relentlessly. Nevertheless, while the Prophet states that he feels pain and agony upon seeing the signs that Abu Bakr has been beaten, just as Aisha had in his case, he says that he the Prophet cannot do anything about it, because it was his mother who had hit Abu Bakr.[21]

The largest narrative complex, and that which dominates the remainder of the sermon, revolves around the child Prophet’s yearning for his father. This theme is reminiscent of and perhaps invokes the emotionally powerful *viraha* romance narratives that have been popular in South Asia and Bengal in particular over the last half millennium. Interesting for our purposes is the fact that the chanted passages highlight the emotional turning points of the narrative typical of Sufi *viraha* romance:[22] The first is the “arising of desire” after the child Prophet is not picked up from school by his father as the other children are and he starts to cry, a scene that ends with his grandfather telling him: “Your father went to sleep the eternal sleep in Medina's earth."[23] Following the pattern set by the romance genre, the next stage depicts the beginning of Muhammad's yearning and search for his father. The obligatory obstacles which he meets are presented through the worries of his uncle, Abu Jahl, who at this point in Muhammad's life is not yet his enemy, but who also does not see his nephew's special gifts. However, his uncle's worries turn out to be opportunities to show the Prophet's power in a series of miracles. As is common in narrations in *waʿẓ maḥfil*s, dangerous animals not only do not pose a danger, but often help the Prophet. Abu Jahl's horse, for example, is granted the power of speech so that it can explain to his owner that it will not move unless Muhammad is seated in front of his uncle.[24] Similarly, as his sermon progresses, Hosen deliberately digresses to describe a scene in which Allah saves an old woman whom Noah had forgotten to load onto his ark, which only serves to show that Allah would never let anything untoward happen to Muhammad. While he adopts chanting at the climactic dialogues of each of these scenes, Hosen always returns to his spoken voice to bring the narrative forward.

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[20] Gérard Genette, *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method,* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1980). The present article intentionally does not follow “mood” as the standard translation for the French “mode,” as it is misleading in the context of emotion research.

[21] *Ābu Bakar re, tor cehārār madhye āghāt dekhā yāẏ, manṭā kaṣṭa dekhā yāẏ byāpār ki? Hujur, kālimā paṛār aparādhe āmār mā āmāke mārche. āmār nabi balen Ābu Bakar mā mārle ei bicār rāsuler kāche deẏā yābe nā.*

[22] See Aditya Behl and Wendy Doniger, *Love’s Subtle Magic: An Indian Islamic Literary Tradition, 1379–1545* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), esp. 23.

The two longest passages of chanting are found in the narrative's climactic scenes. They connect the child's wonders with his longing and later reveal how he reaches his father. The connection between the child's wondrous deeds and his longing is established in a scene that begins with an account told by another of Muhammad's family members, just as the first chanted section began with Aisha's story. This time it is Muhammad's uncle Abbas, who recounts that he saw his nephew lying in his cradle and moving the moon with his finger. The child, again in direct speech directed to Abbas with the vocative "oh uncle" (*cācā go*), explains his longing for a father who would buy, as other fathers do for their children, some flowers and hang them above the child to play with. Because Muhammad did not have a father to do this, however, Allah substituted the flowers by making the moon move at the child's will. This dramatic self-disclosure of the child reconfirms his power and makes his longing for his father tangible.

In the following, the chanted passage steers towards the climax, at which Muhammad finally reaches his father's grave. Arriving there, Amina breaks out in tears and Muhammad's grandfather explains to him that it is here that his father sleeps the eternal sleep. The child is finally able to cry out for his father:

> "Dad, oh dad, how did you become so hard-hearted, oh dad? All children of Mecca climbed on (their) dads' laps, I haven't climbed on (my) dad's lap once. I came from Mecca to Medina, oh dad, please get up,

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[23] *Tor bābā Madinār jamine tomāre etim bānāiẏā cira ghum ghumāiẏā geche.*

[24] A typical comical inversion, which also comes up in other instances of humor directed against the powerful, such as the Pharaoh's horse making fun of him. See Max Stille, "Dialectics of (De)Mobilisation: Humour in Islamic Sermons," in *Mobilising Emotions: The Affectual Dimension of South Asian Politics,* ed. Amélie Blom and Stéphanie T. Lama-Rewal (Routledge, forthcoming [2018]).

> and caress me, please!" It is as if Abdullah is crying from the grave: "Oh Lord! Remove the earth from my grave, so that I can take my orphan Muhammad on (my) lap once!" My Allah says: "Oh Abdullah, don't you behave crazy. You remain sleeping, you don't have to take him on your lap—I, Allah, for my friend I have commanded the whole world, all of creation: you all have to love this my Prophet."[25]

This scene shares many of the characteristics of the previously discussed chanted passages. The emotionally charged dialogue showing the Prophet's personal pains again culminates in a speech act of Allah. This time, however, he performs not a promise, but a command. Again, Allah is sensitive and responsive to Muhammad's pains, clearly substituting Muhammad's earthly father. Also noteworthy is the way in which the dramatic model of direct communication allows the deceased Abdullah to speak, even if it is qualified with the fictionalizing "as if" (*yena*). As with the animals speaking or the dialogue between Muhammad and Allah, the dramatic scene here breaks the mold of ordinary possibilities. The communication within the scene emphasizes co-presence, as by the way does Hosen's evocation at the sermon's beginning, when he describes that the dead are sleeping right under the earth where the *maḥfil* is set.

The chanted scenes, in short, portray instances of suffering and heightened emotions through a distinctive mode of narration. Throughout the sermon, the proportion of direct speech in chanted passages is considerably higher (69%) than the proportion of direct speech in non-chanted passages (28%). This dramatic presentation enhances the identification of the listeners with the dramatic figures, who often have close relationships with the suffering Prophet. The characters disclose their emotions to other characters, who are all co-present. The listeners of the sermon—by virtue of this direct speech—are equally present in this emotional communication.

Historical Antecedents? A Glimpse at a Seventeenth-Century Sufi Court Romance and a Nineteenth-Century Folk Ballad

Having so far established the role of chanting in *waʿẓ maḥfil*s as internally raising and fulfilling expectations of emotionally heightened dramatic scenes with a stress on direct communication, we can now move on to consider the possible historical origins of this structure. To which diachronic series of expectations raised by shifting relations of genres do the contemporary sermons connect? Which historical antecedents does their structure of dramatic chanting draw on? Over the last few years, research on the longue durée of sonic history in South Asia[26] has been accompanied by an uptick in research on the oral and aural aspects of the telling of texts.[27] As the performance-oriented literary history of Bengali is, however, still in its infancy, I cannot at this point do more than draw attention to some striking structural parallels between the role of chanting in the *waʿẓ maḥfil*s and the role of a change in performance indicated by a change of meter in older literary texts.

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[25] *"'Bābā, bābā go, eta niṣṭhur kemne hailā go bābā! makkār sakal chelera bābār kole uṭhla, āmi ekdino bābār kole uṭhlam nā. makkā theke madināẏ aslām go bābā, ekṭu uṭha nā, āmāre ādar kare dāo nā.' Ābdullāh yena kabar theke ḍāk diche 'prabhu go! Āmār kabarer māṭi sarāiẏā dāo nā, āmār etim Mohāmmader ekbār kole laiẏā dei.' āmār Allah balen 'Ābdullāh re, pāglāmi karte habe nā, ghumāiẏa thāko tumi, tomār kole nite habe nā, āmi Allah āmār bandhur janya tāmām pr̥thibir kull makhlūqāt-er upar nirdeś diẏā dilām: tomrā sabāi āmār ei nabire bhālobāste habe!'"*

More specifically, I would like to discuss a connection that I discovered during my research on the poetics of the seventeenth-century "Iusuph Jalikhā"[28] by Muhammad Sagīr, which was based on the "Yūsuf Zulaikhā" by the Persian poet ʿAbd al-Raḥmān Jāmī.[29] One of the most important aspects of taking up a form prevalent in Bengal at that time was the text's transmetricisation:[30] While the Persian work featured only one meter, the Bengali adaptation introduced a pattern of alternation between different meters, an alternation which in turn was linked to differences in performance. My detailed analysis of the metrically highlighted passages revealed that in the Bengali adaptation, the poet used devices similar to those discussed above in the contemporary *waʿẓ maḥfil* sermon: shifts in meter are linked to passages with a slower pace of narration; the narration prefers to report on events through the dialogue of intradiegetic characters or through pictorial descriptions; and changes in meter often occur at key turning points of Zulaikha's inner development and are focused on her emotions of *viraha*.

In Sagīr's rendition, the first changes in meter occur when Zulaikha falls in love with Iusuph, who appears to her in her dreams. Her journey from her homeland to Egypt is summarized, and the narrated events make clear that Iusuph is still in Kanaan. The ruler of Egypt is rather surprised—and very happy—to hear that such a beautiful woman has set out to marry him. The next change in meter shifts attention to Zulaikha's recognition of her mistake. As she cannot wait to see her beloved's face, she persuades her lady's maid—increasingly pressingly, and finally by saying that she would otherwise die—to help her catch a glimpse of the person she thinks is her beloved. Here, we find a change in meter from *paẏār* to *tripadī*, which indicates a change in performance. This is accompanied by a specific style of narration, which is characterized by a restriction of information—while before, the narrator “knew” about Zulaikha’s mistake, in this passage he does not “know”—and a change in the mood of narration from diegetic to mimetic. An intimate dialogue between Zulaikha and her bosom-friends (*sakhī*s) reveals the depth of Zulaikha’s suffering.

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[26] Annette Wilke and Oliver Moebus, *Sound and Communication: An Aesthetic Cultural History of Sanskrit Hinduism* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2009).

[27] Francesca Orsini and Katherine B. Schofield, eds., *Tellings and Texts: Music, Literature and Performance in North India* (Cambridge: Open Book Publishers, 2015).

[28] Also "Ichuph Jolekhā" is common. See Śāh M. Sagīr, "Iusuf-Jolekhā: Sampādak ḍaktar Muhammad Enāmul Hak," in *Muhammad Enāmul Hak: Racanābalī*, ed. Man'sur Musā, 2 vols. 2 (Ḍhākā: Bāṃla Ekāḍemī, 1993).

[29] Max Stille, "Metrik und Poetik der Josephsgeschichte Muhammad Sagirs," in *Working Papers in Modern South Asian Languages and Literatures*, ed. Hans Harder, 1 (2013), accessed 12 July, 2018, http://archiv.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/savifadok/2773/1/stille_josephsgeschichte_sagir_19.06.13.pdf, 1 (2013).

[30] Thibaut d'Hubert, "Histoire culturelle et poétique de la traduction Ālāol et la tradition littéraire Bengali au XVIIe siècle à Mrauk-U, capitale du royaume d'Arakan" (PhD diss., École Pratique des Hautes Études, 2010)

This mode of dramatically rendering decisive turning points is also applied to another character within the same work. Iẏākub (Yaʿqūb), the father of Iusuph, is told that Iusuph has been eaten by a tiger. The changes between meter, narrative information, and narrative mood mirror those of Zulaikha’s lament in the passage before. The lament is repeated in a formulaic manner, to the degree that over many parts only single words are replaced. For instance, the word *karma* (deeds) in Zulaikha’s lament is substituted with *putra* (son) in Iẏākub’s. Both characters react to the perceived loss of and longing for Iusuph, a loss the audience is already informed about, but which is narrated once more from the perspective of and in the words of the characters involved.[31]

Again, drawing these parallels between forms that are separated by hundreds of years cannot be more than a beginning in tracing the history of the performance patterns we encounter today. However, we should not forget that works such as the different Bengali renderings of Yūsuf Zulaikha and other popular stories were distributed by the cheap printing presses of the late nineteenth century and have been performed as part of communal reading practice.[32] Furthermore, the alternation between the two main meters that we have considered thus far was not limited to one particular genre.[33] To illustrate, let us discuss briefly a work from the end of the nineteenth century that is analysed in more detail in this volume by Tony K. Stewart.

The *Bon bibī jahurā nāmā* by Mohāmmad Khāter[34] tells the story of a Muslim female saint (Bonbibī) who becomes the sovereign of the mangrove forests in South Bengal. One of the subplots of the story has Bonbibī saving a poor boy (named Dukhe, literally “grief”), who is taken into the forest by his rich uncle Dhonā to collect honey and wax. Upon arriving in the woods, however, the uncle offers the boy to the tiger-god in exchange for the coveted honey and wax. Dukhe's mother anticipated this danger, and so, after she realizes that she cannot prevent her son from leaving, she asks the forest saint for help. The saint eventually rescues the boy by appearing to him in the shape of his mother, even taking him on her lap. This conjunction of motherly care and saintly power is in many ways reminiscent of the longings of the child Prophet to be taken on his father's lap with Allah stepping in as a substitute for the missing parental love.

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[31] From this perspective, it may be no coincidence that in a *waʿẓ maḥfil* about the story of Yūsuf, the scene of Yaʿqub’s suffering upon being deceived by the brothers is the first instance of melodic presentation of a dramatic dialogue.

[32] Anindita Ghosh, *Power in Print: Popular Publishing and the Politics of Language and Culture in a Colonial Society, 1778–1905* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2006), 276, 287–288; Gautam Bhadra, *Imān o niśān: Uniśśatake bāṃlār kr̥ṣak caitanyer ek adhyāẏ* (Kalkātā: Subarṇarekhā, 1994), 402.

[33] The use of the traditional *tripadī* meter to focus on the emotional tenor of the hero and heroine, especially *viraha* and other forms of emotional stress, is likewise a commonplace throughout Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇav Bengali literatures, hagiographical and poetic, as well as in popular *pīr kathā.* Personal communication with Tony K. Stewart, 12 July 2018.

[34] The edition I use is: Mohāmmad Sāheb Khāter, *Bon bibī jahurā nāmā: Nārāẏanīr jaṅga o Dhonā Dukher pālā* (Kolkata: Gaosiẏā Lāibrerī / Ji. Ke. Prakāśanī, 2010).

The main sufferer in the Bonbibī story is Dukhe's mother. Several scenes touch on her suffering[35] and foreshadow the climax, which once more features a shift in meter, voice, and narrative information. Like Zulaikha and Yaʿqub in the "Iusuph Jalikhā," the mother here suffers because of her limited knowledge. Unlike the recipients, who have learned all about the rescue of Dukhe, it has not yet been disclosed to her that her son was saved; this becomes apparent at the outset of a passage in the meter associated with dialogue and heightened emotionality. It reads: "The mother of Dukhe was at home, / the old woman, and heard / that Dhonā arrived from the place (far away) // When she heard it, the old woman immediately / went to the house of Dhonā / and asked about Dukhe."[36] Like Iusuph's brothers, Dhonā lies to the mother, telling her that Dukhe was eaten by a tiger. As we would expect with the new meter and the mother's widening perception, the scene shifts to the direct speech of the protagonists. The mother laments her fate, complaining to Dhonā that what he says blackens her liver-heart (*kalejā*). She addresses her son with the already familiar exclamation:

> "Alas, you apple of my eye | where did you go and disappear | come and show yourself to the aggrieved one (*dukhinī*) || Come and say 'Mother, mother' | may my eyes rest [literally "get cold"] upon seeing | that you survived on someone's lap || . . . Oh you Dukhe of the aggrieved one (*dukhinīr dukhe*) | come and show yourself to me | my liver-heart was roasted to kebab."[37]

Despite unquestionable differences in the contexts, ideological messages, and aesthetic regimes of the different works that we have considered, there are striking parallels, particularly in scenes that narrate suffering and the heightened emotions caused by characters' limited knowledge. The character's perception is suddenly expanded at moments in which the mode of narration shifts to a dramatic mode, often to interpersonal dialogue. At these moments, the performance changes, too. The heightened musicality is highlighted by a change of meter that corresponds to the change of the performer's voice in contemporary performances. The commonplace of suffering combines different levels of narration and performance, and the listeners' expectations rely on this multitude of techniques.

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[35] Among the relevant passages are the mother's conversation with Dhonā (Khāter, *Bon bibī jahurā nāmā*, 17), her conversation with Bonbibī (Khāter, *Bon bibī jahurā nāmā*, 18), and the monologue of Dukhe (Khāter, *Bon bibī jahurā nāmā*, 23).

[36] Khāter, *Bon bibī jahurā nāmā*, 31.

[37] Khāter, *Bon bibī jahurā nāmā*, 32.

Entanglements with Melodramatic Imaginations

Let us now widen our focus from Bengali narratives to related aesthetic fields. I will argue that the narrative shifts we observed so far are also intertwined with the history of melodrama, which has provided an important impulse in the adaption, proliferation, and transformation of narrative structures in South Asian popular culture since the late nineteenth century. This step is not only significant for historical analysis. I will tease out some reasons why the sermon I analysed in the beginning of this chapter, and the narrative technique it shared with historical antecedents, bears many characteristics that are deemed typically melodramatic by theorists of melodrama. For this reason, this section prepares the ground for approaching the evaluations and analytical vocabulary that make up the following section.

Most studies on Indian—mostly Bombay—cinema are not particularly concerned with situating their subject within literary history. However, some have sought to trace the genealogy of important aspects of Indian cinema—and in particular, songs used in the films—to traditional musical performance.[38] Kathryn Hansen has shown that Parsi theatre was an important predecessor of Bombay cinema, and that, for its part, Parsi theatre borrowed from techniques like recitation of Urdu poetry and its poetic conventions. "The public sphere for Urdu was thus enlarged through the institution of theatre, as was aesthetic appreciation of Urdu poetry's Islamicate cultural moorings. The extended performative reach of Urdu poetry was to have enduring effects on the development of Indian cinema, especially on the figuration of love and desire."[39] It is not the goal of this chapter to argue that the narrative structure of Indian cinema is part of the narrative complex I have described above. For such an inquiry other languages and regions would have to be taken into consideration and more evidence on early cinema would be needed.[40] Nevertheless, the narrative forms that we encountered in the narratives of "Iusuph Jalikhā" and "Bonbibī" described above continued to be influential in twentieth-century popular culture and the conflation of narrative and musical poetics sketched out above are part of the history of South Asian melodramatic poetics. Both are part of the history of the chanting in *waʿẓ maḥfil*s and might help us to fully grasp the evocation of heightened emotions in these sermons.

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[38] R. Vasudevan, "The Melodramatic Mode and the Commercial Hindi Cinema: Notes on Film History, Narrative and Performance in the 1950s," *Screen* 30, (1989): 29–50, 45.

[39] Kathryn Hansen, "Passionate Refrains: The Theatricality of Urdu on the Parsi Stage," *South Asian History and Culture* 7, (2016): 232.

[40] For a similar performance pattern in Tamil Nadu see Alexis Avdeeff, "Horoscopic Sung Narratives, Prosody and Poetics: The Astrologer's Word as a Means to Relieve Mental Distress," *Anthropology & Medicine* (forthcoming).

What are the characteristics of melodramatic poetics as they developed in colonial India? Hansen provides a stunning overview about how "[c]onventions of Western melodrama reached India via travelling actors and the circulation of published plays,"[41] many of which were gothic, military, equestrian, nautical and domestic melodramas. Drawing on Diderot, Hansen mentions as characteristic for "European melodrama" its close affiliation with painting, "the realistic depiction of scenes from everyday life," as is encapsulated in "tableaus or arrested pictures" which "were used to punctuate the end of an act," thus capturing "a moment in time's passage."[42] Furthermore, she claims that melodrama "provided the satisfaction of clearly delineating good and evil and heightening moments of dramatic climax through the device of the tableau, while evoking social themes and familial relationships."[43]

For our question, it might be helpful to consider the literary theorist Peter Brooks's claim that melodrama exerted an influence far beyond the stage, particularly on novels, but also on film. He describes melodrama as a "mode of excess" that depicts "an intense emotional and ethical drama based on the Manichaeistic struggle of good and evil."[44] Again referring to Diderot, he defines melodrama as "the effort to make the 'real' and the 'ordinary' and the 'private life' interesting through heightened dramatic utterance and gesture that lay bare the true stakes."[45] Brooks believes that melodrama is a "peculiarly modern form."[46] In what seems to be intricately related to Charles Taylor's argument about the disenchantment of the modern world and its re-enchantment in romanticism, Brooks argues that melodrama was born after the French Revolution, which he sees as having been accompanied by the "shattering of the myth of Christendom, the dissolution of an organic and hierarchically cohesive society, and the invalidation of the literary forms."[47] He finds a defining feature of melodrama in the fact that "to the melodramatic imagination, significant things and gestures are necessarily metaphoric in nature because they must refer to and speak of something else. Everything appears to bear the stamp of meaning which can be expressed, pressed out, from it."[48] While we need not attempt to establish a causal connection with modes of contemporary cinema and drama, we do find many of these same features surfacing in the sermons. So let us briefly consider some significant intersections between melodrama and the narrative techniques in *waʿẓ maḥfil*s and the Bengali narrative history analysed above: theme, sound, and image—all of which are related to the specific rhetoric of heightened emotions.

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[41] Hansen, "Passionate Refrains," 228.

[42] Hansen, "Passionate Refrains," 228, 229.

[43] Hansen, "Passionate Refrains," 233.

[44] Peter Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination: Balzac, Henry James, Melodrama, and the Mode of Excess* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 12.

[45] Brooks, *Melodramatic Imagination*, 14.

[46] Brooks, *Melodramatic Imagination*, 14.

[47] Brooks, *Melodramatic Imagination*, 15.

[48] Brooks, *Melodramatic Imagination*, 10.

The theme of the sermon discussed at the beginning of this chapter revolves around intimate familiar relationships, most importantly that between mother (and, to a lesser degree, father) and son. The “eternal triangle of mother/son/daughter-in-law”[49] is completed in the sermon’s closing scene, in which the son forgets his mother in favor of his new wife, which, of course, has tragic consequences. As Brooks remarked, this set of “familial relationships” is characteristic of melodrama, and even more so in India where the social drama was to become the focal point of melodrama.[50] Like the melodrama, the sermon makes the ordinary and the private life interesting through heightened dramatic utterance and gesture. Moreover, foreshadowing gloomy events and putting them off to create tension, as we encountered again and again in the sermon, is also an important technique of melodrama. Last but not least, the “special” knowledge (e.g. that between mother and son) reveals the true meaning of the situation by an obscure mechanism which on the one hand borders on the magical, but on the other on the psychological.

The melodramatic mode of the sermon’s presentation fits the particular way in which listeners are positioned to perceive the events. Tophājjal Hosen consciously offers situations in which the listeners easily recognize their own personal relationships. Commenting on the scene of the child Prophet using the moon as a toy in his cradle, he states: “Many [of the listeners] have small children. [. . .] And those who have not married can take it from their own childhood: ‘I was a child.’ Thereby they make the grief their own.”[51] Similarly, he states that the passage where Abdullah calls out to Allah has a strong effect on listeners: “At this moment, the people are also thrown into passion. There is so much pain. The child calls out to the father: ‘Take me on your lap!’ The father wants that you shall take away the earth. Upon these things the people cry. It comes upon them, they consider it as reality, they listen to the words patiently.”[52] Reality here means that people can connect the scenes to their everyday lives allowing them emotionally to participate in the narrative. Moreover, Hosen not only consciously weaves “real incidents” into his sermons, but takes these references to reality from tabloids.[53] This is fitting, since the depiction of reality in the yellow press works along the lines of melodrama, and melodrama has long used tabloids as their blueprint.[54] Furthermore, the lengthy descriptions of the suffering mother as well as her benedictory powers are shared with contemporary Bangladeshi TV series, such as the recent *Your Prayer Keeps Me Well, Mother*.[55] The theme of the sermon and its presentation closely fit melodramatic poetics.

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[49] Kathryn Hansen, “Mapping Melodrama: Global Theatrical Circuits, Parsi Theater, and the Rise of the Social,” *BioScope: South Asian Screen Studies* 7, (2016): 24, accessed 21 November, 2017.

[50] Hansen, “Mapping Melodrama,” 24.

[51] Tofajjol Hossain, interview by Max Stille, 26 March, 2014, Bhairab, Bangladesh. *Choṭa bāccāto anekeri āche. . . āmio to dolnār bāccā chilām. takhan eiṭā to yārā biẏe kare nāi, tārāo nijer belāẏ neẏ, ye āmi to bāccā chilām. te ei duhkhaṭā takhan nijer madhye niẏe āse*.

[52] Tofajjol Hossain, interview by Max Stille. *Te ei samaẏṭā mānuṣo ekṭā ābeger madhye paiṛā yāẏ. ye eiḍā kata byathā. santān ḍākteche, bābā kole nāo. bābā cāiteche māṭi sarāiẏā dāo. .. te ei jinisgulo mānuṣ takhan kānde nijer upare āse, bāstaber mato mane haẏ dhairya dhairā kathāguli śone.*

Second, while Brooks clearly underlines the importance of music for the "evocation of the 'ineffable,'" he treats music merely metaphorically, since he is concerned with novels.[56] Diderot, however, was particularly concerned—as the term melodrama implies—with the relation between drama (pantomime) and music, even subordinating the role of the poet to that of the musician.[57] He dealt with dialogue, recitative, and song and with the transitions between these techniques. For Diderot, a lack of transition between musical and dramatic parts served as a contrast to express heightened emotions.[58] As Hansen notices, such a "European" concept of melodrama "would have had little purchase in India since virtually all drama was already musical."[59] Or, to put it the other way around, song scenes are decisive forms of Indian melodrama exactly because they are linked to Indian traditions. Tophājjal Hosen's chanting during emotionally heightened scenes—particularly those of suffering—fits this pattern. Furthermore, the melodic speaking of the sermons undergoes a development typical of much of South Asia's mediatized folk traditions: it develops in an increasingly melodic manner.[60] During the scene at Abdullah's grave, for example, Hosen adds to the chanting as a marker of the dramatic scene by giving his melodies a particular twist: slight tonal shifts indicate the rising emotionality of the scene and the pains of the child.[61] Furthermore, Hosen adds to the melodic a subtle “mimetic” voice that conveys the emotionality of the figure speaking: particularly noteworthy in this regard is the softness of the child’s address to his mother and the mother’s tender, consoling words in response, and in the voice of Abdullah which noticeably cracks when appealing to Allah.

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[53] Hosen, for example, told me about his new discovery, a "real" incident of his area, which involved a mother hacked into three pieces, see Tofajjol Hossain, interview by Max Stille.

[54] Compare, for example, the origins of *The Colleen Bawn* as an adaptation of the novel *The Collegians*, "which retold the actual murder of a young married girl." Hansen, "Mapping Melodrama," 3.

[55] The "drama serial" *Tomar doẏāẏ bhālo āchi mā* links to the important topic of international migration.

[56] Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination*, 14.

[57] Denis Diderot, "Die dramatische Pantomime oder Versuch über eine neue Schauspielgattung in Florenz," in *Ästhetische Schriften*, ed. Denis Diderot (Frankfurt: Europäische Verlagsanstalt, 1968), 302.

[58] Diderot, "Die dramatische Pantomime," 300.

[59] Hansen, "Mapping Melodrama," 24.

[60] Peter Manuel, *Cassette Culture: Popular Music and Technology in North India* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 136.

[61] I am aware that it is debatable whether thinking in tonalities is the right approach here. To my hearing, this passage moves from below (D flat major) to a higher layer (A flat major), to then a flat minor to express the child's pains. I do not insist on this terminology; it suffices to note that there is a differentiated micro-structure. For another example see Carla Petievich and Max Stille, "Emotions in Performance: Poetry and Preaching," *Indian Economic and Social History Review* 54, special issue Feeling Communities, (2017): 57–102.

Third, as mentioned above, some scholars have pointed out the close association between melodrama and tableau painting. The climactic scene of Boucicault’s blockbuster *The Colleen Bawn*, for example, is not only connected to a musical piece, but also to a “set piece with the moonlit tableau of Myles supporting Eily, her red cloak trailing in the water,” which “appeared over and over in illustrations of the day.”[62] While cross-connections to other genres such as scroll paintings (*paṭuẏā*) come to mind, we should not overlook the visual dimensions of purely “verbal” descriptions. In the early example of the non-narrative metrically highlighted scenes in the Iusuph Jalikhā, extensive visual description (*ekphrasis*) is, like dialogue, a common narrative feature.

In Hosen’s sermon, the discovery of the black spots on the Prophet’s body, the child moving the moon instead of flower toys above his head, as well as Abdullah calling out to Allah from his grave, can each be imagined in an “arrested” picture, a “tableau vivant,” with the fitting gesture and corresponding heightened emotion. Both melodrama and the described narrative technique in *waʿẓ maḥfil*s place stress on a single decisive moment. Hosen himself explicitly emphasizes the visual aspect of his narratives: “I [hold sermons] from seeing. I go to the field of Uhud, when I hold a sermon, the field of Uhud appears in front of my eyes, and I thus present the talk’s feelings. The listeners are also as if they are seeing it: the events of the field of Uhud happen in front of their eyes, and this is the moment when tears are shed.”[63] The excess of emotionality that this visualization evokes in both preacher and audience is certainly a commonplace of popular preaching. At the same time, we can discern specificities of melodrama and its visuality. Hosen states: “At such a heart-splitting incident I can’t control myself. Tears come to my eyes. At that point also the listeners think (*mane kare*): ‘I see in front of my eyes that they are hitting my Prophet.’ Then they also cry. Someone gets up screaming out; someone loses his sense, moves hand and feet instinctively and finally loses consciousness.”[64]

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[62] Hansen, “Mapping Melodrama,” 3-5.

[63] Tofajjol Hossain, interview by Max Stille: *“Āmi ballām dekhen, āpnerā oẏāj karen paiṛā ār āmi oẏāj kari deikhā. āmi ohuder jamine gelām, āmār oẏājer samaẏ ohuder jaminṭā āmār cokhe bhāse, ār alocanār bhābṭā eibhābei upasthāpan kari, śrotārā o yena dekhteche, ohuder jaminṭā tāder sāmne ghaṭanā ghaṭteche, ei takhani cokher pāni ber haẏ.”*

[64] *Ei ye hr̥daẏbidārak ghaṭanāṭā āmi takhan āmāke control karte pāri nā. āmār cokh theke pāni āse. takhan śrotārāo jinisṭā cokher samne ei mane kare ye, āmāder cokher sāmne āmrār nabi mārteche dekhtechi. takhan tārāo kānde. keu keu cillāilā māirā dā̃ṛāiẏā yāẏ, keu keu āche māh’phile āpner sense hārā haiẏā hāt-pāo nāṛāiẏā jñān hārā haiẏā yāẏ.*

Aesthetic Critiques of Popular Preaching and Historicizing Heightened Feelings

So far, I have highlighted the parallels between religious preaching and other literary narrative and performative structures used for the evocation of heightened emotions, including those of melodrama. In particular, I have used melodrama to denote a particular form of narration and performance as seen through the eyes of a response-oriented performance analysis. I have analysed various means of evoking heightened emotions without criticizing these means or judging whether the evoked emotions are of the right intensity or type. However, the aesthetics of (melodic) narration and heightened emotions in religious oration are often problematized by actors in the field of Islamic preaching as well as by Western scholars. Their criticism is often directed at an excess in display and evocation as well as at the emotions evoked, or at stating that the emotions are of the wrong kind. What is more, criticism often targets features that I identified as being central to melodrama.

The New York-based Bangladeshi preacher Nurul Islam Olipuri, for example, states that in Bengali *waʿẓ* "there exists the tendency to [. . .] spellbind (*bhakta*) the people with vocal melody, and to entertain (*cittabinodan*) them with so much vulgar frivolity (*raṃ ṭaṃ er kathā*)."[65] Furthermore, according to Olipuri, listeners and speakers are used to this kind of preaching, which is characterized by long digressions (*abāntar kathābārtā*).[66] In his description, Olipuri hence links vulgarity and excess both of words and concepts; affection and pretension of preaching and transgressions of preacher and audience.[67]

In his preaching, Olipuri cautiously avoids both chanting and the other parts of the poetics of evoking heightened emotions discussed thus far. In his sermon on the story of Yūsuf (I here deliberately use the Arabic transcription to indicate Olipuri's stress on Arabic scholarly discourse), Olipuri does not chant and eschews the dramatic effect of limiting the listeners' level of information. Yaʿqub sees a dream from which he understands everything that had happened and was going to happen, including the plan of the brothers to kill Yūsuf and his eventual rescue. From this perspective, the tense events of the story—the brothers asking permission to take Yūsuf away and their staging of Yūsuf's death by showing Yaʿqub his shirt, which they smeared with blood—are cause neither for alarm nor

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65 *Galār sur diẏe mānuṣke bhakta karā, raṃ ṭaṃ er kathā dvārā mānuṣer cittabinodan karā [. . .] prabaṇatā bidyamān.* Nurul Islam Olipuri, interview by Kālkanṭha, October 15, 2010.

66 *Abāntar kathābārtā balā o raṃṭaṃ er kathābārtār dvārā śrotāder cittabinodaner mādhyame janapriẏatā arjaner abhilāṣī baktāder abhāb nei samāje. ār oẏājer nāme esab anuṣṭhān śunār mata śrotāro e samāje abhāb nei.* Nurul Islam Olipuri, interview by Kālkanṭha.

67 This in-depth semantics of the various levels of excess became clear to me in a correspondence with Tony K. Stewart on the translation of *raṃ ṭaṃ er kathā.* I remain grateful for his time and advice.

for sorrow. This is even confirmed by a prolepsis[68] that reports a dialogue between Yūsuf and his father. The fact that Yaʿqub will have cried for his son is thus only reported once, and because it is narrated proleptically and hence retrospectively, it does not take place in the dramatic present. Furthermore, it is only told to be refuted: in the dialogue of the prolepsis, Yaʿqub states that he cried not because of worries or pains of separation, but only because he could not be sure whether people would exert bad influences on his son while they were separated. While there is a shift to direct speech, this does not serve to create an emotionally heightened moment, in fact, quite the opposite: there is a leveling or diffusion of the emotional content and its dramatic structure.

Prejudices and defensive attitudes against popular excess have also been taken over in works on Islamic preaching written by Western scholars. Ignaz Goldziher wrote a classical account of Islamic storytellers and popular preachers from the perspective of the workings of the Prophetic traditions, which he suggested were in danger of being diluted by the preachers' own inventiveness. In this account, the later popular preachers in particular emerge as engaging in entertaining, weird, exaggerated descriptions that cater to the fantasy of the common people and deviate from the supposedly original intention of moral and religious exhortation. Reflecting the thoughts of Ibn al-Jawzī, Golziher describes the "affectation" and "wrong pathos" of preachers who seek above all to amuse audiences and lack moral and religious sincerity.[69] A century ago, Tor Andrae concluded that the preachers' "so-called pious fantasy reveals itself to be decidedly impious."[70] In short, it seems that rather than an appreciation of aesthetic technique and their function, normative standards modeled on Protestant concerns sometimes meet prejudices in the sources to inform a scholarly interpretation of popular Islamic preaching. The recent scholarly turn to the role of the senses, the aesthetics, and the materiality of religion has, as elaborated in the introduction to this volume, taken seriously and evaluated positively the aesthetic dimensions of these religious discourses. Current scholarship is much more sensitive to the role aesthetics and emotional styles play in power relationships.[71]

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[68] A leap to a later event of the story.

[69] For this classical and amusing description see Ignaz Goldziher, *Muhammedanische Studien,* vol. 2 (Halle: Max Niemeyer, 1890), 161–70. A more distanced but also much shorter contemporary view is Roberto Tottoli, *Biblical Prophets in the Qur'ān and Muslim Literature* (Richmond: Curzon, 2002), 87–88.

[70] See: Tor Andrae, *Die Person Muhammeds in Lehre und Glauben seiner Gemeinde* (Stockholm: Kungl. Boktryckeriet Norstedt & Söner, 1917), Inaugural-Dissertation, 26. He further views popular preaching's excesses as external to Islam (28).

[71] For insights in this regard, see Margrit Pernau et al., *Civilizing Emotions: Concepts in Nineteenth-Century Asia and Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015); Jacques Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible*, ed. Gabriel Rockhill (London: Bloomsbury, 2013); Birgit Meyer and Annelies Moors, eds., *Religion, Media, and the Public Sphere* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006).

Against this background, thinking about the evocation of heightened emotions in Bangladeshi *waʿẓ maḥfil*s asks us to reconsider aesthetic theories of religious feelings. On the one hand, narratological insights have proven useful for tracing the aesthetic and emotional experiences made possible by chanted scenes in *waʿẓ maḥfil*s; they furthermore draw attention to the history of aesthetic forms and underline the structural parallels between the evocation of emotions in *waʿẓ maḥfil*s and those employed in other narrative forms. On the other hand, the value judgements and moral arguments against excessive popular emotions within Islamic tradition and scholarship on Islam call for a deeper engagement with underlying aesthetic assumptions.

In closing, I want to suggest that we link the rejection of "melodramatic" aesthetics and heightened emotions to seminal figures in the study of religion and philosophy. Alongside more specific inquiries into regionally specific concepts of aesthetics, continued consideration of basic works still seems important because they guide our understanding of how to evaluate aesthetic processes. On the topic of the relation between aesthetic theory and religious feelings, Rudolph Otto's *Idea of the Holy* remains one of the most influential studies.[72] In it, Otto emphasizes that aspect of the holy that "completely eludes apprehension in terms of concepts."[73] Following Schleiermacher, Otto draws attention to the deep emotional foundations of religious practice, which he himself had the chance to observe during several long journeys. Otto's necessarily dialectical undertaking of a conceptual study of that which eludes concepts faces the challenge of making transparent the "means of expression of the numinous" or its "ideograms."[74] Otto's discussion—particularly of that aspect of the holy that he calls the *tremendum*—closely parallels Immanuel Kant's discussions of the sublime (*das Erhabene*),[75] a category which, in turn, has roots in rhetoric.

When approaching the evaluations of melodramatic aspects of religious discourse, it is particularly interesting that in Kant's discussion the heightened emotions of the sublime are juxtaposed to a lower class of feelings. These feelings, represented by "romances, lachrymose plays, shallow moral precepts," have negative moral consequences: they "make the heart languid, insensible to the severe precept of duty, and incapable of all respect for the worth of humanity in our own person," and are linked to "false humility" and "whining hypocritical repentance" "in a mere passive state of mind."[76] It seems that many of the characteristics that Kant attributes to these non-sublime emotions resemble judgements against prose-chanting.

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[72] Otto shares his emphasis on individual feeling with contemporaries such as William James, see William James, *Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature*, Centenary ed. (London: Routledge, 2003).

[73] Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy: An Inquiry into the Non-Rational Factor in the Idea of the Divine and Its Relation to the Rational*, transl. John W. Harvey, 6th ed. (London: Oxford University Press, 1936), 5.

[74] Otto, *Holy*, 61.

[75] See Immanuel Kant, *Kant's Critique of Judgement*, trans. J.H. Bernard, 2nd ed. (London: Macmillan, 1914), §§ 23–29.

[76] Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, 141–42.

The structural analysis of the narrative design of *waʿẓ* in contemporary Bangladesh and its possible antecedents and parallels have demonstrated the persistence of what, with Otto, we might call "ideograms of the numinous": the seemingly "immediate" perception of the holy time and figures in dramatic scenes; the importance of miracles performed by these figures;[77] and, more specifically, the excessive love of Allah for Muhammad and of Muhammad for humankind, which can only be depicted in analogies. The affects that the sermons generate in preachers and their audiences seem to allow them to have contact with the numinous, which can only be reached by having suffered.[78] The preacher and the audience both participate in this affective movement, thus blurring the difference between production and reception.[79] The expressions of the numinous and melodramatic modes overlap in many respects, as both work towards expressing and evoking heightened emotions.[80] Their parallels pose challenges for any attempt to demarcate the "real religious feeling"[81] and its sublimity from low popular forms.

There may be various reasons for adopting poetics that have been successful in evoking excessive emotions. The religious communication dealt with in this chapter shows the continued relevance of heightened religious feelings for religious history. At the same time, the chapter has proposed that we pay closer attention to expressions of the numinous in different historical and cultural settings, and, in doing so, emphasized possible uses of concepts from related fields such as literary or film studies. On this basis, hopefully, we can disentangle and historicize the various ways in which heightened religious feelings are evoked in popular religious cultures, and evaluate anew their overlaps with and contributions to other fields.

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[77] Otto, *Idea of the Holy*, 65–66. "Nothing can be found in all the world of natural feelings bearing so immediate an analogy—*mutatis mutandis*—to the religious consciousness of ineffable, unutterable mystery, the absolute other, as the incomprehensible, unwonted, enigmatic thing, in whatever place or guise it may confront us."

[78] Jörg Villwock, "Sublime Rhetorik: Zu einigen noologischen Implikationen der Schrift *Vom Erhabenen*," in *Das Erhabene: Zwischen Grenzerfahrung und Größenwahn*, ed. Christine Pries and Klaus Bartels (Weinheim: VCH, 1989), 33–53, here 39–40.

[79] Villwock, "Sublime Rhetorik," 43.

[80] See Hans Joas, "Säkulare Heiligkeit: Wie aktuell ist Rudolf Otto?" in *Otto, Rudolf: Das Heilige: Über das Irrationale in der Idee des Göttlichen und sein Verhältnis zum Rationalen*, ed. Jörg Lauster, extended new edition (Munich: Beck, 2014), 276.

[81] Otto, *Holy*, 126.

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Jan Scholz

Dramatic Islamic Preaching: A Close Reading of ʿAmr Khālid

Abstract This chapter focuses on a rhetorical technique used by different Islamic preachers on the basis of the prominent example of ʿAmr Khālid, namely the mimetic telling of stories within his sermons. It provides a detailed analysis of his dramatic technique and of the effects it produces. For this analysis, I have chosen a close reading of a short passage from one of his programmes. The advantage of this approach is that it allows for a detailed discussion of the narrative and performative techniques used. The theoretical analysis builds on crucial concepts of the so-called Greco-Roman rhetorical tradition (which modern European rhetorical theory is a part of). However, the reason for recourse to this theoretic tradition is not only due to the fact that it provides a useful theoretical frame. Instead, as I point out, the Greco-Roman (or European) tradition has considerably influenced modern Arabic rhetorical manuals as well. Connecting the theoretical rhetorical reflections with some insights from the field of neuroscience, I argue that the analysed rhetorical techniques provide a particular form of religious aesthetic experience, which is geared towards bringing the past to the present, making it experienceable for modern listeners today.

Modern Islamic preaching on TV, sometimes referred to as Islamic Televangelism,[1] as practiced by ʿAmr Khālid, Muḥammad Ḥassān, Muʿizz Masʿūd, or Muṣṭafā Ḥusnī, to cite just a few of the most prominent preachers, has become well-established. Indeed, there have been a number of studies focusing on this phenomenon in recent years.[2] The scholarly literature has approached the topic from different perspectives: at the beginning there was a particular emphasis on anthropological and sociological analysis, and rhetorical perspective—which focuses on the different rhetorical devices used, including the performance of the speech—has also gained in importance over time.[3]

Different studies have focused on the peculiar oratorical style of ʿAmr Khālid.[4] One main point that has been repeatedly underlined in discussion of his preaching is the mimetic telling of his stories, which is understood as being partly responsible for his success:[5] "Khālid dramatizes and acts out the stories by switching person and entering the role of the stories' characters."[6]

While the importance of this mimetic preaching has been noted and discussed in general terms, it is worthwhile taking a closer look into this technique and into the effects it produces. The aim here is to discuss in some detail the different aspects of this way of preaching from the perspective of aesthetic and rhetorical theory. This means focusing on ʿAmr Khālid more concretely in terms of religious aesthetics, and thus looking into those aspects of religion which are sensually perceptible.[7] The issues inherent to this sensual perception shall be discussed by means of rhetorical theory, and they will be supplemented by a basic observation made by neuropsychological research. This will allow us to draw further conclusions about the peculiar dramatic, aesthetic experience made possible by narrative and performative techniques, including those used by Khālid.

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[1] Yasmin Moll, "Islamic Televangelism," *Arab Media & Society* 10 (2010).

[2] Jacob Høigilt, *Islamist Rhetoric: Language and Culture in Contemporary Egypt*, Routledge Arabic Linguistics Series (London: Routledge, 2011); John Erik Sætren, "Two Narratives of Islamic Revival: Islamic Television Preaching in Egypt" (PhD diss., University of Bergen, 2010); Yasmin Moll, "Islamic Televangelism"; David Hardaker, "Amr Khaled: Islam's Billy Graham," in *The Independent* (January 2006); Patrick Haenni, *L'Islam de marché: l'autre révolution conservatrice*, La république des idées (Paris: Seuil, 2005).

[3] This is particularly true for Høigilt, *Islamist Rhetoric* and Sætren, "Two Narratives of Islamic Revival."

[4] E.g. Asef Bayat, "Piety, Privilege and Egyptian Youth," *ISIM Newsletter* 10 (2002): 23; Lindsay Wise, "'Words from the Heart': New Forms of Islamic Preaching in Egypt" (M.phil. thesis, St. Antony's College, Oxford University, 2003), 6, 57.

[5] Sætren, "Two Narratives of Islamic Revival," 39f, 146f, 200.

[6] Sætren, "Two Narratives of Islamic Revival," 200.

[7] Hubert Cancik and Hubert Mohr, "Religionsästhetik," in *Handbuch religionswissenschaftlicher Grundbegriffe*, vol. 1, ed. Hubert Cancik, Burkhard Gladigow, and Matthias Laubscher (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1988).

This analysis builds in some regards on Rudolf Otto's reflections on religious and aesthetic experience, which he outlines in his *The holy*.[8] One of Otto's basic assumptions is that in order to elucidate the 'religious experience' (religiöse Erfahrung) one needs to compare it with aesthetic experience. However, this chapter is not concerned with the sublime as Otto is, neither does it draw on the aesthetic category of the sublime. Instead, this chapter analyses a certain preaching technique, a certain preaching style, which is not limited to Amr Khālid, but which has become particularly prominent with him. The basic claim of this chapter is that a detailed analysis of this technique is an essential element when trying to understand Islamic televangelism, and, in a more general sense, an important aspect of aesthetic experience in the religious field.

The Approach: A short passage in close reading

The aim here is not to discuss a whole episode in one of Khālid's numerous preaching programs. Instead, I propose a close reading of one very short passage. The advantage of this approach is that it allows for a detailed discussion of the narrative and performative techniques used. While it is not possible, for technical reasons, to offer screenshots within this publication, in order to be as precise as possible I will try to verbally describe the different facial expressions and gestures Khālid uses in combination with what he says at every given point. The reader might want to watch the selected passage in the video, which is (at the moment of writing) available online.[9]

The short sequence, which this article focuses on, stems from the fifth episode of Khālid's program "Maʿa at-tābiʿīn," which was broadcast during Ramadan 2011. As the title indicates, the episode centers around Ḥusayn ibn ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib (626–680), a grandson of the Prophet, and an important figure, particularly in Egypt where Ḥusayn's veneration goes back to Fatimid times.[10] His head is believed to be buried in the *maqām* of the Ḥusayn mosque in Fatimid Cairo, where important festivities take place in his honor to this day.[11]

In the section chosen for the close reading[12] Khālid narrates a short episode in which Ḥusayn is told by his father ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib about the beginning of Muḥammad’s prophethood in Mecca. The selected clip starts with the beginning of ʿAlī’s account and stops at the end. The first step will be to provide some brief remarks on how Khālid presents himself in the program. Following this, the second step will discuss Khālid’s oratory performance in some detail. I will particularly outline how far his narrative and performative techniques are aimed at effecting an identification of the spectator with the ‘characters’ Khālid plays in the selected passage. I will then discuss this identification within rhetorical theory and its techniques for the emotional affectation of the audience, including some findings from neuropsychological research, which are of great interest in this context. Finally, I will conclude with some summarizing remarks, interpreting the presented preaching style as a peculiar way of remembering the past emotionally and linking it to the present.

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[8] Rudolf Otto, *Das Heilige: Über das Irrationale in der Idee des Göttlichen und sein Verhältnis zum Rationalen* (Munich: Beck, 2014).

[9] ʿAmr Khālid, *al-Ḥalqa 5: Sayyidnā al-Ḥusayn, Maʿa at-tābiʿīn,* 2011, accessed 28 June 2017, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RGlaR57rPig.

[10] Yaacov Lev, *State and Society in Fatimid Egypt* (Leiden: Brill, 1991), 151–152.

[11] Cf. Michael Gilsenan, *Saint and Sufi in Modern Egypt: An Essay in the Sociology of Religion* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973).

[12] The section has been chosen because of its dense accumulation of rhetorical and aesthetical effects. These include, but are not limited to, address of the audience, switching of voice (from preacher to narrator, from narrator to figure, from one figure to another), and imitation of emotions of the imitated figures.

The Setting and Khālid’s Oratory Ethos

Before entering into further detail, some remarks with regard to the setting are in order. In terms of rhetorical theory these regard the realm of *ethos*, which—in its original meaning—designates the ‘character.’[13] However, it is not the character of the orator per se that is intended, but rather, as the rhetorician Joachim Knape points out, “the consciously presented character of the orator.”[14] In our context, the term *ethos* can be paraphrased using the modern term ‘image.’[15]

The ethos regards both the character as presented outside a given speech, as well as the character as presented within the speech. As Khālid’s image has been discussed in some detail elsewhere, including in the different projects he contributes to,[16] I will limit myself to his *ethos* as presented in the program.

Khālid sits, as is usual in most of his programs, particularly in the beginning of his career, at a desk; he wears a dark grey suit with a white shirt and a striped tie. On his left lies a small Qurʾān, and in front of him he places his speaking notes for the program. As regards his image, he differs greatly from the image of the “traditional” preacher,[17] who is often associated with a *gallabiyya* and the red fez (*tarbūsh*). The expression “sheikh in a suit,” which was used in the press to describe Khālid, particularly at the beginning of his career,[18] further illustrates this difference. In style, Khālid is more similar to a young Egyptian business man[19] than to the traditional religious scholar. His audience is particularly made up of young middle and upper-class Egyptians, "Egypt's globalizing youth."[20] Khālid also prominently addresses women.[21] Accordingly, the topics of his programs have always differed from the 'traditional' sermon in the mosque. In fact, from the very beginning of his career he has addressed topics central to his audience's everyday life but not usually addressed in the mosque, including the risk of committing sins while on summer holidays at the beach in Alexandria.[22] While these aspects are important for a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon, I mention them only to contextualize his preaching along the most important lines. The main interest of this chapter lies with Khālid's oratory performance.

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[13] Gert Ueding et al., “Affektenlehre,” in *Historisches Wörterbuch der Rhetorik*, ed. Gert Ueding, vol. 1 (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1992), 220.

[14] Joachim Knape, *Modern Rhetoric in Culture, Arts, and Media: 13 Essays* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2013), 58.

[15] Knape, *Modern Rhetoric*, 58–59.

[16] E.g. Julia Gerlach, *Zwischen Pop und Dschihad: Muslimische Jugendliche in Deutschland* (Berlin: Links, 2006), 34–35.

[17] Cf. Bayat, “Piety, Privilege and Egyptian Youth,” 23. Wise, “Words from the Heart,” 5. Sophia Pandya, “Religious Change Among Yemeni Women: The New Popularity of ʿAmr Khaled,” *Journal of Middle East Women’s Studies* 5, no. 1 (2009): 65–66. Haenni, *L’Islam de marché*.

The Oratory Performance

The section that this chapter focuses on[23] narrates a short account, which took place when Ḥusayn was about ten years old. Khālid, who at this point has already been talking about Ḥusayn for some minutes, introduces the account as follows: "and when he [i.e. Ḥusayn] grew up a little bit, and reached the age of ten, his father, ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib, told him . . . ."[24] For the duration of the first part of the sentence, the camera films Khālid from some distance, and as soon as it focuses on Khālid, the viewer sees him in a frontal camera angle. Both of his hands are spread out in front of him as he continues "all the Quraysh went to your other grandfather,[25] Abū Ṭālib." Now, his hands draw a circle thus underlining the entirety of the Quraysh. At the point where Khālid refers to Abū Ṭālib he points with his right forefinger to the right edge of the screen. Through this finger pointing, the screen (or the view frame) is treated like a stage, just as the finger pointing outside the frame 'suggests' that Abū Ṭālib is waiting at the side of the 'stage' for his appearance. In the next sentence, the preacher further describes Abū Ṭālib: "that means to the father of *sayyidnā* ʿAlī." Khālid now turns his forefinger towards himself, hereby underlining the possessive relation of *sayyidnā*. ʿAlī is "our" master; Khālid's gesture identifies him as a representative of the believers. At this point, he reports the direct speech of the Quraysh: "And they [i.e. the Quraysh] told him [i.e. Abū Ṭālib]: 'Hand us over Muḥammad, [in order that] we will do with him what we want.'" While citing the Quraysh's request, Khālid imitates 'them.' His mimics express the mandatory character of the request, and they are supported by his gestures: a rapid movement with both hands symbolizing the request of delivery.

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[18] Cf. Moll, "Islamic Televangelism," 2.

[19] Khālid worked as an accountant before becoming a successful preacher.

[20] Asef Bayat, *Life as Politics: How Ordinary People Change the Middle East* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2010), 134.

[21] Pandya, "Religious Change Among Yemeni Women: The New Popularity of ʿAmr Khaled," 66–67.

[22] For an account of one of his sermons, see Gerlach, *Zwischen Pop und Dschihad*, 35–36.

[23] The episode is available on ʿAmr Khālid's YouTube channel (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RGlaR57rPig), the selected passage is from 5:58 to 6:02.

[24] ʿAmr Khālid's account is slightly confusing, because in the selected section he only mentions Ḥusayn as a listener of the account, from a certain point (6:41) on, however, he always mentions Ḥusayn and his older brother Ḥasan as listeners.

[25] In this numbering, Ḥusayn's first grandfather is Muḥammad.

The interesting point here is that Khālid does not speak in his own person or—in terms of narratology—with his own voice.[26] Instead of speaking as the preacher ʿAmr Khālid or as the narrator of the story—two roles which are clearly distinguished in narratology[27]—the voice that is speaking here is that of the Quraysh. His speech is mimetic: Khālid speaks in the role of someone else, and in doing so he also imitates the gestures of a person (in this case the 'spokesperson' of the Quraysh). This technique is very typical for Khālid. He uses it not only here, where he imitates the Quraysh, but several times in the following of the passage. Before I contextualize the meaning of this technique further in terms of the aesthetic experience, the remainder of the selected clip must be described.

Before the spectator learns about Abū Ṭālib's answer to the Quraysh's request, he is first informed about a change of scenery: "Your grandfather went to the Prophet and told him." This phrase makes the question of roles even more interesting than it has been so far. The possessive determiner *your*[28] qualifies the grandfather as Ḥusayn's. This means that the grammatical addressee here is not the spectator of Khālid's program, but instead Ḥusayn who listens to the account of his father ʿAlī. I have used the term "grammatical addressee" here in order to differentiate between different addressees. While the grammatical construction indicates clearly that Ḥusayn is addressed, this does not mean that the TV-spectator is not addressed. Already the genre of the sermon necessarily implies that the spectator is an addressee, as there is no sermon without a preacher addressing his audience. In order to distinguish both roles analytically I suggest differentiating between the grammatical addressee, namely Ḥusayn who is being addressed by his father ʿAlī, and the factual addressee, namely the TV-spectator who is addressed by Khālid.[29] The doubling of the addressee roles (Ḥusayn and TV-spectator) corresponds with a doubling of the speaker (ʿAlī and Khālid). This doubling is obviously not only at

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26 This distinction between *diegesis* and *mimesis* has its origins in Greek philosophy. See Plato, *The Republic of Plato* [Res publica], 3rd rev. and corr. throughout ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1888), 77. Gérard Genette, *Figures III* (Paris: Seuil, 1972) also builds on him. Among others, Genette's chapter "voix" has been translated into English in Genette, *Narrative Discourse*, trans. Jan E. Lewin, (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1980), 212–262.

27 Cf. Genette, *Figures III*, 226.

28 In the Egyptian Arabic original, it is the possessive suffix *–k* in *abūk*.

29 I adopt this differentiation from Adrian Graffy, *A Prophet Confronts his People: The Disputation Speech in the Prophets* (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1984), 48.

stake in the cited phrase, but it also stretches through most parts of the sermon. From the perspective of aesthetic response (*Wirkungsästhetik*),[30] a crucial aspect of this role doubling is that the TV-spectator 'becomes'—to a degree—Ḥusayn. This is the role, at least, that the sermon provides for him when Khālid addresses him as Ḥusayn. We will see below that this deduction is not an arbitrary one, but instead corresponds to the communicative strategy as well as to the aesthetic one.

After the change of scenery, Khālid/ʿAlī reports on Abū Ṭālib's reaction before the Prophet: "he told him: 'I am helpless against them.'" Khālid expresses Abū Ṭālib's helplessness through mimics and gestures: He slightly tilts his head back stretching both hands out in front of him showing the open palms as a symbol of helplessness and impotence.[31] Introducing the Prophet's reaction, Khālid continues: "Then the Prophet said his famous word." In this place, the Prophet is not referred to as 'your grandfather.' Instead, the chosen general reference "the Prophet" suggests that the speaking voice in this place is Khālid's.[32] In fact, at this point in the sermon Khālid abandons his mimetic style for a short moment, speaking in the role of the preacher instead. He expresses this role change also in the gestures. In this part, his hands do not perform any significant gestural movements as they continuously did before, but rather lie still and relaxed on the desk in front of him.

Immediately after this short gestural and mimic pause, Khālid returns to his mimetic style and imitates the Prophet through gestures. He raises his right forefinger, a gesture which is sometimes described as having been typical for the Prophet, and cites a very famous and central prophetic *ḥadīth:*[33] "O my uncle, by God, if they put . . ."—at this point Khālid stretches out the right hand on his right side—". . . the sun in my right hand . . ."—Khālid leaves the right hand outstretched, and now performs symmetrically the same movement with his left hand, while continuing the *ḥadīth*—"and the moon in my left hand . . ."—concluding the quotation, he energetically shakes the out-stretched right forefinger to express decision and anger—". . . in return for giving up this cause, I would not give it up, until God makes it victorious, or I die in His service." During the last phrase, the right forearm with the out-stretched forefinger decidedly underlines the negation by performing a 90-degree movement from a horizontal to a vertical position.

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[30] The term stems from the literary scholar Wolfgang Iser. Cf. Wolfgang Iser, *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response* (London: Routledge, Kegan Paul, 1978).

[31] Cf. Charles Darwin, *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals*, ed. Francis Darwin, 2nd ed., Cambridge Library Collection—Darwin, Evolution and Genetics (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 277. The gesture performed by Khālid in this place closely corresponds to Darwin's description.

[32] Nonetheless, the second option is possible as well; the chosen wording does not exclude ʿAlī as narrating voice in this place.

[33] The Arabic term *ḥadīth* designates a report of a saying or deed of the Prophet. See James Robson, "Ḥadīth," in *Encyclopaedia of Islam: New Edition*, ed. Bernard Lewis, et al., vol. 3 (Leiden: Brill, 1971).

The sequence comes to a preliminary end, and the camera's focus is again the distant one used at the beginning of the clip. The spectator sees Khālid from some distance sitting at his desk in the inner court of the Ibn Ṭūlūn mosque.

Khālid Commenting on his Performance

The following passage constitutes a sort of comment to the first one. It comments on the effect of the account on the listener, thus making the emotions his account aims to evoke in him or her explicit. 'The' listener has been described above as doubled, on the one side Ḥusayn and Ḥasan as intradiegetic listeners, and on the other the extradiegetic ones—that is, the TV-spectators. Also, this passage seems to refer to both listeners; however, it is only the intradiegetic listeners, Ḥusayn and Ḥasan, that are mentioned explicitly. In order to describe the effect of ʿAlī's account on the two children, Khālid raises the right hand as if he was indicating the height of the child while, saying: "The small child . . .," then corrects himself: "both, Ḥasan and Ḥusayn"—raising his left hand and holding it in the same position, at the same height as the right one—"heard this speech." In order to underline the children's attentive listening, he puts both his hands behind his ears thereby enlarging his auricles in order to mimetically depict the act of listening. His hands only remain in this position for some seconds, however, just long enough to underline the children's attentiveness. Now, both hands are brought to the fore again, holding them at some height over the desk; both fists are strongly balled. Khālid's face increasingly expresses emotions of hurt and anger while he describes the effect that ʿAlī's account had on the two children: "They are touched deeply and they feel . . . ," during these last words Khālid's facial expression changes, his mimics express a mixture of growing anger and decision. "As if . . ." at this point, underlining the climax of the description, Khālid leaves only one fist balled towards the camera, his head is slightly bowed to the other side, ". . . it is a part of them." While pronouncing this conclusion, Khālid stretches his right hand towards the camera and pinches it with the left one. In doing so he illustrates the bodily experience ʿAlī's account has provoked for Ḥasan and Ḥusayn. This short but complex passage expresses a clear message, one which is crucial for the whole sequence: Ḥasan and Ḥusayn have experienced the account they have heard of the Prophet as if it had happened to them; as if they themselves, had been in the place of the Prophet.

The interesting point here is that Khālid's description of this bodily reaction goes well beyond a mere comment on the children's reaction. The goal is not only to describe the effect on the children. Instead, the description of the bodily experienced emotional effect implicitly refers to the extradiegetic listener as well—that is, to the spectator in front of the television. In doing so the doubling of the role of the listener, at once intradiegetic and extradiegetic, is reproduced in the comment. This means, in other words, that while Khālid explicitly refers to the reaction of Ḥasan and Ḥusayn, he at the same time implicitly refers to the television viewer. The goal of this strategy is to emphasize the effect the narration had (or is aimed to have had) on the viewer. Not only do Ḥasan and Ḥusayn experience the story bodily, but the viewer does as well. Emphasizing this bodily experience might have even served to increase it; it certainly makes it explicit. This bodily experience constitutes, I argue, a central aspect of the sermon's aesthetic experience, in other words—to take up Iser's term—of the aesthetic response that is the sermon's aim.

Rhetorical Theory and the Affectation of the Other

Among the most central concerns of rhetorical theory[34] is the affectation of the other. Since the very beginning of its systematization, rhetorical theory has focused on the emotional effectiveness of a speech. Modern rhetorical manuals repeatedly rely, to different degrees, on the ancient rhetoricians. Among these, Aristotle was the first to provide a systematic theory of rhetoric. He noted that oral delivery has the greatest effect, while also underlining that so far nobody had approached the matter.[35] He also undertook the first steps in this direction, and subsequent theoreticians, most importantly Cicero and Quintilian, have further elaborated on the different questions regarding delivery.[36] Even then, the question of affectation was already at the intersection of rhetorical and dramatic theory. In fact, the Greek term used for delivery in rhetorical theory (*hypokrisis*), refers to the actor.[37] In his *Poetics*, dealing with the Tragedy, Aristotle notes: "So far as possible, one should also work out the plot in gestures, since a natural affinity makes those in the grip of emotions the most convincing, and the truest distress or anger is conveyed by one who actually feels these things."[38] This Aristotelian quote provides a good description of Khālid's performance: working out the plot in gestures is precisely what he does in his mimetic performance. However, this reference to the Greek philosopher in the context of a rhetorical analysis of an Islamic preacher is not only motivated by the fact that Khalid's performance corresponds to the importance attached to bodily techniques in the Greco-Roman tradition. In fact, the modern rhetorical manuals used for training preachers also rely on this heritage.

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[34] I use the term rhetorical theory here in its Greco-Roman meaning. Confusion has to be avoided with Arabic *ʿilm al-balāgha*. Although the latter term is often translated as rhetoric, this translation is rather ambiguous. In fact, *ʿilm al-balāgha* mainly treats that section of rhetoric which in the Latin terminology is referred to as *elocutio*, namely the stylistic elaboration of a text or speech and questions of pragmatics and semantics. Whereas within the Greco-Roman rhetorical tradition, apart from *elocutio*, quite some attention has been dedicated also to the speech's vocal and bodily delivery (*pronuntiatio* and *actio*). (Cf. Renate Würsch, "Rhetorik und Stilistik im arabischen Raum," in *Rhetorik und Stilistik (Rhetoric and Stylistics): Ein internationales Handbuch historischer und systematischer Forschung (An International Handbook of Historical and Systematic Research)*, ed. Ulla Fix, Andreas Gardt, and Joachim Knape, vol. 2, (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2009), 2041; Kristina Stock, *Arabische Stilistik* (Wiesbaden: Reichert, 2005), 4; "Warum so viele Worte? Ein Annäherungsversuch an arabische Stilnormen," *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 147, no. 2 (1997): 267 n. 2. Furthermore Philip Halldén, "What is Arab Islamic Rhetoric? Rethinking the History of Muslim Oratory Art and Homiletics," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 37, no. 1 (2005); Abdulrazzak Patel, "Nahḍah Oratory: Western Rhetoric in al-Shartūnī's Manual on the Art of the Orator," *Middle Eastern Literatures* 12, no. 3 (2009). I discuss the transcultural character of modern Arabic rhetorical manuals, which refer to Arabic rhetoric (*ʿilm al-balāgha*) and to the Greco-Roman rhetorical tradition as well, in Jan Scholz, "Modern Arabic Rhetorical Manuals: A Transcultural Phenomenon," in *Engaging Transculturality: Concepts, Key Terms, Case Studies*, ed. Laila Abu-Er-Rub, et al. (London: Routledge, 2018, in press) and in Jan Scholz, "Cicero and Quintilian in the Arab World? Latin Rhetoric in Modern Arabic Rhetorical Manuals," in *Latin and Arabic: Entangled Histories*, ed. Daniel König (Heidelberg: Heidelberg University Publishing, 2019 in press).

[35] Aristotle, *On Rhetoric: A Theory of Civic Discourse*, trans. George A. Kennedy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 218.

The widespread rhetorical manual by al-Ḥūfī, *The Art of Rhetoric,*[39] first published in 1949, will serve as one example.[40] The book, which relies on an Aristotelian conception of rhetoric, as becomes clear from the very beginning,[41] devotes a chapter to religious rhetoric (preaching).[42] The book's importance is well illustrated by the frequency with which other preaching manuals cite it as a reference.[43]

With regard to our topic, the author outlines that the orator should penetrate (*taghalghal*)[44] his listener's souls, which will allow him to direct them as he wants.[45] The direction of souls stands in the same tradition of Plato's concept of psychagogy, namely the leading/direction of souls.[46]

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[36] Although Aristotle insists on the importance of performative aspects, most of the elaborations in this regard go back to his Roman successors, and have been further elaborated in the history of 'Western' rhetoric. An influence of Roman rhetoricians is also manifest in modern Arabic rhetorical manuals, as I discuss in Scholz, "Cicero and Quintilian in the Arab World?" (in press).

[37] Aristotle, *On Rhetoric*, 218 n. 1.

[38] Aristotle, "Poetics," in *Aristotle: Poetics, Longinus: On the Sublime, Demetrius: On Style* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), 89.

[39] Aḥmad Muḥammad al-Ḥūfī, *Fann al-khaṭāba*, 5th ed. (Cairo: Nahḍa Miṣr, 2007).

[40] The WorldCat lists its 2nd edition published by Nahḍa Miṣr in 1949. Given that another copy at the American University in Cairo dating from 1952 is registered as 2nd edition as well, it is plausible to assume 1949 as the year of the publication of the 1st edition.

[41] Al-Ḥūfī, *Fann al-khaṭāba*, 5–7.

[42] Al-Ḥūfī, *Fann al-khaṭāba*, 99–111.

[43] Among these might be noted Muṣṭafā Aḥmad Abū Samak, *Madkhal li-dirāsat al-khaṭāba wa-ṭarīq at-tablīgh fī l-islām* (ash-Sharika al-Waṭanīya li-ṭ-Ṭibāʿa, 1999); Sharaf ad-Dīn Aḥmad Ādam, *al-Khaṭāba: ʿIlm wa-fann* (Maṭbaʿat al-Ḥusayn al-Islāmiyya, 2000); Ḥasan ʿAbd al-Ghanī Ḥassān, *al-Khaṭāba wa-iʿdād al-khaṭīb an-nājiḥ fī l-islām* (Cairo: no publisher, 2006); ʿAbd ar-Raḥmān Jīra, *al-Khaṭāba wa-iʿdād al-khaṭīb*, 3rd ed. ([Cairo]: Maṭbaʿat Wizārat al-Awqāf al-Idāra al-ʿĀmma li-l-Marākiz ath-Thaqāfiyya, s.a.).

[44] Al-Ḥūfī, *Fann al-khaṭāba*, 19.

[45] Al-Ḥūfī, *Fann al-khaṭāba*, 19.

[46] Cf. On psychagogy Thomas Schirren, "Rhetorik und Stilistik der griechischen Antike," in *Rhetorik und Stilistik (Rhetoric and Stylistics): Ein internationales*

In order to achieve this rhetorical goal and in order to be able to lead his audience, the orator should be able to stir the emotions of his listeners and to light up their passions (*ithārat ʿawāṭifihim wa-ishʿāl mashāʿirihim*).[47] In order to stir the emotions, different means are regarded as crucial. As the manual explains, the voice, and particularly the change of its tones, are important.[48] This principle is demonstrated in Khālid's performance, in which he changes his voice according to the mood he wants to transmit; however, the orator's gestures are also discussed in the manual as something that should support the voice. Again, this is precisely what Khālid does in his performance. His gestures support the telling of his story, for instance he points outside the screen as if to indicate that the protagonists are waiting for their appearance on the side of the stage; he not only talks about the figures, he also imitates them, thus speaking in their place. In doing so, he uses his arms and hands to express the emotional states of these figures. Here, the term 'bodily eloquence' which was coined by Cicero, is most fitting.[49] The suggestions offered in the mentioned rhetorical manual are not limited to the hands but also include the head (*raʾs*) and the shoulders (*mankibayn*), as well as the mimics (*malāmiḥ al-wajh*), and the gazes of the eyes (*naẓarāt al-ʿaynayn*) and even the movements of the eyebrow (*ishārāt al-ḥājib*). The manual's outlines on performative aspects enter into some detail. To cite just one example, looking to the ground is explained as a sign of resignation and hopelessness (*yaʾs*) and of submissiveness or humility (*khushūʿ*).[50] While these aspects are all regarded

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Handbuch historischer und systematischer Forschung (An International Handbook of Historical and Systematic Research), ed. Ulla Fix, Andreas Gardt, and Joachim Knape, vol. 1 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2008), 10. The concept is still valid today. See Joachim Knape, "Rhetorik der Künste," ibid., 918.

[47] Al-Ḥūfī, *Fann al-khaṭāba*, 19.

[48] Al-Ḥūfī, *Fann al-khaṭāba*, 27.

[49] "Est enim actio quasi sermo corporis." Marcus Tullius Cicero, *On the Orator: Book 3. On Fate. Stoic Paradoxes. Divisions of Oratory*, trans. Harris Rackham (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1942), 178. "The [bodily] delivery is in a sense the body language." And "Est enim actio quasi corporis quaedam eloquentia," Cicero, *Brutus. Orator,* trans. George L. Hendrickson and Harry M. Hubbell (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1939), 346. English translation: "For delivery is a sort of eloquence of the body." (I have slightly adapted the translations offered by the respective translators.)

[50] Al-Ḥūfī, *Fann al-khaṭāba*, 27. The mentioning of the head (*raʾs*), the two shoulders (*mankibayn*), the mimics (*malāmiḥ al-wajh*), the gazes of the eyes (*naẓarāt al-ʿaynayn*) and the movements of the eyebrow (*ishārāt al-ḥājib*) seems to be a reference to a passage in al-Jāḥiẓ, who mentions nearly all of these aspects in the same order. (Abū ʿUthmān ʿAmr ibn Baḥr al-Jāḥiẓ, *al-Bayān wa-t-tabyīn*, ed. ʿAbd as-Sallām Muḥammad Hārūn, 7th ed., 4 vols., vol. 1 (Cairo: Maktabat al-Khānjī, 1998), 77.) This passage from Jāḥiẓ is one of the comparatively rare places in which an author of autochthonous Arabic rhetoric mentions bodily performative aspects. The subsequent explanation of the feelings that can be evoked instead is clearly influenced by Greco-Roman rhetoric, which has traditionally attributed far more importance to these aspects than did Arabic rhetoric. The Lebanese author Saʿīd ash-Shartūnī, one of the first modern authors adapting Greco-Roman rhetoric in Arabic, discusses performative aspects in a very similar vein. (Saʿīd ash-Shartūnī, *al-Ghuṣn ar-raṭīb fī fann al-khaṭīb* (Beirut: al-Maṭbaʿa al-Adabiyya, 1908), 49.) One of the few studies concerned with the influence of

as very important, it is the face that is regarded as the first and foremost medium for the emotions and for emotional reactions (*infiʿālāt*).[51]

Performance and Self-Affectation

I have already provided a number of extracts, but what has only very briefly been touched upon here is how the orator should perform these different bodily aspects. In fact, the effectiveness of the bodily techniques mentioned is dependent on a good performance, and the orator is thus counseled on *how* to perform them. At this point it might be useful to refer back to ʿAlī Maḥfūẓ, one of the founders of the *kulliyyat al-waʿẓ wa-l-irshād*, who addressed this issue in his manual.[52]

While his manual was only published posthumously, his book seems to have been one of the first preaching manuals used in Egypt. In it, Maḥfūẓ advises the preacher to "excite himself in order that this excitement translates into his voice, his gestures, and his mimics."[53] The orator, in a sense, functions as a medium, and only when he feels the 'appropriate' feelings in himself will he be best able to transmit them to his audience. This general observation was made in other rhetorical and dramatic theories, ones that, incidentally, also provided a foundation for the homiletic theories of Luther and Melanchthon.[54] In short, not only are contemporary Islamic preachers like Khālid directly linked to American televangelists through their practice (a tradition which Khālid and his producers explicitly refer to),[55] the underlying rhetorical theories of modern Islamic preaching and American televangelism both also draw on ancient Greco-Roman rhetorical theory.

Although Maḥfūẓ does not cite any specific reference for his reflection, other preaching manuals do draw more explicitly on Greek theories and Roman antiquity. For instance, al-Ḥūfī's rhetorical manual cites Horace's

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Greco-Roman rhetoric in the context of the *nahḍa* has focused on this book, underlining important parallels with Cicero: Patel, "Nahḍah Oratory." Further see Scholz, "Cicero and Quintilian in the Arab World?" (in press).

[51] Although Cicero and Quintilian are not listed as references here, the passage seems to be particularly influenced by the Roman rhetoricians, who in fact elaborated the mimical questions in particular detail, with most attention to facial expressions. E.g. Quintilian: "dominatur autem maxime vultus" Hartwig Kalverkämper, "Mimik," in *Historisches Wörterbuch der Rhetorik*, ed. Gert Ueding, vol. 5 (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 2001), 1339. I discuss the influence of Roman authors on modern Arabic rhetorical manuals focusing particularly on performative aspects in Scholz, "Cicero and Quintilian in the Arab World? (in press).

[52] ʿAlī Maḥfūẓ, *Fann al-khaṭāba wa-iʿdād al-khaṭīb* (Cairo: Dār al-Iʿtiṣām, 1984).

[53] Maḥfūẓ, *Fann al-khaṭāba*, 66.

[54] Klaus Dockhorn, "*Rhetorica movet*: Protestantischer Humanismus und karolingische Renaissance," in *Rhetorik: Beiträge zu ihrer Geschichte in Deutschland vom 16.–20. Jahrhundert*, ed. Helmut Schanze, (Frankfurt am Main: Athenäum-Fischer-Taschenbuch-Verlag, 1974), 27–29.

[55] Lindsay Wise, "Amr Khaled: Broadcasting the Nahda," *Transnational Broadcasting Studies* 13 (2004), accessed June 28, 2017, http://tbsjournal.arabmediasociety.com/Archives/Fall04/wiseamrkhaled.html.

reflections on the need for self-affectation: “If you would have me weep you must first express the passion of grief yourself.”[56] Although Horace was referring to theater, the fact that these dramatic observations appear within rhetorical theory and vice versa is not surprising. As has been previously mentioned, the performance of the orator lies at the intersection between dramatic and rhetorical theory; in antiquity, actors[57] taught orators how to effectively express different emotional states.[58] In this case, the Arabic manual cites Horace’s quote probably because his formulation is the most famous with regard to self-affectation.[59]

The Transcultural Character of Rhetorical Theory

One might wonder, why, as has been noted thus far, so much of Islamic rhetorical theory stems from the Greco-Roman tradition? Especially as there is an established and so-to-say genuine (as far as any culture can ever be genuine) Arabic tradition of rhetoric—namely *ʿilm al-balāgha* (literally: science of eloquence). The difference between what I refer to as Greco-Roman tradition and the Arabic tradition of rhetoric is that while Arabic *ʿilm al-balāgha* is particularly concerned with questions of good style, syntactical stylistics, the use and classification of metaphors, and other stylistic figures,[60] Greco-Roman rhetoric, being a theory of public speech, besides the mentioned aspects also assigns great importance to oral and bodily delivery (*pronuntiatio* and *actio*). This emphasis did not find a real counterpart in the Arabic rhetorical tradition.[61] To this one might add that within the Greco-Roman context the theater played a larger role, and a number of reflections, particularly those regarding the delivery as well as the emotional affectation of the audience, have in fact been discussed in both rhetorical as well as dramatic theory. It is down to this difference between the Arabic and the Greco-Roman traditions that the rhetorical manuals, which began to appear in the Arabic context from the beginning of the twentieth century onwards, appear in many regards to have been built on the Greco-Roman heritage. At the same time, however, these manuals also included references to Arabic rhetoric, which particularly regards *faṣāḥa* (purity of language) and *balāgha* (eloquence).[62] Taking into account this mixture of two traditions, the manuals constitute a transcultural phenomenon[63]; however, within the context of the approach examined here, which focuses on the dramatic dimension of the preacher's performance, the categories stemming from the Greco-Roman tradition are of particular importance.

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[56] Al-Ḥūfī, *Fann al-khaṭāba*, 128: *Idhā aradta minnī an abkiya fa-ʿalayka an tabkiya awwalan.* (“If you would have me weep you must first weep yourself.”) The original is “Si vis me flere, dolendum est/primum ipsi tibi.” Quintus Horatius Flaccus (Horace), *The Works of Horace*, ed. Christopher Smart and Theodore Alois Buckley (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1863), lines 102–103. Cf. on the question of self-affectation in Islamic sermons also Max Stille, “Conceptualizing Compassion in Communication for Communication Emotional Experience in Islamic Sermons (Bengali *waʿẓ maḥfils*),” *Contributions to the History of Concepts* 11 (2016).

[57] Cicero, *On the Orator: Books 1-2*, 106–107.

[58] This does not allow for a confusing of the two roles. A clear distinction is usually made between the actor and the orator; at least in antiquity and during the Middle Ages, the conceptualization changes with Humanism in early modernity. Jutta Sandstede and Gustavo Becerra-Schmidt, “Deklamation,” in *Historisches Wörterbuch der Rhetorik*, vol. 2 (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1994), 491.

[59] Rüdiger Campe, “Affizieren und Selbstaffizieren: Rhetorisch-anthropologische Näherung ausgehend von Quintilian, *Institutio oratoria,* VI 1–2,” in *Rhetorische Anthropologie: Studien zum homo rhetoricus*, ed. Josef Kopperschmidt (Munich: Fink, 2000), 138. Here the references for Aristotle and Cicero are also given.

[60] Würsch, “Rhetorik und Stilistik,” 2041.

[61] Würsch, “Rhetorik und Stilistik,” 2041.

Preaching and Dramatic Aesthetic Experience

When it comes to a theoretical analysis of Khālid's preaching performance, it is on the basis of the above-mentioned categories in rhetorical and dramatic theories that this performance must be understood, insofar as it allows for a particular dramatic aesthetic experience. Thus far, I have provided a description of the selected section of Khālid's program and have subsequently linked Khālid's performative techniques to some central outlines made in rhetorical and homiletical theory. In a last step, a number of the observations which have been made will be taken up again in order to discuss how far it is justified to speak of a concretely dramatic aesthetic experience.

The quotation from Horace provides an apt starting point from which to explain this experience, because Horace connects the audience's weeping to the orators/actors weeping. It goes without saying that what Horace says on the act of weeping and the feeling of sadness can be applied to other emotions and their expression as well. For anger or joy, the orator or actor is likewise advised to feel the emotions in order to affect his audience. While it is clear that when it comes to conveying emotions, the whole body plays a role, the biggest attention is given to the face or rather to the facial expressions. This is owed to the fact that we express emotions particularly through our mimics. A closer look into this process will allow us to better understand the effectivity and also the importance of this mechanism.

Identification and Neuroscience

The affectation of the spectator has been a crucial point of rhetorical as well as dramatic theory over the last 2500 years; in the last decades it has been increasingly explored by neuroscientists. They have been able to discover the neuronal basis for what scholars from different fields in the humanities had described on the basis of observations. It is because of the mirror neurons that when we watch someone performing a certain action we often feel (at least to a degree) as if we were performing the action or feel the emotion ourselves. These neurons, which were discovered in the mid-nineties, mirror the actions of those we observe by triggering similar neuronal actions that make us feel as though we were actually performing the factual and active actions.[64]

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[62] See, for example, Aḥmad Aḥmad Ghalwash, *Qawāʿid al-khaṭāba wa-fiqh al-jumʿa wa-l-ʿīdayn*, 3rd ed. ([Cairo]: Muʾassasat ar-Risāla, 2012 (1986)), 25–26, 75, 109.

[63] I explore the differentiation between the two traditions and their modern entanglement in Scholz, "Modern Arabic Rhetorical Manuals" (in press) and in Scholz, "Cicero and Quintilian in the Arab World?" (in press).

One of the most famous descriptions in this regard—well before the discovery of the mirror neurons—is Theodor Lipps's account of the ropedancer. Lipps described his experience when observing the ropedancer's performance with the telling phrase "I feel myself in him."[65] To express that he not only followed the dancer's movements, which he observed, but that he also felt them, in a sense, as if he was dancing himself. The German term which he coined in this regard, *Einfühlung*, (which has since been translated as empathy)[66] expresses the idea of feeling *into* somebody else.[67] Indeed, when observing the ropedancer we can't avoid twitching when the dancer risks losing his balance.[68]

With regard to the expression of emotions, experiments have shown, for example, that "humans, when watching people showing facial expressions corresponding to well-defined emotions, covertly activate the same muscles which are involved in the creation of those expressions."[69] As the activation of these muscles is also linked to the perception of the connected emotional states, this allows us to experience the corresponding emotions.[70] These processes, which depend on the mentioned mirror neurons, thus allow us—simply speaking—to experience, to a degree, what we see on the screen. In this case, therefore, the experience which the actor or preacher depicts, affects us in such a way that we feel the same feelings the preacher or actor depicts. In a further step one might add that the degree to which we believe the story to have happened in the depicted way (i.e. with the depicted emotions) is the degree to which we have “experienced” the believed story ourselves.

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[64] Meike Uhrig, *Darstellung, Rezeption und Wirkung von Emotionen im Film: Eine interdisziplinäre Studie* (Wiesbaden: Springer VS, 2015), 20.

[65] Allan Young, "Kultur im Gehirn: Empathie, die menschliche Natur und Spiegelneuronen," in *Wie geht Kultur unter die Haut? Emergente Praxen an der Schnittstelle von Medizin, Lebens- und Sozialwissenschaft*, ed. Jörg Niewöhner (Bielefeld: Transcript-Verlag, 2008), 35.

[66] Gustav Jahoda, "Theodor Lipps and the Shift from 'Sympathy' to 'Empathy'," *Journal of the History of the Behavioral Sciences* 41, no. 2 (2005): 151.

[67] For a brief survey of Lipps's use of this term, see Jahoda, "Theodor Lipps." For a discussion of the origins of empathy as concept, see Jørgen B. Hunsdahl, "Concerning Einfühlung (Empathy): A Concept Analysis of its Origin and Early Development," *Journal of the History of the Behavioral Sciences* 3, no. 2 (1967).

[68] Hans Bernhard Schmid, *Moralische Integrität: Kritik eines Konstrukts* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2011), 163.

[69] Antonella Corradini and Alessandro Antonietti, "Mirror Neurons and their Function in Cognitively Understood Empathy," *Consciousness and Cognition* 22, no. 3 (2013): 1154.

[70] Corradini and Antonietti, "Mirror Neurons," 1154.

On the basis of these short outlines it becomes clear that narrative and performative techniques, such as those used by ʿAmr Khālid, making extensive use facial expressions, gestures, and voice modulations, can provide a particular dramatic aesthetic experience.[71] We no longer merely listen to the (possibly) distanced report of events, we also experience the story that is being told bodily, just as ʿAmr Khālid tells us that Ḥasan and Ḥusayn did when listening to their grandfather.

This particular dramatic experience can be further discussed from different perspectives. One might, for example, approach the different functions of the described dramatic delivery, among which the bodily experience is only the first. Such functions certainly include aspects like entertainment, religious edification, effective religious teaching etc. but are not limited to these. It would be beyond the scope of this chapter to list and discuss all possible functions even if only superficially; however, one aspect which seems to be of particular interest in this context, might be briefly sketched, namely Khālid’s preaching as a form of remembering the past and linking the past to present.

Remembering the Past Emotionally: Linking it to the present

The past only comes into being when it is referred to,[72] and the means and places by which we refer to the past are manifold. As for the places, preaching can certainly be counted among the most prominent memory-institutions: In sermons the past, or rather that part which is regarded as relevant for a given group, is continuously referenced and re-told. With regard to the means of telling the past, Khālid’s preaching is certainly particular.

Based on the outlines mentioned above, it is characteristic of Khālid’s dramatic preaching that it not only refers back to the past, but also that it brings the past to the present. Obviously, dramatic preaching as described in this article is not completely exclusive in this regard; talking about the past always brings the past to the present. However, Khālid not only talks *about* the past, but he in a sense *re-enacts* (episodes) from the past, when he acts out how the figures of early Islamic history (are believed to) have behaved. He not only *tells* the events diegetically, he also *shows* them mimetically. Taking into account rhetorical theory and the insights provided by neuropsychological research, it makes a difference whether we approach the past by reading about it in third person or listen to someone talking about it, or whether we intensively experience it emotionally and

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[71] The described aesthetic experience is only one possibility; the spectator might also avoid such an identification by keeping what has been called a certain aesthetic distance.

[72] Jan Assmann, *Das kulturelle Gedächtnis: Schrift, Erinnerung und politische Identität in frühen Hochkulturen*, 5th ed. (Munich: Beck, 2005), 31.

"reproduce" the emotions which the preacher's (or actor's) facial expressions, gestures, and voice evoke. This is obviously not to say that a written text or an oral account in the third person does not produce emotional responses. Written and oral texts also produce responses and can eventually even contain them, to cite one recent theory.[73] Such processes and responses have been differently analyzed and reflected upon throughout the history of literary theory. However, given the prominent importance of stimulation through the moving image, the acting out of the story and the preacher's bodily as well as vocal performance add further emotional stimuli to our own experience.[74]

In the chosen passage Khālid exploits the possibilities of presenting and showing the past emotionally. He does so not only for the sake of remembrance, but also to link the past to the present, and to present it as a model. What further characterizes Khālid's preaching is that the previously established identification with the protagonists, for which his empathy evoking delivery plays a central role, serves as a basis for addressing the spectator. Having told the story of Ḥasan and Ḥusayn listening to what their grandfather, the Prophet, had experienced, and having underlined that their experience of this account was a bodily one that the two children felt as if it had happened to themselves, "as if it was a part of them," Khālid suddenly interrupts his account. He does so, in order to address the spectator; his hands, which have been performing vividly the different gestures, now lie still on the desk, and his face no longer depicts the protagonists' emotions. Instead, he raises his eyebrows in a quizzical expression: "Do you love the truth? You have taken somebody's right (*ḥaqq*). Are you close to the Prophet? Are you close to Ḥusayn?"

It is important to underline the contrast of this address with the preacher's previous performance. For about a minute, the spectator's role was one of identification with the different protagonists; the same applies to different sections before the analyzed passage as well. He was not addressed in his role of the spectator, but virtually, in the place of Ḥasan and Ḥusayn: Khālid geared his mimetic performance towards the spectator's identification with the story's protagonists. The spectator was expected to be affected by the story of the Prophet, just as Ḥasan and Ḥusayn were. When Khālid addresses the spectator, asking about his closeness to the Prophet and his closeness to Ḥusayn, he builds on this previous identification. Through his dramatic aesthetic identification, the spectator has in a sense experienced the story 'bodily.' While asking the spectator about his closeness to Ḥusayn, however, Khālid shakes his head and answers the question himself: "You have taken somebody's right." This assertion, encapsulates the general message of Khālid's preaching, which often boils down to an exhortation to improve yourself in order to lead a better life. What is important here is obviously less in the message than in its form.

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[73] Simone Winko, *Kodierte Gefühle: Zu einer Poetik der Emotionen in lyrischen und poetologischen Texten um 1900* (Berlin: Schmidt, 2003).

[74] Cf. "Keine andere Kunstform produziert so intensive und vielfältige Gefühlsreaktionen wie das Kino." Margrit Tröhler and Vinzenz Hediger, "Ohne Gefühl ist das Auge der Vernunft blind: Eine Einleitung," in *Kinogefühle: Emotionalität und Film*, ed. Matthias Brütsch (Marburg: Schüren, 2005), 7.

Conclusion

Linking his reflections to rhetorical theory, Charles Hirschkind has underlined that preaching practices often "serve as a vehicle of ethical improvement."[75] In the present analysis I built on his work by trying to insist on concrete rhetorical strategies and on the theories these strategies relate to or stem from. Khālid's core narrative and performative strategies have been analyzed through a close reading of a short section. By reflecting upon his preaching in terms of rhetorical and aesthetical theory, under recourse to some central observations made by neuropsychological research, it has been described in analytical terms as enabling[76] a concretely dramatic aesthetic experience. Despite its entertaining dimension, the aesthetical aspects discussed in this chapter also serve a concretely rhetorical goal: persuading the spectator. Two rhetorical manuals used in the context of Islamic preaching have allowed me to sketch out the theoretical basis for oratory performances like Khālid's. On the one hand, relying on the Greco-Roman rhetorical tradition and on the other including elements from the Arabic tradition of *ʿilm al-balāgha* (science of eloquence), these manuals are markedly transcultural. The analyzed rhetorical strategies, which are characteristic for Khālid's preaching style, have been particularly theorized within the Greco-Roman rhetorical tradition: mimetic representation, identification of the spectator with the actor or orator, and affectation of the spectator. This is due to the circumstance that the performative reflections on oratory delivery were developed in the context of Greco-Roman rhetoric, whereas Arabic rhetoric was more concerned with stylistic matters. Obviously, it would be completely essentialist to conclude that therefore Khālid's style is more 'Western' than 'Arabic.' One must not forget that the Arabs dealt with Greek rhetoric in the 'Middle Ages.' Furthermore, the modern Arabic rhetorical manuals, which not only draw extensively on the Greek and Greco-Arabic but also on the Roman, and later European rhetorical heritage started appearing at the end of the nineteenth century. Rhetorical theory, as I have used it in this article, is therefore not Arabic or European, but rather a historically well-established transcultural frame of reference; and this despite the fact that research focusing on the modern rhetorical manuals uniting different traditions has not yet received much attention in the field of Islamic Studies. If Khālid's example can serve to illustrate the importance of a ‘transcultural’ theoretic frame of reference, this corresponds well to Asef Bayat’s proposition to understand the phenomenon of ʿAmr Khālid as “a reinvention of a new religious style by Egypt’s globalizing youth.”[77] It is not surprising that in times of New Media this youth style is marked by its dramatic performances. However, while it is partly an expression of what Partick Haenni calls ‘market Islam,’ the dramatic element may also have to be understood as an important dimension of religious experience today.

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[75] Charles Hirschkind, *The Ethical Soundscape: Cassette Sermons and Islamic Counterpublics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 37.

[76] I use the term enabling here, because the factual aesthetic experience will always depend, to a degree at least, on the spectator's pre-dispositions.

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[77] Bayat, *Life as Politics: How Ordinary People Change the Middle East*, 134.

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PART III

Experiencing Religion in and through Literature

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Popular Sufi Narratives and the Parameters of the Bengali *Imaginaire*

Abstract A number of Bangla tales dedicated to the fictional or mythic holy men (*pīrs*) and women (*bibīs*) in the Muslim community have circulated widely over the last five centuries alongside the tales of their historical counterparts. They are still printed and told today, and performed regularly in public, especially in the Sunderbans, the mangrove swamps in the southern reaches of Bangladesh and West Bengal. Among them are figures such as the itinerant veterinarian Mānik Pīr, the tamer of tigers Baḍakhān Gājī and his female counterpart Bonbibī, and the matron of cholera Olābibī. Because of the way they defy the strictly demarcated categories that have come to define Hindu and Muslim in the last two centuries, Orientalist scholars, conservative Muslim factions, linguists, and literary historians have until recently rejected or ignored altogether this group of stories as purely entertaining with no religious, linguistic, or literary merit. I argue that not only are these fictions religious, they also create an important space within the limiting strictures of Islamic theology, history, and law that allows people to exercise their imagination to investigate alternative worlds. These texts simultaneously offer a critique of religion and society through their parodies, rather than articulating doctrine or theology. Because they are fictions, any approach to their religiosity must use hermeneutic strategies suited to the literary world in which they operate. But the imagination exercised in these tales is not unlimited, rather the parameters of the discursive arena in which they operate—the *imaginaire*—can be defined by two types of presuppositions and two types of intertextuality, which in turn allows us more clearly to understand the work of these important texts. The example of the tale of Bonbibī will be used to illustrate this.

In manuscripts that were composed at least as far back as the late fifteenth century CE, there exists a substantial body of literature in the Bangla language that tells the adventures of Sufi *pīrs* and *bibīs*, accomplished holy men and women respectively. This in itself is not surprising, for anywhere there is a substantial Muslim population stories of these saintly figures will circulate; but in this cycle of tales the heroes and heroines are entirely fictional.[1] They have no demonstrable association with anyone connected to what passes as the historical record, though there are on occasion allusions to the past that are suggested by the names, forming a rhetoric of association. As fictions, these stories read very much like the fabulous tales of the Arabian Nights; indeed, we can identify a number of narrative motifs they have in common. The primary heroes of these tales include figures such as the itinerant veterinarian Mānik Pīr; the commander of the tiger army of the Sunderbans, Baḍakhān Gājī; and his female analogue, the matron of the forest, Bonbibī. Other figures include Kwaja Khijir, patron saint of boatmen; Olābibī, who controls cholera and water-borne diseases; and Satya Pīr, who overtly signals allegiance to both *hinduyāni* and *musalmāni* perspectives on divinity.[2] As fictions, what kind of religiosity do these texts project, and how might we interpret this religiosity since they do not participate in the discourses of theology or law?

In their basic plots and structures, these tales bear some resemblance to the allegorical romances called *premākhyāns*, but that resemblance is a superficial one. Those *premākhyāns* or 'narrations of love' serve as an explicit platform for Sufi religious teachings, and that instruction is modulated through an exquisitely refined and formal æsthetic of allegory.[3] Bangla *Premākhyāns* explicitly trace their origins to the Persian *ma͟snavī* and their vernacular flowerings in Avadhī, Dakanī, Urdu, and Hindavī.[4] Unlike the highly intentional and heavily symbolic *premākhyāns*, with their strict æsthetic drawn from traditional Persian poetics and Sanskrit-derived *rasa* theory, these popular Bangla tales of *bibīs* and *pīrs* make no attempt to deliver overt or ritual directives, nor do the shapes of the narratives enjoy a clear genre classification. Their æsthetic style demonstrates a working knowledge of both Sanskrit and Persian traditions referred not through refined application, but indirectly through allusion and homage and even through deliberately distorted partial applications of those formal æsthetic principles in an often sophisticated parody that belies their apparent simplicity. They share no formal structural requirements beyond vague characterizations as *kathās*, which can be glossed simply as 'tales,' and they convey a popular religious outlook that cannot be classified as traditionally theological. In short, they are popular narrative fictions informed by the general epoch, tales that for the last five centuries have appealed to a broad spectrum of the population without depending on sectarian claims. Although one of their primary functions is to entertain, they also seem to provoke other responses both positive and negative, a circumstance which hints at an important dimension of their religious work.

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[1] I follow the work of Thomasson who argues that fictional characters are 'artifactual,' that is, real abstract objects that have been created by their authors and thereby exist as such; see Amie L. Thomasson, "Fictional Characters and Literary Practices," *British Journal of Aesthetics* vol. 43, No. 2 (April 2003): 138–157; and for a more extended analysis, idem, *Fiction and Metaphysics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

[2] Throughout the body of this essay the modern capitalized terms 'Hindu' and 'Muslim' will refer to the monolithic constructs of political identity in late colonial and contemporary South Asia. The adjectives *musalmāni* and *hinduyāni* designate the indigenous categories of orientation (as opposed to 'identity'). All Bangla terms are transliterated without changing them to their Persian, Urdu, Arabic, or Sanskrit counterparts, which would be misleading because the semantic fields are not always identical, so *bibī* rather than *bībī*, and so forth.

[3] For a very nuanced survey of the *premākhyān* tradition, see Aditya Behl, *Love's Subtle Magic: An Indian Islamic Literary Tradition, 1379–1545*, ed., Wendy Doniger (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012). An excellent illustration of the Sufi doctrinal appropriation of the *premākhyān* can be found in Manjhan, *Madhumālatī: An Indian Sufi Romance*, trans. Aditya Behl and Simon Weightman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

[4] For a superb study of the relationship of Bangla *premākhyāns* to their predecessors, see Mamtājur Rahmān Tarafdār, *Bāṃlā romāṇṭik kābyer āoyādhī hindī paṭbhūmi* (Ḍhākā: Ḍhākā Viśvavidyālay, 1971); see also Oyākil Āhmad, *Bāṃlā romāṇṭik praṇayopākhyān* (Ḍhākā: Khān Brādārs eyāṇḍ Kompāni, 1970). For the

With a host of recognizable religious figures from traditions that today we would label Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist, and even Christian, and their commerce with a rather lengthy retinue of celestial figures, gods and goddesses, the tales are clearly fully cognizant of the multiple religious cosmologies operating in the Bangla-speaking world. But their precise status as religious texts is difficult to place because they are not overtly doctrinal or theological. Since the early nineteenth century, these tales have been eschewed entirely by Islamists and reform-minded factions, such as the Wahhabis and Salafis, who characterize them indiscriminately as imbecilic blasphemies; they are summarily dismissed. By the late nineteenth century this denigration became very public and vituperative in the print culture of the emerging Islamic discursive medium known as *musalmāni bāṅglā* or *dobhāṣī*.[5] So thorough was this smear campaign that one finds no mention of these texts today among the various Islamist literatures, only vague, formulaic admonitions against the dangers of *pīr* worship that were common in the later decades of the nineteenth and early decades of

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relationship of the *masnavī* to the romance and love literatures of Urdu and its variant vernaculars, see Anna Suvorova, *Masnavi: A Study of Urdu Romance*, trans. M. Osama Faruqi (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2000).

[5] See Ānisuzzāmān, *Muslim-mānasa o bāṃlā sāhitya (1757–1918)* (Reprint: Ḍhākā: Pyāpirās, 2001), passim, esp. ch. 3; see also Asim Roy, *The Islamic Syncretistic Tradition in Bengal* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), esp. 207–253. The *nasihat nāma* literature was often focused on trying to 'correct' what were deemed erroneous views and practices by the so-called masses; see Rafiuddin Ahmed, *The Bengal Muslims, 1871–1906: A Quest for Identity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981), 120–122; and Sufia M. Uddin, *Constructing Bangladesh: Religion, Ethnicity, and Language in an Islamic Nation* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 65–76. See also Neilesh Bose, *Recasting the Region: Language, Culture, and Islam in Colonial Bengal* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

the twentieth centuries.[6] At the same time, Orientalist scholars saw them as 'syncretistic' works that confused what were—from the pristine perspectives of those romanticizing scholars—distinct and exclusive Muslim and Hindu categories of theology and praxis. This prompted researchers to lay these tales aside as texts unworthy of investigation.[7] Ironically, Bengali scholars of the same period who sought to establish a nationalist literary and linguistic history similarly dismissed these narratives as doggerel productions, which were at best fairy tales or folk tales, with all the negative connotations that label carries in the context of high literature.[8] Yet in spite of these various repudiations, the stories have endured among the general population, in some cases for more than six centuries, and many continue to be circulated today. If the texts represent some wayward sectarian form that deviates from the conservative articulations of Islam in Bengal, and if they fail to conform to any of the traditional schools of theology, surviving only as popular tales with no single indigenous genre, is there anything one can make of the religious æsthetic of these productions?

Fiction and Ideology

In their haste to set aside these tales, fundamentalists and scholars alike failed to recognize that these *kathās* articulate a sensibility and cosmology that must be termed Islamic, no matter how irregular by conservative standards. They make clear, however, that they are just as attuned to Hindu and other cosmological constructs. In this world, Āllā (as the name is written in this Bangla) reigns in heaven, and all manner of *musalmāni* functionaries carry out their activities on earth with a steady traffic between the two spheres. Āllā intervenes in the lives of his subjects, especially the *pīrs*, those favored friends of God. Unlike the tales of the so-called historical *pīrs*, whose content and circulation are closely linked to the political arena, these tales of the fictional *pīrs* are less dependent on any explicit historical context—though certain narrative temporalities do suggest broad time frames. At the same time, they provide an oblique but often biting commentary on political issues without always explicitly identifying the objects of their ridicule.

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[6] Typical of this was the vigorous warning against the corruption of bogus *phakir*s and *pīrs* in this final Kali age of degradation in Abbas Ali Najir, *Kalir phakīrer khelā* (Lakpur: by the author, 1920).

[7] For my critique of syncretism, see Tony K. Stewart, "In Search of Equivalence: Conceiving Muslim-Hindu Encounter through Translation Theory," *History of Religions* 40, no. 3 (Winter 2001): 261–288.

[8] The emergence of *musalmāni bāṅglā* or *dobhāṣī*, is well documented in Qazi Abdul Mannan, *The Emergence and Development of Dobhasi Literature in Bengal* (*up to 1855 ad*), 2nd ed. (Dacca: Bangla Academy, 1974). The great linguist Suniti Kumar Chatterji refused to acknowledge *dobhāṣī* as a form of Bangla; see Suniti Kumar Chatterji, *The Origin and Development of Bengali Language*, 2 pts. in 3 vols. (Reprint: Calcutta: George Allen Unwin, 1975), 1:206. D.C. Sen saw the forms as primitive dialects; see Dinesh Chandra Sen, *History of Bengali Language and Literature*, rev. ed. (Calcutta: Calcutta University Press, 1954), 683. An especially stinging critique of the effects of this classification as folk literature and the subsequent collecting strategy is cogently outlined in Giuseppe Flora, *On Fairy Tales, Intellectuals, and Nationalism in Bengal (1880–1920)*, Supplemento no. 1 alla Rivista degli Studi Orientali, vol. LXXV (Pisa: Istituti Editoriali e Poligrafici Internazionali, 2002). Even the venerable Md. Enamul Haq virtually eliminated *dobhāṣī* texts from the condensed English version of his literary history; see Md. Enamul Haq, *Muslim Bengali Literature* (Karachi: Pakistan Publications, 1957). Literary historian Sukumar Sen was divided, opting to include Mānik Pīr and Satya Pīr material, but excluding *premākhyān* and nearly all other forms of *dobhāṣī* literature in his history; see Sukumār Sen, *Bāṅglā sāhityer itihās*, 4 vols. in 6 pts. (Reprint. Kalikātā: Eastern Publishers, 1383–1388 bs [ca. 1976–1981]), vol. 1, pt. 2: 465–491.

The fact that these tales are admittedly fictional modifies the relationship of the narrative to any suggested Islamic doctrine, theology, or ritual and, at the same time, introduces an æsthetic that is generically religious, literary, and performative. In order to help clarify the nature of the religious quality of these texts—following Pierre Machery who follows Tzvetan Todorov—we must recognize that the worlds depicted in these fictions are autotelic, self-contained, and as a result are never subject to the truth test (the very means by which they have been dismissed by traditionalists and fundamentalists because they have read them as theological). The fictional worlds created in these narratives are independent of the world of ordinary things,[9] but that independence, I argue, opens an important space that by its very nature invites authors to critique prevailing doctrinal and theological norms as well as political institutions, and in some instances to explore new possibilities; that is, to imagine a different kind of world. Machery writes:

> . . . the autonomy of the writer’s discourse is established from its relationship with the other uses of language; everyday speech, scientific propositions. By its energy and thinness literary discourse mimics theoretical discourse, rehearsing but never actually performing its script. But in that evocative power, by which it denotes a specific reality, it also imitates the everyday language which is the language of ideology. We could offer a provisional definition of literature as being characterised by this power of parody. Mingling the real uses of language in an endless confrontation, it concludes by *revealing* their truth. Experimenting with language rather than inventing it, the literary work is both the analogy of knowledge and a caricature of customary ideology.[10]

As a result of their nature as fictions, the popular stories of the *pīrs* can articulate only a simulacrum of ideology or religious doctrine, otherwise the texts would cease to be fictional and would become forms of propaganda or manuals for instruction. While the *premākhyāns* are composed deliberately to instruct the adept in the most esoteric reaches of Sufi doctrine through allegory (and cannot then under Machery's definition be understood as proper fictions), the fictional tales of the *pīrs*, by virtue of their being fictions, are positioned to provide a parodic critique of prevailing theologies, both *musalmāni* and *hinduyāni*. Any conspiracy theory that would suggest that these authors set out intentionally to critique *musalmāni* and *hinduyāni* theologies or their general ideological bases removes these texts from the realm of literature. However, the fictions do not champion a clearly delineated doctrinal stance, rather, as I have argued elsewhere, this parodic function is an inevitable exercise in the *subjunctive*, an impromptu exploratory of alternatives to the world of strict agendas as found in the traditional categories of theology, history, and law.[11] That variation is significant.

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[9] Pierre Machery, *A Theory of Literary Production*, trans. Geoffrey Wall (London: Routledge, 1978), 44–65.

[10] Machery, *A Theory of Literary Production*, 59; emphasis in the original. The implications of this argument are extended for several more pages, esp. 59–65.

Whereas the *premākhyāns* share a cosmology grounded in Sufi theologies, which they endeavor to illustrate—a perspective matched to overt theological propositions and realized through the personal experience of ritual (no matter how problematic for the followers of the traditional Sunni schools)—the *pīr kathās*, as true fictions, stand independently and require another tack for interpretation. Although they share no common structural genre, appearing variously as *kathā, kecchā, kāhinī, yātrā, pālā* and *pālāgān*, and *pāñcālī,*[12] their narratives participate in the generic structures of what is known in Western poetics as Romance. The plots clearly conform to both Frye's notions of the narrative structure of Romance (with the hero descending into a realm of chaos and darkness only to recover and set the world right thereby establishing a major intervention in the world order),[13]

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[11] One of the primary functions of these narratives—intentional or not—is an exploration of different possibilities, the different strategies, by which Islamic cosmologies (plural) can be insinuated into, be reconciled with, or accommodate and appropriate preexisting Bengali cosmologies; see Tony K. Stewart, "Religion in the Subjunctive: Vaiṣṇava Narrative, Sufi Counter-Narrative in Early Modern Bengal," *Journal of Hindu Studies* 6, no.1 (2013): 52–72. James C. Scott has argued that popular dramas and other public performances are an important way in which subalterns give voice to their discontents, often without the dominant classes fully understanding the nature of the critique; see James C. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Resistance* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985); and idem., *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990).

[12] In this context *kathā* and *kecchā* are essentially synonymous, both meaning tale; but the texts are also circulated as *kāhinī* or old story (often questionably glossed as 'history'), *yātrā* or public dramatic presentation, often including question-answer routines, *pālā* or *pālāgān* as the story punctuated with song, while the *pāñcālī* signifies a publicly performed dance-drama. For a recent study of these popular forms in Bangladesh that include performances of these tales of the *bibīs* and *pīrs*, see Saymon Zakaria, *Pronomohi Bongomata: Indigenous Cultural Forms of Bangladesh*, with a foreword by Tony K. Stewart (Dhaka: Nymphea Publications, 2011).

[13] Northrop Frye, *The Secular Scripture: A Study of the Structure of Romance*, The Charles Eliot Norton Lectures 1974–75 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1976).

and Fuchs' take on their episodic style, what she called the 'segmented narrative' wherein each plot is interrupted to advance the others toward some kind of utopian end, which delays actually constituting the story itself.[14] As Romances, any kind of religious perspective will, out of necessity, be truncated and reduced to the most general contours consistent with all fictional tales.

The autotelic nature of the Romance seems to divorce the content of those tales from their historical time and place, making them somehow timeless. Yet the various references and allusions to political figures, sacred geography, and so forth, indicate certain temporalities that do situate them generally. While one cannot posit a direct causal link to any of the worlds depicted in those tales to what we recognize as 'real life' (that is, the historical experience of religion in the Bangla-speaking regions), there has to be some connection because of the conditions of their production. It is difficult to accept as 'factual' (referring to the prevailing Muslim religious perspectives today) a world where Āllā cruises the heavens in his celestial vehicle, where a *pīr* can capture Mā Gāṅgā (the Ganges River as goddess) in his shoulder bag, or Baḍakhān Gājī might muster an army of thousands of tigers. Yet those very images emerge from the historical context that made them possible. Otherwise it is very difficult to imagine the authors being stimulated to generate such imaginary worlds.

The seeming impasse created by granting the autotelic quality of the narratives (that would remove them from the real-life of religious legislation) is partially a function of their ontology, that is, the characterizations about their 'reality' is actually an attempt to address their status *vis-à-vis* that of 'things' in the ordinary world. The narratives-as-fictions stand quite apart as language-dependent and language-mediated realities, a product that takes its reality purely from discourse. Epistemologist Nicholas Rescher provides an opening. He observes that "discourse alone underwrites no workable distinction between fact and fiction," rather context is required, which is a standard of measure that lies outside of discourse." . . . As far as the discourse itself is concerned, a statement's fictionality—like its truth or falsity—is altogether invisible: it is something that cannot be extracted from the statement itself and generally requires us to look beyond discourse as such." As a result, fictions create difficulties for theorists because the fiction's internal truth does not correspond "with fact *tout court*, but rather pivots on an oblique, story-mediated correspondence with fact."[15]

Rescher's argument serves to pin down the elusive ontological nature of fiction and provides a furtive connection that is precisely the entry point we need to see how these fictions do their work. Arguing that all worlds are imagined—that is, they are the result of mental constructs—fictional worlds nonetheless present a very special case in the projection or perception of these worlds despite sharing roots in human cultural production.

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[14] Barbara Fuchs, *Romance* (London: Routledge, 2004), 57f.

[15] Nicholas Rescher, "On the Ways and Vagaries of Fictions" in *Studies in Epistemology*, Nicholas Rescher Collected Papers, vol. xiv (Leipzig: Ontos Verlag, 2006), 89–90.

> Neither I nor anyone else can offer an example of a possible world for which there is not a real-world author, a living, breathing producer who conjures up some possibility by a *coup d'esprit*. All of the possible worlds at our disposal are fictional constructs arising from the suppositional thought work of the living, breathing individuals who project them by way of imagination.[16]

For our purposes, the point is that only real-world authors have created these tales of *pīrs* and *bibīs*,[17] and it is their discourse that makes them possible. The discourses of history, theology, and law that define the bulk of Islamic literatures constitute different discourses. The fictional discourses of the *pīrs* and *bibīs* stand apart from the legal discourses and operate according to their own standards; they are of necessity deeply rooted in the imaginal world of their authors.

The Realm of the *Imaginaire*

As anyone who has examined the intellectual history of Islam knows, each of the traditional schools of law—Hanafi, Maliki, Shafi'i, and Hanbali—seeks to establish the content of what they consider to be God's law, the *shari'ah*. In turn, each follows strictly its own constraining principles by which that law is to be interpreted, *ijtihad*, and seeks to apply those determinations through *fiqh*, that is, through morality, ritual, and social regulation. Consistency in these areas is sought by all, but they differ in the evaluations of the effectiveness (rightness) of the bases of authority and the order of their application or elimination. The fictional tales of *pīrs* and *bibīs* are of course governed by no such overt regulation, yet I argue that they are not produced indiscriminately and without constraints and that these constraints share generalizable features in common with those of the schools of law. The creators of these tales do not simply make up anything they want, rather there are limitations on what they can imagine, historically grounded limitations that are both restricting and enabling. These limitations define the discursive parameters of the *imaginaire*, which is the realm within which the imagination operates.

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[16] Rescher, "On the Ways and Vagaries of Fictions," 79.

[17] From the perspective of the academic study of religion, normative assertions of any kind of divine origin or inspiration for stories or revelations of texts are impossible to investigate, much less affirm; so the working assumption can only be that textual and ritual production in religion is always a function of human production.

The discursive arena of any text is the realm of the *imaginaire*, a term which should not be confused with the imagination.[18] Rather, as I am using the term, the *imaginaire* is the 'space' where the imagination is exercised or where imaginative activity takes place. The *imaginaire* is itself structured; it is always historically grounded to particular times and places and, as a result, has observable restrictions and an observable conceptual perimeter. The *imaginaire* defines the 'realm of possibility' for any speaker or actor, one of the most compelling limitations being that of language. It is now widely accepted that the general proposition of the choice of language inevitably structures thought,[19] but historical context likewise dictates other structures of authority that place limits on what can be imagined, and so it is curbed by accepted practices and the definers of various modes of discourse, whether in social and legal systems, science, theology, or simply common sense. At the same time, these constraints should not just be seen as limiting, but enabling, for they provide frameworks within which the imagination can be exercised and which define the boundaries against which the imagination can push and expand. It is seldom possible to envision a world that runs completely counter to prevailing forms—changes can be wrought, but the structuring itself is seldom, if ever, outside of these constraints. At the same time with each new formulation, the shape of the constraint itself can and does shift, often subtly and imperceptibly and usually in gradual processes,[20] even in major paradigm shifts which are not quick and often very messy.[21] This is not to propose some new form of intellectual history; these are pragmatic considerations to help us control our understanding of these processes of creativity, inevitably produced in conversation with others at the time and before. In a sense, we are talking about Bakhtin's dialogic process,[22] as authors and other actors give voice to their perspectives and their conceptual worlds. My concern, however, is to learn how to map these worlds in consistent ways that will, in turn, point us toward issues of import.

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[18] I do not deploy the term in the same manner as Sartre, who saw *l'imaginaire* as a special form of consciousness; his concept is closer to what I consider in English the 'imagination.' See Jean-Paul Sartre, *The Imaginary: A Phenomenological Psychology of the Imagination*, trans. Jonathan Webber, rev. Arlette Elkaïm-Sartre (London: Routledge, 2004); Sartre's original text from the 1940 Gallimard edition was simply titled *L'imaginaire.*

[19] See Edward Sapir, *Culture, Language and Personality*, ed. D. G. Mandelbaum (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1949), and his student, Benjamin Lee Whorf, *Language, Thought, and Reality* (Boston: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1956). Their theories, which seem to have overstated the case about the unthinkability of certain concepts in other languages, are not without their critics today.

[20] Foucault's observations about the nature of historical intellectual shifts are germane here.

[21] Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962).

[22] M. M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, ed. Michael Holquist, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981).

Some years ago, while mining bibliographical entries for intertextuality I came across a small article by Jonathan Culler, titled “Presupposition and Intertextuality,”[23] which made me realize that the specific principles by which the scholars of the Islamic tradition had generated authoritative legal interpretations were actually a subset of a more generalizable set of propositions that is applicable to all literary forms. Culler’s observations are not proposed as the basis of a system of interpretation, but rather highlight four features that any hermeneutic exercise should or could productively analyze to place texts into an imaginal landscape, an intellectual and even cultural history. As we have alluded, texts do not come into existence in a void, though their provenance may often prove elusive; these four factors help define the conditions that allow for the production of any text and can, then, guide its understanding. The two forms of presupposition are *logical* and *pragmatic*, and the two forms of intertextuality are *explicit* (or overt) and *implied* (or covert). These factors define a text’s intellectual context, its historical conversation partners, and its implied audience, who are in turn invited to understand the text according to its own standards of production and consumption. They serve both as constraints on what can be envisioned by these authors in locatable historical contexts, and which equally serve as opportunities for these authors to innovate. How these same texts are later incorporated into new forms of discourse will naturally change their position vis-à-vis other texts and groups (especially obvious when they are co-opted for new histories or teleologies), but the initial situation (where the text represents only ‘the present’) allows us to uncover the terms of its initial creation. If we are careful in our delineation of these four elements, our exegesis of the content of texts, and our understanding of the initial function of these texts, should be much more reliable, and the relationship they bear to existing religious cosmologies should be better understood—that is, we will be better able to gauge the cultural and religious work of these fictional narratives.

Presuppositions: Logical and pragmatic

Every discursive arena is governed by a set of *logical presuppositions* or rules for conducting discourse. These include such things as what constitutes a rational argument, how to draw a proper inference, or what is allowable as a ‘fact’ or proof. The formal nature of logic, such as the mathematical basis of the syllogism, will be included here. It also includes other sources of authority that serve the community in setting the rules for these logical, or at least acceptable arguments, for instance the role of revelation versus reason in traditional Islamic legal systems, resulting in the liberal application of ratiocination among the inheritors of the *muʿtazila* traditions, or the absolute denial of anything suggesting local cultural preferences or opinions by the conservative *hanbalite* school. The *imaginaire* is the realm within which the adjudication of these rules takes place; as will become apparent, no one standard ultimately prevailed in any community, regardless of sectarian or social orientation. Because the logical rules of discourse and their contexts were not uniform, language users constantly negotiated among them, often defining and redefining the same terminologies. A comparison of texts will surely reveal the range of what was acceptable among different communities of Bangla speakers. Cosmology is inevitably at the root of logical presupposition and vice versa, which means that all theological propositions fall under this heading, and so too do propositions such as the laws of physical and moral cause and effect (e.g., *karma*, which is prevalent throughout these *musalmāni* productions). The same is true for science, mathematics, legal codes, and related bureaucratic and institutional regulation, regardless of provenance.

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[23] Johnathan Culler, “Presupposition and Intertextuality,” *Modern Language Notes* 91 (1976): 1380–1396.

Every discourse takes certain identifiable shapes by assuming certain structures that Culler labels *pragmatic presuppositions*. The first obvious but often overlooked pragmatic issue is language—that the stories of the *pīrs* and *bibīs* were composed and circulated in the vernacular Bangla declares a particular audience that lies outside the discourses of law and theology, one that operated primarily through Persian and Arabic, or among the Hindu populations through Sanskrit. In literary issues, the choice of textual genre also signals a type of discursive activity that further defines its audience and the issues to be adjudicated; the choice of genre underscores how authors and even communities choose to present themselves. For instance, a Bangla version of the allegorical *premākhyān* of *Madhumālatī,*[24] which is itself a new creation based on the Avadhī version by Mañjhan, serves as a vehicle of instruction for Shaṭṭārī Sufi adepts as well as more popular story-telling entertainment in the *masnavī* tradition. A *pālagān* performance of the Madhumālatī romance, on the other hand, would likely situate the hero Manohar in local political terms, connecting him to contemporary power brokers—usually at their expense—in the course of what would be a highly entertaining and potentially stinging critical (but deniable) social commentary aimed at a decidedly local audience.

Further, genre is not limited to the outward literary form, but can also be formulated diegetically within the tales themselves. We can extend this concept to include the structured modes of discourse that populate the narratives. For example, when the antagonist presents himself in the *kathā* of Mānik Pīr initially as a merchant, the mode of discourse is replete with its own set of rituals and structured venues that intersect with the expectations and protocols of domestic and foreign courts; but when the same character assumes his persona as an itinerant *pīr*, he abruptly shifts to a completely different set of standards commensurate to that calling.[25] The choice of genre or the switching of diegetic frames of authority within the narratives, regardless of genre, signals authorial perspectives that reflect historical expectations of discursive negotiation. In other words, the choice of form conditions expectations and audiences as much as when the genre for delivery is chosen.

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[24] Muhāmmād Kabīr, *Madhumālatī*, ed. Āhmād Śariph (Ḍhākā: Bāṅglā Ākaḍemi, 1366 bs [ca. 1959]).

Intertextuality: Overt and covert

Every text, with its incipient vision of like-minded community, inevitably invokes precursor texts, both literally and figuratively, as one allows text to be more broadly understood as any prior source of recognizable authority. These precursors signal an *overt intertextuality*, an invocation that provides a context for the current story without having to spell it out. In practice, the naming of another text camouflages the vagueness of detailed content, leaving the audience with the sense of knowing more than is actually stated, allowing them to fill in blanks according to their own understanding of the applicability of that textual content to the current narrative. In this, overt intertextuality also serves to obviate, or at least lessen, the need to justify claims through other means, though references are often bound to the justification of logical presuppositions, as noted above. By invoking the precursor, its power and prestige are directly associated, if not immediately connected, to the present. There are obvious explicitly cited texts, such as the Arabic Qur'ān and the Sanskrit *Bhāgavata Purāṇa,* in many of the tales of the *pīrs* and *bibīs*, whose authority is invoked to shore up the position of various characters, to signal affiliation, or even to eliminate dissent by placing the narrative situation in the larger context of prior cultural constructs. The explicit invocation of a text clearly aligns an overtly religious text with tradition, but in a literary text the invocation points to a more general orientation that acknowledges but does not necessarily promote an explicit perspective on cosmological or other religious issues. Rather, it works through a rhetoric of association that often hinges on analogy of form. For instance, in the opening section of the *Mānik pīrer juhur nāmā*, the hero's father Badar Pīr is married to the princess Dudbibī, but prior to the wedding, when the four *mullahs* from heaven determine the astrologically precise time for the event, they deploy the Ketāb Qur'ān, which allows them to ascertain Āllā's favor for the marriage.[26] Here the Qur'ān obviously stands for authority and the source of all knowledge, whereas the function of the *mullahs* is precisely what *brāhmaṇs* do with their Sanskrit astrological texts (*jyotiṣa śāstra*). Thus, the impression for the audience is one of doing things correctly and according to prescription, no matter that the Qur'ān seldom enjoys such bibliomantic function.

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[25] Tony K. Stewart, "The Tales of Mānik Pīr: Protector of Cows in Bengal," in *Tales of God's Friends: Islamic Hagiography in Translation,* ed. John Renard (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), 312–332.

[26] Jaidi or Jayaraddhi, *Mānik pīrer juhur nāmā*, in *Punthi paricay*, ed. Pāñcānan Maṇḍal (Śāntiniketan: Viśva Bhārati, 1958), 313.

There are also precursors that are not textual. For instance, a fictional character from one story may suddenly intrude into another, or a historical character may show up in a fictional episode, changing the narrative by their appearance. Both of these types of appearances (often depicted as, but not limited to, flashbacks) are labeled analepsis. The heroine Lālmon in the famous tale *Lālmoner kāhinī* of Kavi Ārif, for example, was married to one young prince named Husāin Shāh, invoking the historical figure and all that his enlightened reign stood for.[27] The name situates the text historically because it had to have been composed after that legendary kingship. It also signals what most Bangla speakers see as an accommodating cultural perspective, for Husāin Shāh (r. 1494–1519) proved a champion of Bangla literature by commissioning the translation of texts such as *Rāmāyaṇ* and *Mahābhārat* into Bangla.[28] Similarly, *pīrs* and *bibīs* encounter or even seek the assistance of various Hindu goddesses, such as Lakṣmī, Caṇḍī, or Śītalā. As a rhetorical strategy, direct or overt intertextuality includes texts, people, events, and social and political structures, each one lending an authority that resists question.

Finally, a significant amount of the discourse defining the world of these early modern narratives hinges on unstated invocations of precursors, constituting an *implied* or *covert intertextuality*. For example, in Ābdur Rahīm's *Gājīkālu o cāmpāvatī kaṇyār punthi*, the sleeping hero Gājī is carried into Cāmpā's bedroom by curious færies who want to see the beautiful young woman and handsome young man side-by-side, an act of mischief that results in their immediate private betrothal. This sets the stage for the rest of the plot, which is the quest for reunion after the færies returned Gājī to his own room.[29] That episode perfectly mirrors the love story of Manohar and Madhumālatī, which in turn mirrors the tale of Qamar al-Zāman in *Arabian Nights*, thereby instantly signaling an expectation of a type of action, a type of leading character, and so forth, accomplished only by the invocation of the scene and no other reference.[30] Less explicitly, for instance in the shaping of the *umma*, however loosely defined in these texts, there is an implicit *imitatio muhammadi* at work that runs as an undercurrent to whatever concerns might emerge about proper conduct for *musalmāns*.[31] There are numerous examples of these implied precursors, and they often function well beyond the confines of the texts themselves. The point here is that the intertextualities situate any text, and in our immediate concern they situate the narratives of the *pīrs* and *bibīs* in such a way that they become part of a shared discourse among the authors and audiences, in spite of the autotelic nature of the narratives themselves. ‘Shared,’ however, does not automatically signal ‘identical’; thus, through a comparison of differences one can chart the subtle shifts in attitude or simply different perspectives altogether.

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[27] Tony K. Stewart, trans., "The Wazir's Daughter who Married a Sacrificial Goat" in *Fabulous Females and Peerless: Tales of Mad Adventure in Old Bengal* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 29–50.

[28] So powerful is this association that some historians, who confuse the nature of the text and its discourse, use this as evidence that Husāin Shāh's daughter began the worship of Satya Pīr, even though in the tale Lālmon is the wife of a young prince sharing Husāin Shāh's name.

[29] Munsi Abdur Rahīm Sāheb, *Gājikālu o cāmpāvatī kanyār puthi* (Kalikātā: Nuruddin Āhmmad at Gaosiyā Lāibrerī, 2001), 18–19.

[30] Richard F. Burton, trans., *A Plain and Literal Translation of the Arabian Nights Entertainments, Now Entitled the Book of the Thousand Nights and a Night* (London: Kama Shastra Society, 1885–1886), vol. 3: 212–348, vol. 4: 1–29; cited in the introduction to Manjhan, *Madhumālatī*, xxxi–xxxii.

Select Episodes from the *Bonbibī Jahurā nāmā*

To demonstrate briefly how these features might be useful for understanding the world of a particular text, I want to look at a short passage retold from the *Bonbibī jahurā nāmā* of Mohāmmad Khater, which was composed in the 1880s; direct translations of key phrases are in quotations.[32]

> Berāhim’s wife Phulbibī was unable to conceive, so Berāhim went to Mecca where he humbly petitioned Āllā for children. Fatemā was with the Prophet (*nabi*) in heaven (*behest*) and fetched the Qur’ān from its throne; the Prophet checked what was written and saw that Phulbibī was destined to be barren, but that two children—one boy, one girl—would be born in Berāhim’s house. At the command of Āllā, Berāhim was to marry Golālbibī, the daughter of the *phakir* Śāhā Jalil. “God then determined it was time for the great event of the birth. Āllā summoned Bonbibī and Śājaṅgali, both of whom who were residing in heaven, and issued this command: ‘You will be born to a *bibī* named Golāl in the home of Berāhim . . .” And so they descended with the express mission of confronting Dakṣīṇ Rāy and chastising Dhonāi.

After the marriage and once Golāl had become pregnant, tensions with Phulbibī festered and flared to anger.[33]

> On a rash promise to his unhappy first wife, Berāhim took his pregnant second wife Golālbibī and abandoned her in the forest. Golālbibī’s cry of distress generated sympathy among the wild animals who came to her aid, tending her as she gave birth to twins: a girl first and then a boy. Golālbibī felt incapable of raising both,

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[31] This is, of course, the impulse behind the *aḥādīth* traditions.

[32] Munśī Mohāmmad Khater Sāheb, *Bonbibī jahurā nāmā* (Kalikātā: Nuruddīn Āhmmad at Gaosiyā Lāibrerī, 1401 bs [ca. 1994]), 1–5. There are only minor variations in the many print editions of this text.

[33] Mohāmmad Khater, *Bonbibī jahurā nāmā*, 11–19.

so after consideration, she abandoned the girl. The wild animals—tigers, deer, and others—took it upon themselves to raise this little girl, and so she grew into her rôle as Bonbibī, Mistress of the Forest. After some years, Bonbibī managed to catch up with her brother, Śājaṅgali, and together they traveled to Medinā where they became the students or *murids* of one of the descendants of Hāsen.[34] After studying, they visited the grave of Fātemā to ask her blessings where a disembodied voice directed them to go to the land of the eighteen tides or the Sunderbans. They then visited the tomb of the Prophet (*nabi*) where they praised him as "the *guru* of all mendicants (*phakir*s)" and requested his imprimatur in their quest to establish the *khalifā* in that swampy place. His sanction came in the form of special hats, which they accepted; they made their obeisances, and left.

When they reached the edge of the swamplands, they were warned of a powerful landlord named Dakṣīṇ Rāy who controlled the fabulous wealth of the place: timber, honey, wax, and salt. When they entered the region and Śājaṅgali paused to give the call to prayer, the sound rolled across those low-lying islands like thunder. Dakṣīṇ Rāy was intimidated by the power of this call, so he quickly ordered his second, Sanātan, to investigate. He had immediately realized it was not the voice of his friend Baḍakhān Gājī, with whom he made peace after a lengthy battle. Sanātan reported back: he had espied a young man and a young woman, both dressed in black robes offering praise to Āllā with hands upraised and their staffs firmly planted in the ground, laying claim to the place in the name of Āllā. Rāy was furious that they had not first approached him for permission to enter, so he summoned his army of shape-shifting ghouls (*bhūts*) and hungry ghosts (*prets*) and prepared to show them who was in control. Rāy's mother, Nārāyaṇī intervened and advised him not to fight a woman because even should he win, there would be no victory, but should he lose, the humiliation would be permanent. Rāy conceded and generously allowed his mother to fight as his proxy: let a woman fight a woman.

Nārāyaṇī gathered her army: "ghouls (*bhūts*) emerged from the cremation grounds, appearing as so many messengers of death (*kāl duts*), more than one hundred fifty-six thousand issued forth from secret places. Witches (*ḍākinī*), all fierce viragos, numbered three hundred sixty million and fanned out over the land of the eighteen

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[34] Based on its explicit appearance in other texts, the name Hāsen is most likely a variant of Hāshim, Muhāmmd's great grandfather; see for instance Sāyeb Munsī Ābdul Ohāb, *Gāji kālu o cāmpavatī kanyār punthi* (Kalikātā: Munsī Ābdul Hāmād Khān. Reprint: Kalikātā: Śrīmahāmmad Rabiullā at Hāmidīyā Press, Es Rahmān eṇḍ Sans printer, 1315 bs [ca. 1908]), p. 1.

> tides screaming ‘Kill! Kill!’ Once they were assembled, Nārāyaṇī prepared her battle dress, covering herself with glittering ornaments of war. Arming herself with a myriad of weapons, she vainly sashayed down the road atop her royal chariot, confident of victory.” Her hordes advanced on Bonbibī and Śājaṅgali from all sides.
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> The twins were worried, but the elder sister Bonbibī reassured her brother that he need only call on Āllā for protection. He again belted out the call to prayer which rattled the skittish legions, causing them to scatter in all directions. Bonbibī’s own loud roar (*huṃkār*) paralyzed the rest of the demonic masses and she rained destruction down upon them. Nārāyaṇī rallied and let fly her arrows, but Bonbibī always saw them coming, so with the *kalimā* wet on her lips, those arrows passed through her body as if she were made of mere water. Nārāyaṇī unleashed her most fearsome weapons: the *ṣaṭcakra*, the *gadācakra*, and finally the ultimate *dharmmacakra*. They roared through the air like angry missiles but again Bonbibī tasted the *kalimā*, planted her staff, and the fiery weapons fizzled out. Nārāyaṇī then struck hard at Bonbibī, but she remained untouched as the gleaming sword turned into harmless flowers by the grace of Fatemā. Bonbibī and Nārāyaṇī proceeded in hand-to-hand combat for the rest of the day, neither one getting the upper hand, until Bonbibī felt herself giving way. She petitioned Khodā for help from heaven and through an intermediary he granted her the additional power (*baraka*) she needed. Bonbibī mounted and then sat on the chest of Nārāyaṇī, squeezing from her the very breath of life until she capitulated; then Bonbibī relented. Being the mother of mercy, Bonbibī graciously accepted Nārāyaṇī as her vassal, but agreed to share the rule of the land . . .

The next episode of the story follows the pitiful and helpless child Dukhe who, having been made over to Dakṣīṇ Rāy by his uncle Dhonāi, called on Bonbibī to intervene and protect him.[35]

> . . . Śājaṅgali was about to battle Dakṣīṇ Rāy and “dispatch him to the realm of Yama” when Baḍakhān Gājī himself intervened and cooled him down. Śājaṅgali could not understand how a god-fearing *gājī* warrior could be friends with a demon (*rākṣas*) like Dakṣīṇ Rāy, sufficient to mediate on his behalf. As they faced off, Bonbibī’s own summons rang insistently in their ears, so the three of them went before her with hands pressed together in supplication. She wanted to know just how it was that this Baḍakhān Gājī was the friend of Dakṣīṇ Rāy. Gājī explained that he was the son of Śāhā Sekandār and that he had previously defeated Dakṣīṇ Rāy; as a

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[35] Mohāmmad Khater, *Bonbibī jahurā nāmā*, 26–27.

> result he allowed Rāy to share power in the region. Then Baḍakhān reminded Bonbibī that Dakṣīṇ Rāy was her *de facto* son, because she had defeated his mother Nārāyaṇī in battle, and then offered her protection and grace in sharing the land. That made Nārāyaṇī's offspring her own. Bonbibī acknowledged the truth of it and so a second rapprochement was achieved.

Interpreting the Parameters

Although these are but three small snippets from a considerably larger text, they are sufficient to illustrate the defining parameters of the discursive arena in which the fictional tale of the *Bonbibī jahurā nāmā* operates. The two biggest, genre and language, we have already discussed, but other pragmatic presuppositions can be seen at work in the ways the cosmos is traversed and survived.

The cosmos imagined in this text treats the heavens and their multitudes of celestial inhabitants much as the order of a purāṇic structure. Heaven or *behest* is a clearly defined space 'up there' where Āllā holds court with Mohāmmad and Fatemā and various assistants, which is populated by the pious and where the Qur'ān itself sits on its throne. The reference to the Qur'ān is an overt intertextual claim, but its use to divine the future is roughly analogous to the rôle of the Bengali god of fate, Bidhāta, who writes the destiny for each newborn. Āllā's ordering Bonbibī and Śājaṅgali to an earthly birth in order to combat the unholy actions of Dakṣīṇ Rāy and then Dhonāi is reminiscent of the purāṇic-style *avatār* descents, suggesting a parallel mechanism for divine intervention. The casting out of Golālbibī while pregnant with twins, in the manner of Sītā in the *Rāmāyaṇ* (a covert intertextual reference), anticipates some kind of special intervention, although the decision to abandon the female twin in favor of the male signals a commonly held Bengali cultural assumption common to both *musalmāni* and *hinduyāni*.

Access to Āllā and his power comes in several distinct forms: by meditating on him while uttering the *kalimā* (used in a way equivalent to a yogic *mantra*), or, following a more recognizable *musalmāni* approach, by praying at his tomb. Those mechanisms, however, are replicated among other holders of power in clear hierarchical terms. One need only call on the righteous individuals immediately above, Berāhim petitioned Āllā directly, as Bonbibī advised Śājaṅgali to do when he was in need; however, the child Dukhe was instructed not to call on Āllā, but to call on Bonbibī for help. In all cases, there is an assumption of supplication (servant to master) and kinship (junior to senior) as the model for devotion: to seek the protection of a higher power is to assume subservience with respect to the holder of power, and with that attitude a very real social relationship is established that guarantees the desired protection. Similarly, this reflects the relationship of disciple (*murīd*) to teacher (*murshid*), which in turn depends on structural symmetries of power—indeed, much of the action is to determine who is above and who below—as can be seen in the conflict between Nārāyaṇī and Bonbibī, or in the previously attested conflict between Dakṣīṇ Rāy and Baḍakhān Gājī, or when Bonbibī and Śājaṅgali approach Mohāmmad as the *guru* of all *phakir*s. The issue in these (and in other cases in the larger text) do not hinge on establishing the rightness of religion *per se*, but rather in fixing the relative powers available to different types of practitioners. In the end, the cosmology that emerges as most encompassing features Āllā as the sole God and every other figure below him, with gods and *yogīs* and *pīrs* and *bibīs* operating with similar, relative forms of power.

Other features of the imagined cosmos include a number of more or less malevolent figures common to *hinduyāni* classifications—and here we see the *musalmāni* appropriation of a *hinduyāni* cosmos. Ghouls or *bhūts* are individuals who at death are unsatisfied and do not transmigrate, and so come back to torment the living. *Prets* are karmically pernicious, hungry ghosts who are greedy to the point of fetishizing particularly vile and abominable appetites, in pursuit of which they harass the living. And finally, there are *yoginīs* or witches, who are literally women who practice *yoga*, but because they are women the exercise of the powers obtained always tend to nefarious ends. In the larger picture, *bhūts*, *prets*, and *yoginīs* will all be ranked lower than morally upright humans, and in this text they constitute the followers of Dakṣīṇ Rāy and Nārāyaṇī. In previous tales, the armies of Dakṣīṇ Rāy and Baḍakhān Gājī were composed of crocodiles and tigers respectively, though it should be noted that later in the *Bonbibī jahurā nāmā*, Dakṣīṇ Rāy does deploy his crocodile minions, and in some editions even sharks, in defense of his honey and wax. Śājaṅgali easily dispatched them while promising to send Dakṣīṇ Rāy to the realm of Yama, the land of the dead, another explicitly *hinduyāni* cosmological construct with associations of hell. When challenging the authority of the pious Śājaṅgali, both Dakṣīṇ Rāy and his mother will be consigned to their own special hell (Yama's abode) that is set aside within the larger *musalmāni* cosmology. But the change in the makeup of the armies suggests that the characters Dakṣīṇ Rāy and Nārāyaṇī are morally reprehensible, a not so subtle hint that they are no longer *hinduyāni*, but in the eyes of the author more Hindu in the polarizing attitudes of the times.

That the adventures of Dakṣīṇ Rāy and Baḍakhān Gājī appear in prior texts makes them analeptic characters, both of which serve as overt intertextual references. The earliest extant version of this story is the *Rāy maṅgal* of Kṛṣṇarām, which dates to the late decades of the seventeenth century.[36] The next extant *Rāymaṅgal* is by Haridev, but in that text Rāy does not battle Gājī, rather he greets him as brother because they are both favored and appointed by God.[37] In Kṛṣṇarām's version, the conflict between Baḍakhān Gājī and Dakṣīṇ Rāy is the result of an insult. A merchant on a trading voyage performed a *pūjā* worship to a mound in the image of Dakṣīṇ Rāy at a shrine along the route, where Rāy was styled a demigod born of the legendary King Prabhakar and wife Līlāvatī, daughter of Dharmaketu, and now controller of much of the land and resources of the region.[38] The unwitting trader failed to pay any, much less commensurate, respect to Baḍakhān Gājī, a prominent warrior saint who lived in the forest with his band of tigers. Infuriated by the insult, Gājī destroyed the image and then attacked Dakṣīṇ Rāy. As they engaged, the minions of both of their tiger armies either deserted, were knocked unconscious, or died until only the two of them—Dakṣiṇ Rāy and Baḍakhān Gāji—were left standing. In the end, the protagonists slew one another with each subsequently revived by God, who brokered a peace. Significantly, God or Īśvar takes the form of Satya Pīr, his physical body appearing half white and half black, and he carried a copy of the Korān in one hand and the Bhāgavata Purāṇa in the other. He granted dominion over the Sunderban to Rāy from a fixed base in the land of the eighteen tides, while Baḍakhān Gājī remained itinerant, though any judgement he made or that was made in his name was recognized with full legal authority and equal or complementary to Rāy's own rule. In that text, Dakṣīṇ Rāy is a man who rode a horse, though he occasionally mounted a tiger, but in the Bonbibī tale—as the son of Daṇḍabakṣan Muni and Nārāyaṇī, altogether different parentage from the previous texts—he resorted to the odious side of his considerable yogic powers as a shape-shifter himself, and periodically assumed the form of a tiger to terrorize people and demand his tribute in human sacrifice. That transformation again points to the *Bonbibī jahurā nāmā* revalorizing the powerful landlord into a more menacing religious enemy; but this revalorization runs counter to the explicit statement in both Kṛṣṇarām's and Haridev's respective *Rāymaṅgals* wherein both Dakṣīṇ Rāy and Baḍakhān Gājī were favored by God, hints of which again surface in the story of Dukhe in the Bonbibī text but remain ambiguous in the Bonbibī story itself as Dakṣīṇ Rāy and Dukhe—both non-*musalmāni* characters—submit and accept her protection. Even though each story stands alone (its autotelic nature), the explicit references to other figures inevitably create fictional histories of characters, weaving a considerably more complex narrative, and one that, unsurprisingly, often yields contradictions that seem to mirror some of the ambiguities of everyday life.

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[36] Kṛṣṇarām Dās, *Rāymaṅgal* in *Kavi kṛṣṇarām dāser granthāvalī*, ed. Satyanārāyaṇ Bhaṭṭācāryya (Kalikātā: Kalikātā Viśvavidyālay, 1958), 165–248.

In the story of Dukhe, Baḍakhān Gājī introduces himself as the son of Śāhā Sekandār, another overt intertextual reference in the form of analepsis, this time with a possible historical figure; this same reference is found in the earlier text of *Gājīkālu o cāmpāvatī kaṇyār puthi*.[39] The obvious historical referent is Śāhā Sekandār, second in the line of the Ilyās Shāhi dynasty who ruled 1358–90 CE. Some historians have succumbed to the temptation to read the texts of both the *Rāymaṅgal* of Kṛṣṇarām and the *Bonbibī jahurā nāmā* of Mohāmmad Khater as testament of some factual connection, surmising that these tales tell of actual historical conflicts that occurred in the misty past. But because of the nature of the tales as fictions, we can only evaluate the effect of this allusion to a historical figure. Because the full name is never given, we must assume that the figure of Śāhā Sekandār is as fictional as every other character in the tale. But the invocation provides a perspective for understanding the outcomes of both fictional texts, for the historical Sekandār, like his father Ilyās, in battle with the Tughluq rulers of Delhi, was reputed to have taken refuge in the islands of southern Bengal, a strategic retreat that resulted in stalemate for both. The 'history' of the father repeats itself in the son as Dakṣīṇ Rāy brokers a peace with Baḍakhān and again as Nārāyaṇī and Dakṣīṇ Rāy with Bonbibī. Remembering the autotelic nature of the narrative, the function of this reference is what is important, and that reference points to rapprochement as a solution to conflict.

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[37] Haridev, *Rāymaṅgal* in *Haridever racanāvalī: rāymaṅgal o śitalāmaṅgal*, ed. Pañcānan Maṇḍal, Sāhitya Prakāśikā 4 (Śāntiniketan: Viśvabharatī, 1367 bs [ca. 1960]), 1–172.

[38] Kṛṣṇarām Dās, *Rāy maṅgal*, 166–167.

Finally, the overt references to both Mohāmmad and Fatemā provide another set of analeptic figures who invoke the traditions of the Shi'ah, but seem also to provide a parodic and indirect commentary on tomb worship. Fatemā and Mohāmmad are both very much alive and active in heaven with their powers accessible through their tombs. The worship at the tomb is not effected until both twins have achieved their own credentials as spiritual masters by studying with a descendant in the line of Āli—the obvious Shi'ah connection again as overt intertextual reference—that gives them the right to petition Fatemā at her grave. There is a fairly common notion that the *dargā* or tomb of the saint is the real court of God,[40] and here Fatemā's tomb acts as a direct pipeline to that realm, to divine intervention signaled by the disembodied voice that gave them instruction. That grace of Fatemā later aids Bonbibī by protecting her from Nārāyaṇī's sword, giving her the power to evade the terrible weapons hurled by Nārāyaṇī—notably, each of those *cakras* or discs invokes the weapons deployed by the warriors in the Bangla retellings of the *Rāmāyaṇ* and *Mahābhārat* (more covert intertextual references). Fatemā's tomb lies in the same compound as that of Mohāmmad. Once again, the connection to God in his heavenly court (*behest*) is immediate and direct, and the twins (now themselves *murshids*) can approach Mohāmmad directly as the *guru* of all *phakir*s, the real heavyweight (as the term *guru* means) among teachers—that is, the teachers' teacher, whose actions inspire the *imitatio muhammadi*. Confirmation of their status comes through the presentation of special hats (in the text, no human agency is indicated), which serve as the physical mantel of authority, signaling they are ready for their missions. There are, of course, no details about how the twins conducted their worship, or if they simply prayed with intent. Once established, this connection seems to be available to the twins simply by praying or meditating, providing immediate access to God's *baraka* or power. Significantly, no other tomb worship was mentioned. In the historical context of the 1880s, when tomb worship was a very hot topic, one has to wonder if the characters' actions seem to hint at some middle position on the availability of power through tombs, but not just any *phakir's*.

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[39] Abdur Rahīm, *Gājikālu o cāmpāvatī kanyār puthi*, 1 and passim.

[40] See Anand Taneja, "Saintly Visions: Other Histories and History's Others in the Medieval Ruins of Delhi," *Indian Economic and Social History Review* 49, no. 4 (December 2012): 557–590.

In this brief exercise, we can see that the four parameters that defined the discursive arena of the *Bonbibī jahurā nāmā* help us to situate the text in its historical place and with its literary and religious interlocutors. Because the text operates through images and allusions rather than explicit theology, it can only hint at the matters in question, such as protection from the vagaries of the swamps and wetlands, and who controls the wealth and access to natural resources.[41] Yet in this extremely truncated exercise, we can see potentially significant shifts in the way the author parodies tensions, how he traffics in stereotypes rather than doctrine, and how he can imagine a *musalmāni* cosmology expanding to accommodate and appropriate a more generalized Bengali cosmos. To extend the analysis to multiple tales—invited by the multiple intertextualities—would not only help us to understand indirectly the changing perspectives of their creators, but also to map the issues that occupied their imagination and to see where prevailing notions of the world were stretched into some new shape.

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[41] The work of Annu Jalais has well documented this in contemporary culture; see Annu Jalais, *Forest of Tigers: People, Politics, and Environment in the Sunderbans* (London: Routledge, 2010).

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Susanne Enderwitz

Religion into Literature: A Close Reading of ʿAbd al-Ḥakīm Qāsim's Novel *Ayyām al-insān as-sabʿa* (The Seven Days of Man)

Abstract Modern Egyptian literature was secular from its beginnings, which can be traced to the beginnings of the twentieth century. Contrary to most of the other authors, ʿAbd al-Ḥakīm Qāsim came from a rural community with a vibrant Sufi brotherhood tradition. And yet, he too made his increasing distance from the brotherhood the main subject of his novel *Ayyām al-insān as-sabʿa* (The Seven Days of Man). The paper examines the religious-aesthetic dimensions of Sufism in this novel, since Sufism initially played the role of a great educator before it was successively replaced by more rational means of conceiving the world. The aesthetic dimensions of the novel, however, blur this clear-cut distinction between religion and enlightenment. *Ayyām al-insān as-sabʿa* is, perhaps, the last example of a "Bildungsroman" in modern Egyptian literature, but at the same time, it is also an elegy for a lost world. The ambiguity starts with the title's reference to "seven days," which could either refer to the creation of the world by God or to man's own creation of his world. The end is likewise ambiguous, since the (Sufi) "way" (*ṭarīq*) leads the main protagonist back to his roots without offering him any kind of redemption. Shall we thus conclude that religion, by the natural laws of modern life, turns into literature, but that literature is nothing without religion, which is otherwise and outside literature irretrievably lost?

Islamic quotations, formula, and topoi are omnipresent in modern Arabic literature, and yet this literature keeps religion at a distance. The novel's characters may breathe with religious feelings, imaginations, and norms, but in most cases the authors and/or narrators seem mainly unaffected by the religious mood of their protagonists. This is certainly due to the fact that modern Arabic literature was secular from its outset, as it was predominantly composed by members of the urban middle classes who were more nationalist than religiously oriented. However, there are notable exceptions to this rule. One of these is ʿAbd al-Ḥakīm Qāsim, who was brought up in rural Egypt and only later benefitted from the educational system of the Nasserist state. In his novel *Ayyām al-insān as-sabʿa* (The Seven Days of Man), which is halfway autobiographical, he addresses both his protagonist's alienation from tradition and his ensuing sense of loss. As an author, Qāsim felt challenged by the social transformations in Egypt that were threatening the continuation of the values, imaginations, and beliefs of the peasantry. As neither the mosque nor the museum seemed suitable asylums to him, he turned to the aesthetic realm of literature. Like any other "reflexive modernity," literature guarantees participation in a vivid process and a lively discussion over the future of tradition. In addition to other discourses, literature enables the presentation of human beings as actors within their own social, religious, and political settings. The role of the author is not only to frame, to reconstruct, and to structure communicative processes, but also to give subjective fears, wishes, hopes, feelings, and moods their due. In this sense, Qāsim has a lot to tell us about the life of the Egyptian peasantry around the mid-twentieth century, and particularly about the close connection between social, religious, and individual experience.

ʿAbd al-Ḥakīm Qāsim was born in 1934 into a peasant family living in Bandara near Tanta. He attended the secondary school in Tanta, moving to the city in his last year. Afterwards, he continued his education at the Faculty of Law of the University of Alexandria. Before graduation, he was arrested on suspicion of leftist activity and sentenced to five years internment in a concentration camp. After his release in 1964, he graduated and began working in the State Organization for Insurance and Pensions. At the same time, he started his career as a writer and published his first novel *Ayyām al-insān as-sabʿa* (The Seven Days of Man) in 1968/69. From 1974 onward, he lived in Berlin and planned a dissertation on modern Egyptian literature. The dissertation was never finished, but it was in Berlin that he wrote most of his works, including the novella *al-Mahdī wa-ṭuraf min khabar al-ākhira* (The Mahdi and Good News from the Afterlife, 1984; Engl. trans. Rites of Assent). In 1985 he and his family returned to Cairo where he worked in the General Egyptian Book Organization, co-edited the cultural periodical *Majallat al-Qāhira* (Cairo Magazine), and began writing a weekly column in the Islamist newspaper *ash-Shaʿb* (The

People).[1] However, at the same time—in 1987—he ran for a seat in the National Assembly as a member for the socialist *Tajammuʿ* (Unionist) party. A severe stroke, which he suffered in the same year, left him partly paralyzed, but did not stop his activities for the next three years.[2] He died in Cairo in the year 1990 at the age of 56. In a short autobiographical account, he wrote: “It was fate that bore me in the train away from my village [. . .] Anxiety and alienation hit me. I hasten back to my delights, and there in the village [. . .] I am a stranger once again. I discover that the rattle of the train over the tracks is my fate, it is my own inner voice, my hybridism, my split loyalty.”[3]

A life between the worlds seems to have been the motor that turned the former student of law into an author of belles-lettres, and his semi-autobiographical novel *Ayyām al-insān as-sabʿa* is exactly along these lines.[4] It can be called a “Bildungsroman,”[5] as it presents the story of a young boy named ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz, who grows up in an Egyptian village near Tanta, then leaves his family in order to pursue his education in Tanta and Alexandria and gradually alienates himself from the ways of the Egyptian peasants and thus from his family and village. The novel has seven chapters which cover the seven days of the week preceding and including the annual pilgrimage (Mawlid) to the shrine of Egypt’s highest (Sufi) saint, Aḥmad al-Badawī (Shaykh Badawī, al-Sayyid)[6] in Tanta. However, the cyclical structure of the novel, which describes the preparations for, the performance of, and the return from the annual feast as an ever-recurring ritual, is counterbalanced by a linear structure, since the shift from day to day is also marked by lapses of several years in which the young boy turns into a young adult and develops a perspective of his own. Thus, in the first chapter, on the first of the seven days, he is still the small village boy who uncritically admires his father and his position among his Sufi friends, and by the concluding chapter, on the last of the seven days, he is already a student in Alexandria who returns to his native village only to realize that the old times, people, and customs have gone. Between the beginning and the end of the novel he takes us to a Sufi gathering in his father's house, the baking day of the women, the journey of the men to Tanta, the Mawlid of Shaykh Badawī with its climax in "the Big Night" (*al-layla al-kabīra*),[7] and the farewell to the female owners of the lodgings before the group returns to the village.

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[1] On *ash-Shaʿb*, see Andrew Hammond, *Popular Culture in the Arab World: Arts, Politics, and the Media* (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 2007), 242.

[2] For Qāsim’s (auto-)biography, see Abdel-Hakim Kassem, *The Seven Days of Man*, trans. N. Bell. (Evanston: North Western University Press, 1996), XVIII–XIX; “Qāsim, ʿAbd al-Ḥakīm,” in *Crosshatching in Global Cultures: Dictionary of Modern Arab Writers*, ed. John J. Donohue sj. and Leslie Tramontini, vol. 2, (Beirut: Ergon, 2004), 898–901; “Qāsim, ʿAbd al-Ḥakīm,” in *Aʿlām al-adab al-ʿarabī al-muʿāṣir. Siyar wa-siyar dhātiyya*, ed. Robert B. Campbell, vol. 2 (Beirut: Steiner, 1996), 1080–1083.

[3] Donohue and Tramontini, *Crosshatching*, 2: 898.

[4] Semah Selim presents a sample of al-Qāsim’s statements, all of which revolve around being torn between old and new, rural and urban, and religious and secular worldviews. Semah Selim, *The Novel and the Rural Imaginary in Egypt, 1880–1985* (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2004), 185–186.

[5] See Roger Allen, *The Arabic Novel: An Historical and Critical Introduction* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1995), 168; Muhsin al-Musawi, “Beyond the Modernity Complex: ʿAbd al-Ḥakīm Qāsim’s Re-Writing of the *Nahḍah* Self-Narrative,” *Journal of Arabic Literature* 41 (2010): 33.

[6] Shaykh Aḥmad al-Badawī (1199–1276), who was born in Fez, Morocco and died in Tanta, Egypt, was the founder of a Sufi order in Egypt and is credited by his followers with many miracles. For this Egyptian saint, see Karl Vollers, and Enno Littmann, “Aḥmad al-Badawī,” in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, new ed., vol. 1 (Leiden: Brill 1960).

Like Ṭāhā Ḥusayn's (1889–1973) semi-autobiographical novel *al-Ayyām* (The Days) from 1929, *Ayyām al-insān as-sabʿa* starts in the twilight. It is the twilight which marks the divide between day and night or, in other words, the divide between day and anti-day. One of many more opposites which occur in the novel (man/woman, village/city, individual/group, Sufi/orthodox, illiterate/literate etc.), the day is defined by the merciless light of the murderous sun, the exhausting work on dry fields, and harsh language in daily conversation. When night falls everything becomes different, but not for everybody. With another pair of opposites and with Sufi overtones, the darkness of the village is illuminated by the big, warm, and swinging light of the kerosene-lamp in the guest-house of ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz's father. It is a religious privilege, or a privilege of intimacy, to be invited to this house, not a social privilege. The friends or "brothers," who gather every evening for their talks, twice in the week for performing religious rituals and on even rarer occasions for conducting a public *dhikr*,[8] define themselves by their adherence to the same Sufi order[9] and not by their status and wealth. On the contrary, the prevailing pluralism and mutual tolerance of the members of the group is obvious: Among them is a man who is a deaf-mute and mentally disabled, another who lives on the proceeds of his wife's thieving, and still others who commit adultery and/or consume drugs. After the group of seven to eight Sufis is complete and they are introduced to the reader of the novel, the evening begins with talks among the brothers and then proceeds with a recitation from old Sufi texts and culminates in reciting the Opening Sura of the Koran (*al-fātiḥa*) over and over again. A publicly performed *dhikr* (Remembrance of God) outside the house, which is attended by many other villagers, brings the evening to a close and serves as a prelude for Sayyid Badawī's Mawlid, which will unfold during the forthcoming days/chapters of the week/novel.[10]

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[7] Mawlids play an eminent role in the Egyptian popular imagination. This is underlined by the fact that the vernacular poet Ṣalāḥ Jāhīn (1930–1986) produced a puppet theater musical with the title *al-Layla al-kabīra*. It was the first show to run in the Puppet Theatre, which was opened by ʻAbd al-Jamāl Nāṣir in 1959; it continues to run to this day and is frequently aired on state television. See Terri Ginsberg and Chris Lippard, *Historical Dictionary of Middle Eastern Cinema* (Landham, Maryland: Scarecrow Press, 2010), 218. In 2007, the puppet theater play was transformed into a ballet version and, in this form, even entered the Cairo Opera House.

[8] For this Sufi ritual, see Louis Gardet, "dhikr," in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, new ed., vol. 2 (Leiden: Brill 1965).

[9] Like Ṭāhā Ḥusayn, ʿAbd al-Ḥakīm Qāsim does not mention the name of the Sufi order to which his father was attached.

The importance of the (mainly Shādhilī) Sufi texts from books for the identity of the protagonists, which are kept in a huge chest in the house, cannot be overemphasized, as they shape their world-view. They are: the *Dalāʾil al-khayrāt* (The Waymarks of Benefits) of al-Jazūlī, a fifteenth-century song of praise for the Prophet; the *Qaṣīdat al-Burda* (Mantle Ode) of al-Būṣīrī, also a praise poem for the Prophet from the thirteenth century, which was regarded as sacred already in its author's life-time; the *Manāqib aṣ-ṣāliḥīn* (The Deeds of the Righteous), which was mentioned by Ṭāhā Ḥusayn in *al-Ayyām* as belonging to the stock-in-trade of travelling booksellers and containing stories about the legendary early Islamic raids and conquests;[11] the *Wasīla* (The Intercession), a hagiographic collection of the lives of the saints and their miracles; and last but not least, the *Sīrat Abū Zayd al-Hilālī* (The Life of Abū Zayd al-Hilālī), an Arabic epic recounting the Banū Hilāl's conquest of Egypt in the eleventh century. The list, which also comprises the epic *Sīrat ʿAntar* (The Life of ʿAntar) and tales from *Alf layla wa-layla* (A Thousand and One Nights), is not only proof of the fact that theology means nothing for the peasants, it also reveals that oral performance ranks first and that folkloristic books were seen as part of the religious heritage, which switches from the sacred to the profane and back again. Furthermore, the list speaks of an almost sacral reading of a popular, deep-rooted and, seen against the background of urban mainstream literature, "counter-hegemonic" textuality which is part and parcel of the rural cultural cosmos.[12]

This becomes clear when ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz compares the books in the chest with his schoolbooks which, with their stories about little boys with clean clothes and little girls with braids and ribbons, use the "disciplinary discourse" of modernity.[13] The Sufi books, on the other hand, exert an irresistable magical spell on his imagination. The archaic script on yellow pages, tiny lines with hardly any space between them, and their recitation with a full, rhythmic, and chanting voice evoke in his fantasy a kind of dreamland inhabited by men who are different from ordinary men. Thin, frail, and wearing the most tattered garments, they stand at the four corners of the earth, and when they choose to journey they cover huge distances with each step. Living among the ordinary people they stretch out their hands and heal the sick, and when they die, their light breaks forth and domed tombs are built for them in the cities. The streets are then filled with people who, like armies of ants, carry their provisions to the feasts of the saints in order to seek their intercession.[14]

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[10] ʿAbd al-Ḥakīm Qāsim, *Ayyām al-insān as-sabʿa* (Cairo: Dār ash-Shurūq, 2005), chapter one. Most of the following text quotations (page numbers in brackets) are from Bell's English translation. Kassem, *The Seven Days*.

[11] Ṭāhā Ḥusayn, *al-Ayyām* (Cairo: Dār al-Maʿārif, 1992), 97. Cf. Remke Kruk, "Harry Potter in the Gulf: Contemporary Islam and the Occult," *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 32 (2005): 50.

[12] Cf. Selim, *Novel*, 195.

[13] Cf. Selim, *Novel*, 195.

The magnificent evocative power of the old books by no means only sparks the imagination of the child, it is also echoed in the frequent mention of the “glint of longing” (*iltimāʿat al-shawq*)[15] in the eyes of his father and the other Sufi brothers. This “glint of longing” is certainly an allusion to the Sufi’s understanding of life as a journey, and the life-journey unfolds in the novel as a cosmology in which the past and the present, the known and the unknown as well as the sacred and the profane continuously blend together.[16] The dead are as much present in the evening sessions of the Sufis as the living. The power of the saint Shaykh Badawī is attested by all kinds of mediators (the shaykh of the congregation, wandering dervishes in fantastic array, holy fools with strange habits) as well as of rituals (amulets, magical procedures of all kinds, performance of the exorcist ritual of the *zār*), and the continuous overstepping of the boundaries between the profane and the sacred is marked not so much by *what* is told in the novel, but by *how* it is told. The language of the novel, with its comparisons, metaphors, and images is a mixture of the colloquial dialect, rural imagery, and sacred discourse. On the one hand, the language of the protagonists is often coarse and derived from their daily experience when, for instance, the eyes of a man are depicted as “two red openings that looked like pigeon anuses,”[17] but on the other, the daily experience of the peasants is continually generalized and imbued with meaning by the insertion of comments from the holy tradition. To give but a few examples: “Ḥājj Muḥammad [. . .] had owned extensive lands, many animals, and even some riding horses. Then had come the crash and he had faithfully supported the brothers with all that he had [. . .]. But men are merely guardians of what they have; they own nothing. And the aim of this life is the afterlife.” Or: “Ḥājj Karīm lit his lamp every night for the brothers, and he illumined their gatherings with his enchanting words. How happy were those men who opened their hearts to affection and sincerity. The few acres Ḥājj Karīm still had were many, by the grace of God.” Or: “His wife had given birth to a son whom they had named Shaḥḥāt, or ‘Beggar.’ Were we not all beggars? The good things of this life were few, scattered marvels here and there.”[18]

The cosmos of the Sufi peasants is inclusive, tolerant, and humorous, but it is also a self-contained entity which turns a deaf ear towards the orthodox/Islamicist and the secular/areligious. In this world, the implacable village preacher is and remains an awkward figure, "that hulking giant who stood in the midst of the assembled peasants and shouted at the top of his voice terrifying things about the fire of hell, liars, thieves, and fornicators."[19] But competing worldviews are not so easily dismissed when they grow among the Sufis themselves in the next generation as a result of a better, comprehensive and secular education. This is the case with ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz, who distances himself increasingly from his father's circle after he has moved to Tanta and meets them for the annual pilgrimage to Sayyid Badawī at the railway station. First, he becomes aware of the fact that he is no longer part of this collective: "They were like flecks of iron drawn toward the pole of a magnet. But he was made of a different metal."[20] Gradually, in comparing the wealth, cleanliness, and rational structure of urban culture with the poverty, backwardness, and magical thinking of the village, he rejects the collective outright. In the end, the collective has lost all of its former spiritual splendor for him, and he perceives it only as a smacking, defecating and urinating body, devoid of all higher faculties and aspirations: "They might be sitting on the mats, but inside they were standing up, craning their necks, grasping, and chewing irreverently. The stomach was the moving force of history. The history of those creatures that were born in the primeval slime [. . .] that long epic of ugliness, greed, and voracity, was the history of man."[21] The alienation of ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz from his roots reaches its climax in a confrontation with his father, during which the father is prevented from cursing his son by the intervention of some other peasants.

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[14] Qāsim, *Ayyām*, 8–9, 23.

[15] Qāsim, *Ayyām*, 10 (3).

[16] Cf. Selim, *Novel*, 191–192.

[17] Qāsim, *Ayyām*, 146 (122). Cf. Allen, *Novel*, 176.

[18] Qāsim, *Ayyām*, 13–14 (7); 30 (22). Cf. Selim, *Novel*, 192–193. van Leeuwen points to the frequent metaphorical use of the journey to denote a life-span, thus also imbuing an individual life with a religious-existentialist meaning. Richard van Leeuwen, “The Journey in Two Arabic Novels,” in *Sensibilities of the Islamic Mediterranean: Self-Expression in a Muslim Culture from Post-Classical Times to the Present Day*, ed. Robin Ostle (London: Tauris, 2008), 134.

After leaving the "path" of the Sufis and following his individual and personal "path" from Tanta to Alexandria, ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz returns to his native village after news reaches him that his father is on his deathbed. Most of the Sufis are dead, the Sufi order itself is in decline, and the family is totally impoverished. The coffee house has replaced the mosque in its function as the village's center, the radio brings urban culture and world news to the village, and angry young men play cards, drink tea, and smoke waterpipes. They listen to the radio's popular music, comment upon the world news, criticize governmental decisions, and ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz takes part in their discussions. The very last passage of the book runs as follows: "He lost himself among them. He felt the same bitterness, anger, and pain that they did [. . .]. Someone handed him a water pipe. He filled his lungs with the thick, rich smoke [. . .]. Only that heavy blue smoke could interrupt the incessant storm of his words."[22]

To most of the commentators of ʿAbd al-Ḥakīm Qāsim's novel *Ayyām al-insān as-sabʿa*, the "sudden intrusion of calendrical time"[23] into the closing of the novel does not make sense. Hilary Kilpatrick deems the last chapter "unimportant,"[24] Roger Allen dismisses it as "unsatisfactory,"[25] and only Samah Selim writes: "The novel ends on this note of vitality and inevitability. ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz finds himself in this furious din. He is once again reconciled to the community, but one that has actively thrown itself into the stream of history and collectively redefined itself as a community in open, angry rebellion against its own marginalization and oppression."[26] I agree with this view, but I would add that the protagonist ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz, who sits in the coffeehouse and is about to return to Alexandria, is also about to turn into the writer ʿAbd al-Ḥakīm who will write the novel *Ayyām al-insān as-sabʿa*. In this moment protagonist and author merge into one: the protagonist witnesses the disappearance of the Sufi dreamland in favor of a new realism, and the writer becomes aware of the fact that this realism needs some roots in order to protect itself against any misconceptions. As a writer, ʿAbd al-Ḥakīm Qāsim sought to dig beneath the surface of his memories, to preserve the vital kernel of tradition, to cast his findings into the form of a novel, to address an audience of urban/secular readers, to remind them of their own roots in Egypt's rural past, and to thereby immunize them against demagogues of any kind. In his own words:

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[19] Qāsim, *Ayyām*, 17 (10–11).

[20] Qāsim, *Ayyām*, 141 (117).

[21] Qāsim, *Ayyām*, 168 (140f.). Cf. Selim, 198, and her comments on ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz': "libidinal individuation from the collective body as he slowly becomes aware of its stifling, monolithic corporeality."

[22] Qāsim, *Ayyām*, 256 (218).

[23] Selim, *Novel*, 204.

> I understood that my critical vocation hadn't just dropped upon me from the sky, prophecy-like [. . .]. During revolutionary periods in our history, people were able to raise themselves above (their) passivity and to resist their reality with vitality and seriousness of purpose [. . .]. During the present age of decadence and disastrous defeat, (the) fragmentation prevails once again but the people can never fall back to the same point from which they began.[27]

An angry young man, was how the audience perceived ʿAbd al-Ḥakīm Qāsim when he published his novel in 1968/69. Two years after the disastrous war of 1967, Nasser's experiment with an "Arab socialism" or "Arab nationalism" had fallen to pieces. Qāsim's novel marks the beginning of a new writing which believed less in technical modernity, had a greater concern for the self, and turned more to the religious-cultural tradition than the novels of the "social realist" period. Indeed, none other than that paragon of "social realism," Najīb Maḥfūẓ, referred to the ideas of ʿAbd al-Ḥakīm Qāsim when he started to experiment with the literary tradition, mystical thinking, and self-reflection in the aftermath of the Nasserist project.

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[24] Hilary Kilpatrick, *Modern Egyptian Novel: A Study in Social Criticism* (Reading: Ithaca Press, 1974), 146.

[25] Allen, *Novel*, 177.

[26] Selim, *Novel*, 205.

[27] Quoted in Selim, *Novel*, 185.

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Suzanne Pinckney Stetkevych

Rhetoric, Hybridity, and Performance in Medieval Arabic-Islamic Devotional Poetry: *Al-Kāfiya al-Badīʿiyya* of Ṣafī ad-Dīn al-Ḥillī

Abstract The premier work of Islamic devotional literature of the post-classical period is undoubtedly the Mantle Ode (*Qaṣīdat al-Burda*) of al-Būṣīrī (d. 694–696/1294–1297), which generated a vast body of derivative works composed in the hope of acquiring the blessing or *baraka* of the poem. Among these was the *badīʿiyya*, a praise poem to the Prophet Muḥammad (*madīḥ nabawī*) that is a contrafaction (*muʿāraḍa*) of al-Būṣīrī's *Burda* in which each line exhibits a particular rhetorical device. The present paper offers a re-evaluation of the *badīʿiyya* as a hybrid devotional performance that combines the science of rhetoric—the essential element of the tenet of the miraculousness of the Qurʾān (*iʿjāz al-Qurʾān*)—with the art of praise poetry to the Prophet (*madīḥ nabawī)* as a reenactment of the miracle of the Qurʾān and of the *baraka* of al-Būṣīrī's *Burda*. It takes as its main example *Al-Kāfiya al-Badīʿiyya* of Ṣafī ad-Dīn al-Ḥillī (d. 749 or 750/1348 or 1349) to examine the rhetoric and aesthetics of the *badīʿiyya* in light of contemporary ideas of performance and performativity.

SUZANNE PINCKNEY STETKEVYCH

Introduction: The Genesis of the *Badīʿiyya*

An extraordinary and largely unexplored phenomenon of post-classical or medieval Arabic poetry is the emergence and fluorescence of the genre of devotional poetry to the Prophet Muḥammad (*madīḥ nabawī*), and within this genre-formation process the unrivalled domination of a single poem, that is, *Al-Kawākib ad-Durriyya fī Madḥ Khayr al-Bariyya* (Pearly Stars in Praise of the Best of All Creation) by a poet from Mamlūk Egypt, Sharaf ad-Dīn Abū ʿAbd Allāh Muḥammad ibn Saʿīd al-Būṣīrī (d. 694–96AH/1294–97CE).[1] Known simply as *Qaṣīdat al-Burda* or *Burdat* al-Būṣīrī (The Mantle Ode or The Mantle of al-Būṣīrī) this 160-line ode, rhymed in the letter *mīm* and in the meter *basīṭ* (*mustafʿilun fāʿilun*) was fully grounded in the classical Arabic court panegyric form (*qaṣīdat al-madḥ*) and, particularly, in the poetic conventions of the High ʿAbbāsid ornate rhetorical style termed *badīʿ*. Such was the power and popularity of al-Būṣīrī's *Burda* that it generated countless poetic progeny of various types throughout the Arab and Islamic world, from the eighth/fourteenth century up to this day. These include many imitations or contrafactions (s. *muʿāraḍa*) that challenge the base-text in a counter-poem using the same rhyme and meter; amplifications, in which original verses are added to those of the base-text (especially *tashṭīr* and *takhmīs*); as well as innumerable commentaries and translations into other Islamicate languages. All of this is in addition to the incessant performances—oral, scriptural, and material (talismans, etc.)—of al-Būṣīrī's *Burda* for devotional and talismanic purposes.[2]

Al-Būṣīrī's *Burda* was also the key ingredient of a newly emergent genre, the *badīʿiyya*, first composed and named (it appears) by the celebrated eighth/fourteenth-century Arab poet, Ṣafī ad-Dīn al-Ḥillī (d. 749 or 750/1348 or 1349).[3] The *badīʿiyya* is a sub-genre of praise poetry to the Prophet Muḥammad (*madīḥ nabawī*) that (1) takes the form of a contrafaction (*muʿāraḍa*) of al-Būṣīrī's *Burda* in that it rhymes in *mīm* and is in the meter *basīṭ*;[4] (2) that explicitly sets out to exemplify one particular rhetorical device in each line of the poem. Contrived as this may sound to modern poetic sensibilities, it should be kept in mind that Arabic poetics from the High ʿAbbāsid period onward demanded a style that was dense in rhetorical tropes, and these were both required by and familiar to the educated/critical audience.[5] The still much-loved *madīḥ nabawī* named *ash-Shuqrāṭīṣiyya*, after its author Abū Muḥammad ʿAbd Allāh ibn Zakariyyā ash-Shuqrāṭīṣī (al-Maghribī) (d. 496/1073) is laden with and celebrated for its highly ornate rhetoric that is explicitly in imitation of the ʿAbbāsid master-poet of the *badīʿ*-style, Abū Tammām (d. 231–2/845–6).[6] In this regard, in common rather than technical parlance, any rhetorically ornate *madīḥ nabawī* may be called a *badīʿiyya*.

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[1] For text, translation, and discussion of al-Būṣīrī's *Burda*, see Suzanne Pinckney Stetkevych, *The Mantle Odes: Arabic Praise Poems to the Prophet Muḥammad* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010), 70–150.

[2] See Stetkevych, *Mantle Odes*, 70–71; 85–88; 149. See also my as yet unpublished paper, Suzanne Pinckney Stetkevych, "Takhmīs as Verbal Reliquary: Enshrinement, Inscription and Performance in Shams al-Dīn al-Fayyūmī's *Takhmīs al-Burdah*," (Keynote Lecture presented at the 26th Annual Middle East History and Theory Conference: "Mutual Perceptions," The University of Chicago, Chicago, Il, May 13, 2011).

[3] W. P. Heinrichs, "Ṣafī al-Dīn al-Ḥillī," in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, new ed., vol. 8 (Leiden: Brill, 1971). The other main contender for the honor of composing the first *badīʿiyya* is the blind Andalusian poet, Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad ibn ʿAlī ibn Jābir al-Andalusī and his *Al-Ḥulla as-Siyarā*. See ʿAlī Abū Zayd, *al-Badīʿiyyāt fī l-adab al-ʿarabī: Nashʾatuhā—taṭawwuruhā—atharuhā* (Beirut: ʿĀlam al-Kutub, 1983), 75–76; and esp. the study of this poem and its commentary by Rajāʾ as-Sayyid al-Jawharī, ed. and intro, *Kitāb Ṭirāz al-ḥulla wa-shifāʾ al-ghulla li-l-Imām Jaʿfar Shihāb ad-Dīn . . . al-Gharnāṭī* (Alexandria: Muʾassasat ath-Thaqāfa al-Jāmiʿiyya, 1990).

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[4] The fullest study and a most valuable resource for further study of the genre of *badīʿiyya* is Abū Zayd, *al-Badīʿiyyāt*. There is some variation in definition, but this, to my mind, is the strictest and most accurate. Many scholars, although they mention the distinctive features of al-Būṣīrī's *Burda*, that is, the meter *basīṭ* (- - ˇ - / - ˇ -) and the rhyme in the letter "m" that the *badīʿiyya* must exhibit, do not explicitly mention al-Būṣīrī's *Burda* (although they must be well aware of the relationship). For an overview and discussion of this issue, see Abū Zayd, *al-Badīʿiyyāt*, 40–51 and al-Jawharī, *Kitāb Ṭirāz al-ḥulla*, 26–34. An attempt to treat the aesthetic issues of the *badīʿiyya* is made by Pierre Cachia in his work on ʿAbd al-Ghanī an-Nābulsī's (d. 1143/1731) *badīʿiyya*. See Pierre Cachia, "From Sound to Echo in Late *Badīʿ* Literature," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 108 (1988). A valuable study of the history and aesthetics of the *badīʿiyya* is Thomas Bauer, "Die *Badīʿiyya* des Nāṣīf al-Yāziǧī und das Problem der spätosmanischen arabischen Literatur," in *Reflections on Reflections: Near Eastern Writers Reading Literature*, ed. Angelika Neuwirth and Andreas Christian Islebe (Wiesbaden: Reichert Verlag, 2006). And see Th. Emil Homerin, "Chapter 3: Arabic Religious Poetry, 1200–1800," in *Arabic Literature in the Post-Classical Period: Cambridge History of Arabic Literature, Volume 6*, ed. Roger Allen and D. S. Richards (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006). For the translations of rhetorical terms and definitions in an-Nābulsī's *badīʿiyya* and commentary, see Pierre Cachia, *The Arch Rhetorician or the Schemer's Skimmer: A Handbook of Late Arabic badīʿ drawn from ʿAbd al-Ghanī al-Nābulsī's* Nafaḥāt al-Azhār ʿalā Nasamāt al-Asḥār, *Summarized and systematized by Pierre Cachia* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1998).
As with all genre definitions, there are exceptions to the one I have adopted for the present study: ʿIzz ad-Dīn al-Mawṣilī (d. 789/1387) is said to have composed a *badīʿiyya* on Kaʿb ibn Zuhayr's renowned *madīḥ nabawī* Bānat Suʿād (composed and presented to the Prophet in 9/630; rhymed in *lām*, meter *basīṭ*), see Abū Zayd, *al-Badīʿiyyāt*, 79; among Arab Christians *badīʿiyyāt* were composed in praise of Christ and the Apostles; Nāṣīf al-Yāzijī (d. 1287/1871), a Maronite Christian and major figure of the Nahḍa, composed a *badīʿiyya*, termed by Thomas Bauer "ecumenical"; that is, as I read it, not a devotional poem at all, but rather, as Bauer points out, it consists of *nasīb* and, instead of the expected *madḥ*, *dhamm ad-dunyā* (blame of the world). See Homerin, "Arabic Religious Poetry," 83–86; Bauer, "Die *Badīʿiyya* des Nāṣīf al-Yāziǧī," 54–56; 62–66.

[5] The place of the *badīʿiyya* in the development of Arabic rhetorical styles is the subject of a paper on which the present study is built, "From Jāhiliyyah to *Badīʿiyyah*: Orality, Literacy, and the Transformations of Rhetoric in Arabic Poetry." Papers of the Orality and Literacy VII Conference, Rice University, 12–14 April, 2008. O*ral Tradition* 25 (2010), accessed June 15, 2018, http://journal.oraltradition.org/issues/25i/stetkevych
An important contribution to the study of hybridity, intertextuality, and some of the particular stylistic and technical features of the badīʿiyya, which intersects at some point with the present study, is Bauer, "Die *Badīʿiyya* des Nāṣīf al-Yāziǧī." For scholarship on ʿĀʾisha al-Bāʿūniyya's (d. 923/1517) *badīʿiyya*, Al-Fatḥ al-Mubīn fī Madḥ al-Amīn (The Clear Inspiration in Praise of the Trustworthy [Muḥammad]), see Th. Emil Homerin, "Review of ʿĀʾishah al-Bāʿūnīyah, *Sharḥ al-Badīʿīyah al-Musammāh bi-l-Fatḥ al-Mubīn fī Madḥ al-Amīn*. Edited by Riḍā Rajab; *Badīʿīyat al-Fatḥ al-Mubīn fī Madḥ al-Amīn*. Edited by Ḥasan Rabābiʿah; *Al-Badīʿīyah wa-Sharḥuhā: al-Fatḥ al-Mubīn fī Madḥ al-Amīn*. Edited by ʿĀdil Kuttāb and ʿAbbās Thābit," *Mamlūk Studies Review* 17 (2013).

The hybrid nature of the *badīʿiyya* as both devotional poem and rhetorical work was not lost on its inventor. On the contrary, Ṣafī ad-Dīn feels compelled in the introduction to his commentary, *Sharḥ al-Kāfiya al-Badīʿiyya*,[7] to explain both this complex form and its author's complex(ed) motivations. He tells us that he originally intended to compose a prose treatise on the figures of rhetoric and *badīʿ*:

> I collected everything that I found in the books of the scholars and added to this other figures that I extracted from the poetry of the ancients, with the intention of composing a book that would cover most of them, since there was no way to cover them all. Then I was afflicted with a severe and protracted illness and it so happened that I saw in a dream a message from the Prophet (the greatest blessings and peace be upon him) demanding that I compose a praise poem to him and promising that I would be cured thereby of my ailment. So I turned from compiling the treatise to composing a *qaṣīda* that gathered the various types of *badīʿ* and was embroidered with the praise of [the Prophet's] glory. Thus, I composed 154 lines in the meter *basīṭ* containing 151 types of devices [. . .] and I made each verse an example illustrating a particular type.[8]

The most striking feature of this anecdote to anyone familiar with the medieval Arabic tradition is that it is a clear reference to, or variation on, the renowned story of al-Būṣīrī's *Burda*. A version of that story—which in one form or another is inseparable from al-Būṣīrī's *Burda*—is found in Muḥammad ibn Shākir al-Kutubī's (764/1363) biographical dictionary, *Fawāt al-wafayāt*:

> Al-Būṣīrī said: [. . .] Then it happened that I was stricken with hemiplegia that left me half paralyzed, so I thought of composing this *Burda* poem, and I did so. With it I asked for [the Prophet's] intercession with God the Exalted for Him to forgive me, and I recited it over and over again, and wept and prayed and entreated. Then, when I had fallen asleep, I saw the Prophet (peace upon him). He stroked

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[6] For the text, see Yūsuf ibn Ismāʿīl an-Nabhānī, *al-Majmūʿa an-Nabhāniyya fī l-madāʾiḥ an-nabawiyya*, 4 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 1996), 3: 150–160.

[7] Ṣafī ad-Dīn al-Ḥillī, *Sharḥ al-Kāfiya al-Badīʿiyya fī ʿulūm al-balāgha wa-maḥāsin al-badīʿ*, ed. Nasīb Nashāwī (Damascus: Maṭbūʿāt Majmaʿ al-Lugha al-ʿArabiyya bi-Dimashq, 1982). The editor's introduction is a valuable resource as well, 3–51.

[8] Al-Ḥillī, *Sharḥ al-Kāfiya al-Badīʿiyya*, 54–55.

> my face with his blessed hand, then threw a mantle over me. When I awoke, I found my health restored.[9]

So intimate was the connection between al-Būṣīrī's poem and the miracle of his recovery, that the sobriquet "Mantle Ode" (*Qaṣīdat al-Burda*) (but also the sobriquet *Qaṣīdat al-Burʾa*, or Poem of the Cure) was conferred upon it and the poem itself was credited with miraculous powers to cure maladies both physical and spiritual. It became widely used in devotional exercises, especially as a means of procuring Prophetic intercession on Judgment Day, more particularly in Ṣūfī devotions to evoke the presence of the Prophet, but also—in full or in select verses believed to possess particular powers (*khaṣāʾiṣ*)—in charms, amulets, talismans, and philters of all sorts.[10]

It should be noted, however, that al-Būṣīrī's was not the first praise poem to Muḥammad to be called *Qaṣīdat al-Burda*, but rather, in its recounting of the dream of the Prophet's mantle the medieval account of the composition of al-Būṣīrī's is usurping and displacing the celebrated *Qaṣīdat al-Burda* by the poet from the age of the Prophet, Kaʿb ibn Zuhayr. Slow to convert to Islam and having composed invectives against the Prophet, Kaʿb, now a hunted man with no kin to defend him, made his way incognito to the Prophet and delivered his celebrated poem of apology and submission, *Bānat Suʿād* (Suʿād Has Departed), whereupon the Prophet, as popular tradition has it, conferred his mantle upon the poet.[11]

What we are witnessing is not merely devotion to the Prophet Muḥammad, but a long series of poetic competitions and displacements of rivals for both poetic excellence and Prophetic favor, which in the world of *madīḥ nabawī* are the same thing.

At this point I would like to introduce the concept of reading the concordances of stories and the contrafactions of poems in light of ideas of performance and performative theory, and further, to look at performance as a means of both honoring and displacing the work "performed." In the case of al-Būṣīrī's *Burda*, all the various forms of "reenactment," which I term "performance," aim to coopt or redirect for the new performer the *baraka*, the religious or magical efficacy, of the original poem. In other words, the new poet sees himself in competition with other poets, both past, passing, and to come.

Within the poetics of ritual exchange of poem for prize (*qaṣīda* for *jāʾiza*) that I have established in an earlier work on classical and medieval Arabic poetry, the mantles that the Prophet confers on the poets Kaʿb and al-Būṣīrī are the reward that the Prophet confers in exchange for the poem. Thus, it recognizes the poem's literary beauty and performative efficacy, which, again, are the same thing. Furthermore, the mantle serves as a sign of acceptance and protection and, in the spiritual-symbolic realm, was understood by Muslims to refer to the Prophet's protection and to his intercession on Judgment Day. Al-Būṣīrī's adoption or cooption of Kaʿb's symbolic mantle therefore indicates his (at least) equal status in the Prophet's eyes. In this respect, we need to understand al-Būṣīrī's physical ailment and cure—of which there is no indication in the text of the poem itself—as above all a symbol of spiritual malady and restoration, that is, of salvation.

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[9] Muḥammad ibn Shākir al-Kutubī, *Fawāt al-wafayāt wa-dh-dhayl ʿalayhā*, 4 vols., ed. Iḥsān ʿAbbās (Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, 1973–1974), 3: 368–369; and see Stetkevych, *Mantle Odes*, 83.

[10] See Stetkevych, *Mantle Odes*, 70–71; 82–88 and refs.

[11] See Stetkevych, *Mantle Odes*, 33–69.

Returning to Ṣafī ad-Dīn's dream narrative, we find that he "reenacts" that of al-Būṣīrī with distinct changes: in his sequence, the poem does not lead to the dream, but rather in the dream it is the Prophet who provides the inspiration for this new type of poem. We gather that Ṣafī ad-Dīn's ailment is closely associated with some sort of writer's block or anxiety concerning his ambitious rhetorical undertaking, and the cure is not so much physical as it is the solution to the poet's literary rhetorical dilemma.

Ṣafī ad-Dīn's introduction alerts us as well to a field of competition other than the poetical, that is, the field of rhetoric. Much as in praise poetry to the Prophet we find a complex motivation exhibited in the strange tension between devotional piety and literary competition; so too in Arabic-Islamic rhetoric, both religious and literary motives are at work. Between the third/ninth and fifth/eleventh centuries the Islamic doctrine of the miraculous inimitability of the Qurʾān (*iʿjāz al-Qurʾān*) came to be defined as, above all, its incomparable rhetorical beauty. This was taken to mean that the rhetorical beauty of the Qurʾān was proof of its divine authorship and therefore of Muḥammad's prophethood. Furthermore, it is essential to understanding Ṣafī ad-Dīn's poetic-rhetorical undertaking to realize that the concept of *iʿjāz al-Qurʾān* is essentially bound up in the idea of contest, challenge, or competition. The word *iʿjāz* means to render an opponent impotent, to disable him. The idea behind this is a verbal "match" in which the Qurʾān proves "unmatchable." The Qurʾān is the miracle that irrefutably establishes the prophethood of Muḥammad, defeating and dumbfounding all rivals, just as Moses' rod-turned-snake defeated and dumbfounded the magicians of the Pharaoh's court.[12] The miraculous inimitability of the Qurʾān is thus not merely an article of faith but the essence of Islam. In the eyes of the scholars of *iʿjāz al-Qurʾān*, at least, the Muslim has no true understanding of his/her faith until he/she understands rhetoric and can grasp the inimitable beauty of the Qurʾān; that is, witness the miracle that proves Muḥammad's prophethood and the truth of Islam through the exploration of rhetoric. Ṣafī ad-Dīn states this in the pious invocation that opens his introduction to *Sharḥ al-Kāfiya al-Badīʿiyya*: "Praise be to God who made *licit* for us the *magic* of eloquence and made playing with it in the mind [the same as] witnessing with the eye. [emphasis mine]”[13] Following the scholars of *iʿjāz al-Qurʾān*,[14] he then states:

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[12] See Q 7:103–122 and the discussion of lines 142–143, below.

> The science most deserving of precedence and most worthy of being learned and taught, after the knowledge of God Almighty, is the knowledge of the verities of His Noble Speech [the Qurʾān] and the understanding of what He sent down in the Wise Remembrance [the Qurʾān], so that they might be safeguarded from the calamity of doubt and delusion [. . .] And there is no way to [acquire this knowledge] except through the knowledge of the science of rhetoric, including the figures of *badīʿ*, through which the meaning of the inimitability of the Qurʾān and the veracity of the prophethood of Muḥammad (peace and blessings of God upon him) is known by evidence and proof.[15]

In other words, to grasp through the study of rhetoric the unmatchable beauty of the Qur’ān is to experience firsthand, to be an “eye-witness” to, the evidentiary miracle of Muḥammad’s prophethood. What must be understood in this regard is that in Arabic-Islamic culture the greatest achievement of the Arabs was their poetry—the *qaṣīda* (ode) tradition grounded in the Islamic period canonization of the pre-Islamic poetic tradition. This means, *tout court*, that establishing the rhetorical superiority of the Qurʾān to any human composition meant, above all, its superiority to poetry, with the result that although moral-aesthetic precedence must, for doctrinal reasons, be accorded to examples from the Qurʾān, the Ḥadīth of the Prophet, and some of the sayings of the Ṣaḥāba, the vast majority of examples (*shāhida*, pl. *shawāhid*) in rhetorical works and works on *iʿjāz al-Qurʾān* are lines of poetry. Further, although the use of poetry as *shawāhid* for meaning and usage for Qurʾānic exegesis (*tafsīr*) was limited to “authentic” materials with a cut-off date of early Umayyad poetry, we find that works on *iʿjāz al-Qurʾān* derive from more mainstream rhetorical studies and normally contain examples up to the time of the compiler—Umayyad, ʿAbbāsid, and post-ʿAbbāsid.

No sooner, however, do we turn the page of Ṣafī ad-Dīn’s commentary than we enter the realm of competition with other scholars of rhetoric. In an unabashedly competitive spirit, Ṣafī ad-Dīn presents the number of rhetorical devices mentioned by those he sees as his most esteemed predecessors but also his chief rivals: Yūsuf ibn Abī Bakr as-Sakkākī (d. 626/1229) in *Miftāḥ al-ʿUlūm*: 29; ʿAbd ʿAllāh Ibn al-Muʿtazz (d. 296/908) in *Kitāb al-Badīʿ*: 17; Qudāma ibn Jaʿfar (d. 337?/948?) in *Naqd ash-Shiʿr* and *Kitāb al-Kharāj*: 30; Abū Hilāl al-ʿAskarī (d. after 400/1010) in *Kitāb aṣ-Ṣināʿatayn*: 37; Ibn Rashīq al-Qayrawānī (d. 456 or 463/1063–4 or 1070–1) in *Al-ʿUmda*: 37; Sharaf ad-Dīn at-Tīfāshī (d. 652/1253) in his *Kitāb al-Badīʿ*: 70; and—his most admired and most immediate competition—Zakī ad-Dīn Ibn Abī al-Iṣbaʿ (d. 654/1256) in his *Taḥrīr at-Taḥbīr*: 90.[16] Ṣafī ad-Dīn adds further that his esteemed predecessor Ibn Abī al-Iṣbaʿ claims to have relied on forty books for his rhetorical work, which Ṣafī ad-Dīn lists, whereas he himself has added thirty additional works, for a total of seventy, which he also lists.[17] After recounting his dream, Ṣafī ad-Dīn triumphantly declares that he has a total of 151 types of rhetorical devices, adding—in the interest of full disclosure—that if you count all twelve types of *jinās* (paronomasia, root-play) as one, then the total is 140.[18]

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[13] Al-Ḥillī, *Sharḥ al-Kāfiya al-Badīʿiyya*, 51.

[14] See G. E. von Grunebaum, “Iʿdjāz,” in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, new ed., vol. 3 (Leiden: Brill, 1971).

[15] Al-Ḥillī, *Sharḥ al-Kāfiya al-Badīʿiyya*, 51–52.

It is of note that although he provides detailed information on the works of his scholarly antecedents in the realm of rhetoric, Ṣafī ad-Dīn refers not at all to his poetic predecessor, al-Būṣīrī, sufficing with a mere mention of the meter *basīṭ*. It goes without saying, given the extraordinary extent to which al-Būṣīrī's *Burda* was woven into the texture of popular Muslim devotional life as well as literary life at this period and the following centuries, that any Muslim would recognize from the opening line of *Al-Kāfiya al-Badīʿiyya* that it is a *muʿāraḍa* of al-Būṣīrī's *Burda*—not merely in the rhyme in *mīm* and the meter *basīṭ*, but also in the familiar motifs and specific rhyme-words.[19] As mentioned above, with the crystallization of the doctrine of *iʿjāz al-Qurʾān* around the concept that its miraculous inimitability was above all rhetorical, Arab-Islamic culture put an unequalled premium on the power of rhetoric. For supplicatory panegyric in general (*qaṣīdat al-madḥ*), whether in the pre-Islamic tribal or Islamic courtly productions, this meant that the most beautiful poem was the most rhetorically powerful—that is, performatively effective—and vice-versa, on both counts. Thus, for the medieval Muslim, al-Būṣīrī's *Burda*—its unique efficacy having been established by the evidentiary miracle of the poet's dream vision and cure (and subsequent miracles attributed to the poem)—was *ipso facto* the most beautiful, poetically accomplished poem.

For successor poets hoping for the Prophet's intercession, or merely for worldly poetic fame, the issue was how to coopt the *baraka* or blessing of the *Burda*. The successor poet's challenge then is to create a poem that simultaneously "is" and "is not" the *Burda*. The *muʿāraḍa* form strives to achieve precisely this. In the Arabic, especially in oral recitation and especially for *muʿāraḍāt* of the *Burda* (which, it seems to me, cleaves closer to the *Burda* base-text than the *muʿāraḍa* genre in general), the rhyme, meter, diction, motifs, and the many, but not always, repeated thematic sections, create a virtual identity of sonority and near identity of meaning between the two poems. The poet who wants to thus coopt the *Burda* has to take possession of it as closely as possible, but without producing a mere "recitation" or "imitation." As a poetic art, a successful *muʿāraḍa* has to be at the same time an "original" work in its own right—the successor poet's "own" poem.

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[16] Al-Ḥillī, *Sharḥ al-Kāfiya al-Badīʿiyya*, 52–53, and refs.

[17] Al-Ḥillī, *Sharḥ al-Kāfiya al-Badīʿiyya*, 54; 335–346; 347–356.

[18] Al-Ḥillī, *Sharḥ al-Kāfiya al-Badīʿiyya*, 54.

[19] In this respect it is interesting to see that al-Āthārī al-Mawṣilī (d. 828AH) in the introduction to one of his *badīʿiyyāt*, *Badīʿ al-Badīʿ fī Madḥ ash-Shafīʿ*, mentions explicitly that it is a *muʿāraḍa* of al-Ḥillī's *muʿāraḍa* of [al-Būṣīrī's] *Burda*. See Abū Zayd, *al-Badīʿiyyāt*, 87.

Ṣafī ad-Dīn concludes the introduction to his commentary by insisting on the originality of *Al-Kāfiya al-Badīʿiyya* both as a rhetorical handbook and as a poem. As constrained or artificial as his project may seem to the modern reader, Ṣafī ad-Dīn makes the claim (which post-classical critics find accurate), however curiously phrased, that he was striving for a fluid, limpid style:

> And I compelled myself in composing it to avoid constraint and forced language but rather to follow what my soul led me to of delicacy and ease of expression, strength and soundness of meaning.[20]

Another key element in Ṣafī ad-Dīn's sense of accomplishment is that his *badīʿiyya* is a condensed yet comprehensive rhetorical work based on seventy books (which he lists at the end of his commentary) of rhetoric, so that he concludes his introduction as follows:

> So, look, o littérateur-critic and wise scholar, at this rich collection that is delightful to the ear, for indeed it is the product of seventy books of which I did not skip a single chapter. So with it you can dispense with the excess stuffing of lengthy books and the arduousness of repetitive speech.[21]

And finally, in what is to us an astounding claim for originality and authenticity, he quotes a famous line by al-Mutanabbī (d. 354/955):

> Leave off every voice but my voice, for I
> Am the voice that speaks, the others are [mere] echoes.[22]

In this sense then, Ṣafī ad-Dīn's title *Al-Kāfiya* (the Sufficient) indicates that his *badīʿiyya* provides so sufficient an account of the rhetorical figures that the other seventy books are rendered superfluous. It seems he does not dare make such extravagant poetic claims, at least explicitly, in his prose introduction (but see below, discussion of line 42)—which is of note since his fame is as the foremost poet, not rhetorical scholar, of the eighth/fourteenth century.

But however "contrived" Ṣafī ad-Dīn's rhetorical poetic undertaking may appear to modern sensibilities, we should not underestimate the genius of his complex hybrid project. On the one hand, he has set out his competitive rhetorical goal: to outdo and complete the catalog of rhetorical devices, the understanding of which fulfills the religious obligation of proving and witnessing the evidentiary miracle that proves Muḥammad's prophethood and therefore the Islamic faith. In terms of competition, this entails not only Arabic rhetoric, but the fierce polemical debates among and between Islam, Christianity, and Judaism that flourished in this period, and for which, on the Islamic side, *madīḥ nabawī* (including several praise poems to the Prophet by al-Būṣīrī)[23] was a major site. On the other hand, in choosing to incorporate this rhetorical competition in the form of a *madīḥ nabawī* and in particular one that is a *muʿāraḍa* of al-Būṣīrī's *Burda*, Ṣafī ad-Dīn has both "upped the ante" of the competitive game/gamble and "trumped" the rhetorical scholars among his competition by "changing the rules of the game" from prose treatise to devotional poem. A further element that surely comes into play is that just as rhetoric is valorized as the preeminent scholarly field, so too has *madīḥ nabawī* by this time become the preeminent genre for poetic composition.

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[20] Al-Ḥillī, *Sharḥ al-Kāfiya al-Badīʿiyya*, 55.
[21] Al-Ḥillī, *Sharḥ al-Kāfiya al-Badīʿiyya*, 55.
[22] Al-Ḥillī, *Sharḥ al-Kāfiya al-Badīʿiyya*, 56.

The poetic side of this hybridity to a large degree mirrors the competitive and performance aspects of the rhetorical side. A key element here is that the *muʿāraḍa* is by its very nature—and the etymology of the term—an essentially and explicitly competitive form, in a way that rhetorical treatises are not. In terms of morphology it is the Verbal Noun of a Form III verb (*ʿāraḍa*) that signifies to vie, to compete, to contend for superiority, to emulate, rival, imitate,[24] and in its use as a technical poetic term embraces all of these significations. Thus, the competition that is implicit in the rivalry and one-upmanship of the tradition of rhetorical scholarship becomes explicit when Ṣafī ad-Dīn adopts this poetic form. And just as he outperforms the scholars of rhetoric by turning to poetic form, he strives to outdo the poets—specifically al-Būṣīrī, his arch-rival when it comes to *madīḥ nabawī*—by systematically foregrounding his total mastery, not just conceptually but in poetic practice or performance of the totality of rhetorical devices as he himself established them.[25] Thus on the poetic side, too, he "ups the ante" and "trumps" his rivals by "changing the rules of the game." Much like a Swiss Army Knife, then*, Al-Kāfiya al-Badīʿiyya* is "sufficient" or "all-sufficient," performing a full range of tasks necessary for survival in the rhetorical and poetic jungles of this world and for salvation in the world to come.

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[23] Stetkevych, *Mantle Odes*, 81–82.

[24] Edward William Lane, *An Arabic-English Lexicon*, 8 vols. (New York: Ungar, 1958), *ʿ-r-ḍ*.

[25] On the practice and theory of *muʿāraḍa* and specifically Aḥmad Shawqī's *Nahj al-Burda*, his contrafaction of al-Būṣīrī's *Burda,* which was also deeply influenced by the *badīʿiyya* tradition, see Stetkevych, *Mantle Odes*, 153–156; 163–233 passim. See also, Akiko Motoyoshi Sumi, "Poetry and Architecture: A Double Imitation in the Sīniyyah of Aḥmad Shawqī," *Journal of Arabic Literature* 39 (2008); and on various forms and terms of poetic emulation, competition, and imitation in Arabic and Persian poetry, Paul Losensky, "'The Allusive Fields of Drunkenness': Three Safavid Mogul Responses to a Lyric by Bābā Fighānī," in *Reorientations: Arabic and Persian Poetry*, ed. Suzanne Pinckney Stetkevych (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994).

Nevertheless, in one respect, *Al-Kāfiya* was not so self-sufficient: the poet had to label each line to indicate which rhetorical device it exemplified. In the ongoing literary competition that *Al-Kāfiya* sparked, however, this insufficiency or deficiency was overcome when ʿIzz ad-Dīn al-Mawṣilī (d. 789/1387) took it upon himself to outdo his predecessor by adding the stricture that each line of his *badīʿiyya*, entitled *At-Tawaṣṣul bi-l-Badīʿ ilā t-Tawassul bi-sh-Shafīʿ* (Achieving through Badīʿ Supplication to the Intercessor [Muḥammad]), would contain a *tawriya* (pun) on the name of the rhetorical device it exemplified.[26]

Having examined, at least briefly, the aspects of rhetoric and hybridity in *Al-Kāfiya al-Badīʿiyya*, we will now turn to consideration of performance, which is inseparable in this case from the other two. In choosing to compose his rhetorical treatise in the form of a *muʿāraḍa* of al-Būṣīrī's *Burda*, Ṣafī ad-Dīn has devised a literary form that surpasses the rhetorical scholars in poetry and surpasses the poets in rhetorical scholarship. Further, it requires that the scholar-poet demonstrate or perform the efficacy of rhetoric—not by competing with the Qurʾān, which as a point of doctrine is impossible as well as forbidden, but by composing a poem that is performatively successful—that is, that outperforms the competition in rhetorical science, especially that of Ibn Abī al-Iṣbaʿ, and in poetry, specifically al-Būṣīrī's *Burda*. Here too, the issue of hybridity born of multiple motives is essential to Ṣafī ad-Dīn's undertaking. On the scholarly side, he aims to establish his knowledge and mastery of more rhetorical devices than any other scholar; in terms of the genre of *madīḥ nabawī*, the purpose is to compose a devotional poem so beautiful that, in return, the Prophet will intercede for the poet on Judgment Day (see lines 41–46, discussed below). Moreover, as a contrafaction of al-Būṣīrī's *Burda*, *Al-Kāfiya* strives to "outperform" the celebrated master, that is, to co-opt its *baraka* or blessing and to displace and replace it on its devotional pedestal. In this respect, the act of *muʿāraḍa* in and of itself demands the comparison and evaluation of the two ritual-poetic "performances" of *madīḥ nabawī*. In essence, then, Ṣafī ad-Dīn's innovation is that he raises the bar and declares that scholarship alone is not sufficient to fully understand the rhetorical miracle of the Qurʾān, rather, the proof lies in the "performance" of the devotional poem.

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[26] Abū Zayd, *Al-Badīʿiyyāt*, 77–79; (the first line of al-Mawṣilī's *At-Tawaṣṣul* given in Abū Zayd is not found in the other sources cited here). See also the discussion in Stetkevych, "From Jāhiliyyah to *Badīʿiyyah*," 225–227. The full text of al-Mawṣilī's *At-Tawaṣṣul* can be found in Taqī ad-Dīn Ibn Ḥijja al-Ḥamawī, ʿIzz ad-Dīn al-Mawṣilī, et al., *al-Badīʿiyyāt al-khams fī madḥ an-nabī wa-ṣ-ṣaḥāba al-kirām* (Cairo-Fajjāla: Maṭbaʿat al-Maʿārif, 1897), 15–22; all its lines are also included in Ibn Ḥijja al-Ḥamawī's commentary on his own *badīʿiyya, Taqdīm Abī Bakr* (The Precedence of Abū Bakr) in which he tries to outdo both Ṣafī ad-Dīn al-Ḥillī and al-Mawṣilī, combining the limpid style of the former with the stricture of punning on the name of the rhetorical device of the latter. See Abū Bakr Muḥammad ibn ʿAlī Ibn Ḥujja [*sic*] al-Ḥamawī, *Khizānat al-adab wa-ghāyat al-arab*, ed. Ṣalāḥ ad-Dīn al-Hawwārī, 2 vols. (Beirut: Al-Maktaba al-ʿAṣriyya, 2006). Some later composers of *badīʿiyya*, notably Ibn Ḥijja al-Ḥamawī, followed this stricture, others did not.

In my earlier work, I adopted the point of view of ritual theory, derived primarily from the disciplines of anthropology and religious studies, as a starting point from which to interpret the form of the classical Arabic *qaṣīda* in terms of rite of passage, seasonal theory, and rituals of exchange. This has extended into performative and performance theory, which I see in terms of my work as broadening the discussion beyond the structure of the text itself to its extra-textual efficacy. Inasmuch as my argument for the ritual structure of poetic texts has always presumed that the text effects or carries out (rather than describes or recounts) a ritual, it sees the classical Arabic poetic tradition as inseparable from performance and performativity.[27]

In the medieval tradition of *madīḥ nabawī*, it seems to me that concepts of performance and performativity prove particularly useful in interpreting the phenomenon of the poetic progeny of al-Būṣīrī's *Burda*—especially in regard to issues of identity, imitation, innovation, and competition. The mimetic aspect of ritual has much to tell us about issues of "identification," which, as Paul Connerton suggests, often takes the form of a "mythic concordance"[28] between the original "performance"—in this case al-Būṣīrī's *Burda*—and the "ritual reenactment" —Ṣafī ad-Dīn's *Al-Kāfiya al-Badīʿiyya*—or between the original performer and the ritual reenactor. In other words, to reenact the *Burda*, the new poet must take al-Būṣīrī's place; that is, he must become the "speaker" of the poem—the "lyric I" of the Arabic poetic tradition.

In the case of the *muʿāraḍa*, we can understand the strictures of this form through Richard Bauman's terms "framing" or "keying"—the rhyme and meter, together with the rhyme words and diction of the opening lines fall fully into Bauman's concepts of both "framing" and "metacommunicative conventions." Furthermore, given the competitive nature of the *muʿāraḍa*, and of the *badīʿiyya* in particular, Bauman's attention to the elements of "competence" and "evaluation" comes to the fore.[29] Thus, in Ṣafī ad-Dīn's *Al-Kāfiya*, as with all rhetorical-style *madīḥ nabawī*, the mastery of metacommunicative conventions—poetic conventions of rhyme, meter, themes, and diction, but also, and especially, rhetorical devices—constitute the aesthetic criteria for the evaluation of the ritual performance. That is, the poet's poetic—including rhetorical—competence is equated with his moral and spiritual worthiness.

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[27] See Suzanne Pinckney Stetkevych, *The Mute Immortals Speak: Pre-Islamic Poetry and the Poetics of Ritual* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993), passim; Suzanne Pinckney Stetkevych, *Poetics of Islamic Legitimacy: Myth, Gender, and Ceremony in the Classical Arabic Ode* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002), passim; and Stetkevych, *Mantle Odes*, passim.

[28] Paul Connerton, *How Societies Remember* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 43. See also my use of Connerton's term in Stetkevych, *Poetics of Islamic Legitimacy*, chapter 6 and index.

[29] Richard Bauman, *Verbal Art as Performance* (Rowley, MA: Newbury House, 1977), 15–16; 17–24 passim.

Al-Kāfiya al-Badīʿiyya of Ṣafī ad-Dīn al-Ḥillī[30]

We shall begin our discussion by comparing the opening two lines of Ṣafī ad-Dīn's *Al-Kāfiya* with the first line of al-Būṣīrī's *Burda*:

1. *barāʿat al-maṭlaʿ* (masterful opening): smooth, clear, and delicate;
   jinās murakkab (compound paronomasia/root-play: *s-l-ʿ* plus *n*):
   Salʿan . . . . sal ʿan;
   jinās muṭlaq (pure paronomasia/root-play: *s-l-m*): *salām . . . . Salam*
      in ji'ta ***Salʿan*** *fa-**sal ʿan*** *jīrati l-ʿAlami*
      w-aqrā s-salāma ʿalā ʿurbin bi-Dhī Salami
      If you come to **Salʿ** then **ask about** the neighbors of ʿAlam,
      And recite a greeting to the Bedouin of Dhū Salam.

2. *jinās mulfaq* (paronomasia/root-play in which both members
   are compounded of two words)
      fa-qad ḍamintu wujūda d-damʿi ***min ʿadami***
      la-hum wa-lam astaṭiʿ maʿa dhāka ***manʿa dami***
      I guaranteed/was afflicted with the presence of tears
      because of [the loved ones'] **absence,** and yet was not able
         to **prevent my blood** [from being shed].

Al-Būṣīrī's *Burda*[31]

1. *a-min tadhakkuri jīrānin bi-Dhī Salami*
   mazajta damʿan jarā min muqlatin bi-dami
   Was it the memory of those you loved at Dhū Salam
   That made you weep until you mixed your tears with blood?

Both poems invoke through classical rhyme, meter, diction and motif, and the rhymed hemistichs of the opening line (*taṣrīʿ*), the form or genre of a classical Arabic *qaṣīda* with its conventional opening motif of the *nasīb* (erotic prelude), which by this time has been adopted by both Ṣūfī *ghazal* (mystical lyric) and *madīḥ nabawī* (devotional panegyric).[32] Ṣafī ad-Dīn's opening line, in its identical rhyme and meter with the *Burda*, echoes and evokes its base text from the very beginning. Further, by opening his poem with two, rather than the conventional one, lines with *taṣrīʿ*, and repeating al-Būṣīrī's sound play on *damʿ* (tears) and *dam* (blood), Ṣafī ad-Dīn reinforces the identity of the two poems. The metacommunicative aspects here are essential: the opening line(s) establish through prosodic and motival identity, and partial identity of diction: (1) the generic identity of Ṣafī ad-Dīn's poem as a *qaṣīda*; (2) more specifically in this period, a *madīḥ nabawī*; and (3) most importantly and most precisely, that it is a *muʿāraḍa* of al-Būṣīrī's *Burda*. This tells the medieval Muslim all he needs to know in terms of literary expectations and criteria for evaluation and comparison. This, then, takes care of the identity side of the *muʿāraḍa* challenge.

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[30] For textual purposes in the present study, I have relied on al-Ḥillī, *Sharḥ al-Kāfiya al-Badīʿiyya* and Ṣafī ad-Dīn al-Ḥillī, *Dīwān* (Beirut: Dār Ṣādir/Dār Bayrūt, 1962), 685–702. In the subsequent text, I refer to line numbers. [I have not been able to procure for this study the newer edition of the *Dīwān*: Ṣafī ad-Dīn al-Ḥillī, *Dīwān*, 3 vols., ed. Muḥammad Ḥuwwar (Beirut: Al-Muʾassasa al-ʿArabiyya li-d-Dirāsāt wa-n-Nashr, 2000).]

[31] Stetkevych, *Mantle Odes,* 244.

[32] Stetkevych, *Mantle Odes*, 88–94.

Ṣafī ad-Dīn's double *taṣrīʿ*—in the first two verses, rather than just the opening verse—alerts us to his aim of outperforming his predecessor. Even without the rhetorical labels that accompany many (though not all)[33] of the manuscript or print forms of the poem and the explanations and definitions offered in the poet's commentary, the sonority of this double *taṣrīʿ* declares to the ear that Ṣafī ad-Dīn has tried to rhetorically surpass the base-text. Through this novelty he announces, indeed enacts, his innovative one-upmanship. Further, as he notes in his commentary, there are often more rhetorical devices in each line than the one (or more) that he singles out for labelling and explication.[34] Line 2, for example, formally exemplifies *jinās mulfaq* (paronomasia/root-play in which both members are made up of two separate words) in *min ʿadami* (from non-existence, absence) and *manʿa damī* (prevent my blood [from being shed]). But in addition, we can note the *jinās maqlūb* (metathesis) between *damʿ* (tears) and *ʿadam* (absence, non-existence) and the *ṭibāq* (antithesis) first between *wujūd* (existence) and *ʿadam* (absence, non-existence), and further, perhaps, between *astaṭiʿ* (be able) and *manʿ* (prevent). Further, the rhyme words of al-Būṣīrī's line 1 *taṣrīʿ* are now the final rhyme-words of Ṣafī ad-Dīn's lines 1 and 2, strengthening the identification with the base-text. Finally, we could add (in my reading at least) a *tawriya* (pun, or apparent pun in which the first apparent meaning gives way to the ultimately intended second) on the word *ḍamintu*, which seems to mean at first glance, "to be a surety or guarantee" for tears, but resolves on its other meaning, "to be afflicted (with a chronic illness)"—especially since, according to poetic convention, the poet-lover's unceasing tears turn to blood. This rhetorical density in and of itself signals to the listener/reader what the grounds of competition are.

In sum, the "text" (oral or written) of *Al-Kāfiya al-Badīʿiyya* tells us through a variety of metacommunicative poetic conventions that it is a *muʿāraḍa* of the *Burda*, a poetic challenge or contest intent on surpassing and displacing al-Būṣīrī's master-text. In this respect Ṣafī ad-Dīn's prose introduction, which likewise serves to "key" or "frame" the text is, in the end, redundant.[35]

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[33] For example, the rhetorical figures are not listed in the text of Ṣafī ad-Dīn's *Badīʿiyya* in al-Ḥamawī et al., *al-Badīʿiyyāt al-khams*, 33–40. There are two ways of looking at the omission of the names of rhetorical devices in those *badīʿiyyāt* that do not include a *tawriya* or pun on the term exemplified in each line: (1) that the devices are so familiar to the readers of this genre that the labels are redundant; and (2) that the poems are read increasingly for devotional rather than rhetorical purposes—although it is the argument of the present study that the rhetorical and devotional are not necessarily distinct or distinguishable.

[34] Al-Ḥillī, *Sharḥ al-Kāfiya al-Badīʿiyya*, 55.

An exhaustive treatment of Safī ad-Dīn's *Al-Kāfiya al-Badīʿiyya* would far exceed the allotted space for the present study, so I will present briefly some observations that support my reading and should prove fruitful in subsequent studies of this poem and other *badīʿiyyāt*.[36]

In broad thematic terms, *Al-Kāfiyya* as *madīḥ nabawī* can be divided as follows:

Lines 1–41: *nasīb*: features the motifs and diction conventional to the amorous prelude of the classical *qaṣīda* and of *madīḥ nabawī*: the weeping disconsolate lover imploring his companion to enquire about his lost beloved and her departed tribe; erotic suffering, sleeplessness; the torments of those that blame him (*ʿādhil*, pl. *ʿudhdhāl*). Ultimately the poet-speaker feels that the beloved and/or her people have failed him and the section ends with his feelings of deception and regret concerning his hopes for profane love and worldly success. In the intertextual context of al-Būṣīrī's *Burda* (verses 1–28),[37] this refers to eschewing worldly poetry and turning instead to praise of the Prophet.

Lines 42–45: form a transitional section between the sentiments of passivity, failure, and despair conveyed by the *nasīb* to the mood of agency, mastery, and hope through the composition of praise to the Prophet. Although brief, this section plays with the diction and motifs of the central *raḥīl* (journey) section of the classical *qaṣīda* and performs the same transitional function. The use of an oath (*qasam*) here should be understood performatively, that is, as a speech act that commits the speaker to a particular course of action.[38]

42. *al-qasam* (oath)
May noble deeds not dub me "the master of his trade" on
the day of the boast (*fakhār*), and **may piety not fulfill**
my oath
43. *al-istiʿāra* (metaphor)
If I do not urge on the **mounts of determination**, which are
laden with rhymes and **heading for glory** close up,

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[35] In fact, like the labelling of the rhetorical devices, the introduction is sometimes omitted, as, for example, the text of the poem in al-Ḥamawī et al., *al-Badīʿiyyāt al-khams*, 33.

[36] I hope at some future date to complete a full translation and study of Ṣafī ad-Dīn al-Ḥillī's *Al-Kāfiya al-Badīʿiyya*.

[37] See Stetkevych, *Mantle Odes*, 92–97.

[38] To my mind the clearest exposition of performatives, that is, speech acts, remains J. L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1965). For a recent performative reading of a classical Arabic poem, which includes references to recent work on performative theory and Arabic poetry, see Suzanne Pinckney Stetkevych, "Performative Poetics in ʿAbbāsid Poetry: A Re-Reading of Abū Firās al-Ḥamdānī's Rāʾiyyah: *Arāka ʿaṣiyya al-damʿi*," *Annals of the Japan Association for Middle East Studies* 29 (2013).

44. *murāʿāt an-naẓīr* (association—of items related to a particular theme)[39]
    [These mounts are] **merchants** of words to the **market** of
    acceptance bringing from the **sea** of ideas the **pearls** of
    speech,
45. *barāʿat at-takhalluṣ* (masterful transition—from previous theme to praise of patron)
    Of every pointed and unpointed word which is adorned
    by the praise of the best (of all mankind, both) Arab and
    non-Arab.

What to me is most striking here, in the context of the genre of *madīḥ nabawī*, which, as I have argued elsewhere is overwhelmingly composed for the purpose of gaining the Prophet's intercession on Judgment Day,[40] is that for Ṣafī ad-Dīn a major motivation appears to be to win the title of "the master of the art/craft" of poetry. This is expressed in his use of the proverbial expression in line 42 *ibn bajdatihā* ("master of his trade"), which means a person intimately acquainted with, skilled in, and fully mastering a matter.[41] The competitive nature of his undertaking is encapsulated in the word *fakhār* (boast), itself an essentially competitive endeavor, and one which might better have been vocalized as *fikhār* (Form III) "boasting match." Tellingly, Ṣafī ad-Dīn's oath involves not so much his salvation in the other world, but his literary fame in this world. The strange thing for the modern reader is that he manages to conflate the two. He seems to consider the composition of *madīḥ nabawī* the ultimate proving-ground of both his poetic skill and moral virtue. The foregrounding of the poet's boast that emerges in this passage of Ṣafī ad-Dīn's *Al-Kāfiya al-Badīʿiyya*, as well as the conflation of rhetorical mastery with spiritual salvation, comes to the fore once more toward the closure of the poem (see below, ll. 142–143).

In a charming metaphor (which is labelled as such) the poet styles his "journey" as urging on "mounts/camels of determination" "laden with rhymes" heading for the glory of composing prophetic praise (l. 43). Line 43 employs the well-known conceit of poems as strings of pearls to describe his poetic venture as a trade-caravan bearing priceless pearls to market. The market here, however, is *sūq al-qabūl* (market of acceptance)—that is, the Prophet Muḥammad's acceptance of Ṣafī ad-Dīn's gift (or "merchandise") of praise.

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[39] For the English, see Cachia, *Handbook*, 48 (no. 73). It is entirely indicative of the transfer from the manuscript to the print tradition, and likewise from a religious to a secular approach to rhetorical knowledge, that Pierre Cachia, *Handbook*, has extracted and translated a handlist of rhetorical figures, definitions, and examples from ʿAbd al-Ghanī an-Nābulsī's (d. 1143/1731) commentary on his own *badīʿiyya*, entitled *Nafaḥāt al-Azhār ʿalā Nasamāt al-Asḥār*, while eliminating and/or dismantling the *badīʿiyya* itself that forms the structure—and at least partly the purpose—of the original Arabic work.

[40] See Stetkevych, *Mantle Odes*, 97–106; 148–149; and index.

[41] Lane, *Arabic-English Lexicon*, *b-d-j*.

With line 46 we have arrived squarely in the *madīḥ* or praise section, which, in conventional terminology, comprises the goal (*gharaḍ*) of the remainder of the poem 46–145). However, the final 100 lines comprise distinct subthemes, which are essential to, and in some cases distinctive of, *madīḥ nabawī*.

Lines 46–64 are standard fare of prophetic praise, and it seems noteworthy to me that the theme of prophetic intercession, so pronounced and essential to al-Būṣīrī's *Burda* and to the genre of *madīḥ nabawī* in general, is, as it were, mentioned only in passing in lines 54 and 60. Lines 65–99 comprise the largest thematic subsection of the *maḍīh*, and it is of note that of the several distinct sub-themes that are developed in what I have termed the Sīra-derived *madīḥ* sections of al-Būṣīrī's *Burda*—the Prophet's birth, his miracles, the Qurʾān, al-Isrāʿ wa-l-Miʿrāj (Night Journey and Ascension), and Jihād and military campaigns[42]—only this last is fully developed, and indeed expanded, in *Al-Kāfiya al-Badīʿiyya*. Although there may be several motivations for this, it strikes me that the primary one may be simply rhetorical: Ibn al-Muʿtazz's claims in *Kitāb al-Badīʿ* notwithstanding, the quintessential *badīʿ* style, including many distinctive and original features, reached its apex in the great victory odes of the High ʿAbbāsid caliphal and subsequently princely courts.[43] The sustained and intensive use of intricate and abstract wordplay, simile, and metaphor as the linguistic correlative of divinely appointed and therefore superhuman caliphal might and right often played out in the theme of military campaigns, battlefields, and sites of plunder.[44] Thus, for the poet steeped in the rhetoric (*badīʿ*) of the ʿAbbāsid golden age, the topic of the Prophet's military campaigns offered an ideal site for enacting the poet's verbal might. It is worth noting that the base-text, al-Būṣīrī's *Burda*, also exhibits a similar poetics in Part 8: The Messenger's Jihād and Military Campaigns (*ʿan jihād ar-rasūl wa-ghazawātih*, ll.118–139).[45]

In terms of the poetics of performance, a poetic contest may be at its liveliest and most dramatic when engaging in a military contest: verbal combat enacted as and enacting armed combat. It is also noteworthy that this passage of *Al-Kāfiya al-Badīʿiyya* is entirely "generic" High ʿAbbāsid battle poetry. There is no mention of any of the historical proper names of Muḥammad or other persons, nor of any of the place-names associated with the military campaigns or *maghāzī* of the Prophet. In other words, the passage derives entirely from poetic sources and not from *as-Sīra an-Nabawiyya* (Biography of the Prophet) or historical chronicles. In terms of style, it echoes the taut and unrelenting *badīʿ* of Abū Tammām, though less convoluted and with simpler diction, and yet, to my mind, it is denser than the style of al-Buḥturī or al-Mutanabbī. The passage is in the 3rd ms pronoun ("he") from lines 65–81, referring to the Prophet. An explicit allusion to Ṣafī ad-Dīn's illustrious ʿAbbāsid predecessor, Abū Tammām, and his celebrated victory ode to the ʿAbbāsid Caliph al-Muʿtaṣim bi-Allāh appears in Ṣafī ad-Dīn's example of *tasjīʿ* (rhymed phrases—in which the line is divided into four non-parallel parts, with an internal rhyme the same as the end-rhyme):

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[42] See Stetkevych, *Mantle Odes*, 90; 106–141.

[43] See Suzanne Pinckney Stetkevych, *Abū Tammām and the Poetics of the ʿAbbāsid Age* (Leiden: Brill, 1991), chapter 1; and ʿAbd Allāh Ibn al-Muʿtazz, *Kitāb al-Badīʿ*, ed. Ignatius Kratchkovsky (London: Luzac, 1935), passim.

[44] See Stetkevych, *Abū Tammām*, chapters 5–9; Stetkevych, *Poetics of Islamic Legitimacy*, 152–179; and Stetkevych, "From Jāhiliyyah to *Badīʿiyyah*," 214–219.

[45] See Stetkevych, *Mantle Odes*, 132–141 on al-Būṣīrī's *Burda*; also of interest is the cognate (now anti-colonial) passage in defense/praise of *jihād* and the Prophet's military campaigns (ll. 129–141) in the neo-classical poet Aḥmad Shawqī's (d. 1932) famed contrafaction of al-Būṣīrī's *Burda*, *Nahj al-Burda* (The Way of the Mantle); see Stetkevych, *Mantle Odes*, 202–208.

80. *tasjīʿ* (internal rhymed phrases)
faʿālu muntaẓimi l-aḥwāli muqtaḥimi l-
ahwāli, multazimin, bi-l-Lāhi m/Muʿtaṣimi
The action of one who orders affairs,
rushes headlong into terrors,
steadfast, relying on God.

which audibly echoes the much-imitated line from Abū Tammām's celebrated victory ode to al-Muʿtaṣim on the conquest of the Byzantine city of Amorium (Ammūriya) (223/838):

37. *tadbīru m/Muʿtaṣimin bi-l-Lāhi muntaqimi*
li-l-Lāhi murtaqibin fī l-Lāhi murtaghibi
The direction of one relying on God, avenging for God
striving and yearning toward God.[46] [Abū Tammām]

What is curious and noteworthy is that a celebrated line praising an ʿAbbāsid caliph is serving here as an explicit base-text for a line praising the Prophet Muḥammad. Furthermore, we can add that in less explicit terms the same is true for this military section of Ṣafī ad-Dīn's *madīḥ nabawī*, as is indeed also the case in al-Būṣīrī's *Burda*.[47] We should take this to mean that the High ʿAbbāsid *badīʿ* style of panegyric has become the "gold standard" for praise—including prophetic praise.

A pivot line about Islam versus Kufr (infidelity, unbelief) (l. 82) achieves the transition from direct praise of the Prophet to the praise of his army. This line serves as a good example of Ṣafī ad-Dīn's style. While exemplifying what seem to be constrained or constraining rhetorical devices—here *tasmīṭ* (stringing [pearls]: dividing the line into four metrically parallel sections, the first three of which are exhibit *sajʿ*-rhyme different from the fourth), he uses very simple diction and clear ideas expressed in antithetical pairs (*ṭibāq*):

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[46] See the discussion and translation of Abū Tammām's masterpiece in Stetkevych, *Poetics of Islamic Legitimacy*, 152–179; 160.

[47] See the text and discussion in Stetkevych, *Mantle Odes*, 132–141.

82. *at-tasmīṭ* (stringing [pearls])
fa l-ḥaqqu fī ufuqin, wa sh-shirku fī nafaqin,
wa l-kufru fī faraqin, wa d-dīnu fī ḥarami
Truth is on the horizon; Polytheism is in a trench;
Disbelief is in terror; Religion is in an inviolate sanctuary.

Lines 83–92 adopt the 3mp pronoun or the singular "each one," referring to the warriors rather than the Prophet himself, and at line 93 the subject shifts from the warriors themselves to their battle-steeds and the cavalry. Line 98 describes the warriors as frolicking merrily under the shadows of the brown spears, as lions frolic in their lairs. Line 99 serves as a pivot line, achieving a transition first from the warriors back to the Prophet, and from war to peace.

Lines 99–117 bring us back to the 3ms pronoun and to standard motifs of prophetic praise, describing the Prophet's virtues and miracles. Once again, we find that what sound like contrived devices when defined, result in clear, limpid, semantically concise lines, as in the alliterative effect and doctrinal concision (the status of Muḥammad as the "seal of the prophets") achieved by the *taqyīd* (restriction) in the letter *mīm*, whereby the letter "M" must appear in every word:

111. *at-taqyīd bi-ḥarf al-mīm* (restriction—to words containing the letter "M")
Muḥammadu l-muṣṭafā l-mukhtāru man khutimat
bi-majdihi mursalū r-Raḥmāni li l-umami
Muḥammad the selected, the chosen one, by whose
glory those whom God sent as Messengers to the nations
were sealed.

Of course, the choice of the letter *mīm*, given its morphological ubiquity (i.e., in addition to having its fair share of the letters of the triliteral roots, *mīm* is a morphological prefix for the *maṣdar mīmī*, the nouns of place and instrument, all the derived active participles, and all of the passive participles) considerably lightens the rhetorical challenge and makes for a light and fluid line.

Ṣafī ad-Dīn introduces the prophets Ibrāhīm (Abraham) (l. 114) and Yūnus (Jonah) (l. 115), to arrive, somewhat indirectly, at ʿĪsā (Jesus) in line 116. This line is notable in that, for his example of *istiʿāna* (seeking help, borrowing), Ṣafī ad-Dīn chooses a line from al-Būṣīrī's *Burda* (l. 43), admonishing Muslims not to attribute to Muḥammad what the Christians [falsely] attribute to Jesus—that is, divinity.[48]

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[48] Ṣafī ad-Dīn's line is a variant of al-Būsīrī's as it occurs in most versions. See Stetkevych, *Mantle Odes*, 98; 246.

116. *al-istiʿāna* (seeking help; quoting a full line from another poet)
Leave off [for Muḥammad] the excessive claims
the Christians make
for their Messiah; say what you wish and judge proper.

This is the closest Ṣafī ad-Dīn comes, in the text of the poem, to explicitly acknowledging al-Būṣīrī's *Burda*.

Lines 117–131 consist of an extended benediction. With the *taṣliya* of line 117 [invocation of God's blessing upon Muḥammad, traditionally in the formula *ṣallā l-Lāhu ʿalayhi wa-sallama* (may God bless him and give him peace)], which is a requisite component to ensure the fulfilment of any Muslim prayer (*duʿāʾ*),[49] Ṣafī ad-Dīn signals the entry into the concluding and obligatory rituals of the *madīḥ nabawī*. Once again, we find the poet coopting and redirecting the poetic genre and al-Būṣīrī's genre-model, toward his own ends, as, indeed, every "performer" does. First, he extends and constructs the *taṣliya* to clearly convey his Shīʿite sympathies. This may also alert us to the differences between Ṣafī ad-Dīn's motivations and concerns as opposed to al-Būṣīrī's. The great doctrinal and polemical issue for al-Būṣīrī, it seems to me, is an intercommunal one—he is bent upon establishing that Muḥammad is the seal of the Prophets, outranking all others, and that, concomitantly, Islam is the true religion as opposed to the claims of the Christians and Jews. Thus, al-Būṣīrī devotes major sections of his *Burda* to the Prophet's miracles (ll. 72–87); the Qurʾān (ll. 88–104)—an eternal miracle that overshadows the temporary miracles of others; and al-Isrāʾ wa-l-Miʿrāj (the Night Journey and Ascension) (ll. 105–117), which emphasizes Muḥammad's status as closer to God and higher in rank than the other prophets.[50] By contrast, Ṣafī ad-Dīn's concerns are more intracommunal. Although his tone is devotional rather than shrilly polemical, he nevertheless clearly presents his case for the precedence of Āl al-Bayt, the family of the Prophet (lines 118–122),[51] before proceeding to the praise of the (other) Companions. Of special significance in this respect are lines 118 on Āl al-Bayt and 124 on the Companions. Line 124, in declaring the Companions/Ṣaḥb identical to Āl al-Bayt *except in* kinship to the Prophet and mention in the Qurʾān, secures the precedence of Āl al-Bayt, even as it ensures that the remaining lines of praise (ll. 125–131) apply equally to Āl al-Bayt and the Ṣaḥāba.

Lines 132–145 comprise the conclusion of the poem as supplicatory ritual and as competitive performance. The benediction (*taṣliya*) of the Prophet in lines 117–131, as mentioned above, is a ritual requisite for a prayer to be granted. Now it is time for the poet's concluding prayer and plea and the poetic discourse therefore shifts to a direct address to the

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[49] See Stetkevych, *Mantle Odes*, 146.
[50] See Stetkevych, *Mantle Odes*, 117–132.
[51] On Ṣafī ad-Dīn's Shīʿite proclivities, see Heinrichs' brief but to-the-point remarks, Heinrichs, "Ṣafī al-Dīn al-Ḥillī." On the Sunnī-Shīʿī rivalries as presented in *badīʿiyyāt*, see Stetkevych, "From Jāhiliyyah to *Badīʿiyyah*," 226.

Prophet directly in the 2nd person, “O Seal of the Prophets,” (l. 132). The concluding passage of the poem is, to my mind, quite extraordinary. Stylistically, it is very simple, powerful, and straightforward in its expression and diction—exemplifying the radical clarity (as opposed to rhetorical or stylistic opacity) that, as I have argued elsewhere,[52] characterizes the “ritual core” of the *qaṣīda*: the passages in which the poet-supplicant pleas for, negotiates, and/or demands the fulfilling of the obligation that the “gift” of the praise poem places on the patron—the Prophet—for a counter-gift—the Prophet’s intercession on Judgment Day. It is noteworthy that whereas the stories of the donation of the Prophet’s mantle of Kaʿb ibn Zuhayr’s *Bānat Suʿād* and the dream of al-Būṣīrī’s *Burda* are prose narratives external to the text of the poem, Ṣafī ad-Dīn has incorporated his dream of the Prophet into the ritual core of his poem. He names the Prophet as having initiated the ritual transaction of praise poem for intercession, and now he calls on the Prophet to fulfill his promise. Further, the poet declares that this “prior agreement” with the Prophet is a distinction that has been conferred upon no other poet before him. With this claim, Ṣafī ad-Dīn is making a transition from one classical Arabic *gharaḍ* (genre) to another, that is, from *madḥ* (praise) to *fakhr* (boast).

133. *al-muzāwaja* (pairing)
When I am afraid on Resurrection Day, but have praised him,
I will escape [hellfire] and my praise for him will be my refuge.
134. *ḥusn al-bayān* (clarity of expression)
In my dream, you made me a promise, in which I placed my trust,
Requiring that my praise for you be rhymed.
135. *as-suhūla* (ease of expression)
So I said: This is a guarantee that I have received beforehand,
One that no man before me has ever received.
140. *al-musāwāh* (equivalence of meaning and expression)
And I have praised you by [a poem] in which *badīʿ* has reached perfection
With elegance in both opening and closure.

What is so extraordinary about Ṣafī ad-Dīn’s poem is that his hybrid or multiple motivations are not repressed in his supplicatory closure, rather the irresistible urge to competition, to boast—the Arabic genre or *gharaḍ* of *fakhr*—bursts forth in the closing lines as he pronounces his poem his “rod” or “staff”—identifying it with the “rod” of Moses by which he defeated the Pharaoh’s magicians. In what I consider the greatest rhetorical feat of the poem, Ṣafī ad-Dīn, purporting to exemplify the device of *iqtibās* (quotation, esp. from the Qurʾān), appropriates for himself the words of Moses (l. 142) from Q 20:17–20: *[God asked] "What is that in your right hand, Moses?" He replied, "***It is my rod***: I lean on it and* ***knock down leaves to feed my flocks*** *and* ***have many other uses for it****." [God] said, "Throw it, Moses!" He threw it and behold, it was a writhing snake.* Then, exemplifying *talmīḥ* (allusion), Ṣafī ad-Dīn uses particular words or phrases from Q 7:109–126, esp. 7:116–117: the Pharaoh's magicians . . . *produced mighty* ***magic****. We [God] inspired Moses, "Cast your rod!" and behold! it* ***swallowed up*** *their falsehood*. The effect of this is to recast the Qurʾānic magic contest between Moses and Pharaoh's magicians as a poetic contest between Safī al-Dīn and his rival poets.

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[52] See Suzanne Pinckney Stetkevych, “Pre-Islamic Poetry and the Poetics of Redemption: *Mufaḍḍaliyyah 119* of ʿAlqamah and *Bānat Suʿād* of Kaʿb ibn Zuhayr,” in *Reorientations: Arabic and Persian Poetry*, ed. Suzanne Pinckney Stetkevych (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), 12–14; 33–37; Stetkevych, *Mantle Odes*, 141–143 and index.

142. *al-iqtibās* (quotation)
This is my rod for which **I have many uses**;
Sometimes I knock down leaves with it to feed my flocks.
143. *at-talmīḥ* (allusion—through a word or two to a proverb, story, the Qurʾān, etc.)
If **I throw it, it will swallow up** all that they have made,
when the **magic** of their words is brought to me.

That is, Ṣafī ad-Dīn has transformed the *siḥr* (magic or sorcery) of Pharaoh's magicians into the *siḥr ḥalāl* (licit magic) of eloquence/poetry, and the "magicians" into his rival poets. In terms of reenactment and performance, Ṣafī ad-Dīn is playing a complex rhetorical game of multiple shiftings with his mythic and textual concordances, referents of key terms, and speakers. The Qurʾān is understood to be the speech of God, but in Q 20:17 it "quotes" Moses. Ṣafī ad-Dīn then appropriates Moses' words as his own in his "quotation." In this respect, he is claiming for himself a Prophetic miracle, the God-given miracle of Moses' rod and, in a further textual and mythic concordance, this miracle is the analog of Muḥammad's miracle of the Qurʾān. Thus, rhetorically speaking, our poet is at most one step away from claiming prophethood. His identification with Muḥammad is strengthened by transforming the *siḥr* of the Pharaoh's magicians into the "licit magic" of speech and poetry, which, in the Islamic context brings us once more to the linguistic miracle of the Qurʾān and the poets as the foremost challengers of Muḥammad. The reader may at first be shocked to hear the poet invoking for himself a Qurʾānic prophetic miracle—Moses' rod—especially in a poem addressed ostensibly to the Prophet himself. For, in the catalog of Qurʾānic miracles and especially in the discourse of *iʿjāz al-Qurʾān*, Moses's rod is analogous to Muḥammad's Qurʾān. At this point, however, we might refer once more to Ṣafī ad-Dīn's opening invocation to his *Sharḥ al-Kāfiya al-Badīʿiyya*: "Praise be to God who made *licit* for us the *magic* of eloquence and made playing with it in the mind [the same as] witnessing [the miracle of the Prophet] with the eye." In this respect, then, Ṣafī ad-Dīn has pulled off a final rhetorical feat: he has (magically/ rhetorically) transformed a seemingly doctrinally scandalous claim to prophecy into the ultimate witnessing of the prophethood of Muḥammad and the truth of Islam.

Quite wisely, and in accord with the supplicatory conventions of both *qaṣīdat al-madḥ* and *madīḥ nabawi*, Ṣafī ad-Dīn concludes in a tone of self-abasement and humility. This he accomplishes with lines that are reminiscent of the closure of the celebrated poem of excuse or apology (*iʿtidhāriyya*) of the pre-Islamic master-poet an-Nābigha adh-Dhubyānī to the Lakhmid king, an-Nuʿmān ibn al-Mundhir:[53]

49. This is my praise, if it sounds good to you
I have alluded—May you disdain all curses!—to no gift.

50. This is my apology, if it has availed me nothing
Then its author is indeed down on his luck!

Thus, Ṣafī ad-Dīn concludes:

144. *ar-rujūʿ* (retraction, correction)
Within my shortcomings, I have made [this poem][54] long,
and made it my excuse
—**No! surely my excuse could not stand!**
145. *barāʿat al-khitām* (masterful closure)
If I meet with good fortune, then my praise for you is
the reason;
If I meet with misfortune, my own sin is the cause of
my affliction.

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[53] See Stetkevych, *Poetics of Islamic Legitimacy*, chapter 1, esp. 24–25, 42.

[54] I am unsure of the translation of this line, but certainly the editor’s note claiming that the pronoun refers to *maʾārib* (uses; two lines back) makes no sense. See al-Ḥillī, *Sharḥ al-Kāfiya al-Badīʿiyya*, 331, n. 1. I take it rather to refer (grammatically) to the “rod” and therefore (metaphorically) to the poem itself.

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Ines Weinrich

Strategies in Islamic Religious Oral Performance: The Creation of Audience Response

Abstract Contemporary Islamic chanting (*inshād*) has fed into Islamic popular music (*nasheed*) and vice versa. This chapter deals with more traditional, non-Sufi *inshād* in a ritual context. It analyses audio examples from fieldwork conducted in Lebanon in 2011 and 2012 and focuses on the mediation of poetic verses in praise of the prophet Muḥammad from the ninth century. Starting from the premise that one main aim in the rendition of religious texts is not only to convey information but also to create an emotional impact on listeners, the analysis builds on the concept of emotional involvement (*infiʿāl*) rooted in the Arab musical tradition. This concept highlights the interactive dynamics of the performance and thereby focuses not only on the performer but also on the listeners' perspective. The triggers of audience responses operate on a rhetorical, musical, and semantic level. The carefully staged aesthetic experience of the poetic text shows that the meaning of the Prophet's birthday (*mawlid*) becomes encapsulated in his role as an intercessor in the everyday life of the believer.

In the Islamic literary tradition, a vast repertory of texts was composed not for silent reading but for public recitation. Texts whose main purpose is to be publicly enacted to unfold their religious meaningfulness and function include not only the obvious forms, such as the Qurʾān or sermons, but also many prayers (*duʿāʾ*, pl. *adʿiya*) and literary genres, including narratives of religious figures (*mawlid*, *miʿrāj*, *maqātil*) or praise poetry for the Prophet. The artistic performance of such texts takes place communally and is a highly interactive process. Participants in these events take part in the delivery of text either through collective or alternating singing and reciting or through responses to a performing soloist. It is this last form that shall be explored in this paper: How does this process begin? What triggers the responses? And what rhetorical, musical, extra-textual and extra-musical factors contribute to and shape the performance?

Contrary to the investigation of historic performances, this paper deals with live events. Rather than taking the text as a starting point or analysing large parts of the textual material that is performed, it will take a short poetic passage as an example. Further, it will examine the performance of poetry with regard to concepts rooted in the Arab musical tradition and seek to identify the intertwined layers that are at work during the process of reception. This analysis is based on fieldwork study of the contemporary practices of *inshād* (religious chanting) in Syria and Lebanon.

Beyond conveying information alone, the performers of *inshād*—as well as reciters of the Qurʾān or preachers—are expected to exercise an emotional impact (*taʾthīr*) on the listeners.[1] This impact is generated through the framing of the event, the employment of body language, vocal techniques, and—according to the context—through musical means. In her analysis of Qurʾānic recitation, Kristina Nelson states: “It is recognized that the use of musical skills plays an important role in communicating not only the meaning of the text, but the significance of the recitation experience by capturing emotions, affecting the senses, and engaging the total attention and focusing on the significance of the Qurʾan.”[2]

Writing on listening in the religious context, the theologian Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī (d. 1111) describes the ear as an interface that is only the entrance point of the sound. It is then perceived by an inward sense which sets the heart in motion and guides the believer’s interaction (*muʿāmala*) with God.[3] The heart should be opened up to receive the Divine message;

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[1] Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyāʾ ʿulūm ad-dīn,* vol. 2 (Cairo: Dār ash-Shaʿb, n.d. [1937]), 1133; Kristina Nelson, *The Art of Reciting the Qur’an* (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 2001), 59, 102; Linda G. Jones, *The Power of Oratory in the Medieval Muslim World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 245.

[2] Nelson, *The Art of Reciting,* 100.

[3] al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyāʾ,* 1140, 1153. This blends well into the Platonic notion of psychagogy; cf. Introduction to this volume. There is a wide-spread tendency to cite al-Ghazālī foremost as an advocator of Sufism; it is worth noting, however, that he is not exclusively writing on listening in the Sufi context.

and listening is one way to soften the hard heart (*tarqīq*).[4] Whereas during a sermon the musical means of the performer are naturally limited to rhetoric and poetry, body language and voice techniques, during Qurʾānic recitation[5] and *inshād* the performer can make use of a wide range of musical devices.

Inshād: Contemporary practices and usages of the term

The context of my analyses is the religious practice of *inshād* (chanting). *Inshād* is the verbal noun of n-sh-d in form IV which denotes any kind of language articulation that exceeds normal speech. In historical sources, the verb is often used when a person recites poetry ("fa-anshada"), which denotes a kind of declamatory speech modus, including a raised voice, a strong rhythm, and a tempo that is eventually slower than that of normal speech.[6] The term can also be used for the musical rendition of literature. Referring to the etymology of Arabic lexicographers, Geert Jan van Gelder points out that *inshād* is not used for musical rendition, the latter being *ghināʾ* (singing).[7] I agree with van Gelder that *ghināʾ* is to be distinguished on a musical-technical basis, since as an art form (*al-ghināʾ al-mutqan*), it is more complex than simple chanting. Nevertheless, many Arabic native speakers would refer to the musically elaborated *qaṣīda* performance[8] in a religious context as *inshād* and not as *ghināʾ*.

Today, many Muslims choose to use the root n-sh-d and its derivations to draw a line between secular singing (*ghināʾ*) and religious chanting. Even when there is not much difference at a musical-technical level—the performance of religious poetry shares many features with secular singing—the terminological distinction is retained to keep music as a secular art form separate from religiously employed sound.[9] Sometimes the use of the term is ideology-driven, serving the need to draw a clear-cut line between 'Islamic' and 'non-Islamic': for instance, one finds references to YouTube videos of religious songs under the title "*nasheed* (not song)" or "*nasheed* (not music)." *Nasheed*, the English spelling of Arabic *nashīd* (the verbal noun of n-sh-d in form I), is also used by non-Arabic speakers to denote a religious—or religiously licit—repertory. 'Nasheed' has turned into the denomination of a genre of religious songs in many languages that are loosely defined by shared musical and textual characteristics. Texts speak of love for the Prophet, praise for God, longing for religious sites, or describe how to live a 'good life'; non-Arabic texts often have some Arabic passages interspersed. Musically, the vocal line is emphasised, the songs use soft melodies (often against a computerised strings background in pop versions) and occasionally lively rhythmic patterns.[10]

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[4] al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyāʾ,* 1178; Nelson, *The Art of Reciting*, 89–92; Jones, *Power of Oratory,* 102, 107; with a slightly different vocabulary *(inshirāḥ)* in the context of audiotaped sermons Charles Hirschkind, *The Ethical Soundscape: Cassette Sermons and Islamic Counterpublics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 68, 72.

[5] Here the *mujawwad* style of recitation, which is generally used for public performances, as opposed to the musically less complex *murattal* style. See for both styles and their musical characteristics, Nelson, *The Art of Reciting,* 102–116.

[6] Another verb which is used in this context is *qāla* ("to say") which is quite versatile in its application: it is used for normal speech, the rendition of poetry, for recitation in the religious context, singing, and instrumental playing. Interviews and conversations during fieldwork; Scott L. Marcus, *Music in Egypt: Experiencing Music, Expressing Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 12; Ali Jihad Racy, *Making Music in the Arab World: The Culture and Artistry of* Ṭarab (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 32, 79.

[7] Geert Jan van Gelder, *Sound and Sense in Classical Arabic Poetry* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2012), 160.

[8] For the musical characteristics of a *qaṣīda* performance, see below.

[9] Many Arabic speaking Christian and Druze communities use different terms for singing and chanting (e.g. *tartīl*) as well. Cf. Kathleen Hood, *Music in Druze Life: Ritual, Values and Performance Practice* (London: The Druze Heritage Foundation, 2007), 24–26; Ines Weinrich, "Musik im sakralen und profanen Kontext im Nahen

In the context of this paper—contemporary Bilād al-Shām or the Eastern Levant—the term *inshād* is used as a generic term for the performance of texts in the religious context.[11] Here it refers to a religious repertory performed as and during a pious act of listening. *Inshād* is an integral part of many commemorative festivities (*iḥtifāl*), including the Prophet's birthday, the Prophet's ascension to heaven, the beginning of the Islamic *hijrī*-year, or the anniversary of the birth or death of important figures in religious history. *Inshād*, either as live-performance or broadcasted via radio and television, is also used to mark ritually special times like the hours before fasting and fast-breaking in Ramadan. The repertory of *inshād* includes praise poetry for the Prophet, doxology, prayers, rogation, benediction, and the performance of narratives. Musically quite heterogeneous, *inshād* features solo singing and group singing, rhythmic and metrically free melodies, simple and musically elaborated styles.

The observations and sound examples presented in the following stem from fieldwork that was conducted in Sunni urban milieus in Syria and Lebanon between 2009 and 2013. Here a small performance ensemble (*firqa*) carries out the *inshād*. It typically consists of a lead singer (*munshid*) and a chorus of four to eight persons. Often, one to three frame drums are used

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Osten und darüber hinaus. Terminologische Überlegungen," in *Rezeption und Selbstwahrnehmung von Musikkulturen. Musik in rituellen und ritualisierten Kontexten,* ed. Marianne Bröcker (Münster: Monsenstein und Vannerdat, 2009), 21–23. On the other hand, by no means do all Muslims consider this terminological differentiation necessary. In my analysis of the musical material, I will use the term 'singing' also for the religious context.

[10] Sharing the same etymological root, but coming from a different cultural and musical background, *nashīd* (pl. *anāshīd*) also denotes predominantly political hymns, like the national anthems or patriotic hymns of the early Arab nationalist movements, bearing many resemblances with European marches. See, for general musical characteristics, Ines Weinrich, *Fayrūz und die Brüder Raḥbānī. Musik, Moderne und Nation im Libanon* (Würzburg: Ergon, 2006), 75–80. Some contemporary Islamic movements use the musical language of both forms of *nashīd*.

[11] Conversations during fieldwork; see also Nadhīr Muḥammad Maktabī, *al-Inshād wa-l-munshidūn. Dirāsa adabiyya sharʿiyya* (Damascus: Dār al-Maktabī, 2000); Muḥammad Fuʾād, "al-Munshid Ḥasan Ḥaffār," *ath-Thawra. Al-Mulḥaq ath-thaqāfī,* February 24, 2009.

for the musical accompaniment; one of the drums may have several pairs of cymbals incorporated into the frame to add further subtleness to the sound. Performance ensembles are either all-male or all-female. In mixed festivities, which were the most common during fieldwork, male groups perform; whereas in segregated festivities, women's ensembles perform for the women. The observed occasions commonly feature Qurʾānic recitation, *inshād*, suspended by a short oration addressing the occasion, and a concluding prayer (*duʿāʾ*). The events are organised by Sunni governmental institutions, mosque communities, religious associations, or private endowments.

Infiʿāl: The sensual experience of text

In his introduction to a recitation, a local shaykh in Beirut talked about the difference between books made for studying history and books made for recitation. The latter he termed as "books of *infiʿāl*." And *infiʿāl*, he added, means aesthetic experience (*jamāl*).[12] This example describes the difference between reading texts in order to obtain or convey information and reading or reciting texts in order to sensually experience its meaning. In the latter case, the performer makes use of the full range of vocal techniques and body language and enters a communicative process with the listeners.

Infiʿāl means the "(state of) being affected or involved." The dictionary of Edward William Lane elaborates further: "the suffering, or receiving, the effect of an act, whether the effect is intended by the agent or not; [. . .] e.g. blushing in consequence of confusion, or shame, affecting one from the seeing a person (sic) and the emotion, or excitement, ensuing from the hearing of singing, and the agitation of the passionate lover at his seeing the object of his love."[13]

The concept of *infiʿāl* has hitherto only been studied within Arab music from an ethnomusicological perspective.[14] It is relevant for the rendition of many religious texts as well. I use *infiʿāl* in this paper as a generic term; in practice, a variety of similar terms and synonyms are used to describe the state caused by making or listening to music. Nevertheless, *infiʿāl* is the most abstract term which denotes the process or state of being involved.

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[12] Shaykh al-Mūsawī, Beirut, 15.11.2012.

[13] Edward William Lane, *An Arabic-English Lexicon,* book 1, part 6 (Beirut: Librairie du Liban, 1968), 2420.

[14] Ali Jihad Racy, "Creativity and Ambience: An Ecstatic Feedback Model from Arab Music," *The World of Music* 33 (1991); "Improvisation, Ecstasy, and Performance Dynamics in Arabic Music," in *In the Course of Performance: Studies in the World of Musical Improvisation,* ed. Bruno Nettl and Melinda Russell (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1998); Racy, *Making Music*; see also Jürgen Elsner, "Listening to Arabic Music," *The World of Music* 39 (1997); Jonathan Holt Shannon, *Among the Jasmine Trees: Music and Modernity in Contemporary Syria* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2006).

This may refer to both the performer and the listener: a performer in the state of *infiʿāl* will fully indulge in the performance and feel inspired by the ambience; things will come out well without even noticing. On the listeners' side, *infiʿāl* involves emotional, bodily, and acoustic responses. For instance, it is manifested in a tense body, a raised arm or finger, or a swaying hand at peaks of the performance; it is further manifested through sighs or exclamations like "yā allāh" (o God), "ṣalli ʿalā n-nabī!" (invoke blessings upon the Prophet!), or comments on the melodic progression. Audience response is a necessary tool that is needed to stimulate the performer.

This highly communicative process, verbal and non-verbal, is mirrored in the term *tafāʿul* (mutual involvement) which stresses reciprocity. Through their responses, listeners savour the performance, show their enthusiasm for the artistry, and support the performer. Nevertheless, it is not the aim to show as much response as possible: both too much and too little response may spoil the performance, as would the choice of the wrong moment, using inadequate words, or inappropriate musical wishes. These rules of behaviour are subsumed into a code called *ādāb*. *Ādāb* (rules of conduct) refers not only to ethically and/or ritually correct behaviour but also to the musical level: a musically initiated listener does not interrupt but sustains the modal ambience by providing appropriate responses which are related to the musical process. *Ādāb* therefore requires musical knowledge, or at least a certain level of intimacy with the music performed. These well-informed listeners have, again, a special term: *samīʿa.*[15] Performers highly value the support of a true *samīʿa*.

The described phenomena of *infiʿāl*, *ādāb*, and *samīʿa* are closely related to a typical *ṭarab* performance. *Ṭarab*, often simplified in translation as "ecstasy," denotes the transformative state caused by music and encompasses enchantment, rapture, delight, and affliction. However, *ṭarab* is today a highly loaded term, since it may be used both pejoratively and as a compliment, depending on the cultural orientation and attitude of the speaker or writer. The usage of the term includes discussion on the significance of writing and a written musical tradition, the status and value of improvisation, ways to modernise and teach music, and adequate musical expressions.[16] In religious contexts, there is a debate on whether or not *ṭarab* is desirable for religious performances: for opponents to *ṭarab*, the *ṭarab* phenomenon is either closely associated with secular singing in general or with certain recitation techniques which are seen as having the musical devices prevail over the text. On the other hand, we find *ṭarab* or its derivations, especially *taṭrīb*,[17] used to describe an emotionally effective and successful religious performance.[18] Furthermore, in contemporary usage *ṭarab* may denote a musical style which is associated with an older repertory, especially of the early twentieth century up to the 1960s.

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[15] This term may in general be best translated as "listening connoisseurs," cf. Ali Jihad Racy, "Musical Aesthetics in Present-Day Cairo," *Ethnomusicology* 26 (1982): 392.

[16] Scott Marcus, "Arab Music Theory in the Modern Period" (PhD diss., University of California, 1989); Jonathan H. Shannon, "Emotion, Performance, and Temporality in Arab Music: Reflections on Tarab," *Cultural Anthropology* 18 (2003): 74; Weinrich, *Fayrūz,* 59–64, 357–364.

After this short introduction to the general context of the fieldwork and to the basic technical terms, I will now turn to the poetic verses and their performance.

Yā khayra man (O best of those): The religio-semantic context

The following verses were performed during a celebration to commemorate the Prophet's birthday (*mawlid*) in a small mosque in downtown Beirut in 2011.[19] It was the first full-fledged solo performance after a number of rhythmic and collectively sung songs, and it featured a careful elaboration of the text as well as intense audience responses.

> *Yā khayra man wuqiʿat fī l-qāʿi aʿẓumuhu*
> *fa-ṭāba min ṭībihinna l-qāʿu wa-l-akamu*
> *Nafsī l-fidāʾu li-qabrin anta sākinihu*
> *fīhi l-ʿafāfu wa-fīhi l-jūdu wa-l-karamu*
> O best of those whose bones are buried in the plain
> by their fragrance, the plain and the hill are made fragrant
> My soul is the ransom for a grave you inhabit
> in it are virtue, generosity, and magnanimity.

The overall context of these verses is the *ziyāra* (lit. "visit") to the grave of the Prophet Muḥammad. Muḥammad was buried in his house in Medina, and his grave was subsequently connected to the mosque and soon became a site for visitors.[20] Today, the *ziyāra* of graves, tombs, or special sites[21] is a widespread practice among Muslims and Christians in the Middle East.

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[17] *Taṭrīb* designates the effect a successful *ṭarab* performance has on the listener. From this semantic field, the common term for singer, *muṭrib*, is derived, lit. "the one who enraptures." Connoisseurs still distinguish between a *muṭrib* (a 'real singer' who knows how to produce *ṭarab*) and a *mughannī* (any singer).

[18] The debate on *ṭarab* in the religious context cannot be explored here at length. It shall be noted that evaluations and terminology depend heavily on individual attitude and historical contexts and cannot be generalised.

[19] The birthday of Muḥammad is nowadays generally dated on 12 or, less frequently, 17 Rabīʿ al-awwal of the Islamic calendar. Nevertheless, festivities on the occasion are not limited to a single day but may span a period from a week before until three weeks after that date.

[20] Marcel Behrens, *"Ein Garten des Paradieses." Die Prophetenmoschee von Medina* (Würzburg: Ergon, 2007), 155–157; for the rites of the Prophet's *ziyāra* cf. 227–276.

[21] Connected to persons or events but not necessarily containing a grave. For *ziyāra* in Syria throughout history cf. Daniella Talmon-Heller, *Islamic Piety in Medieval Syria: Mosques: Cemeteries and Sermons under the Zangids and Ayyūbids (1142–1260)* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 179–207; for contemporary Syria cf. Gebhard Fartacek, *Pilgerstätten in der syrischen Peripherie. Eine ethnologische Studie zur kognitiven*

Many Muslims combine the visit to the Prophet's grave with their pilgrimage to Mecca (*ḥajj*).

The addressee of the verses is Muḥammad—the "best of those whose bones are buried" in Medina. Bones figure here *pars pro toto* for the complete body. Notably, the bones/body described here do not smell, as one might expect from a corpse or skeleton, but instead emit fragrance and thereby perfume the surrounding area. Fragrant smell is a distinction granted by God: numerous traditions tell of Muḥammad's extraordinarily fragrant and pleasant smell. The notion that corpses of persons in a privileged relationship to God do not decompose and that their graves emanate fragrance is a widespread notion in Islam, and it is one that is illustrated through numerous narratives and poems recited in *inshād*.[22] Ṭayba or Ṭība (The Fragrant One) is also one of the epithets of Medina, due to the fact that Muḥammad and many of his companions are buried there.

Following the semantic development of ṭ-y-b, it is worth noting that its literal meaning "to be good, pleasant" has become identified with pleasant smell. In the Qurʾān, numerous verses mention the good things (*aṭ-ṭayyib*, *aṭ-ṭayyibāt*) that God has provided for humankind,[23] and one positive quality—fragrance—has becomes synonymous with "good."[24] The doubling of the positively connoted sound of ṭ–y-b through the combination of verb and verbal noun (*ṭāba*, *ṭību*) reinforces this positive effect.

Equally, *fidāʾ* is a highly evocative metaphor: f-d-y means "to redeem, to ransom s.th. with or by." In pre-Islamic tribal society, it denoted the ransoming of a person from captivity by someone who was not involved in the circumstances which led to captivity. The payment was carried out as an act of chivalry, and we find the term being used as an expression of devotion and friendship in pre-Islamic poetry. In early provisions for fasting in the Qurʾān, *fidya* is the act of redemption required by someone who is not fasting (Q 2:184). In the tradition of the Twelver Shīʿa, addressing the imams with "juʿiltu fidāka" ("could I only be your ransom") expresses the wish to render unnecessary the sacrifice of the imams by one's own suffering.[25] In older as well as contemporary love poetry, f-d-y is used to denote the sacrifice of the lover to his or her (unrequited) love. Finally, a *fidāʾī* is someone who makes him or herself a ransom. Although the term was used in this sense in modern Arabic literature as early as the 1930s, the *fidāʾī*-ethos of Palestinian poetry became highly influential from the

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Konstruktion sakraler Plätze und deren Praxisrelevanz (Vienna: Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2003).

[22] We find this notion also in Judaism and Christianity, cf. Susan Ashbrook Harvey, *Scenting Salvation: Ancient Christianity and the Olfactory Imagination* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2006), 11–13, 47–48.

[23] Amongst others Q 2:57; 7:58; 8:26; 9:92; 10:22; 14:24; 34:15.

[24] For a similar equation of "good things" with "good smells," see Harvey, *Scenting Salvation*, 55.

[25] Cf. Heinz Halm, *Die Schia* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1988), 178.

1960s onwards[26]. In our context, the metaphor is used to indicate the high degree of devotion of the speaker to the person he is addressing.

Whereas the first hemistich of the second verse focuses on the devotion of the speaker, its second hemistich focuses on the person addressed by enumerating some of his highly esteemed qualities. These qualities appear often as the qualities of Muḥammad in songs and prayers and are thereby familiar to the listener. The two verses thus encompass the thematic sequence of the evocation of the place, the act of approaching and addressing the Prophet—both use the marker of smell as a distinction for place and person—as well as acts of devotion and praise.

These two verses are well known and were performed more than once during the observed occasions. According to the Islamic tradition, the verses are ascribed to a Bedouin (*aʿrābī*) who uttered them at the grave of the Prophet and were transmitted by the ninth-century author al-ʿUtbī.[27] The thirteenth-century scholar Muḥyī ad-Dīn ibn Sharaf an-Nawawī (d. 1277) gives the context as follows:

> I was sitting by the grave of God’s messenger pbuh, when a Bedouin came and said: “Peace be upon you, oh messenger of God. I heard that God said: If only, when wronging themselves, they had come to you and asked God’s forgiveness, and the Messenger had asked forgiveness for them, they would have found God to be All-Pardoning, Compassionate to each.[28] Therefore, I came to you to ask for forgiveness for my sins (*dhanbī*) by asking for your intercession with God.”
> Then, he started to recite (*yaqūl*):
> O best of those whose bones are buried in the plain
> by their fragrance, the plain and the hill are made fragrant
> My soul is the ransom for a grave you inhabit
> in it are virtue, generosity, and magnanimity.
> Then he left, and I fell asleep, and I saw the prophet pbuh while sleeping, and he said: “O ʿUtbī, follow the Bedouin and tell him the good news that God the Exalted has him forgiven his sins.”[29]

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[26] See further Angelika Neuwirth, “Kulturelle Selbstbehauptung zwischen Erinnerung und Aufbruch: Einblicke in die Welt der palästinensischen Dichtung,” in *Kulturelle Selbstbehauptung der Palästinenser. Survey der modernen palästinensischen Dichtung,* eds. Birgit Embaló, Angelika Neuwirth, and Friederike Pannewick (Beirut: Ergon, 2001), 17–18.

[27] Muḥammad ibn ʿUbaydallāh ibn ʿAmr al-ʿUtbī (d. 842) was a poet, compiler of *akhbār*, and author of early *adab* literature; cf. Khayr al-Dīn az-Ziriklī, *al-Aʿlām,* vol. 6 (Beirut: Dār al-ʿIlm li-l-Malāyīn, 2002), 258–259.

[28] This is a quotation from Q 4:64. Translation by Tarif Khalidi, *The Qur’an: A New Translation* (London: Penguin, 2009).

[29] Muḥyī ad-Dīn ibn Sharaf an-Nawawī, *Majmūʿ sharḥ al-muhadhdhab,* ed. Maḥmūd Najīb al-Muṭīʿī, vol. 8 (Jidda: Maktabat al-Irshād, 1983), 256–257. This is an eighteen-volume commentary on the two-volume *al-Muhadhdhab* by the Shāfiʿī jurist Abū Isḥāq al-Shīrāzī (d. 1083). Translations are mine if not indicated otherwise.

This narrative illustrates the central position of Muḥammad's role as intercessor (*shafīʿ*). This role is often supported by the above-quoted Qurʾānic verse (4:64) and is further elaborated in various sayings ascribed to the Prophet.[30] Besides, the well-known narrative, or at least the allusions to it, of Muḥammad as the only prophet able to intercede where all other prophets fail, is often incorporated into *inshād* sessions and celebrations, either as solo performance or in songs. For instance, an-Nawawī introduces the above-quoted narrative and its verses as the best way that one can ask for Muḥammad's intercession (*istishfāʿ*).[31]

In an-Nawawī's text, only two verses are included, and as is often the practice in *inshād* with old or prestigious verses, several verses are added or combined with these two. In our example, the following verses are added:

(Fa-)[32]*Anta sh-shafīʿu lladhī turjā shafāʿatuhu*
ʿalā ṣ-ṣirāṭi idhā mā zallati l-qadamu
Fa-ṣāḥibāka fa-mā ansāhumā abadan
minnī s-salāmu ʿalaykum mā jarā l-qalamu
You are the intercessor whose intercession is hoped for
at the path when the foot slips
And your two companions I will never forget them
I greet you with "as-salāmu ʿalaykum," as long as the pen writes.[33]

Although there are not many variants possible in a phrase as short as a hemistich, the first hemistich is strongly reminiscent of a verse from the so-called poem *al-Burda*:

Huwa l-ḥabību lladhī turjā shafāʿatuhu
li-kulli hawlin mina l-ahwāli muqtaḥami[34]
He is the beloved of God whose intercession is hoped for
in the face of every dread and unexpected horror.[35]

The *Burda* is an immensely popular poem in praise of the Prophet Muḥammad that was written by the Mamluk poet Sharaf ad-Dīn Muḥammad al-Būṣīrī (d. 1294–97). Significantly, the whole poem aims invoking Muḥammad as intercessor for someone who admits his wrongs and repents.[36] The resemblance to the *Burda* is generated by textual evidence on several levels: besides the almost identical wording, both verses rhyme in *mīm* and the metre corresponds (*basīṭ*). Although *ḥabību* (beloved) of the *Burda*'s verse is substituted here by *shafīʿu* (intercessor), the sound pattern of ī-u remains. *Hawl* (horror) in the context of *shafāʿa* refers to the horror of death and Judgement Day, which is, in our example, evoked by the word *ṣirāṭ*. *Ṣirāṭ* is derived from Latin *strata,*[37] which means "path, way," and is likewise found in this neutral meaning in the Qurʾān. It is furthermore used to denote the 'right way' that a believer should choose to follow in his or her life: *aṣ-ṣirāṭ al-mustaqīm* ("the straight path"). This expression features most prominently in the opening Sura of the Qurʾān (*al-fātiḥa*): *ihdinā ṣ-ṣirāṭa l-mustaqīm* (Guide us to the straight path; transl. Khalidi). In addition, *aṣ-ṣirāṭ* (always with article) is a term of Muslim eschatology. It belongs to a repertory of conceptions, found in the Islamic tradition but not in the Qurʾān and partly influenced by Iranian ideas, about the occurrences on Judgement Day. Here, *ṣirāṭ* denotes the narrow bridge above hell which the believer has to cross: for the righteous it is easy to cross, but for the wicked it becomes thin and sharp like a razor blade so that they may fall.[38] The slipping of the foot can be read either literally, the physical slipping on the bridge, or in the figurative sense, that a person slips in her/his life path and does something wrong.

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[30] For further Qurʾānic verses on intercession *(shafāʿa)* and discussions about who is entitled to intercede, cf. A.J. Wensinck [D. Gimaret], A. Schimmel, "shafāʿa," *Encyclopaedia of Islam,* new ed., vol. 9 (Leiden: Brill).

[31] an-Nawawī, *Majmūʿ,* 256.

[32] "Fa-" is sung but does not belong to the verse, as its inclusion would exceed the number of fourteen syllables and the general sequence of syllables in the line.

[33] One of the usual phrases that indicates eternity, typical of praise poetry for the Prophet.

[34] Verse 36 of the *Burda,* cf. Sharaf ad-Dīn Muḥammad al-Būṣīrī, *Dīwān,* ed. Muḥammad Sayyid al-Kīlānī (Cairo: Maktabat wa-Maṭbaʿat Muṣṭafā al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī, 1955), 193.

[35] Translation by Suzanne Pinckney Stetkevych, *The Mantle Odes: Arabic Praise Poems to the Prophet Muḥammad* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010), 97.

The two companions mentioned in the second verse refer to the two caliphs Abū Bakr and ʿUmar who were buried next to Muhammad[39] and are also mentioned in an-Nawawī's text: an-Nawawī advises the visitor to also pay respect to both, since the head of Abū Bakr is located next to the Prophet's shoulder (*liʾanna raʾsahu ʿinda mankabi rasūli llāh*), and to greet them with "as-Salāmu ʿalayka yā Abā Bakrin [. . .] / as-Salāmu ʿalayka yā ʿUmar [. . .]."[40]

As recorded in videos posted on the internet,[41] the first two verses, each hemistich on a column, are written in golden letters on a green background which is on the columns demarcating the entrance to Muḥammad's burial place inside today's mosque.

Thus, the performed verses exhibit a dense texture of associations and meanings and are thereby highly emotive. They evoke a number of theologically charged keywords, including *shafāʿa* (intercession), *ziyāra* (visit of the grave), and *shawq* (longing, here for a visit to Medina). Although only one concept (*shafāʿa*) is explicitly verbalised, from their pre-knowledge and listening experience the listeners can derive *ziyāra* and *shawq*. The verses furthermore feature devotional commitment, the distinction of Muḥammad (fragrance, ability to intercede), and praise for Muḥammad (virtue, generosity, magnanimity). The musical elaboration of the vocal rendition mirrors this semantic density.

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[36] For more on the poem, see the contribution of Suzanne Stetkevych in this volume and for a literary analysis, see Stetkevych, *Mantle Odes,* chapter two; for contemporary ritual enactments of the poem cf. Ines Weinrich, "Between Poem and Ritual: The *Burda* by al-Būṣīrī (d. 1294–1297)," in *Performing Religion: Actors, contexts, and texts. Case studies on Islam,* ed. Ines Weinrich (Beirut: Ergon, 2016).

[37] Arthur Jeffery, *The Foreign Vocabulary of the Qurʾān* (Baroda: The Oriental Institute, 1938), 196.

[38] Cf. G. Monnot, "sirāṭ," *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, new ed., vol. 9 (Leiden: Brill).

[39] The exact positioning of the graves is unclear; see Behrens, *Prophetenmoschee*, 125.

[40] an-Nawawī, *Majmūʿ,* 256.

[41] For instance, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rjeJeNwHa7I (accessed February 26, 2016).

Yā khayra man: The musical rendition

The metrically free rendition is performed by the soloist; no drums are used, and only the chorus occasionally provides tonal support for the soloist. In addition, members of the audience respond to the performance. The singer takes five minutes for the delivery of the four verses. A transcription of the verses as they are actually performed shows immediately why this is the case. On the left side, we find the performed text, on the right side the audience response.

(1)	Yā khayra man wuqiʿat fī l-qāʿi aʿẓumuhu	ṣallū alayh!
	yā_____	
	yā khayra man / wuqiʿat / fī l-qā_ʿ / aʿẓumuhu	
	fa-ṭāba min ṭībihinna l-qāʿu wa-l_-akamu	eh, allāh, ṣallū ʿalayh!
	fa-ṭāba min ṭībihinna l- / qāʿu wa-l-akamu__	
(2)	Nafsī l-fidāʾu li-qabrin anta sākinuhu yā___ ḥabībī	allāh! ah, ṣalli ʿalayh!
	nafsī l-fidāʾu li-qabrin anta sākinuhū	ah, a___h
	fīhi l-ʿafāf	
	fīhi l-ʿafā_f / wa-fīhi l-jūdu wa-l-karam	ah, allāh
	wa-fīhi l-ju_______d wa-fīhi__ l-jūdu wa l-karamu	
(3)	Fa-anta sh-shafīʿu lladhī turjā shafāʿatuhu ʿalā ṣ-ṣirāṭi idhā mā zallati l-qadamu ḥabī__bī	a___h
	[shouted:] allāhumma ṣalli ʿā-n-nabī!	
	fa-anta sh-shafī_ʿ / fa-anta sh-shafīʿu lladhī__ turjā_	a___h
	fa-anta sh-shafīʿ / fa-anta l-ḥabī____b	
	fa-anta sh-shafī_ʿ	ṣalli ʿalayh
	fa-anta l-ḥabī_b	allāh allāh allāh
	alladhī turjā shafāʿatuhu ʿalā ṣ-ṣirāṭi idhā mā zallati l-qadamu ḥabī____b	a___h
	[shouted:] ṣallā llāhu ʿalayhi wa-ālih wa-sallam!	

(4) Wa-ṣāḥibāka fa-lā ansāhumā_ abadan   raḍiya llāh ʿankum![42]
wa-ṣāḥibāka fa-lā ansāhumā___ abadan   a__h
minnī s-salā___m
fa-ṣāḥibāka fa-lā ansā_humā__ abadan
minnī s-salāmun ʿalaykum
mā_ jarā l-qalam / yā ḥabība llāh

Transcription of the performed verses, 2011.
/ indicates a short pause; ___ indicate how long a syllable is held.

It becomes clear that the singer does not render the words in a linear, consecutive manner. Instead, he lengthens the text through repetitions, pauses, the holding of single notes, and melisma, that is, by singing more than one musical note on one syllable. Musically, the singer starts in a lower register of the voice and, by degrees, ascends to a higher register. Each hemistich of the first verse is performed completely, and then it is repeated by breaking up the text in several portions. The rendition of the second verse provides the first musical climax, reaching the highest pitch at the end of its first hemistich with the interpolation of "yā ḥabībī" (O Beloved). The singer removes the tension by returning to a lower register and a slower pace. In the third verse, another climax is reached. This climax is well prepared by retardation in tempo and a melisma in a low register ("jūd") before, thus creating a contrast to the following acceleration and ascension to the highest register of the whole passage. The acceleration is less achieved by the concrete act of speeding up than suggested by uttering, almost shouting, the complete verse without pause and almost in one breath. The agogic accents and the slightly pressed voice add further intensity. Again, the singer inserts "ḥabībī," and the responses are fierce. The tempo decelerates again; the singer musically elaborates on the text, playing between *shafīʿ* (intercessor) and *ḥabīb* (beloved). Then he delivers the rest of the verse again in a long breath with much emphasis on "ḥabībī" through melisma and grace notes. The musical mode changes with the fourth verse, which also introduces a different topic. The rendition of it is thus far less dramatic.

Responses usually appear at the end of a musical phrase. This corresponds to the technique of the single-breath phrase followed by a tension release at the end, which Nelson has observed for Qurʾānic recitation in the *mujawwad* style.[43] Melisma is used to emphasise significant words like *jūd* (generosity), the interjection *yā* addressing Muḥammad, or *ḥabīb* (beloved) and often elicit responses. The invitation to invoke blessings upon Muḥammad, "ṣallū (pl.)" or "ṣalli (sing.) ʿalayh," is not necessarily triggered by the mere mentioning of his name. It can just as easily be a spontaneous exclamation in response to something exciting or beautiful, as it is used in common parlance.

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[42] "May God be content with you," is the usual eulogy for the caliphs.
[43] Nelson, *The Art of Reciting,* 27, 122.

In these techniques, the musical rendition shares many characteristics of a *qaṣīda*-style performance in Arab music: the liberties taken by the singer in his treatment of melody, time, and wording, the careful articulation (*lafẓ*), and the interaction between performer and listener (*tafāʿul*). Particularly striking is the use of techniques of textual stretching: fragmentation and repetition, interpolation and verbal fillers, holding tones and melisma. Also, silence (i.e. pauses) is an important tool in the successful delivery of the text. All these techniques provide enough space to let the meaning sink in and the impact fully unfold. In textual stretching, Ali Jihad Racy sees both a "balance between textual-semantic evocation and vocal-musical stimulation" as well as a necessary tool: "This balance precludes the stifling effect of excessive wordiness or extreme semantization, thus giving the music more space to 'breathe.'"[44] In our case, it is exactly this 'breathing' which ensures a semantic enhancement, by operating both on a musical-emotional and semantic-auditory level. Describing the *mujawwad* style of Qurʾānic recitation, Nelson writes:

> One structuring technique characteristic of this style is to present the text in short clear phrases characterized by syllabic and unornamented melodies, and then to repeat the text in a single long phrase. In fact, a sequence of short phrases usually signals a melodically elaborate recapitulation of the text executed in a single long breath. This technique allows the reciter to be both clear and inventive in his art, fulfilling demands both of the ideal and of the musical aesthetic. The effect on the audience is to heighten involvement by means of delaying the resolution provided by the longer phrase: that is, the greater the sequence of short phrases, the more tension is prolonged. The tension and release experienced by the listeners, however, is evident in their response, which is restrained until it breaks like a wave in the pause following the long phrase.[45]

Although in our example the complete hemistich is performed *before* its fragmentation, the overall fragmentation and the predominantly syllabic rendition serve to enhance the third verse (*Fa-anta sh-shafīʿu . . .*). This verse contains a central message of the celebration (see below) and features emotionally loaded keywords like *shafāʿa*, *ṣirāṭ*, and *ḥabībī*. Both their musically staged position and their auditory-semantic appeal[46] enhance their emotive effect.

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[44] Racy, *Making Music,* 91.

[45] Nelson, *The Art of Reciting,* 117.

[46] I borrow this term from Racy, *Making Music,* 174f. Building on the linguist and anthropologist Paul Friedrich, he uses the term to show that the sonic quality of well-known keywords may evoke a series of semantic meanings that are based on a shared literary history as well as individual experience.

Such exhaustive elaboration does not necessarily always occur. A second performance by the same *munshid*, recorded at a commemorative celebration of the Prophet’s night journey and ascension (*al-isrāʾ wa-l-miʿrāj*)[47] in 2012, also features a metrically free solo rendition and the acoustic responses of the audience. But whereas in the first example the performer takes five minutes to musically elaborate on the text, the second example has a length of approximately only half that time (2.20 min.). This is not simply due to the fact that the second example features only three of the four verses,[48] as the texture of the performance shows:

(1) Yā khayra man / wuqiʿat /
fī l-qāʿi aʿẓumuhu fa-ṭāba min ṭībihinna l-qāʿu wa-l-akamu allāh, ṣallū ʿalayh

(2) Nafsī l- fidāʾu li-rawḍin
anta sākinuhu___
Nafsī l-fidā__ʾ / li-rawḍin / anta sākinuhu fīhi l-ʿafāf
fīhi l-ʿafā__f / wa-fīhi l_-jūdu wa-l_-karamu   allāh

(4) Wa-ṣāhibāka fa-lā ansāhumā abadan
Wa-ṣāḥibā___k
fa-lā___ ansāhumā abadan
minnī s-salām / minnī s-salā_m /
ʿalaykum mā jarā l-qalamu ḥabī________bī   ah, allāh allāh allāh
Wa-ṣāḥibāka fa-lā__ ansāhumā abadan
minnī s-salā__m / ʿalay_kum / mā jarā l-qalamu a___h

Transcription of the performed verses, 2012.
/ indicates a short pause; ___ indicate how long a syllable is held.

The pace is faster, there are less pauses, less melisma, and less repetitions. Consequently, there are also fewer responses. The different rendition of the same passage is the result of the overall context of its staging within the celebration and the flexible handling over the course of a celebration in general. Before further drawing upon textual practices, we shall therefore take a closer look at the context of the verses and how they are staged within the overall celebration.

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[47] The Prophet’s night journey and ascension to heaven are nowadays commemorated together 27 Rajab of the Islamic calendar.

[48] Only the second of the added verses features; following consecutive numbering of the first example’s verses, the second example would feature verses 1, 2, and 4.

Yā khayra man: The staging of the verses in the *iḥtifāl* context

The musical context of both examples is very similar: both feature after twenty to thirty minutes in the first section of the *inshād* (i.e. before the oration), following a number of rhythmic songs. Many of these songs feature alternate singing between a soloist who performs the stanzas and the *firqa*, or all participants, who performs the refrain. In both cases, respectively, this forms the first metrically free solo performance, followed by more collective songs. Thus, the passage is musically distinct from the rest of the repertory and thereby emphasised. Its position parallels the conventions of a *ṭarab* performance: a musically intense passage would never feature at the very beginning since the musicians need time to develop the appropriate mood and to build up a relationship with the audience.

Regarding the thematic alignment of the celebration, the order of both examples varies slightly. In the second example, during the commemoration of Muḥammad's ascension to heaven, the passage is preceded by a number of songs on the event of the night journey and ascension to heaven. Two songs follow which prominently feature the profession of faith (*shahāda*). Another song leads to the solo passage. This song mainly constitutes an invitation to invoke blessings upon the Prophet. The solo passage is followed by excerpts from a poem by the Syrian Shaykh Abū l-Hudā aṣ-Ṣayyādī (1850–1909), *ʿAlayka ṣallā llāh* (God shall bless you). A collectively and repeatedly performed invocation of blessings concludes this part of the celebration before the oration starts. Thus, the solo passage constitutes here both greeting and praise of the Prophet, which joins other greetings and blessings.

The staging and message of the solo passage in our first example, during the commemoration of the Prophet's birthday, are different. The celebration starts with songs that already touch upon themes which will become relevant for the verses of the solo passage: the birth of Muḥammad, the wish to perform a *ziyāra* to Medina, longing (*shawq*), intercession, and Muḥammad as the best of humankind. This part ends with a song praising God, which is followed by a spoken invitation to invoke blessings. After a short interval, the solo passage unfolds. It is followed by the central song of the occasion, *al-Layla ʿindakum ʿīd* (Tonight you have a celebration). This is a joyful song with a strong rhythm and a refrain which praises the birth of the Prophet.[49] The relatively short song is stretched here to almost nine minutes, featuring drum soli, the addressing of the participants in spoken speech modus by the lead singer, and collectively sung invocations of blessings. Moreover, one of the song's stanzas contains the line "You will meet the Prophet on the Day of Resurrection / standing at the river Kawthar [in Paradise] and shouting: o you who love me!"—forming a confirmation of what is part of the *shafāʿa*-concept but has not been stated explicitly before: those who love the Prophet and invoke blessings will be granted his intercession and enter paradise.

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[49] In the years that the fieldwork was carried out, this song turned out to be one of the most popular: people sang along, clapping their hands, and the soloist more than once extended single stanzas of it into a long question-response sequence between the *firqa* and the community. Although the first line continues with "the birthday of God's messenger," it was performed on other occasions as well, sometimes replacing "birthday" with the given occasion.

The solo passage and subsequent song mark the celebration's centre of gravity: they combine the joy of the occasion, his birth, with the one central meaning ascribed to the event. The four solo verses picture Muḥammad's function that is relevant in the everyday life of the followers: his ability to intercede and therefore to provide a coping strategy when faced with the idea of death and judgement. This message is carefully prepared on a musical as well as on a content-related level.

Textual practices and textual qualities

Inshād ensembles usually perform without any written form of the text or music. Only rarely one can spot some written text during a performance, let alone a book. Rather, the singers sometimes have in front of them single sheets of paper with scribbled notes on the event's sequence or the text of a longer song with many stanzas. There are several reasons for this. First, performers habitually know the repertory by heart. Second, performance in the *qaṣīda* style does not require a pre-composed written script, since the processes of composing and performing are overlapping. Moreover, the musical processes that constitute the accompaniment or embellishment of a melodic line—heterophony, alternate singing with overlapping voices, vocal or rhythmic fill-ins—can be easily organised during the performance: the size and positioning of the ensemble members in a half-circle enable the necessary communication processes. And finally, the repertory of a festivity is typically developed over the course of the performance. Although ensembles have an approximate sequence for the repertory in mind when they start to perform, nevertheless, they may divert from that and change as is appropriate according to time, atmosphere, and audience, and thereby develop the final sequence during the performance.[50]

This is exactly the practice that Racy describes for *ṭarab* musicians, albeit in a less extended and extreme way. *Ṭarab* musicians seek to establish a relationship with their audience in order to elicit the necessary responses which support and shape their performance. Especially when performing in an unknown environment, they employ a kind of 'trial and error' system in order to find out which musical structures the listeners will respond to. Musicians furthermore sometimes bring 'their own *samīʿa*':

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[50] Interviews with male and female lead *munshids* in Beirut, 10.06.2009; 15.03.2010; 24.06.2013; 25.06.2013; 06.07.2013.

when performing in front of large crowds especially, they might bring in a group of people who could be counted on to provide adequate responses.[51] I observed a similar phenomenon during my fieldwork when often a group of especially active listeners could be seen sitting in the front area. These men and women gave typical responses after single-breath phrases and knew large parts of the texts by heart.[52]

Therefore, the given repertory of any event is the result of spontaneous reactions to the atmosphere and to the composition of the audience, especially in relation to its level of musical intimacy. This requires flexibility in the sequence of repertory in general and in the performance of a single piece, as regards repetitions, interpolations, or length. The overarching aim is not textual integrity, but rather a delivery that produces emotional impact (*taʾthīr*) on the audience.

In addition to textual stretching, other textual diversions occur in our examples. The two verses sung correspond to the version given by an-Nawawī with the exception of one verb: instead of *dufinat* the performer in both cases sings *wuqiʿat* without altering the meaning. Furthermore, the passive clause of both verbs indicates the same morphological structure and sound pattern.

The verses are furthermore included in the four-volume compilation of praise poetry by the scholar, judge, and poet Yūsuf ibn Ismāʿīl an-Nabhānī (1849–1932). Here, the two verses exactly correspond to the verses in an-Nawawī; but the additional verse on the Prophet as intercessor is inserted between the two verses instead of added afterwards.[53] Sometimes, this verse (no. 3) features *ḥabīb* instead of *shafīʿ*;[54] and in an-Nabhānī's collection, the version has *nabī* (Prophet). Each of the words denotes a different quality of Muḥammad—beloved, intercessor, Prophet—but all of them have the same sound pattern.

In the second performance, the *munshid* sings *rawḍ* (garden) instead of *qabr* (grave). This evokes the larger spatial arrangement of the place addressed, as it echoes the famous saying of the Prophet: *Mā bayna baytī wa-minbarī rawḍa min riyāḍ al-janna* (Between my house and my pulpit is a garden of Paradise).[55] It further refers to an eschatological scenario: the phrase “rawḍa min riyāḍ al-janna” is familiar to the listeners through its inclusion in prayers, most frequently as a petition in the closing *duʿāʾ* of the daily Ramadan night prayers (*tarāwīḥ*): *Allāhumma ijʿal qubūranā rawḍatan min riyāḍ al-janna* (O God make our graves a garden of Paradise).[56]

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[51] Racy, *Making Music,* 64.

[52] Whether these were brought in on purpose by the *firqa* or merely constituted a religiously and/or musically eager group cannot be said for certain.

[53] Yūsuf ibn Ismāʿīl an-Nabhānī, ed., *al-Majmūʿa an-nabhāniyya fī l-madāʾiḥ an-nabawiyya,* vol. 4 (Beirut: al-Maṭbaʿa al-Adabīya, ca. 1320H), 71. An-Nabhānī's version includes three verses.

[54] For instance, in versions found on the internet; this would correspond to the wording of the *Burda*.

[55] Abū ʿAbd Allāh Muḥammad ibn Ismāʿīl al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* (Damascus: Dār Ibn Kathīr, 2002), 288.

Sometimes changes are not about substituting single words but about playing around with the text: an-Nabhānī remarks that he has changed the first line according to an expression used in al-Būṣīrī's *Burda*:

Yā khayra man ʿabiqat bi-l-qāʿi turbatuhu
fa-ṭāba bi-ṭ-ṭībi minhā l-qāʿu wa-l-akamu[57]
Oh best of those whose grave exhales scent in the plain
by the fragrance [emanating] from it the plain and the hill
are made fragrant.

The respective verse of al-Būṣīrī goes:

Lā ṭība yaʿdilu turban ḍamma aʿẓumahu
ṭūbā li-muntashiqin minhu wa-l-multathimi[58]
No perfume is as redolent as the dust that holds his bones
whoever inhales or kisses it is blessed.[59]

The linking lexeme between an-Nabhānī's and al-Būṣīrī's verse is *turba*, meaning both "dust" and "grave." For grammatical reasons, the syntax of the second hemistich needed to be changed, but the phonetic structure is almost completely retained (al-ʿUtbī: *bi-ṭībihinna*, an-Nabhānī: *bi-ṭ-ṭībi minhā*). The sonic doubling of ṭ-y-b is further developed by al-Būṣīrī into the *jinās* (root-play) of *ṭīb* and *ṭūbā* (blessing). The re-occurrence of *ṭīb* and *aʿẓumahu* in al-Būṣīrī's verse, which is strongly reminiscent of the original verse, is noteworthy. Moreover, al-Būṣīrī's verse encompasses rites connected to *ziyāra* such as incorporating the positive power or blessing (*baraka*) of the place through inhaling its fragrance or by the physical contact of touching or kissing.

The lines transmitted by al-ʿUtbī were repeatedly taken up by other poets. We find a version of the lines inserted in a poem (*basīṭ*, rhyme in *lām*) by al-Buraʿī.[60] The Yemeni poet ʿAbd ar-Raḥīm al-Buraʿī was for a long time believed to have lived in the eleventh century[61] but most probably died in 1400.[62] His poems are well known and widespread in religious chanting today.

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[56] Fieldwork during Ramadan in Beirut, 2010–2013.
[57] an-Nabhānī, *al-Majmūʿa,* 71.
[58] al-Būṣīrī, *Dīwān,* 194 (verse 58).
[59] Stetkevych, *Mantle Odes,* 99.
[60] Another technique of using and thereby honouring a text is the formalised way of *tashṭīr* or *takhmīs;* in the case of the *Burda* we furthermore find the unique case of the *badīʿiyya,* which is studied in detail by Suzanne Stetkevych in this volume. In the case of al-Buraʿī, the three lines are consecutively inserted in to a thirty-seven-line poem.
[61] Carl Brockelmann, *Geschichte der Arabischen Litteratur,* vol. 1 (Weimar: Emil Felber, 1898), 259; see also *Geschichte der arabischen Litteratur. Erster Supplementband* (Leiden: Brill, 1937), 459; Ismāʿīl Bāshā al-Baghdādī, *Hadīyat al-ʿārifīn. Asmāʾ al-muʾallifīn. Āthār al-muṣannafīn,* vol. 1 (Istanbul: Milli Eğitim Basımevı, 1951),

Yā khayra man dufinat fī t-turbi aʿẓumuhu
fa-ṭāba min ṭībihinna s-sahlu wa-l-jabalu
Nafsī l-fidāʾu li-qabrin anta sākinuhu
fīhi l-hudā wa-n-nadā wa-l-ʿilmu wa-l-ʿamalu
Anta l-hābību lladhī narjū ʿawāṭifahu
ʿinda ṣ-ṣirāṭi idhā mā ḍāqati l-ḥiyalu[63]
Oh best of those whose bones are buried in the dust
from their fragrance the plain and the mountain
are made fragrant.
My soul is a ransom for the grave you inhabit
in it are guidance, generosity, knowledge,
and accomplishment.
You are the beloved whose compassion we hope for
at the path when the way-outs became few.

The third verse may indeed have served as a source for one of the often-added lines, especially its second hemistich. Yet textual archaeology is not the aim of this paper; rather, these examples were included to show that textual integrity is not always the priority in delivery, although it does play a role in valuing poems of single authors.

Conclusion

In the context of *inshād*, the overall aim is not the word-by-word delivery of a given text. Instead, it is to convey its overall meanings and emotions. To achieve this, the performance makes use of a variety of features: textual, auditory, semantic, and musical.

The textual features include rhetorical devices like rhyme and metre, which are not necessarily central to the performance. Especially in textual fragmentation, the metre becomes less tangible, but the rhyme indicates the end of a hemistich or verse and therefore structures the performance. The doublings of positively connoted sounds stress the overall joyous message (*ṭāba/ṭībi*; *shafīʿu/shafāʿa*). The semantic message is conceived by powerful imagery and religiously charged keywords encompassing the fields of praise (*khayr*, *ṭīb*, *ʿafāf*, *jūd*, *karam*), devotion (*fidāʾ*, *ḥabīb*), and

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559; *Dīwān al-Buraʿī fī l-madāʾiḥ ar-rabbāniyya wa-n-nabawiyya wa-ṣ-ṣūfiyya* (Cairo: Al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī [1950]), no pagination.

[62] ʿUmar Riḍā Kaḥḥāla, *Muʿjam al-muʾallifīn,* vol. 5 (Damascus: Maṭbaʿat at-Taraqqī, 1958), 202; az-Ziriklī, *al-Aʿlām,* 3: 323.

[63] *Dīwān al-Buraʿī fī l-ibtihālāt wa-t-taḍarruʿāt al-ilāhiyya wa-l-madāʾiḥ an-nabawiyya* (Beirut: Dār an-Najm, 1994), 94. The aforementioned *Dīwān* (footnote 60, poem starts p. 181) was no longer accessible to me when writing this paper.

eschatology (*ṣirāṭ*, *shafāʿa*). The intensity brought on by the direct address and invocation (*yā*, *anta*) is reinforced by the interpolations during the performance ("yā ḥabībī"). *Ḥabībī* ("beloved") is by no means an exclusively religious form of address, since it is also used in common parlance to address a lover, a friend, or a child. It signifies closeness and affection. Addressing the Prophet as *ḥabībī* is a strategy often used in *inshād* to create intimacy.

Some of the auditory features are already inscribed into the text, such as rhymes or assonances. Others highly depend on the concrete vocal rendition and the skilful use of the voice: the subtleties of volume, pitch, timbre and tempo, or the employment of interpolation, repetition, emphasis, lengthening, and silence. The mode of delivery is musical, and here involves the single voice performance as opposed to the spoken mode or to multiple or alternating voices. The musical mediation is furthermore characterised by the metrically free *qaṣīda* style with its single-breath phrases, pauses, and interpolations. The organisation of pitch and melodic progression is bound to the rules of the modal system of Arab music, which involves the gradual progression from a lower to higher register and the stress on notes which are central for the musical mode (*maqām*).

Semantic meaningfulness is provided by associations and allusions to larger coherences which refer to the prior listening experiences of the audience, including the singularity of the Prophet's ability to intercede on behalf of his followers. The here analysed poetic passage interconnects with songs, prayers, or other genres employed in *inshād* as well as with the literary experiences or religious knowledge of the audience.

Audience response constitutes an integral part of the performance. Its triggers operate on both a musical-auditory and a semantic-auditory level. Listeners react to the rhythm of tension and release produced by textual fragmentation, sudden stops, and accelerando in the delivery. They musically respond to the shifting to higher tonal degrees and the lengthening and ornamentation of syllables. These musical devices are not arbitrary but chosen to highlight significant parts of the text. Emotionally loaded words, charged with religious meaning, like *shafāʿa* or *ḥabībī*, produce affects which are grounded both in musical and semantic processes. The semantic texture of the verses interacts with literary traditions (e.g. *fidāʾ*) and religious propositions (e.g. *ziyāra* for the purpose of *istishfāʿ*).

Furthermore, extra-musical and extra-textual factors play a role in performance: the occasion of the performance, the temporal staging of the verses within the celebration, the overall spatial arrangement in the mosque, and the composition of the audience shape the choice of the musical means according to atmosphere and the level of interaction. In this sense, both the listeners and the setting become "co-creators."[64]

The existence of an established 'process of delivery,' however, does not necessarily mean that all modes of musical delivery need to meet the criteria of age or tradition. Thinking in terms of transculturality, it would fall short to assume that the described processes constitute a self-contained system which would not allow transcultural developments. On the contrary, building on the listening experiences of the audience and the flexibility of performers with regard to the course of a single *inshād* session and their choice of musical means, facilitates the incorporation of new sounds that are not found in tradition but are nowadays nevertheless ubiquitous. Such sounds, for instance, are built on European tonality and contain glimpses of functional harmony, be it derived from European art music or global pop music.[65] Performers respond to current trends—some eagerly, others more reluctantly, sometimes regretting that people today prefer simpler and faster musical styles.[66]

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[64] Ruth Finnegan, "The How of Literature," *Oral Tradition* 20 (2005): 172.

This paper has revealed the material qualities of both poetry and its mediation through a short textual example. More than just a voiced rendition of poetic lines, the performance of the verses and their semantic and emotional content set multi-layered processes in motion: on the level of text, we find the performed text and its rhetorical devices as well as a backgrounded history of literature and religious propositions according to the individual pre-experience of the listeners. On the level of sound, we find auditory devices, partly inscribed into the text and partly realised during performance, and the musical modal organisation rooted in the Arab musical tradition. Finally, we need to name the extra-textual and extra-musical factors which shape a performance, such as the physical setting and the level of musical intimacy between the performers and listeners.

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[65] European art music has become part of the musical culture in the Middle East on a larger scale since the late nineteenth century. Furthermore, European musical theory has become part of the educational curricula since the 1930s. For asymmetries in the relationship between Arab and European music, see Ines Weinrich, "The *Inḥiṭāṭ* Paradigm in Arab Music History," in Inḥiṭāṭ – *The Decline Paradigm: Its Influence and Persistence in the Writing of Arab Cultural History,* ed. Syrinx von Hees (Würzburg: Ergon, 2017).

[66] Interviews with female and male performers in Damascus and Beirut, 06.10.2007; 13.04.2013; 24.06.2013; Fuʾād, "al-Munshid Ḥasan Ḥaffār."

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4

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ISBN 978-3-947732-02-9
9 783947 732029