POETICS OF MODERNITY IN 19TH CENTURY ARABIC MAQAMAS

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POETICS OF MODERNITY IN 19TH CENTURY ARABIC MAQAMAS

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Poetics of Modernity in 19th Century Arabic Maqamas studies mobility and intellectual exchange the in 19th century Arabic maqama, an Arabic classical narrative genre that originated in 11th century Baghdad. Focusing on the Arab Renaissance, also known as *Nahda*, the study argues that the maqama form provided 19th century Arab authors a creative space to negotiate questions on identity, language, community, and authority to articulate multiple modernities: anthropocentric, nesologic, and mimetic. The study examines the maqamas of three major literary figures: Ahmad Faris al-Shidyaq (d. 1887) and Nasif al-Yaziji (d. 1871) from the Levant and Rifaʿa al-Tahtawi (d. 1873) from Egypt. Examining the modern maqama *vis-à-vis* its classical form, the study traces the changes in the maqama over time, therefore illustrating how form carries its own historical content. It argues that al-Shidyaq's maqama in his 1850 *al-Saq ʿala al-saq* (*Leg over Leg*) symptomizes an anthropocentric modernity: a modernity that questions the metaphysical foundation of language and meaning. Chapter two, examines al-Tahtawi's 1850 Arabic translation of François Fénelon's 1699 epic novel, *Les aventures de Télémaque*. Rendered in rhymed prose that is reminiscent of the maqama style, al-Tahtawi's translation articulates a nesologic modernity, where geography and poetics intersect. The study argues that both the original French work and the maqama are implicated in the discursive production of the "island" form, both aesthetically and

politically. In effect, the poetic meeting of both works through al-Tahtawi's translation reflects Egypt's self-conceptualization as a sovereign state dominating the Sudan. al-Yaziji's 1856 maqama collection, *Majmaʿ al-bahrayn* ("Meeting of Two Seas"), by contrast, portrays modernity as being motivated by mimesis and repetition. Examining two of al-Yaziji's maqamas, tellingly set in the Arabian Peninsula, the study traces al-Yaziji's poetic creation of sameness, suggested obliquely by a contraction of distance, that is in return philosophically made possible through the maqama's use of hearing and listening in the desert.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Rama Alhabian holds a BA in English Language and Translation from Effat University, an MA in English Literature from King Saud University, and an MA in Near Eastern Studies from Cornell University.

كلما تراءى لي أن "جواباً" أضحى في متناول يدي، وجدتُني أمام ركام جديد من "الأسئلة."
م.محمد

The moment I envision an "answer" to be within my grasp, a new mass heap of "questions" is thrust before me.
M. Muhammad

To Ghali Alhabian and Rajaa Alshakaki,
and to everyone in their shade

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I dedicate this work to my beloved family members: my parents Ghali Alhabian and Rajaa Alshakaki, for standing by and being with me despite the long distance, and to my siblings Abdulhassib, Omar, and Raghad, for their unyielding encouragement and faith in me. And to the new fortunate addition to our family, Ghidaa, Layan and Ghali Jr., I strongly hope the end of this long journey will finally permit our first, but certainly not last, meeting, which I very much look forward to.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES

PREFACE

Poetics of Modernity in 19th Century Arabic Maqamas is a transhistorical and transregional study, investigating the works of three Arab intellectuals who wrote during the 19th century, also known as the *Nahda*[1] or Arab Renaissance. The study focuses on two authors from the Levant: Ahmad Faris al-Shidyaq (d. 1887) and Nasif al-Yaziji (d. 1871) and on an author from Egypt: Rifaʿa al-Tahtawi (d. 1873). In this dissertation, I revisit the authors' respective uses of the Arabic classical maqama, thereby bringing together three main questions often raised in relation to the period: travel, genre, and translation. Taking into consideration the intellectuals' range of travels between Europe and the Middle East, the range of European and Semitic languages they knew, and the translation projects they were part of, I demonstrates that although these intellectuals wrote around the same historical moment, they nevertheless experienced modernity in specific ways.

Chapter one focuses on a maqama in al-Shidyaq's work *Leg over Leg*, where al-Shidyaq uses the classical form to interrogate the metaphysical foundations of language, meaning, and therefore the invented category of "equivalence" in translation among cultural and linguistic systems. Crucially written as an expression of al-Shidyaq's vexed relationship with figures of authority, including European orientalists and translators at the time, "A Maqama: or a Maqama on Chapter 13" dramatizes a world characterized by failure of meaning-transfer in translation. Besides proposing to

[1] For transliterating Arabic excerpts from primary and secondary sources, I follow the *International Journal of Middle East Studies* transliteration conventions. Arabic proper names, book titles, and Arabic terms that have a standard are untransliterated, and so are any Arabic terms that have acquired standardized spelling in English, e.g. *Nahda* and maqama.

read al-Shidyaq's as part of an anthropocentric modernity, the chapter exposes his revolutionary take on the relationship between historical and literary knowledges, a relationship, as I show, that is regulated by "contiguity" rather than epistemological and ontological hierarchies.

In chapter two, translation is imagined as a geopoetic event that stages a circular relationship between texts and the worlds they inhabit. Examining al-Tahtawi's Arabic translation of François Fénelon's 1699 French epic novel *Les aventures de Télémaque* into the maqama form, the chapter proposes to read al-Tahtawi's experience of modernity in terms of nesologies: the discursive and ideological production of insular forms across multiple representational genres, namely the maqama, the travelogue, modern cartography, and the epic novel. Unpacking the implications of al-Tahtawi's choice to translate *aventures* into Arabic rhymed prose, a characteristic feature of the Arabic maqama, the chapter demonstrates that the choice is linked to how al-Tahtawi engaged with Egypt's imperial ambition, manifest through its colonization of the Sudan.

Chapter three focuses on al-Yaziji's maqama collection *Majmaʿ al-bahrayn* ("Meeting of Two Seas"). Considering al-Yaziji's "limited" scopes of travel and of knowledge of foreign languages, the chapter reads his "conservative" imitation of the classical maqama to propose a reading of modernity premised on repetition. Rather than semantically void or ontologically inferior, repetition, the study shows, has two crucial functions: it liquidates the boundaries between the "original" model and the "copy," and reverses the chronological sequence from "original" to "copy," thus positing the "original" in a future moment of realization for the "copy." The chapter

demonstrates that this inversion has telling implications for how al-Yāzijī envisioned national Arab identity as a specter, always in a state of deferral.

Poetics of Modernity analyzes the ways the maqama genre speaks both diachronically and synchronically. It demonstrates the timely functional uses of the genre. As such, it challenges postcolonial theses that read Arabic intellectual recourse to tradition as a mode of cultural resistance to European influence in arts and literature. As demonstrated throughout, the maqama's morphological specificity allowed Arab intellectuals to engage with various philosophical, ideological, and cultural discourses of their time.

INTRODUCTION

Why Couldn't Tricksters Be "Modern"?

"يسجل رينان 'ضآلة الأهمية التي يبدو أن هذا الكتاب يعرضها،
كتاب في الظاهر تافه في العمق [. . .]و حين يتوارى 'العمق،' يتم الارتداد إلى 'الشكل،'
الذي سيدل بدوره على 'سوء الذوق' مما يذكّر بـ'التقزز' الذي أثاره أبو زيد.
إن أسلوب المقامات و سخنة الشخصية موصلان للانزعاج و التقيؤ."

عبد الفتاح كيليطو، *المقامات: السرد و الأنساق الثقافية*

> "[Ernest] Renan highlights the insignificance of this book,a book that is, starkly, profoundly lacking in depth. [. . .] And when 'depth' is missing, 'form' becomes the source of meaning, which in return evinces 'bad taste,' and which in return reminds us of the 'disgust' Abu Zayd causes. Both the maqamas' style and their character's mien are sources of annoyance and revulsion."
>
> Abd al-Fattah Kilito, The Maqamas: Narration and Cultural Paradigms

No genre of Arabic literature has perhaps generated controversies among critics and readers as much as the medieval maqama. Whether during the early moments of its inception at the hands of 10th century Badiʿ al-Zaman al-Hamadhani (d. 1007), or in 19th century literary debates among orientalists and 20th century Arab responses to those debates, the maqama was the subject of ongoing disputes about its origins,[2]

[2] For example, see Zaki Mubarak's work *al-Nathr al-fanni fi-l-qarn al-rabiʿ*, where he traces the origins of the genre to a collection of anecdotes, i.e. hadiths transmitted by Ibn Durayd (d. 933), which are

literary merits,[3] and place in world literature. In *al-Maqamat: al-sard wa-l-anmaṭ al-thaqafiyyah* (The Maqamas: narration and cultural paradigms), Moroccan literary critic Abdelfattah Kilito examines how 19th century French orientalist Ernst Renan (d. 1892) read the classical maqama of al-Hariri (d. 1122), al-Hamadhani's famous successor. Under the secondary title "*Taraddudat Rinan*," (Renan's hesitations), Kilito analyses what he calls Renan's "astonishment" by the genre, "[an astonishment] that is curiously vexing but at once polished."[4] For Renan, there is no other work of Arabic literature so confounding to European readers. Driven by (an imaginary) divide between Europe and the Orient, as Kilito tells us, Renan looked at the maqama trickster through a culturalist lens: "us [the West]," where "intellectual culture ennobles the individual through the spirit of commitment," versus "them [in the Orient]" who come from "there [where] the individual cannot be emancipated from shackles of illusion; [for] in the Orient, the individual does not fight against mortifying fate. Therefore, he is either destined to live in eternal nobility, or to sink into irremediable humiliation."[5]

What caused Renan to view the trickster as lacking any sense of commitment? And why did he not see in this figure the promise of agency or the capacity to make a

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found in the *Kitab al-Amali* by Abu Bakr al-Qali (d. 967). For Mubarak, the *maqama* must have originated in those anecdotes because they have the similar feature of using stylized prose (*al-nathr al-fanni*), punctuated by proverbs and poetic verse. However, as Kilito observes, Mubarak's diagnosis does not quite explain the origin of the genre because these features are common to the work of the "vast majority of Arabic authors." Abd al-Fattah Kilito, *al-Aʿmal,* vol.3 (Casablanca: Toubkal, 2015), 93.

[3] Considering, for example, the extant dispute between two classical grammarians and linguists: Ibn al-Khashshab (d.1172) and Ibn Barri (d. 1187) about the value and soundness of al-Hariri's *maqamas.* Whereas Ibn al-Khashshab located a number of language errors in those maqamas Ibn Barri defends al-Hariri and reject's Ibn al-Khashshab's claims. Kilito, *al-Aʿmal,* 3:146.

[4] "إن موقف رينان، طوال مقالته عن الحريري، يتميز باحساس عميق بالدهشة، دهشة هي في آن واحد قاهرة و مهذبة، محسوبة لا على فرد فحسب، بل أيضا على ثقافة. Kilito, *al-Aʿmal,* 3:162.

[5] For detailed reading of Renan's reservations about the genre see Kilito, *al-Aʿmal,* 3:162ff.

difference? Put differently, why can't tricksters be "modern;" why can't they speak "modern"? One can explain Renan's views by considering its historical context. In a historical moment when knowledge-making was closely intertwined with strong sense of historicity,[6] Renan saw al-Hariri's maqama trickster as the anathema to agents of (material and political) change. Because the trickster in the entire maqama collection remains the marginalized rogue that is consistently relegated to societal irrelevance, Renan did not find in this figure a history-maker. For him, the repetitive morphological cycle of the maqamas, and their similar conclusions translate into (political) passivity: "The Orient never understood the inner dignity of man, a dignity that enables him to challenge fate."[7] By contrast, the noble "man," against whom the "passive" trickster is compared unfavorably, is defined through Eurocentric liberal humanism.[8] Placed at the center of existence, emboldened by agency, Renan's "man"

[6] In a study of the "Modern Episteme," Alexis Wick underscores three modern elements of the radical transformation of the organization of knowledge, which led to the emergence of the human sciences. The first may be termed the subjectification of knowledge, and it is grounded in a new notion of history. History in the modern age, as Foucault's *The Order of Things* shows, is not only a specific mode of representing the past. It is at the heart of the modern episteme, forming the very condition of possibility of knowledge in the novel discursive formation that transformed words and things at the end of the eighteenth century. Viewed not only as compilation of facts and a representation of the past, but "fundamental mode of being of empiricities, upon the basis of which they are affirmed, posited, arranged, and distributed in the space of knowledge." The subjectification of knowledge, according to Wick, "explains why, however many the definitions of modernity may be, the one constant is history." Alexis Wick, "Sailing the Modern Episteme: al-Ṭahṭāwī on the Mediterranean," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 34, no. 2 (2014): 408.

[7] لم يفهم الشرق أبدا الإباء الباطني الذي يسمو بالإنسان فوق القدر. Kilito, *al-Aʿmal*, 3:165.

[8] I use this term with caution, by drawing on Peter Barry's elaborate definition of liberal humanism as the early beginning to modern literary theory. Initially, liberal humanism emerged in the early 19th century, when the English studies were beginning to be institutionalized in England's universities. As F. D. Maurice, a professor at King's College observed in 1840, the study of English literature should serve to emancipate pupils and scholars "from the notions and habits which are peculiar to one's own age, connecting one instead with what is fixed and enduring." Barry observes that such emphasis on the fixed and the enduring, which transcends one's own time, was initially intended to create a sense of national cohesion among the English middle-class, a substitute for religion since attendance at below middle class level was very patchy, and there was the fear that the lower classes, finding that in the country they had no stake, would rebel and something like the French Revolution would take place. These were the early seeds of liberal humanism in England, where universal values were abstracted from literature to transcend the specificity of context and culture. Intriguingly, in Renan's valuations of

is a foil, against whom the trickster emerges as both failing and meaningless. The semantic vacuum the trickster leaves behind then, renders the maqama a profoundly insignificant work.[9] And therefore, regarding where he fits in relation to European literary and artistic taste, the trickster of the classical maqama is "an impossible character."[10]

This study can be read as a response to myriad "hesitations" about the maqama genre. My choice to foreground Renan's reading of the maqama is not particularly because of his Eurocentric take on the genre and the cultural view this take represents. It is mainly because his "hesitations" do symptomize a general modern reservation over a narrative genre that offers no "story" in the proper sense of the word, leaving the reader perplexed, if not disgruntled. The study centers around one question: with its "insignificant" trickster, what forms of meaning does the maqama, specifically in its modern revival, take to help understand Arab modernity? To answer this question, I look at the maqama works of three Arab intellectuals who wrote in the 19th century, during the Arab Renaissance or *Nahda*: Ahmad Faris al-Shidyaq (d. 1887) and Nasif al-Yaziji (d. 1871) from the Levant, and Rifaʿa al-Tahtawi (d. 1873) from Egypt.

I have three main premises. First, I recognize Renan's divide between the Orient and the West (or Occident), both existentially and historically, as a construct. Such a

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the maqama, we can glean similar ideas. His hesitations about the genre stems from his view that the trickster does not have timeless significance nor transcends the peculiarities of the age in which the maqamas were written in. Because the maqamas did not contain their own meaning within, they were dismissed as an empty exercise. Renan's perception here seems to suggest that human nature, in the universal sense, is unchanging. Yet, the paradox is that human nature itself is abstracted from particular values effacing their particularisms by claiming to be universal. For more on the ten major tenets of liberal humanism, see Peter Barry, *Beginning Theory: an Introduction to Literary and Cultural Theory* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 2017), 11-23.

[9] Kilito, *al-Aʿmal,* 3:165.

[10] "إن هذه الشخصية مستحيلة عندنا من وجهة نظر الفن" Kilito, *al-Aʿmal,* 3:164-5.

division was not consistently present in the minds of Arab intellectuals at that time. I follow the lead of Peter Hill in "The Arabic Adventures of *Télémaque*: Trajectory of a Global Enlightenment Text in the *Nahda*." Telling "the story of the nineteenth-century Arabic metamorphoses of François Fénelon's (d.1715) work [through translations] against the larger background of its European and near global vogue," Hill critiques how "[t]he literary history of Arabic, particularly that of the nineteenth century *Nahda*, has too often been written in terms of only two spaces—the Arab and the European (often meaning the French)." Hill adds, "Where [the literary history of Arabic] has gone beyond these, it has generally ventured only into the Middle Eastern or Eastern Mediterranean region."[11] Examining the "changes made in translation, [and] the successive metamorphoses that a single original [has] undergo[ne]," Hill productively dilutes divisions conventionally used to imagine the *Nahda* . He argues that the *Nahda* needs to be seen as the "unique local variant of a *global process of Enlightenment* [emphasis added], patriotic awakening, and the propagation of 'civilization.'"[12] Without dismissing the fact that the *Nahda* did happen in the "context of increasing European power," Hill views the period as a product of emerging groups who "combined both local and imported discourses and practices for their own [divergent] ends."[13] Along those lines, I demonstrate in the first chapter that many of the questions al-Shidyaq raises upon encountering cultural and linguistic difference in France and

[11] Peter Hill, "The Arabic Adventures of *Télémaque*: Trajectory of a Global Enlightenment Text in the Nahḍah," *Journal of Arabic Literature* 49 (2018), 172.
[12] Hill, "The Arabic Adventures of *Télémaque*," 174. In the dissertation, the use of *ibid*. has been deliberately avoided in order to maintain unambiguous citation information throughout.
[13] Hill, "The Arabic Adventures of *Télémaque*," 174.

Britain transcend imagined divisions between the Orient and the West.[14] For al-Shidyaq, the stakes lay elsewhere. We shall see that in his maqama, al-Shidyaq was preoccupied with the role of literary imagination and its epistemological validity in the face of hegemonies of historical fact and history-writing. He critiques how literary imagination is set in opposition to a pursuit of historical knowledge that is quite distinctive of Enlightenment ideals, not only in Europe, but also in the Arabic-speaking world. As I show over the course of the study, al-Shidyaq's maqama can be read as a rejoinder to Renan's emphasis on material change as a precondition to participation in modernity.

In agreement with Hill's view of the *Nahda* as a local variation of "a global process of Enlightenment," I refuse to consider Renan's reading of the maqama as the sole example of (what seems to be an ideological) skepticism about the relevance of the genre to modernity. This study of the modern maqama takes into consideration that the reservation about the genre extends beyond Renan, and comes from much of the local sentiment within the Arabic speaking world.[15] In fact, the maqama was viewed

[14] For excellent reading of Arabic literary modernity transcending Orient-West divides, see Rebecca Johnson, "Archive of Errors: Aḥmad Fāris al-Shidyaq , Literature, and the World," *Middle Eastern Literatures* 20, no. 1 (2017): 31-50. Rather than viewing literary modernity as the entrance into world literary space's zones of equivalence, Johnson places "error" and "unintelligibility" at the center for theorizing *Nahda*, thus "posing literary modernity as an error-prone aggregation of foreign and domestic forms, styles, and references." Error enables us to reorient understanding the Nahda from one that reads world literatures vertically through hierarchies, to another that is embedded in a "larger network of transnational, horizontal associations."

[15] In looking at Renan's criticism of the maqama as *one* variant of a yet more pronounced reservation about the genre from the Arabic-speaking world, I am influenced by discourses that transcend West-Orient dichotomies set by Edward Said's *Orientalism.* For example, Eve Trout Powell situates the themes of knowledge and power in the historical context of Egypt's colonial mission in the Sudan. Powell builds on Aijaz Ahmad's criticism of how Said's *Orientalism* 1) sets the trap of the seductive "us" and "them" that Said himself falls into and 2) omits a similar binary of relationship that could exist within the discourse of the colonized as well, and 3) freezes the colonized into a curious passivity, in worlds in which the only prime movers are British or French or German. Eve Trout Powell, *A Different Shade of Colonialism: Egypt, Great Britain, and the Mastery of the Sudan* (Berkeley: University of

unfavorably by modern Arab intellectuals themselves,[16] some of whom critiqued its excessive use of *sajʿ*, or rhymed prose. For example, Palestinian literary critic and intellectual Ruhi al-Khalidi (d. 1913), a leading Arab comparatist, criticized the stylized and rhymed prose characteristic of the maqamas. Contending that "the origin of speech is meaning, rather than form,"[17] al-Khalidi advocated *bayan*, "elucidation," which for him was the foundation for pure and clear meaning, examples of which can be found in the romantic poetry of Victor Hugo (d. 1885).[18] Because the maqamas rely on excessive use of stylized prose and hence fall short of lucid expression, al-Khalidi holds that there is no need (for the modern Arab writer) to produce "a third or fourth maqama, since [true] composition consists essentially in the author's ability to express his private and personal feelings towards the universe and its secrets, rather than following the footsteps of literary predecessors and past echelons of the Arabic language and belles letters."[19] As such, mindful of al-Khalidi's critique of the genre, I show that as al-Shidyaq, al-Tahtawi and al-Yaziji chose to write maqamas, they were in fact writing against a literary mindset, both indigenous and foreign, that was skeptical of the genre's value. The choice to write the maqama in the 19th century is not, then, an act of resistance to European cultural and literary models.

California Press, 2003), 8-9. We shall see in the second chapter that with al-Tahtawi, the maqama acquires, through translation, formal structures that make it suitable for *othering* practices that align well with in Egypt's colonial administration of the Sudan.

[16] Whether those intellectuals adopted this negative view of the maqama because they were influenced by European literary standards is, though not unthinkable, beyond the scope of this study.

[17] This intriguing binary of meaning and form will be obliquely touched upon in my discussion of Shidyāq's maqama in the first chapter.

[18] In addition to Ruḥi al-Khalidi, Nadir Kazim adds Jurji Zaydan as one of the leading Nahḍah literary figures who dismissed the maqamas merely as demonstration of Arabic language rhetoric, stylized prose, curious word choice, proverbs and maxims. For more on the modern perception of the maqamas, see Nadir Kazim, *al-Maqamat wa-l-talaqqi* (Beirut: al-Muʾassah al-ʿArabiyyah, 2003), 145-6.

[19] Kazim, *al-Maqamat wa-l-talaqqi*, 146.

My second premise postulates that some of the modern criticisms of the genre are caused by limitations in the analytical tools available for literary critics whether in Europe or in the Arabic speaking world during the period. If modernity is, in the terms set by Alexis Wick in "Sailing the Modern Episteme," a time period in which the notion of "history" is essential, the maqama, with its "story-less" *story*, has nothing to offer. This shortcoming might be understood better if we examine the maqama's monotonous structure. This structure consists of four main features: first is a frame narrator opening the scene; second is the linguistically prodigious hero whose marginal status in society, despite his disguise, never changes; third is the cyclical narrative form that repeats throughout the collection; 20 and last is the predictable outcome. Because of this structure, it would be sufficient for the reader to be familiar with one maqama only in order to predict how the other maqamas in the collection unfold. This predictable and cyclical narrative form obviously denies progress and negates material change, both of which are basic to understanding historical processes. In the course of the study, I show that the *Nahda* authors often adhered to and occasionally manipulated some or all the morphological elements of the classical maqama. By doing so, they produced maqamas that challenge the views that any claim

[20] This structure builds on the detailed anatomy of the genre Kilito provides in his work, upon which Monroe builds. The message the narrator delivers in the maqamas can be divided into eight Proppian functions: 1) Arrival of transmitter in a city 2) encounter of the transmitter with the disguised rogue/rhetorician 3) literary display by the latter 4) rewarding of the rogue by the transmitter 5) recognition of the rogue's true identity 6) reproaches of the transmitter 7) justification by the rogue 8) parting of the two. Nonetheless, there are a few maqamas by both al-Hamadhani and al-Hariri that do not conform to this structure. To those eight functions Monroe adds a ninth: departure of the transmitter from the city. Monroe observes that Kilito fails to see these nine functions as a basic organizational unit revealing a meaning, when one arranges them into a chart one sees that they fall effortlessly into a circular sequence exhibiting a pattern of ring composition. James Monroe, *The Art of Badi' Az-Zaman Al'Hamadhani as Picaresque Narrative* (Beirut: Center for Arab and Middle East Studies, American University of Beirut, 1983), 21-2.

to historicity must evident in the hero's capacity to make change.

Yet, although the maqama at face value negates the difference that can signal change, I argue that it *does* have the potential to function along lines of progress it seems to reject. To explore this aspect of the genre, I return again to Kilito's work, where he identifies *fi al-taʿarruf* "recognition scenes," also known as *anagnorises*, to be an essential element in defining the maqama genre vis-à-vis other genres that share similar features of rhymed prose narrative form. Kilito highlights the cyclical structure of the maqamas and links successful moments of *anagnorisis* obliquely to the memory of the maqamas narrator :

> the narrative form that is monotonously repeated in the maqamas is connected with the *return* [original emphasis] of both main characters [narrator and trickster]: regardless what forms of disguise Abu al-Fath takes up, the narrator needs to recognize him eventually. This act of recognition indicates *the passage* [emphasis added] from false knowledge to true one. Nevertheless, the latter form of knowledge [true knowledge] is possible only because of the narrator's *past* knowledge of the trickster [emphasis added]. In other words, if the narrator recognizes the trickster, it is because he had known him before; and his knowledge of him is shown in several other maqamas.[21]

[21] "التعرف: الشكل السردي الذي يتكرر بوتيرة كبيرة في المقامات مرتبط بعودة الشخصيتين الرئيستين. مهما يكن تنكر أبي الفتح، ينتهي الراوي دائما بالتعرف عليه. يفترض التعرف عبورا من المعرفة الوهمية إلى معرفة حقيقية، لكن هذه الأخيرة ليست ممكنة إلا إذا كانت هناك معرفة سابقة على التجربة التي جرى وصفها. و بعبارة أخرى، إذ تعرف الراوي على أبي الفتح، فلأنه كان يعرفه من قبل، و هذه المعرفة معروضة في مقامات عديدة."
Kilito, *al-Aʿmal,* 3:98.

Kilito's morphological analysis implies two contradictory aspects of the genre. On the one hand, the monotonous structure that leads to "return" "regardless" of the trickster's various forms of disguise reduces the genre to inevitabilities in the narrative that negate political will and change. On the other hand, that acts of recognition are possible in any one given maqama because they are connected with other acts of recognition leads to two more points. First, by linking acts of recognition across more than one maqama, Kilito suggests that meaningful reading of the genre needs to consider the maqama collection as a whole. Rather than examine each maqama as one discreet narrative unit, a productive study of the genre considers the various relations the maqamas establish among themselves. Second, by arguing that the narrator recognizes the trickster because of previous acts of recognition, Kilito suggests that the narrator is endowed with a dynamic memory that is cumulative. These two contradictory aspects, the cyclical structure and the memory-driven acts of recognition across the entire collection, encourage alternative ways of reading. As I will show, tracing morphological shifts in the maqama by modern authors and considering the (transhistorical) relationships among different maqamas collections, offers great insight about how the genre was deployed by the *Nahda* authors not simply to demonstrate, through the stylized rhymed prose, language prodigy.

Kilito's focus on recognition scenes leads to the third main premise that informs my study of the genre in the modern period, viz. the poetic. In placing the poetic at the center for understanding Arab modernity, I also draw on Kilito's reading that, since

the 1980s, caused a paradigm shift in the genre's reception.[22] Kilito's proposal that the maqamas be understood through active *rending*[23] of what he calls *shiʿriyyat al-sitār*, the "poetic veil," came as a corrective measure to modern attacks on a controversial claim al-Hamadhani puts in the mouth of the trickster in one of his maqamas. Modern Arab critics and readers found troubling Abu al-Fath al-Iskandari's criticism of one of the most prominent classical Arab belle-lettrists and polymaths of all time, namely Jahiz (d. 868). In the "maqama of Jahiz," Abu al-Fath describes Jahiz's prose style as one that suffers from "a paucity of metaphors, and from plain expressions [while being] tied down to the simple language he uses, and avoids and shirks difficult words [. . .], rhetorical expressions [and] recondite words."[24] Such bold opinion triggered the reservation of a number of such modern thinkers as Muhammad Abduh (d. 1905), Maroun Abboud (d. 1962), Shawqi Daif (d. 2005), and even Abdulmalek Murtad (b. 1935), himself a zealous advocate of al-Hamadhani's maqamas, who regarded the latter's opinion of Jahiz as untenable.[25] What most attacks failed to take into account, according to Nadir Kaẓim, is the need to view al-Hamadhani's maqamas on its own terms, rather than subject the work to the reader's own bias. In this respect, Kaẓim

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[22] Kilito's work in the late 1970s represents how Arabic literary criticism of the maqamas borrowed increasingly from such approaches as formalism, structuralism, semiotics and deconstruction. According to Kazim (*al-Maqmat wa-l-talaqqi*, 289; 393), the shift in critical perception of the genre stood at variance with studies focusing on the maqama while demonstrating an obsession with it being the origin of modern Arabic narrative form, of which the novel and the short story are two prominent examples.

[23] I borrow from James Monroe's term "Rending the Veils of Obscurity" 87, in whose study he proposes that the maqamas need to be understood *by* conceiving of its flowery language as "a material entering into a structure." To my mind, Monroe's use of "veil" here alludes to his indebtedness to Kilito, the latter whose *shiʿriyyat al-sitār* is key to understanding his take on the maqamas.

[24] W.J. Prendergast, *The Maqamat of Badi al-Zaman al-Hamadhani* (London: Curzon Press, 1915), 72. قليل الاستعارات، قريب العبارات، منقاد لعريان الكلام يستعمله، نفور من معتاصه يهمله، فهل سمعتم له لفظة مصنوعة، أو كلمة غير مسموعة؟

Kazim, *al-Maqamat wa-l-talaqqi*, 339.

[25] Kazim, *al-Maqamat wa-l-talaqqi*, 400.

acclaims Kilito's intervention, in which the latter argued that al-Hamadhani's project in essence comes from a revolutionary standpoint that advocates *shiʿriyyat al-kitāba al-marmūza*, "poesis of intensely-encoded writing," as opposed to *balāghat al-iqnāʿ*, "rhetoric of persuasion."[26] Hence, while Ibn al-Muqaffaʿ (d. 759) and Jahiz offered written prose that functioned linearly, with politics that aim to persuade the readers of their worldviews, al-Hamadhani by contrast offered a prose that was, through excessive use of rhymed prose and metaphor, more evasive. For that reason, in the maqamas, meaning is "concealed into the folds of obscure horizon, the arrival at which is possible only by penetrating into a thick layer of metaphors. [Such] highly encoded mode of writing is built on increasing the distance between signifier and signified, calling for laborious efforts to unpack its symbols."[27] My study of the maqamas of the three *Nahda* figures demonstrates that, far from offering a linear story, the maqamas operate through a logic of hidden meaning. This meaning can be revealed by tracing what I am calling textual phenomenology. By this term I mean not what the text of the maqama tells on the immediate level of referent, but the sum of the internal and external correlations that arise 1) among the various elements of a single maqama 2) between the maqama itself and other maqamas in the entire collection by a single modern author and 3) between a given collection by a single author and the classical model the author attempts to emulate.[28]

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[26] Kazim, *al-Maqamat wa-l-talaqqi*, 401.

[27] كان نثر بديع الزمان يؤسس لشعرية جديدة في الكتابة العربية، أطلق عليها كيليطو "شعرية الستار" أو "شعرية الكتابة المرموزة" حيث "يتوارى المعنى في أفق عائم، و من أجل الوصول إليه يجب اقتحام عقبة الغريب و المجازات. الكتابة المرموزة مبنية بشكل يحفر مسافة بين الدال و المدلول، لذا فهي بحاجة إلى عملية شاقة لفك الرموز." Kazim, *al-Maqamat wa-l-talaqqi*, 401.

[28] My choice to examine the relations between different maqamas runs opposite to Reynold A. Nicholson's (d. 1945) view that "each maqama forms an independent whole, so that the complete series may be regarded as a novel consisting of detached episodes in the hero's life, a medley of prose and

Considering the above, one can argue that modern reservations about the maqama were mainly caused by subjecting this narrative form to readers' expectations and biases, among which is the search for progress that provides the base for a "story" in narrative. As we have seen, these opinions were common to many intellectuals, both Arab and European, who dismissed the genre for its irrelevance to modern time. Such problems as predictability of outcome, feebleness of narrative scenario, use of flowery language, ornate style and metaphor led not only to devaluation of the genre during its own moment of inception, but also to dismissal of every modern attempt to write a maqama as unliterary, unnecessary, and superfluous.

I started this introduction by asking why tricksters can't be modern. Throughout this study, I invert the statement by asking the following: given that three towering literary figures of the Arab *Nahda* did choose to write a maqama, what kinds of modernity emerge from such creative writerly choice? In other words, instead of situating the maqama within a discourse about how modern Arab intellectuals were at a cross-road between a profound literary tradition and newly-introduced aesthetics imported from Europe, I proceed by viewing the maqama as a modern literary event *proper*. From there I venture to examine how modernity acquires nuances through the maqama form itself. As such, I extend Kilito's logic of *poetics*, upon which the maqama genre rests, into a hermeneutic of Arab modernity. Put differently, I read literary period through genre, rather than the opposite.

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verse in which the story is nothing, the style is everything." Monroe. *The Art of Badi' Az-Zaman al-Hamadhani*, 87.

Poetics of Modernity: Reading the *Nahda* by Sidelining Postcolonial Teleologies

Numerous foundational studies of the *Nahda* define the period through material and historical changes befalling the Arabic speaking world under European political and cultural influence.[29] In those, the *Nahda* is viewed as a period of enlightenment and modernity that brought about progress and civilization in the Arab world, resulting from the circulation of books and ideas, technological progress, and accelerated cultural exchange with or direct borrowing from Europe from the 19th century onward.[30] This cultural flourishing and the ensuing *Nahda* is attributed to Napoleon's invasion of Egypt in 1798.[31] For example, the *Nahda* is defined by Albert Hourani and Hisham Sharabi in terms that question its autonomy, as a "*reaction* [emphasis added] to a European political onslaught, that exposed the cultural and technological retardation of the Ottoman Empire."[32] The defeat of the Mamluks—brought about by Napoleon's military power was an event that cast the *Nahda* as the outcome of violence that awoke Arabs from their historical and cultural slumber under Ottoman rule. Consequently, it "forced them to forge new social, political, and cultural models in order to reenter world history."[33]

As Tarek El-Ariss observes, such a narrative of the *Nahda* was constructed and

[29] For example, in the *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, *Nahda* is defined as 'awakening', the *Arab renaissance*, [as] the rebirth of Arabic literature and thought under Western influence since the second half of the 19th century.
Accessed 18 December 2019 <http://dx.doi.org.proxy.library.cornell.edu/10.1163/1573-3912_ei2glos_SIM_gi_03573>
[30] Tarek El-Ariss, *The Arab Renaissance: A Bilingual Anthology of the Nahda* (New York: Modern Language Association of America, 2018), xvii.
[31] El-Ariss, *The Arab Renaissance*, xviii.
[32] El-Ariss, *The Arab Renaissance*, xviii.
[33] El-Ariss, *The Arab Renaissance*, xviii.

promoted by scholars and historians who ended up "prioritizing political confrontation and borrowing from Europe as the path to Arab modernity."[34] Besides contributing to the "entrenchment of a clear binary between tradition and modernity, between East and West, that has shaped the ways Arabs understood and continue to understand their relation to the world," this narrative emphasized political and material realities and, in the process, overlooked the roles of literature, imagination, and various cultural agents and geographic regions outside Western Europe as sites that have shaped and were shaped by the *Nahda* . Therefore, El-Ariss's critique suggests, what is needed is a reappraisal of the period as a "dynamic process, complex and multifaceted, crossing space and time," as a period that is "shaped by great minds but also performed by daily and mundane practices, influenced by Arab exchanges and confrontations with Western Europe but never reduced to these exchanges and confrontations."[35]

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[34] El-Ariss, *The Arab Renaissance*, xx.

[35] El-Ariss, *The Arab Renaissance*, xx. Other studies have also crucially questioned the annexation of creative cultural agents, e.g. literature, to geopolitics, aiming therefore to rethink classical understanding of cultural and political hegemonies as analyzed by Edward Said in *Culture and Imperialism*. These works vary in their temporal and spatial scopes. One good example is Pascal Casanova's *World Republic of Letters*. The literary world charted in her project has conventions and power structures that do not always coincide with political or economic ones. Casanova builds off of the words of Fernand Braudel in his analysis of the global literary space: "'in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth, France, though lagging behind the rest of Europe economically, was the undisputed center of painting and literature; the times when Italy and Germany dominated the world of music were not times when Italy and Germany dominated Europe economically; and even today, the formidable economic lead enjoyed by the United States has not made it the literary and artistic leader of the world.' The key to understanding how this literary world operates lies in recognizing that its boundaries, its capitals, its highways and its forms of communication do not completely coincide with those of the political and economic world." Pascale Casanova, *The World Republic of Letters* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2004) 11. Muhsin al-Musawi builds upon Casanova's thesis, re-examining Arabic literary history by focusing on the so-called "age of decadence" (roughly 1258-1811) in the history of Arabic literature. For al-Musawi, the disparaging evaluations of the Arabic postclassical period, that were made by figures in the highest echelon of *Nahda* Arabic intellectualism, such as Salama Musa, Ṭaha Ḥusayn, and Aamad Hassan al-Zayyat, were the product of European Enlightenment discourse that led to their suspicious view of and distrust at the past and its massive accumulation in cultural capital. This misevaluation is in return a result of the copula that links political power to cultural dominance. As he writes, "by associating the political loss of an Arab center for an Islamic empire after the Mongol invasion of Baghdad in 1258 with cultural decadence, they [Musa, Husayn, al-Zayyat] fail to dissociate political disintegration from ongoing cultural dissemination and

Recent works in the field of Arabic studies have increasingly redefined the *Nahda* as a "dynamic process," specifically by sidelining the teleologies outlined by the field of postcolonial studies, a prevalent framework for engaging modern Arabic literature in academia especially in the U.S.[36] As El-Ariss observes, postcolonial studies often reduce modern Arabic literary texts to "the practical politics of colonialism and the neocolonial dynamics of global capital [. . .] treating them as sites of resistance to or deployment of Western cultural models, thereby engaging modernity as a narrative of complicity with the hegemonic West"[37] Decentering postcolonial discourse on the *Nahda*, recent scholarship in Arabic studies has targeted or thought along the teleology linking Arab modernity with imagined social and cultural trajectories culminating respectively in the emergence of 1) the nation-state as the socio-political organization informing how Arabic-speaking communities imagined themselves and 2) the novel, imported from Europe, as *the* genre that is most representative of this emerging socio-political entity. For example, Samah Selim's "Pharoah's Revenge: Translation, Literary History and Colonial Ambivalence" targets Arabic literary history's inescapably teleological bent by highlighting the way it is primarily written in terms of

exchange across the Islamic world. This twentieth century outlook is a notable sign of failure on the parts of the architects of modernity to connect effectively with a rich culture of their past, and it is also largely responsible for their failure to establish emotive and cultural links with the Muslim populace." Muhsin J. al-Musawi, *The Medieval Islamic Republic of Letters: Arabic Knowledge Construction* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2015) 5; 11. It is noteworthy that all the Arab intellectuals al-Musawi mentions are from Egypt. It would be worthwhile to examine whether such view of the postclassical period was dominant only among many Egyptian intellectuals. In other words, how did Arab intellectuals, for example in the Levant, view the period al-Musawi targets in his study? Could these viewpoints again be understood in light of seductions of translation in Egypt, the paradigm of which Shaden Tageldin outlines in *Disarming Words: Empire and the Seductions of Translation in Egypt* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011).

[36] El-Ariss, *Trials of Arab Modernity*, 10.

[37] El-Ariss, *Trials of Arab Modernity*, 10.

"historical collapse and critical dystopia," around concepts of "rise and fall."[38] For Selim, Arab literary modernity was accordingly "constructed as a renaissance that appropriated and copied European modes and forms."[39] Highlighting these formulations allows Selim to further explore the many assumptions about translation processes that shaped Arab modernity in the 19th century. Concepts institutionalized in reading the period, such as "translation" and "original" were all part of the way "hierarchies of colonial modernity were constructed and projected both inside and outside Europe."[40] As a period that witnessed important translation projects, the *Nahda* has been closely entwined with the history of the Arabic novel: a story that is supposed to begin with the translation, adaptation, and imitation of the European novel towards the end of the 19th century, and that is guided by an "elusive search for normative equivalence.[41]

For his part, Kamran Rastegar, in *Literary Modernity between the Middle East and Europe,* rethinks the landscape of the 19th century literary production in the Middle East by "sidestepping the limits of both the novel and the nation."[42] By viewing the 19th century as one of "contingent modernities,"[43] Rastegar reads the period in terms of indeterminacies: that "before the full development of nationalist discourse, the destiny of literary production was *not yet foretold* [emphasis added] within the history

[38] Samah Selim, "Pharaoh's Revenge: Translation, Literary History and Colonial Ambivalence," in *The Making of the Arab Intellectual,* ed. Dyala Hamzeh (London: Routledge, 2013), 20.
[39] Selim, "Pharaoh's Revenge," 20.
[40] Selim, "Pharaoh's Revenge," 21.
[41] Selim, "Pharaoh's Revenge," 24
[42] Kamran Rastegar, *Literary Modernity between the Middle East and Europe: Textual Transactions in Nineteenth-Century Arabic, English, and Persian Literatures* (London: Routledge, 2007), 4.
[43] Rastegar, *Literary Modernity*, 5.

of any specific narrative form."[44] Rastegar's version of modernity does not "prefigure the nationalist discourses that were to emerge as dominant by the end of the 19th century."[45] In this sense, his *Literary Modernity* disentangles the intellectual history of the period from the teleological reading of development in 19th century prose-writing as culminating in the novel and in nationalism.[46] By pushing these two cultural and political registers to the margins of the narrative of the 19th century, Rastegar recuperates a literary history that focuses on issues that both registers try to suppress: interlinguistic subjectivities, ambiguous imaginative geographies, and dynamic shifts in cultural register.[47] Both Selim's and Rastegar's projects invite us to reconsider Arab modernity in terms of contingencies, of open possibilities emancipated from both the literary and political terrains as we have come to know them in the 20th century.

Whereas Selim and Rastegar target the delimiting registers of the novel and the nation in reading Arab modernity, El-Ariss, in *Trials of Arab Modernity*, targets the positivistic reasoning associated with those registers. It "questions visuality and the mistrust of hearing [that] are constitutive of the Enlightenment project with which Arab modernity is associated as well."[48]

In this project, El-Ariss focuses on literary works from the 19th century, by examining instead the workings of *affect* and *symptoms* on the human body as a site of rupture and signification in order to sideline questions of representation. For El-Ariss, engaging "affect" and the "body" as sites of experiencing modernity challenges the

[44] Rastegar, *Literary Modernity*, 4.
[45] Rastegar, *Literary Modernity*, 4.
[46] Rastegar, *Literary Modernity*, 4.
[47] Rastegar, *Literary Modernity*, 4
[48] El-Ariss, *Trials of Arab Modernity*, 6.

prevalent conceptualization of modernity, both that treat it as a Western ideological project imposed by colonialism, and others that understand it as a universal narrative of progress.[49] Through a transhistorical approach that draws on both classical and modern Arabic literature and thought, El-Ariss registers what he refers to as "somaesthetics." With the word "soma" denoting "the living [. . .] body rather than a mere physical corpus of flesh and bones," *Trials* refuses to view the body merely as an object of representation. Rather, the body in this view "expresses the ambiguity of human being, as both subjective sensibility that experiences the world and as an object perceived in that world."[50] By placing the human body at the center of enquiry, El-Ariss joins a number of thinkers who foreground the "senses" in understanding modernity.[51] What is crucially useful in this choice is that "senses" are "not a stable foundation upon which a singular and unassailable truth can be erected," but rather "a space for heterogeneity and possibility."[52] Ultimately, El-Ariss's reading of modernity as a series of trials afflicted onto the body interrogates the reading of Arabic literature through teleological narratives of progress or anticolonial struggle, and diverges from the linear genealogy of Arab modernity starting with Napoleon's invasion of Egypt.[53]

If El-Ariss diverges from the linear narrative of Arab modernity as an event rooted in Napoleon's invasion of Egypt, Shaden Tageldin, by contrast, takes 1798 as the very historical moment that shaped this modernity by focusing on the trajectory of translation movement in 19th century Egypt. In *Disarming Words: Empire and the*

[49] El-Ariss, *Trials of Arab Modernity*, 2.
[50] El-Ariss, *Trials of Arab Modernity*, 5.
[51] El-Ariss, *Trials of Arab Modernity*, 5-6.
[52] El-Ariss, *Trials of Arab Modernity*, 6.
[53] El-Ariss, *Trials of Arab Modernity*, 8.

Seduction of Translation in Egypt, Tageldin analyzes the cultural afterlives of two modern colonial occupations of Egypt – the French, in 1798, and the British, in 1882. Yet, she also takes *affect* as a modality to complicate colonial encounter between European powers and Egyptian natives. Tageldin examines the "psychodynamics of translation in (post)colonial Egypt to propose new understandings of cultural imperialism in general and of Orientalism in particular."[54] Following the lead of, but also building on, Gayatri Spivak's notion of translation as "a most intimate act of reading [which involves] surrender to the [source] text," Tageldin complicates the traditional reading of colonial encounter that reduced the event (of translation) to one of the two reactions: resistance and surrender. For her, translation in (post)colonial Egypt needs to be framed within the politics of "love," thereby demonstrating that "affect" problematizes what we conventionally understand about colonial resistance. Because early colonial encounters between natives and orientalists in Egypt evinced the orientalists' self-translation into an Arabo-Islamic identity,[55] subsequent European cultural control of Egypt became viable. Many intellectuals of the Egyptian *Nahda* responded to French and British identifications with Arabic, Islam, or Egyptianness with the *mimetic* desire to translate themselves, in turn, into Frenchness and Englishness. But this, Tageldin notes, they did within the skin of Arabic, which made it all too easy for them to disavow their mental colonization (at least symbolically). This, however, is an illusion. Egyptian *Nahda* intellectuals were driven by the thought that Arabic could be "equivalent" or even superior to French and English. They

[54] Tageldin, *Disarming Words*, 7.
[55] A most obvious example is Napoleon Bonaparte's speech presented in Arabic, where he depicted himself as a Muslim ruler bringing social justice to Egyptians and ridding them of the Mamluks.

imagined that translating European literatures into Arabic confers on their culture the sovereignty they sought to wrest from the yoke of colonization.[56] What can be insightfully gleaned from Tageldin's project is that 1) cultural and linguistic "equivalence" as a notion that sustains fictions of resistance and sovereignty and that, marred by *affect*, 2) the colonial encounter is more indeterminate than the divisions that (post)colonial notions of resistance or surrender may suggest.

In this dissertation, I draw on these scholarly works that, directly or indirectly, echo Samah Selim's invitation to abandon the *Nahda* in the singular. Selim speaks of "two intertwined *Nahdas*: one that, partly looking backwards to an antediluvian 'golden age,' was invested in an act of genetic and linguistic recuperation (re-naissance) and another that was strictly materialist in the play of its textual and social articulations."[57] I revisit the 19th century with the aim of expanding the existing ramifications of the *Nahda* narrative. My study of the maqamas by the selected authors excavates various configurations of modernity as they manifest in the authors' "antediluvian" deliberations. By doing so, I sideline both the novel and the nation as two registers that came into discursive currency in the wake of (post)colonialism. Moreover, the study gives a fuller articulation to 19th century's literary and socio-political contingencies. I

[56] Drawing on Kilito's take on al-Manfaluti's *mantling* of French writers into an Azharite (Arabic) garment through translation, Shaden Tageldin's reads into implied "whispers" on each of al-Manfaluti's pages, "How can I be a European?" to challenge the traditional colonial dichotomies of resistance and hegemony, and to question the bipolar choice between foreignization and domestication which often regulates understanding of translation. al-Manfaluti's case of enclosing French signifier within a classical Arabic one so that it passes on as a native signifier does not necessarily constitute an act of resistance. To the contrary, it could indicate that the target culture as it deeply absorbs the foreign into the familiar body. Tageldin, *Disarming Words*, 1-11.

[57] Rebecca Johnson, Introduction, in Ahmad Faris al-Shidyaq, *Leg over Leg or the Turtle in the Tree Concerning the Fariyaq: What Manner of Creature Might he Be*, tr. Humphrey Davies (New York: New York UP, 2013), xix.

take into consideration the fact that when Arab intellectuals did negotiate conceptualizations of the nation at the time, they were speaking of a moment that is *yet to come* while envisioning the passing of a another moment that is, as it turns out, *not quite gone*.[58] As such, I explore the past as temporality that is open, experimental, and inconclusive. Although I challenge paradigms established by postcolonial studies in reading Arabic cultural and literary production in the 19th century, I do of course recognize the (post)colonial implications of Napoleon's invasion of Egypt. This historical event, as I show the second chapter, is crucial to understanding the colonial imaginaries the maqama help to reveal in al-Tahtawi 's translated work.

Ramifying, complicating, and interrogating a hegemonic narrative of Arab modernity, the study of 19th century maqamas therefore takes *poetics* as key concept to understanding the period. By using *poetics*, I do not only draw on the maqamas' *shiʿriyyat al-sitār*, or "poetic veil," to problematize how we read the genre and what we already know about the period. My use of *poetics* in understanding modernity draws additionally on how Richard Kearney and Kascha Semonovitch configure the term. Drawing on Martin Heidegger, Kearney and Semonovitch takes *poetics* in the broadest sense, as "a productive act beholden to something beyond itself."[59] They observe that, "traditionally, poetics marks the event of the possible rather than the

[58] We read instances of this "odd in-between period" that inserts itself into historical time in the work of al-Yaziji. In adopting this view, I am indebted to Hannah Arendt, whose view of modernity has a special relevance to my study: "an interval altogether determined by things which are no longer and by things which are not yet." This formulation resonates with Heidegger's modernity: an epoch "too late for the gods and too early for Being." The implications of such configuration of modern time is, nevertheless, beyond the scope of the study. Richard Kearney, *Poetics of Modernity: towards a Hermeneutic Imagination* (Atlantic Highlands, N.J.: Humanities Press, 1995), xi.
[59] Richard Kearney and Kascha Semonovitch, "At the Threshhold: Foreginers, Strangers, Others," in, *Phenomenologies of the Stranger: Between Hostility and Hospitality,* ed. Kearney and Semonovitch (New York: Fordham University Press, 2011), 18.

actual: the new –the strange – erupting into the world."[60] As Plato defines it in the *Republic*, *poiesis* (acts of creation) "can provide vision for what is otherwise invisible. It creates existing things from non-existing things."[61] By reconfiguring Arab modernity through the notion of possibilities, I make no claims about initiating such conversation anew: in fact, such views can be found in the work of Egyptian novelist Radwa Ashour in her 2009 study *al-Hadatha al-mumkina* (Possible modernity). Taking al-Shidyaq's *Leg over Leg* as her primary source base, Ashour links the marginalization of al-Shidyaq's work in literary memory as of the early decades in the 20th century to hegemonic cultural and educational institutions that found in his groundbreaking worldviews a threat to authority. These institutional choices, she remarks, need to be viewed as "choices by the Arab cultural elite, [and are shaped by] its relationship with its own tradition and colonial situation, [as well as] its aspiration to be liberated from the past."[62] Exploring how al-Shidyaq's case defies postcolonial calls to break away from the past and advocates "revival without disavowal of one's tradition," she argues that his modernity was one that transcends and is at variance with colonial modernity, calling it a "possible modernity."[63]

I thus propose that we re-consider the 19th century in terms of possibilities. By invoking possibilities in the plural, I am suggesting that among Arab authors who wrote around the same historical moment, modernity had various configurations. These configurations were determined by a range of factors: from the expanse of the

[60] Kearney and Semonovitch, "At the Threshold," 18.
[61] Kearney and Semonovitch (eds), *Poetics of Modernity,* xii.
[62] Radwa Ashour, *al-Ḥadatha al-mumkina* (Cairo: Dar al-Shuruq, 2012), 14.
[63] Ashour, *al-Hadatha al-mumkina*, 133.

geographical swaths those authors covered in their respective travel itineraries across the Mediterranean, to the range of languages they spoke as well as the nature of the translation projects they participated in, to the kinds of the cultural and political institutions they operated through or against. To explore modernity through the maqamas by those authors, I explore various articulations of *poiesis*. In al-Shidyaq's work we encounter the human body of the hero affected by insomnia as he grapples with philosophic questions about the nature of Platonic forms and their relations to language. In al-Tahtawi 's, Egypt is placed into an age-long colonial modernity, dating back to 17th century, that runs on discursive practices producing island forms. In al-Yaziji's work, configurations of modernity are inscribed through articulate a shrinking of distance between bodies, enabling the hearing of sounds in the deserts of the Arabian Peninsula. Respectively, these three forms of modernity are: anthropocentric, nesologic, and mimetic.

Ahmad Faris al-Shidyaq's Leg Over Leg: from Anthropocentrism to Contiguity

A belletrist, a poet, a travel writer, a translator, a lexicographer, a grammarian, a literary historian, an essayist, a publisher, and a newspaper editor, al-Shidyaq (1805-06?-1887) is known as a pioneer of modern Arabic literature, a reviver of classical forms, the father of Arabic journalism, and a modernizer of the Arabic language itself.[64] His most famous work, *Kitab al-saq ʿala al-saq fi ma huwa al-Faryaq* (1855, *Leg over Leg or the Turtle in the Tree Concerning the Faryaq, What Manner of*

[64] Rebecca Johnson, "Introduction," in al-Shidyaq, *Leg over Leg*, xi

Creature Might He Be) is an important work for understanding (a possible)[65] Arab modernity. The book is "generically impossible to characterize; it is critical, self-referential, learned, and irreverent book of observations on the lives and manners of 'The Arabs and their Non-Arab Peers' that includes scathing attacks on authority, both ecclesiastical and worldly, as well as liberal and libertine discussions of relations between the sexes."[66]

Born in Lebanon to a prominent literary family in the Maronite community, al-Shidyaq was an intelligent child; he learned in large part at home and took up the family profession as a copyist and instructor in the service of the emir Haydar al-Shihabi. In 1825, his brother Asʿad began working as an Arabic instructor and translator for the American evangelical missionaries in Beirut and eventually converted to Protestantism and declared his desire to interpret the Gospel independently. Asʿad's conversion and revolutionary spirit were met with hostility by the local church and he was taken into Patriarchal custody. Kept in a small cell under poor living conditions, where Asʿad could have been tortured, he died in 1830.

Troubled by his brother's punishment, al-Shidyaq developed a distrust towards forms of authority in his community, which resulted in a sense of skepticism al-Shidyaq expressed in his writings. Following his brother's death, al-Shidyaq fled Lebanon with several Americans to Alexandria and then to British-protected Malta, where he worked for the London-based Church Missionary Society (CMS) and took various positions as translator, Arabic language instructor, and supervisor of the local

[65] Cf. Ashour, *al-Hadatha al-mumkina*.
[66] Account of al-Shidyaq's life draws on Rebecca Johnson, "Introduction," in al-Shidyaq, *Leg over Leg*, x.

Arabic printing press. During his stay in Malta (from early 1827-28 and again from 1834-48), al-Shidyaq maintained his steadfast distrust in all matters ecclesiastical, insisting throughout on a "sound knowledge of the truth of the Gospels." When he left the CMS, it was in order to complete a translation of the Bible, in accordance with the Hebrew and the Syriac texts, under the auspices of the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, another Anglican mission operating also in Malta. This appointment led to him working with orientalist and missionary Samuel Lee (d.1852) in Cambridge. After Lee's death, al-Shidyaq continued to work on his translation. It was during this time, Rebecca Johnson observes, that he was also working on a treatise arguing for the unreliability of the Gospels on the very basis of source criticism.[67]

Not much detail is known to us about al-Shidyaq's experience translating the Bible with Dr Lee. Nevertheless, fragments of his conferences with the learned orientalist can be found in his 1863 travel account, *Kashf al-mukhabbaʾ ʿan funun Urubba* (Revealing the hidden in the arts of Europe). What can be gleaned from the account is that there were significant disagreements between al-Shidyaq and Lee about the Arabic translation of the Bible. As al-Shidyaq relates, Lee seemed to advocate a literalist translation of the book,[68] often at the expense of the clarity of the Arabic

[67] Johnson, "Introduction," in al-Shidyaq, *Leg over Leg,* xv.

[68] Lee once asked about the origin of the *alif* in the dual imperative of "qifā" (قِفا) in the famous line by Imruʾ al-Qays. When al-Shidyaq answered that it signals the conjugation of the imperative in the dual form since the poet was addressing two of his travel companions, Lee, thinking in terms of Hebrew, disputed that "this *alif* rather originates in the Hebrew ה[H], for the [Jews] suffix this letter to the end of verbs in both the imperative and inhibition modes, which denotes both request-making and petition." Ahamd Faris al-Shidyaq, *Kashf al-mukhabbaʾ ʿan funun Urubba*, (Constantinople: al-Jawaʾib Press, 1882), 103. On a different occasion, Lee asked al-Shidyaq if he knew the etymology of the word "zināʾ," (الزناء), i.e. prostitution, and explained to him that it came from the Hebrew verb "zanā," which means "to sell, as in the prostitute selling her body to a man." In translating the Bible, Lee's practice demonstrated to al-Shidyaq what to latter seemed like a special interest in preserving and reflecting the original, for he often followed the adverb *qāʾilan* (قائلا) after the verb *qāla* (قال): a redundancy which is neither possible in Arabic nor in English, as al-Shidyaq himself observes.

translation. Lee's approach annexed the Arabic translation to the original. In other words, Lee gave the original a superior ontological status while always striving to produce a translation that could (like a metaphor) reflect the original.

Moreover, from this account, one has the sense that that orientalists' interest in Arabic in 19th century was driven primarily by the desire to better understand the history of the ancient world and Semitic languages (specifically Hebrew) in which the Bible was written. According to Nadia Bou Ali, "[during the *Nahda*], American missionaries were interested in the Arabic 'race' (*jins*) because the language, like ruins, told the secrets of history and had the key to ancient knowledge."[69] al-Shidyaq himself makes observations about such interest. Disconcerted with how the orientalists did not seem to have a consistent method of translating from Arabic into other languages and vice-versa, he wrote, "By God, their learning of our language has no motive other than to get to the snippets of Hebrew and Syriac, for these two languages are more important and useful to them than Arabic."[70]

To go in detail about al-Shidyaq's experience translating the Bible into Arabic, or even more broadly his challenging views of Scripture's authority (both the Bible and the Quran), is beyond the scope of the present study. Besides, excellent scholarship tackling the subject rather indirectly has been done by Nadia al-Baghdadi[71] and Rana

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"و من ذلك انه كان يريد المحافظة على الأصل بالإتيان بقائلاً بعد قال، فإنه يقال فيه قال قائلا مع أن هذا التركيب في لغة الانكليز منكر، و لذلك نجد في توراتهم و تكلّم قليلا لا قال قائلا" al-Shidyaq, *Kashf al-mukhabbaʾ*, 104.

[69] Nadia Bou Ali, "Collecting the Nation: Lexicography and National Pedagogy in al-Nahḍah al-ʿArabiyya," in *Archives, Museums and Collecting Practices in the Modern Arab World*, ed. Sonja Mejcher-Atassi and John P. Schwartz. (Surrey, England: Ashgate, 2012), 35.

[70] al-Shidyaq, *Kashf al-mukhabbaʾ*, 102.

[71] Nadia al-Bagdadi, "The Cultural Function of Fiction: from the Bible to Libertine Literature. Historical Criticism and Social Critique in Ahmad Faris al-Shidyaq." *Arabica* 46 (1999): 375-401.

Issa.[72] What is relevant for my purpose, however, is that al-Shidyaq wrote at a moment when the idea of authority itself was instituted but paradoxically, for him at least, was generating its own defeat. In other words, al-Shidyaq wrote in a world that purported to hierarchize knowledge ontologically, only in ways to belie that this hierarchy is fictitious. The skepticism he developed upon the violent death of his brother, combined with his construal of the contradictions in the Gospels, as well as the confounding ways in which translation of the Bible into Arabic was done, all contributed to a philosophical position that was uniquely anti-metaphysical. In this anti-metaphysical stance, al-Shidyaq refused to subscribe to authority of already-existing models. Consistently, he refused to assign the status of authority to himself and refused to assign the value of a model to his own work. In "Snow" of volume one of *Leg over Leg*, al-Shidyaq reflects on his own work, the idiosyncrasy of which is his excessive use of "allusions and insinuations, transformations and witty formulations."[73] At the same time, al-Shidyaq , in the mantle of pseudo-literary pride, announces that by writing his book, "the door is closed in the face of competitors."[74] Yet, what al-Shidyaq seems to actually mean by this announcement is his outright refusal that subsequent authors follow his path, for, he himself shunned from imitating former authors. Here, al-Shidyaq describes himself as a "no chain man:"

> While I do not claim to be the first writer in the world to follow this path or

[72] Rana Issa, "Scripture as Literature: The Bible, the Qurʾān, and Aḥmad Faris al-Shidyaq," *Journal of Arabic Literature* 50 (2019): 29-55.
[73] al-Shidyaq, *Leg over Leg*, 252.
[74] al-Shidyaq, *Leg over Leg*, 252.

> thrust a pinch of it up the noses of those who pretend they are dozing, I do notice that all the authors in my bookcase are shackled to a single stylistic chain. I do not know whether they've changed their style or not. [. . .] once you've become familiar with one link of the chain, you feel as though you know all the others, so that each one of them may truly be called a chain-man, given that each has followed in the footsteps of the rest and imitated them closely. This being established, know that I have exited the chain, for I am a no-chain man and will not form the rump of the line; nor do I have any desire to be at its front, for the latter is an even more calamitous place to be than the former [. . .] I reject the impositions of traditions.[75]

This "no-chain man" stands alone among his generation. His work is so anomalous that it is difficult for us to think of it as representative of anything that is produced during al-Shidyaq's time. For while al-Shidyaq refused to follow tradition and rejected the idea of imposing it, he unambiguously refused that his work acquires the same authoritative value of the tradition it seeks to eschew. Moreover, while he insists on not being viewed as a beginning point in a literary chain of authors, he also refuses be read as a conclusive figure that brings closure to a certain chain of literary creativity.

Therefore, what al-Shidyaq advocates in this modernity is the de-sublimation of the model: an idea which, I believe, is meaningfully connected to his anti-metaphysical stance that shifts epistemological orientations from theocentricism to

[75] al-Shidyaq, *Leg over Leg*, 252.

anthropocentrism.[76] The descent into anthropocentrism has, in its turn, further implications that consistently work to replace the hierarchization of knowledge (epitomized in dualism) with the logic of affective contiguity. In this sense, while orientalists pursued historical fact through a philological-archeological engagement with Arabic, al-Shidyaq refuses to assign historical fact an ontological ascendancy. Consistent with this worldview, he refuses to think of translation as a metaphor, whose sole role is to index the literal meaning of the original text as the ultimate source of truth. We will see in the first chapter that this stance is linked to how he also criticized orientalists for their search for historical truth while they read classical Arabic poetry by leading discursive conversations that revolve exclusively around political and power shifts in the middle ages while dismissing the functions of metaphors in this poetry. Al-Shidyaq's critique extends over to the notion that literal and metaphoric meanings must not be viewed in binaries but are rather contiguous and regulated through affective proximity.

It is within this context that I undertake my reading of al-Shidyaq's first maqama, "Maqama on Chapter 13" from the first volume of *Leg over Leg.* In this short episode, al-Shidyaq takes his readers on a quest led by sleepless narrator al-Haris ibn Hitham,

[76] For more on iterations of this shift, see Issa's "Scripture as Literature." In that article, Issa argues that "al-Shidyaq theorization of scripture as a literary genre underscored its human temporality against modern practices that upheld scripture's transcendent relevance as eternal iteration, and demonstrated through various methods that scripture's meaning is a human relation that is contingent on the historical variables of its time." Furthermore, in this stance al-Shidyaq's work is not only subversive to our understanding of Arabic literary history in general, but also of the *Nahada* in particular, because "his recasting of scripture as literature broke with the *Nahda*'s teleological eschatology, from its missionary iterations of end-of-time narratives to the more secular determinisms of its promise of progress. He positions scripture instead within a textual tradition that functioned, as Rebecca Johnson observes, as an archive of literary history that "does not proceed along a straight line to modernity. It does not pass at all but accumulates. Issa, "Scripture as Literature, 31; 34.

who tries to find universal truth answering a question about the essence of man's condition in this world: whether it is rooted in misery or joy. After consulting with a metropolitan, then a teacher, a jurisprudent, a poet, and finally with the scribe of the emir, al-Haris goes to Fāryāq, who offers satisfactory answers in dense metaphor. In my reading of this maqama, I argue that al-Shidyaq problematizes the existing perception of relationship between historical knowledge and literary iterations of it through dramatization of letters (literal meanings, historical meanings, the things themselves) and metaphors. The relationship he dramatizes reflects al-Shidyaq's own confoundedness at a modern epistemic zeal towards (t)ruth.

Rifaʿa al-Tahtawi's Arabic Translation of François Fénelon's 1699 *Les aventures de Télémaque* and Egypt's Nesologic Modernity

Most scholarship in Arabic studies on 19th century Egypt understandably examines the region through (post)colonial paradigms, by situating Egypt within Napoleon Bonaparte's occupation in 1897 and the subsequent cultural and political (also colonial) transformations that followed. Likewise have many studies that tackled the oeuvre and contributions of Rifaʿa al-Tahtawi, Egyptian imam and translator, whose travel to France in the early 19th century culminated in his1834 account *Takhlis al-ibriz fi talkhis Bariz* (The Extraction of Gold in the Summation of Paris). In 1826 Alexandria, at a very young age, al-Tahtawi boarded a French ship bound for Marseilles, joined by forty-four students selected by Egypt's ruler, Muhammad Ali (d. 1849), to be part of a mission to Paris. Then assigned the role of imam to the mission,

al-Tahtawi was participating in one of many such excursions engineered by the ambitious ʿAli in his quest to acquire new European knowledge.[77] al-Tahtawi's role was specifically to provide religious instruction and guidance to his fellow travelers as they explored the unfamiliar world of France. Yet, rather than confining himself to the role of an imam, al- Tahtawi approached the world he encountered with the eyes of an avid student: learning the language, examining French political and social systems, as well as literature, and therefore writing his travel account *Takhlis.* This book, as Roxanne Euben notes, "marked the beginning of what would ultimately be a long and a productive career in government service in which al-Tahtawi oversaw two thousand translations of European and Turkish works into Arabic, earning him posthumous descriptions as 'father of modern Arabic literature,' pioneer of the Arab/Muslim *Nahda*, a leader of the Egyptian 'Enlightenment,' and a 'citizen of the world' who helped initiate the 'nineteenth century's growing Arab awareness of the West."[78]

Due to the role assigned to him by ʿAli, which is also the role that he continued to fulfill for the Alawite dynasty following ʿAli's death, al-Tahtawi has been viewed mainly, but reasonably, through lenses attenuated to understand ʿAli's geographically double vision: on the one hand was the governor's aspiration to elevate Egypt by aligning it civilizationally with the West, i.e. with France in particular; on the other hand however was his scheme to simultaneously give shape to the nascent Egyptian nation/state and his ambition to assert Egypt's role as an imperial power, particularly

[77] This account of al-Tahtawi's life is drawn from Roxanne Euben, *Journeys to the Other Shore: Muslim and Western Travelers in Search of Knowledge* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 90-98.
[78] Euben, *Journeys to the Other Shore*, 90.

by extending its domination over the Sudan. For instance, Roxanne Euben observes that al-Tahtawi "sought in Paris knowledge of the sciences he saw as integral to the intellectual reawakening and material prosperity of Egypt, [hence bringing home] useful knowledge."[79] His pursuit of knowledge, she adds, can be seen as "serving [Egypt's newly emerging] national project [therefore reflecting] what it meant to be Egyptian in the nineteenth century."[80] For that reason, al-Tahtawi's work illustrates Benedict Anderson's argument about "the crucial role of traveling functionaries in the emergence of a framework of specifically national 'imagined communities.'"[81]

This is not the whole story; for one needs to remember that al-Tahtawi was also banished to the Sudan later on. After successfully working for some fifteen years in government service following his return from France, al-Tahtawi was asked, by the governor then ʿAbbas, to leave for Sudan in order to "establish a primary school in Khartoum, an expression of longstanding colonialist aspirations in Sudan."[82] During his stay there (1850-45), al-Tahtawi translated François Fénelon's 1699 *Les aventures de Télémaque* into Arabic, giving it the title *Mawaqiʿ al-aflak fi waqaʾiʿ Tilimak.* Distressed by what he saw as imposed exile, al-Tahtawi wrote an introduction to the work where he expressed deep sense of alienation and estrangement from the Sudan: "I undertook this translation into Arabic in that Sudanese land with a troubled mind, clouded with sorrow, remote from family and home, and bowed by misfortunes and mishaps of destiny."[83] This sense of alienation, we shall see in chapter two, is

[79] Euben, *Journeys to the Other Shore*, 92.
[80] Euben, *Journeys to the Other Shore*, 93.
[81] Euben, *Journeys to the Other Shore*, 93.
[82] Euben, *Journeys to the Other Shore*, 94.
[83] Euben, *Journeys to the Other Shore*, 94.

conveyed discursively throughout his work, and is registered in language that is simultaneously *othering* to and *reconstructing* of the other. For al-Tahtawi, this use of language, was not going to be a single occurrence. For later in his writings on the history of Egypt, he exhibited hardening contempt for the Sudan, which appears as an uncivilized locale, its inhabitants characterized as barbaric, like savage roaming ignorant animals, and its blackness eternal. These racial and civilizational distinctions, produced discursively through writing and representation, are, as Euben rightly notes, "crucial to elaborating emerging national borders and colonial aspirations."[84] In al-Tahtawi's work then, spatial and temporal categories converge to construct both Egypt's nascent national identity as well as the Sudan as the colonial other. Seen holistically, his oeuvre uses "scientific" method to produce "a taxonomy of civilizations that racialize the political and cultural boarders of the Egyptian nation-state."[85] Attention to race, in terms of black/white categories then comes from his "classification of racial differences in skin color, sexual behavior, and religious attitudes among the Sudanese," and illustrates "how an increasing sense of racial difference could be incorporated into a sense of political and cultural boundaries."[86]

My intent in this study is not to iterate what scholars have thoroughly articulated about how al-Tahtawi's works illuminates Egypt's unique position between two geographical entities corresponding to two cultural and political economies that are organized in logic of (post)colonial progress. Nevertheless, I contend that these discursive practices of constructing the imperial nation-state and its colonial other are

[84] Euben, *Journeys to the Other Shore*, 95.
[85] Euben, *Journeys to the Other Shore*, 96.
[86] Euben, *Journeys to the Other Shore*, 96.

strongly connected to the configurations of modernity in al-Tahtawi's translation of Fénelon's work, *Les aventures*, which I will define further below as *nesologic*. *Les aventures* has received relatively less interest by scholars of the *Nahda* in Egypt, who focused more on al-Tahtawi's more straightforward ethnographic observations in *Takhlis* and its usefulness for understanding ensuing cultural comparisons in the 19th century. To my mind, the scholarly neglect of al-Tahtawi's translation of *Les aventures* can be accounted for by the perception of translation as simply a trans-linguistic iteration of meaning (notwithstanding the inconclusiveness of *meaning* to begin with). This perception reflects one or more of the following fallacies: 1) that languages are symmetrical and hence what matters in translation is the search for equivalence 2) that translation is inferior to the original and therefore lacks creative and critical relevance or 3) that literary translation is merely an iteration of the original, and hence is superfluous.

It is only recently that scholars of Arabic literature have started to transcend those perceptions and examine the work more patiently. Shaden Tageldin's "Fénelon's Gods, al-Ṭahṭāwī's Jinn: Trans-Mediterranean Fictionalities" (2016) revolves around two central points. The first is how al-Tahtawi negotiated "a crisis of comparison and mediating a literary-epistemic sea change in modern Arabic fiction."[87] which in effect facilitated the temporal relevance of his translation. Looking at the preface to the Arabic translation, Tageldin explores al-Tahtawi's comparison of the gods, goddesses, and demigods of Greek mythology in *Les aventures* with *jinn* (genii) and *malāʾikah*

[87] Shaden Tageldin, "Fénelon's Gods, al-Ṭahṭāwī's Jinn: Trans-Mediterranean Fictionalities," *Philological Encounters. 2, no* 1-2 (2016), 5.

(angels) of the Arab-Islamic tradition:

> By arguing that the ancient Greek gods are analogous to Muslim jinn – spirits of smokeless fire understood to be real – al-Tahtawi rewrites as Islamized 'truth' what Muslims long had dismissed as pagan 'fiction.' [. . .] Indeed, the 'untrue' gods of the Greeks (and of French literature) turn not to be just real but historically referential: al-Tahtawi translates Fénelon's original into a text that speaks to the real historical world of 1850s Egypt, exhorting an unjust Ottoman-Egyptian sovereign to heed the lessons in just governance that Fénelon's original (a 'mirror for princes') once had addressed to French royalty: the grandson of Louis XIV, Fénelon's longtime pupil.[88]

The second argument that drives Tageldin's study of the work centers around the prefiguration of the novel as *the* literary avatar that Arabic narrative form would assume in the 20th century. She asks, "with al-Tahtawi's translation of Fénelon's *Télémaque*, does Arabic prose fiction enter what Georg Lukács would call the world of the novel?… [which he defined] as an 'epic [yet] of a world that has been abandoned by God.'"[89] Because the "novel's hero's psychology is demonic" and that is precisely what the world of *jinn* is, between God and human, al-Tahtawi's translation then "at once solicits and does not solicit belief, [a world that is] believable."[90]

[88] Tageldin, "Fénelon's Gods, al-Ṭahṭāwī's Jinn," 5.
[89] Tageldin, "Fénelon's Gods, al-Ṭahṭāwī's Jinn," 14.
[90] Tageldin, "Fénelon's Gods, al-Ṭahṭāwī's Jinn," 15.

Seen holistically, Tageldin's focus on how al-Tahtawi's translation paves the way for "truth," understood through Islamic belief in *jinn*, and the work's ability to "solicit belief" is linked to how the translation has temporal relevance. As she insightfully observes, "al-Tahtawi believes, increasingly, in history [. . .] that is, history guarantees 'truth' almost as securely as God [. . .] when al-Tahtawi first introduces Telemachus and Ulysses, he initially positions the father Ulysses between mythology and history."[91] As such, al-Tahtawi's effort to bring rational credence to the story he translates may be viewed in relation to his overall project of mapping Egypt onto a narrative of world progress that is verifiable and authoritative.

If Tageldin's reading of the translation is shaped by how the work can express its relevance temporally, it is Peter Hill's, by contrast, that implicates the work rather spatially. In "The Arabic Adventures of Télémaque: Trajectory of a Global Enlightenment Text in the *Nahda*," Hill tells the story of the nineteenth-century Arabic metamorphoses of Fénelon's work against the larger background of its European and near global vogue. He reads the various Arabic translations of the work at a times when it was not only the most popular work in France, but also had already been translated into at least sixteen languages, among which are English, Polish, Hungarian, and Serbian. Following but critiquing Franco Moretti's geographical atlas of the novel, Hill traces "the substantial changes made in translation [within Arabic and] the successive metamorphoses that the original [has] undergo[ne]."[92] Keeping the global, comparative, Eurocentric model offered by Moretti in tension with the literary history

[91] Tageldin, "Fénelon's Gods, al-Ṭahṭāwī's Jinn," 15.
[92] Hill, "The Arabic Adventures of *Télémaque*," 173.

of the work's specific trajectory within Arabic, Hill (quoted earlier) makes a case for seeing the "*Nahda* as the unique local variant of a global process of Enlightenment, patriotic awakening, and the propagation of 'civilization.'"[93]

In their divergent projects, Tageldin and Hill dwell partially on why al-Tahtawi links the French work to the maqamas of al-Hariri. In an attempt to *bring home* the French work into an Arab-Islamic cultural realm, al-Tahtawi argues that that "*maqālāt* of Fénelon's text—by which he means the episodic narratives that compose the whole –resemble the celebrated *maqāmāt* [maqamas] of al-Hariri."[94] However, for Tageldin, al- Tahtawi needs to be seen through a hierarchized literary aesthetic, for "no Arabic text [it seemed to al-Tahtawi] can compete with *Télémaque*'s content."[95] For his part, Hill argues that al- Tahtawi's decision to translate the work in the maqama's hallmark feature of *sajʿ* is linked to the original work's ambivalent position between high and low literatures. Because the original was widely perceived as a novel that was, in the 17th and 18th centuries, viewed as a new, suspect, low genre to many, al-Tahtawi's choice to use *sajʿ* reflects a similar dilemma over where to place the work in, which he resolves by using that feature of the maqamas, thus casting *Télémaque* as high literature.[96]

Both Tageldin and Hill, then perform their readings of the original work through generic teleologies in modern Arabic literature. It is in response to the pull towards what happened after, i.e., the dominant (forward-looking) pull of the modern novel,

[93] Hill, "The Arabic Adventures of *Télémaque*," 174.
[94] Tageldin, "Fénelon's Gods, al-Ṭahṭāwī's Jinn," 16.
[95] Tageldin, "Fénelon's Gods, al-Ṭahṭāwī's Jinn," 16.
[96] Hill, "The Arabic Adventures of *Télémaque*," 188.

that this study joins the discussion. Rather than looking forward however, I re-read al-Tahtawi's Arabic translation by dragging the critical lens backwards in the narrative of Arabic literary history to examine points of homology between the classical maqama and the original French work. My examination of al- Tahtawi's work in chapter two demonstrates that the meeting of maqama form and *Télémaque* through the Arabic *Tilīmāk* reveals that both works are implicated in various forms of *nesologies*, to borrow Antonis Balasopoulos's term.[97] He defines *nesologies* as the discursive production of island (and insular) forms through practices that serve both aesthetic and political ends.

To do so, I draw upon, but also depart from, scholarship I have surveyed so far. My analysis of *Tilimak*, like Tageldin's, Euben's and Trout Powell's, iterates the colonialist registers of al-Tahtawi's work, keeping in view the discourses that shaped his perception of western civilization, epitomized by France, and his construction of the Sudan as the colonial other, both spatially and temporally.[98] In conjunction,

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[97] Antonis Balasopoulos, "Nesologies: Island Form and Postcolonial Geopoetics," *Postcolonial Studies*, 11, no. 1 (2008), 9-26.

[98] In emphasizing the word discourse, I am situating my approach to *Tilīmāk* within poststructuralist geopoetics. As Eric Prieto observes, poststructuralists emphasize the importance of doubt and link it to the epistemological problem of mediation, the indirectness of so much of our knowledge of the world. Within this paradigm, doubt is necessitated by the socially mediated nature of knowledge, the fact that we are born into institutionalized power networks and impersonal social structures that shape the information that comes to us and restrict our access to counter-hegemonic forms of knowledge. For this reason, poststructuralists are less interested in the subjective experience of place than in the semiotics of spatial representation, they see space not as a neutral featureless void within which objects and events, but a dimension that has been produced by social forces that in turn constrain future possibilities. Eric Preito, "Geocriticism, Geopoetics, Geophilosophy, and Beyond," in *Geocritical Explorations: Space, Place, and Mapping Literary and Cultural Studies*, ed. Robert T. Tally Jr. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 17. Along the same lines, my study of al-Tahtawi's work situates his perception of the Sudan (and France) within the hegemonic form of knowledge shaping his attitude towards both within *nesologic* and colonial modernity. However, by doing so, I do not mean to negate al-Tahtawi's agency, nor negate the ambivalence his experience of modernity may carry if we focus on the somaethstic aspect of his account, thoroughly explored in El-Ariss's *Trials of Arab Modernity*.

exploring homologies between the maqama form and *Télémaque*, I re-orient Egypt's modernity temporally by viewing it as a variant of an earlier nesologic modernity involving France. In this nesologic discourse, the imperial hegemon, conceptualizing its sovereignty visually as a well-bounded discreet cultural, racial, and political entity, imposes its sense of insularity onto its colonial domain. Moreover, looking at the historiography of the maqama form in early Arabic biographical dictionaries, I argue that the maqama form, compared with other Arabic literary genres, enjoys a privileged, self-reflexive position that is comparable to that which islands (and all discursive and representational practices linked to insular forms such as island-centered cartographic genres) enjoys among various geographical forms. My examination of *Tilimak* therefore not only sheds light onto Egypt's unique experience of modernity; it also explores generic idiosyncrasies in the history and genealogy of the maqama heretofore unexplored.

Nasif al-Yiziji's Maqama Collection *Majmaʿ al-bahrayn*: What is Modern about Repetition?

If the *Nahda* is read in the singular, as a period of literary revival and innovation occasioned with Arab intellectuals' contact with the west, then there would be difficulty in making a case for the relevance of Nasif al-Yaziji's (d. 1871). Indeed, Radwa Ashour expelled Al-Yazijī from her "possible modernity" altogether. For Ashour, al-Shidyaq's attack on the very idea of emulation in *Leg over Leg* was promising. Yet, by contrast, with its display of language creativity put aside, al-

Yaziji's maqama collection *Majmaʿ al-bahrayn* arrived nevertheless "empty of any innovation, [for it] was marred by lifeless imitation of a [classical] text that had been immortalized for over eight centuries already."[99] Many of those who assigned al-Yaziji an empty literary value, exemplified by Ashour, are likely to have read him through hegemonic narrative of the *Nahda*, i.e. with emphasis on contact with Europe and on literary innovation. Therefore, since al- Yaziji was ignorant of foreign languages, his lack of contact with European literature deemed him a "attardé volontaire."[100]

The "lifeless imitation" of earlier predecessors was nonetheless admired by other scholars for reasons that are mainly linked to al- Yaziji's ornate language and his deep knowledge of Arabic. As John Haywood tells us, al- Yaziji's maqama collection was considered worthy to be mentioned in the same breath as those of al-Hariri,[101] making al-Yaziji "the first genius – or near genius of the *Nahda* [. . .] a virtuoso in the

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[99] Ashour, *al-Hadatha al-mumkina*, 37.

[100] John A. Haywood, *Modern Arabic Literature* (London: Lund Humphries 1971), 52. David Grafton tells the story of the translation of the Bible into Arabic (the Van Dyck Bible), through joint work by American Protestant Missionary Eli Smith (1801-1857) Cornelius Van Dyck (1818-1895), Butrus al-Bustani (1819-1883), Nasif al-Yaziji, and Yusuf al-Asir (1815-1889). As Grafton notes, this "precise linguist, and grammarian" was hired by Eli Smith because of his linguistic skills and abilities, as one of the members of the Bible translation project in 1848 until Smith's death in 1857. Although he is considered to be one of the major intellectuals who developed new thinking in Arab culture in the *Nahda*, al-Yaziji, in Georg Graf, remained stuck in an older literary style. Concerned with al- Yaziji's style, Eli Smith observed that in his criticisms, al- Yaziji gives special caution "lest he sacrifice any important shade of the inspired idea to the niceties of Arabic grammar or taste which, after all, are not essential. [Yet] master as he is of Arabic grammar, and richly as his mind is stored with Arabic words, it was soon found that in terms of natural history and certain other sciences, as well as in the technicalities of different trades and professions, and in other like matters, his knowledge was indistinct and often very defective. [. . .] his translation would come out in very many passages wide of the original meaning, and the force of the sentiment be lost." As Grafton adds, the concern that al-Yaziji would subject important Biblical terms and ideas to Arabic phrasing and rhyming schemes of the maqamas rather than utilizing a more direct translation of the Greek or Hebrew words as provided by al-Bustani is certainly the main reason that Van Dyck did not renew his contract. David Grafton, *The Contested Origins of the 1865 Arabic Bible* (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 31-2.

[101] Haywood, *Modern Arabic*, 52

[Arabic] language [who yet] could only use his virtuosity on old themes with time honored ideas and imagery."[102] Yet, with all the attention his work elicited from orientalists and Arab readers alike, Haywood predicted that "the time will come when nobody save a few specialists will read him."[103] Placed "in the museum of literary history," al-Yaziji was viewed to be standing in the shadow of literary predecessors, for "[even] his poems imitate those of the great classical poets, especially al-Mutanabbi."[104] As such, there was no significance to be seen in his work beyond masterful repetition.

Because al-Yaziji's collection was viewed as an iteration of previous maqama collections, it was approached not differently than how the maqamas of al-Hariri and al-Hamadhani had been approached prior to Kilito's crucial intervention in the 1980s. Writing in the 1970s, Haywood illustrates how most reading practices had emptied the genre, whether in its classical form or its modern revival, of geographical signification and historical relevance, therefore reducing it to simple exercise of linguistic creativity. He observes that,

> Like [al-Hariri] and [al-Hamadhani] before him, [al-Yaziji] gives many of his [maqamas] place-names as titles – Yemenite, Baghdadi, Upper Egyptian, Aleppan, and so on. But they are particular neither to these places in any but a casual sense, nor to the time at which the author wrote. The overall theme is the hero's virtuosity (and therefore the author's too), sometimes in recondite

[102] Haywood, *Modern Arabic Literature*, 45
[103] Haywood, *Modern Arabic Literature*, 52.
[104] Haywood, *Modern Arabic Literature*, 52

knowledge, but fundamentally in the manipulation of language, in rhymed prose or verse.[105]

My reading of al- Yaziji work responds to the reading practices Haywood's exemplifies. To my mind, his maqama collection are neither geographically, nor historically void. On the one hand, place-names in *Majmaʿ al-bahrayn* are not arbitrary; they dictate the poetic relations that unfold into the maqama scene. On the other hand, al-Yaziji's maqamas are the author's platform to explore the timely question of what it means to be a revivalist at a moment when Arab subjectivity itself was being discursively theorized by the *Nahda* intellectuals in the 19th century. Considering this revivalist thrust, I read *Nahda* through al-Yaziji by iterating Samah Selim's earlier-mentioned configuration of the period. Following her suggestion, I abandon reading the *Nahda* in the singular, particularly by examining al-Yaziji's "antediluvian" lookback onto the "golden age" through acts of linguistic and genetic recuperation. Towards that end, I explore revival through poetics of repetition. This repetition is achieved simultaneously at two levels: once as al-Yaziji faithfully revives al-Hariri's maqama, and once again as acts of repetition (philosophically explored as *mimesis*, or creation of *sameness*) are staged in *Majmaʿ al-bahrayn* itself.

Unlike Haywood's, my reading of al-Yaziji (side by side with al-Hariri) reappraises the value of "place-names" in the maqamas and the historic moment at which these authors wrote. In other words, I approach both al- Yaziji and al-Hariri by using Mikhail Bakhtin's 1937 concept *chronotope.* Bakhtin's formulation, as I show, helps

[105] Haywood, *Modern Arabic Literature*, 50.

to understand the configurations of space and time in this narrative form. Neither place-names, nor writing times (or even textual times, i.e. time within the text) are empty for the maqamas. Rather, I demonstrate that for both maqama collections, place-names have significations that regulate the nature of the plot in each narrative episode. The geographical expanses covered by tricksters both offer clues as to how the maqamas need to be read and reflects the historical moments in which these collections were written. To explore these inter- and intra-textual relations, I situate three maqamas by al-Hariri("of Meragha," "of Ahwaz," and "of Samarkand") side by side with two by al- Yaziji ("of Tihama" and "of Yamama"). What compels me to examine those maqamas together is their correlative geopoetics. While al-Hariri's are set in parts of the medieval Arabo-Islamic world where various forms of *ʿujma* (linguistic alterity; heterolingualism) predominate, i.e. in Ahwaz, Samarkand, and Azerbaijan, al-Yaziji's are set in parts of the Arabo-Islamic world where linguistic sameness permeates (homoligualism), i.e. in Tihama and Yamama which are located in the Arabian Peninsula, the mythic *terra prima* of the Arabic language.

My attention to the more limited geographical swaths of al-Yaziji's collection owes much to Stephen Sheehi's *Foundations of Modern Arab Identity.* Sheehi examines the various Western and indigenous (Ottoman and Arab) discourses that Arab thinkers of the 19th century used and appropriated for both self and communal definitions.[106] Locating al-Yaziji within a "classical consciousness" that marks his

[106] Sheehi's project is mainly concerned with the various discourses Arab intellectuals in the 19th century engaged with in the formation of modern Arab identity. Looking at the elaborate discussions of Arab identity in the 19th century enable Sheehi to shed light on how Arabi identity in modern historiography has been linked a priori to pan-Arabist national identity and political ideology. Focusing on 19th century discourses instead refuses to favor material, political, and ideological development, and

work, Sheehi examines the social and cultural implications of *Majmaʿ*. In the preface to the work, al-Yaziji identifies himself as one of the Christian community, combining classical language with confessed religious affiliation in order to secularize an otherwise expressly Islamic register.[107] In doing so, he expands the cultural and social parameters of classical Arabic and the classical genre of the maqama [particularly] by employing an explicitly Islamic nomenclature and placing in a non-Islamic context.[108] His secularizing move is reflected in his choice to include only Arab cities as locations for his maqama, unlike those of al-Hariri (and al-Hamadhani before him), which use cities in the Arab and non-Arab Islamic worlds. In other words, for *Majmaʿ*, al-Yaziji shrunk the geographies of the maqama heroes, and therefore confined the scope of their linguistic experience to the Arabic language. Viewed through these decisions, al-Yaziji's maqamas should be read as the author's attempt to "recode classical genres (form) with a new, expanded sense of secular Arab culture (content) that would be most appropriate for the new subjectivity that would emerge."[109]

By shrinking the geography of the classical maqamas so as to reflect on a "new [secular] subjectivity" that is primarily defined by unity in language, I argue that al-

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refuses to read Arab identity as a historical fact or an ideologically generated myth. Sheehi's work responds to Bernard Lewis's claim that "the concept of ethnic identity was alien to Arabs along with other ethnicities in Southeast Asia during the premodern era; descent, language, and habitation were all of secondary importance, and it is only during the last century that, under European influence, the concept of political nation has begun to make headway. For Muslims, the basic division is that of faith, of membership of this religious community." Sheehi's diagnosis of Lewis's inaccurate reading is because the latter sees that national identity inevitably manifests itself in a logical if not etiological desire for nation-state. In that view, Lewis is not alone in conflating the notion of the nation state with the notion of self-hood. Stephen Sheehi, *Foundations of Modern Arab Identity* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2004), 7-8.

[107] In the introduction to his maqama collection, al-Yaziji locates himself as "one from the Christian community (al-umma al-ʿisawiyyah) of Mount Lebanon." Sheehi, *Foundations of Modern Arab Identity*, 120.

[108] Sheehi, *Foundations of Modern Arab Identity*, 122.

[109] Sheehi, *Foundations of Modern Arab Identity*, 122.

Yaziji's *Majmaʿ* predicates its vision, during what Sheehi identifies as the "dawn of a new era," onto dense poetic exercise that consciously creates *sameness*. This creation is manifest in deliberate acts of *mimesis* that are variously staged in "of Tihama" and "of Yamama," two places that are meaningfully set in Arabia. How *sameness* unfurls in these two episodes is complex. Remarkably, in these two maqamas, *sameness* is conveyed through contraction of distances that bring closer both the narrator in *Majmaʿ*, Maymun (trickster) and Rajab (his boy), as well as a congregation of audience who witness the drama. This contraction, I demonstrate, is transacted through *affect*: we witness how the audience responds to the exchange between trickster Maymun and his boy Rajab somatically. As the audience *listen* to the conversation between trickster and his boy, their body parts flinch in response to poetic repetitions that cause a sense of anxiety. The anxiety is engendered in the unsettling agency of repetitions; here, rather than working through logic of hierarchies, repetitions hack divisions between subject and object, between original and copy. As such, the *same* that emerges from repetition does not lead to quietude (unity or uniformity), but to distilling noise that problematizes positivistic knowledge.

It is these sophisticated processes of creation of the *same*, what Ashour misread as "lifeless imitation," that provide the backdrop for reappraising al-Yaziji's crucial intervention to understand Arab modernity. Through meticulous use of *affect* as a way to stage *sameness*, al-Yaziji reveals a rather non-rational side of modernity (and of Enlightenment more generally). To illuminate this aspect further, my study draws on Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno's *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, in which they debunk the myths surrounding the project of Enlightenment as "the disenchantment of

the world; the dissolution of myths and substitution of knowledge for fancy."[110]While Ashour's exclusion of al-Yaziji's work from "possible modernity" reveals the general assumption that modernity is a liberation of the individual from tradition and social constrains,[111] al-Yaziji's maqamas, through *affect*, reveal the repressive aspect of such version of modernity's narrative. By deploying the somatic, i.e. the body as a site responsive to anxiety that is caused from repetition, al-Yaziji's maqamas present the act of knowing as, to borrow Matthew Potolsky's phrase, physical and mimetic rather than methodical. In effect, these two maqamas reveal the "biological prehistory" of humanity from which reason arises, but which rational thought [of Enlightenment] rejects.[112]

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[110]Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1969), 3.
[111] Matthew Potolsky, *Mimesis: the new critical idiom* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 117.
[112] Potolsky, *Mimesis*, 144, quoting Horkheimer and Adorno.

CHAPTER ONE: AHMAD FARIS AL-SHIDYAQ'S "A MAQAMA, OR A MAQAMA ON CHAPTER 13:" DISSECTING AN AUTHOR'S PHILOSOPHICAL VIEW OF MEANING IN LANGUAGE

"وجدتُ نفسي قُرب نفسي، فابتعدتُ."
محمود درويش

"And I have found myself so close to my being… well, I have escaped."
Mahmoud Darwish

Introduction

In this chapter, I focus on the work of a foundational figure in Arabic literary modernity, namely, the work of (Ahmad) Faris al-Shidyaq (1804[05?]-87). A belletrist, poet, travel writer, translator, lexicographer, grammarian, literary historian, essayist, publisher, and newspaper editor, al-Shidyaq left behind a legacy of works that are fundamental to understanding Arab modernity. His monumental, four-volume work, *Kitab al-saq ʿala al-saq fi ma huwa al-Faryaq* (Trans. *Leg over Leg or the Turtle in the Tree Concerning the Faryaq, What Manner of Creature Might He Be)* (1855) remains his most controversial and enigmatic. Resisting generic classification, critical, self-referential, learned, and including "scathing attacks on authority, both ecclesiastical and worldly, as well as liberal and libertine discussion of relations between the sexes,"[113] *Leg* poses a challenge to Arabophone and Anglo-European academies alike, both linguistically and generically. Despite its central position in

[113] Johnson, "Introduction," in al-Shidyaq, *Leg over Leg*, ix-x.

Arabic literary history, the work suffers from scholarly neglect—a phenomena that extends beyond the work of al-Shidyaq itself, for the "nineteenth century [i.e. the *Nahda*][114] has [. . .] remained one of the lesser studied periods of Arabic literature.[115]

Yet from within the under-studied Arabic literary production of the 19th century, certain literary forms were especially neglected or misevaluated. A large portion of existing scholarship on the period connects the story of the *Nahda* with the history of the Arabic novel. According to Samah Selim, "this history is supposed to begin with the translation, adaptation, and imitation of the European novel towards the end of the nineteenth century."[116] In orientalist discourse, adds Selim, "the extent to which Arab writers were able to reproduce [translate/imitate] this idealized European genre became the kind of yardstick with which to measure the progress and value of the *Nahda* as a whole."[117] The coupling of the *Nahda* with the rise of the Arabic novel influenced the way indigenous Arabic genres were viewed in histories of Arabic literature, the most obvious example being that of the Arabic maqama: a trickster-centered brief narrative unit dating back to 10th century Baghdad and known for its alternating use of poetry and rhymed prose, in Arabic it is referred to as *sajʿ*. Many discussions of the period interpret Arab intellectuals' use of the maqama either as an act of revival of Arabic literary tradition in the face of European influence, or as an "episode" in the development of Arabic fiction which, in a linear progression,

[114] The *Nahda* is generally understood as a historical moment in the early nineteenth century when Arab intellectuals began to acquire the cultural and scientific knowledge of the West, thereby initiating a modern renaissance that rescues the region from centuries of decadence and stagnation. Selim, "Pharoah's Revenge," 24.
[115] Johnson, "Introduction," in al-Shidyaq, *Leg over Leg*, x.
[116] Selim, "Pharoah's Revenge," 24.
[117] Selim, "Pharoah's Revenge," 24.

eventually leads to rise of the novel.[118] While the first view locks the maqama up in a proto-colonial discourse of hegemony and resistance, the second reduces the genre by placing it in an historical narrative of literary development leading ultimately to the emergence of the novel.

The implications of such understanding of the *Nahda* extend beyond these perceptions of the maqama. Since the period was predicated on "translation [and translatability], adaptation, and imitation" functioning as vehicles of modernity, an "elusive search for some kind of normative equivalence between free-floating source text and target texts" produced a loaded rhetoric of possession and value to describe the translated text."[119] Such categories as "fidelity," "treachery," "bastardization," "usurpation,"[120] and "literalism [literal iteration of the original]" emerged alongside other evaluative categories. These categories do not only essentialize an "original" source text and therefore endow it with a metaphysical ontology, they also annex to it

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[118] In "The Deceived Rooster," Moroccan intellectual, writer, and literary critic Abdelfattah Kilito associates the rise of the Arabic novel with the demise of the maqama in the 19th century. For him, the new genre was born when the Arabic novel abandoned poetry and confined itself to prose:

"ما حال الرواية العربية الحديث؟ يمكننا أن نجزم من غير كثير مبالغة أنها عرفت النور بوم نبذت الشعر مقتصرة على النثر: التخلص من الشعر هو إحدى السمات التي تميز السرد الحديث عن نظيره التقليدي. لا ينبغى أن ننسى في هذا الصدد أن بطلي مقامات الهمذاني و الحريري شاعران. [. . .] هل سيكون من قبيل المبالغة أن نذهب إلى القول أن الرواية العربية الحديثة لم تر النور إلا لوصف أوروبا؟ ما أكثر الأمثلة على ذلك، ابتداء من الساق على الساق للشدياق إلى موسم الهجرة إلى الشمال للطيب صالح [بيد أن أوروبا] تقطن منذ نهاية القرن التاسع عشر في قلب العواصم العربية. يمكننا أن نلحظ ذلك في حديث عيسى بن هشان للمويلحي (1858-1930) الذي يحتل مكانة هامة في الأدب العربي، فهو يعتبر في الوقت ذاته أول رواية عربية، و آخر تجل للمقامة."

"What is the modern status of the Arabic novel? With no exaggeration, one may assert that it saw light when it abandoned poetry and confined itself to prose: abandoning poetry is one of the features distinguishing modern prose from its traditional counterpart. One must not forget that the heroes of the classical maqamas (al-Hariri and al-Hamadhani) were poets [. . .] would it be an overstatement then to claim that the modern Arabic novel was only born when it undertook to describe Europe? Many examples can be used as evidence, beginning with *Leg over Leg* through *Season of Migration to the North.* Yet, Europe, since the end of the nineteenth century had resided *within* many of the Arab world capital cities as well. A case in point is *What ʿIssa ibn Hisham Told us* by Muḥammad al-Muwaylihi (1858-1930), a foundational work in modern Arabic literature. It is at once the first Arabic novel and the last incarnation of the maqama."

Kilito, *al-Aʿmal*, 1: 242-3.

[119] Selim, "Pharoah's Revenge," 21.

[120] Selim, "Pharoah's Revenge," 21.

the "translation" as an inferior "copy." An unlimited set of binaries generate from this view: while the "original" texts occupied the realm of the "literal," their translations are viewed as "metaphors," functioning merely as indicators of their "literal," also "historic" predecessors. Even beyond the textual hierarchies instigated by these binaries, such notions as the "original" and the "copy" were institutionalized in a proto-colonial discourse linking the empire to its spheres of influence outside during the 19th century. Since most cultural and literary borrowing instituted Europe as an exporter of "models," a discourse of differentiation developed in viewing Europe *vis-à-vis* the rest. Hence, while European literary history and literary culture (mainly those of France, England, and Germany) became the "original," the literary history and culture of the exterior of Europe was reduced to the status of copy.[121]

[121] Selim draws attention to the recent "invention" of the notion of originality in literature and art, a notion which was not in and of itself considered as aesthetic value in relation to literary production before the 18th century. "Instead," she writes, "imitation, free adaptation and commentary were variously privileged in the circulation of poetic forms." With romanticism things changed, "the spirit of the nation was understood by Herder and Schlegel to be reflected in its language and, in turn, in the original literary text, understood as an organic and self-contained form. Nonetheless, Germen Romanticism used translation as a strategic tool for dismantling the dominance of French models and mediations in its 18th century literary culture and directly accumulating world literature in the German language. At the same time, the institutionalizing of north European national literatures and genres was being assimilated to colonial epistemologies and projected outwards to the rest of the world as a series of universal categories. In this sense, European literary history and literary culture as a whole (mainly those of France, England, and Germany) became the "original," while the literary history and culture of the exterior of Europe was reduced to the status of copy." Selim, "Pharoah's Revenge," 22. Consider also the following excerpt taken from the Friedrich Schlegel's 1799 *Lucinde,* demonstrating the author's preoccupation with the "original:" "The Arabs have highly polemical natures; they are annihilators among nations. Their fondness of destroying or throwing away the originals when the translations are finished characterizes the spirit of their philosophy. Precisely for that reason it may be that they were infinitively more cultivated but, with all their culture, more purely barbaric than the Europeans of the Middle Ages. For barbarism is defined as what is at once anti-classical and anti-progressive." In this excerpt, eighteenth-century German Romanticist observes that for classical Arabs, translation was an eliminative act. Once their translation of Greek texts was accomplished, Arabs never recognized, not even in the back of their minds, the need to refer to the "original" manuscripts again. Translation for them was an announcement of the "birth" of a text in their language as well as a marker of the "death" of another text in the language of the "original." In Schlegel's view, Arabs were among the very few people who had a neurotic boldness to send foreign translated texts into exilic oblivion. Their inclination to eliminate and (maybe) destroy the "original" after translation was, for Schlegel, remarkable: for although the Arabs' interest in translation was a sign of the breadth of their cultural

Notwithstanding the persistence of such views, a careful examination of what the *Nahda* was like for Arab intellectuals of the time and of how they experienced it themselves, reveals that neither resistance to European genre models preoccupied their intellectual stance as a priority, nor did they conceptualize translation in terms projected from colonial discourse. In this respect, the work of al-Shidyaq is a telling study-case. His first maqama titled, "A Maqama, or a Maqama on Chapter 13" from the first volume of *Leg* ingeniously dramatizes its author's philosophical take on translation. In my analysis of "A Maqama," I examine the narrator's (al-Haris ibn Hitham's) meanderings among "metaphysical," "historical," "literal," and "metaphoric" meanings. I demonstrate that his encounter with the "metaphorical" meaning foregrounds the metaphor as an essential category in the very definition of "historical" meanings. Although in my analysis I situate the maqama in its contemporary context by referring to al-Shidyaq's account of his travel to Europe in *Kashf al-mukhabbaʾ ʿan funun Urubba* (Revealing the hidden in the arts of Europe) (1863), I remain mindful of the literary genre in its classical form by focusing on the way al-Shidyaq deviated from it. What strikes me as unique in a given author's choice to write a maqama is that it is by its very nature and act of translation itself. I propose the view that the decision to write a maqama puts its writer in literary relationships that are binding, in which the author of the maqama enters into a translational contract whereby her version of the maqama is viewed as a "copy" of the "original" one authored by medieval writers. Indeed, to write a maqama means to assume a position

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view, they were nevertheless barbaric because of their dismissal of the original texts after translation. Friedrich von Schlegel, *Friedrich Schlegel's Lucinde and the Fragments,* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1797-8), 194.

in a specific literary genealogy traced more immediately to a literary figure (father) than to a geographical locale.[122] Discussions of the maqama directly take us via associations to the 10th century figure of Badiʿ al-Zaman al-Hamadhani as well as his 11th century successor, al-Hariri of Basra. Therefore, while I view al-Shidyaq's maqama as a representational space in which he dramatizes a complex relationship among the translational categories of "metaphysical," "historical," "literal," and "metaphoric" meanings, I also view the modern maqama itself as a (re)translation of its own classical model.

Particularly, while in the classical model the narrative episode ends with *anagnorisis* (revelation) in which the "true" identity of the trickster is exposed following his "disguise," al-Shidyaq's maqama eschews that element altogether. The implications for such intervention extend beyond an act of revival of the traditional genre. I demonstrate how al-Shidyaq's maneuver is telling in its own philosophical and linguistic context. Emerging from my analysis is the argument that al-Shidyaq's linguistic world was far from being predicated on the doubly restrictive yet liberating concepts of "translatability" and "equivalence." More particularly, building on an argument advanced by Rebecca Johnson, I demonstrate that al-Shidyaq's linguistic world was founded on the more inclusive notion of "contiguity," rather than on "equivalence," as the driving force of meaning.

al-Shidyaq's First Maqama: Translating the Classical Model

[122] I use "geography" here because in the case of the novel, the geographical alterity of the genre is a marker of its entrance into the Arabic literary history, and more specifically in its postcolonial manifestation.

Most studies which examine al-Shidyaq's *Leg* find the book too overwhelming to be analyzed in full detail, due to the complex nature of work itself which, as Stephen Sheehi rightly observes, resists categorization.[123] Indeed, the work is a bricolage of almost every genre and mode of writing known to al-Shidyaq. In addition to four separate maqamas located at the thirteenth chapter of each volume, the work contains narrative *saj ʿ* (rhymed prose) and non- *saj ʿ* prose and poetry in a variety of meters, genres, and styles, as well as digressions on hundreds of lexicographical items.[124] The work has a relative degree of inaccessibility, due to its copious nature, its discursive style, and its poetically-thick language.

Yet, if poetic thickness is a defining characteristic of the work as a whole, it is even more characterizing of the work's maqamas. Within the available literature on *Leg*, there are not many studies focusing on al-Shidyaq's four maqamas, in part or sum. Inattention to the maqama may be justified since most scholars consider writing the maqama during the *Nahda* to be merely an iteration of poetic and linguistic legacy dating back to 10th century Baghdad, or merely a demonstration of the author's skill in using *saj ʿ*. Elevated rhymed prose of language play was historically considered as a literary *rite of passage.*[125] A trans-historical study by Nadir Kazim examining the

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[123] Sheehi, *Foundations of Modern Arab Identity*,123.
[124] Sheehi, *Foundations of Modern Arab Identity*,123.
[125] Nadir Kazim situates the early medieval reception of the maqamas of al-Hamadhani and al-Hariri in a context literary rivalry and competition. Using excerpts from al-Hamadhani's *rasāʾil* to reconstruct contemporary modes of reception, Kazim observes that "al-Hamadhani was aware of the value of his maqamas; he was infatuated by them [. . .] and would use them as a tool to challenge his literary adversaries." Kazim, *al-Maqamat wa-l-talaqqi*, 75.
Likewise, English orientalist Thomas Chenery (1826-1884) reports from the accounts of Ibn Khallikan's 13thcentury *Deaths of the Eminent Men and History of the Sons of the Epoch* of al-Hariri's struggle with his literary detractors. According to the account, al-Hariri had opponents in medieval Baghdad who not only "asserted that the work was full of faults, [but] they also affected to believe that it was not his [al-Hariri's] own."
al-Hariri, *The Assemblies of al-Hariri*, trans. Thomas Chenery (Farnborough: Gregg, 1969), 27.

reception of the maqama in the 19th century onward corroborates this view. Kazim considered al-Shidysq's maqamas as a manifestation of what he refers to as "literary reception" within the larger wave of "revivalist reception" in the period. Within this category, Kazim includes Nasif al-Yazji (1800-71), al-Shidyaq, and Muhammad al-Muwaylhi (1858-1930). Writers within "revivalist [and literary] reception" chose to write a maqama or more in a corrective attempt to combat stylistic "feebleness [*rakākah*] and weakness" characterizing most literary writing during their time. While these writers can be said to have performed a straightforward emulations of literary masters al-Hamadhani and al-Hariri, they varied in the "degree" of their imitation, and in the extent to which they "enabled" the "ghost of the literary predecessors" to arbitrate their maqamas. [126] Kazim argues that al-Shidyaq belongs to a category where writers significantly reduced the presence of the predecessor in their maqamas. According to him, al-Shidyaq, unlike his contemporary al-Yaziji for example, rendered the classical maqama by deliberately "distorting" [*taḥrīf*] it. This move, Kazim argues, emanated from al-Shidyaq's "lack of appreciation" for that classical form of art. What motivated al-Shidyaq's choice, however, was his desire to "examine [and also prove] his literary talent and ability to use *sajʿ* and *tajnīs*." In other words, al-Shidyaq was pressured into writing a maqama by the literary community of his time and the cultural scene in which "celebrating literary heritage was a sign of zeal [*ghīrah*] about the language and a sign of one's skill to write in it and emulate the ancestors."[127] Since the maqama was emblematic of the literary grandeur of these

[126] Kazim, *al-Maqamat wa-l-talaqqi*, 111.
[127] Kazim, *al-Maqamat wa-l-talaqqi*, 111.

ancestors, writing one was equated with making a literary self-proclamation and; it made an affirmative cultural and literary statement.

While Kazim does not offer an elaborate literary analysis of al-Shidyaq's maqamas, he nevertheless makes a number of mainly structural observations that merit attention. Since al-Shidyaq did not think highly of the maqama and their "ornate" language style, he strategically resorted to setting his own maqama as a "parody" of the classical model. Viewing himself as a "rival" of his literary ancestors, al-Shidyaq produced a piece whose literary substance comes from ridiculing its own ideal example. However, by doing so, al-Shidyaq also confounds the expectations of readers familiar with the genre. First, unlike the classical maqamas that come together as a single body of work, al-Shidyaq's four maqamas are scattered cyclically in *Leg*, with each one positioned at the thirteenth chapter of each of the four books. Second, and more important for my purpose here, al-Shidyaq significantly modified and reduced the role the classical figure of the trickster. While the trickster's linguistic and literary performance dominate and guide the plot of the classical maqama, al-Shidyaq's maqama diminishes the role of the trickster. Consequentially, unlike the classical maqama where the trickster's identity is typically (and predictably) reveled at a moment of *anagnorisis* (recognition scene) towards the end, al-Shidyaq's maqama does not offer us a full-fledged and articulate moment of *anagnorisis*. There is no *kashf* (revelation); nor is there an acute moment of recognition. The maqamas of al-Shidyaq end with the Faryaq emerging in a spontaneous and straightforward manner; at which point he gives his answer in poetic form to the main question raised by the narrator, al-Haris ibn Hitham. Kazim describes al-Shidyaq's alteration of the classical maqama as a

deliberate attempt to "marginalize" the trickster—a claim I would like to problematize in the course of my analysis of the first maqama further on.

One can't dispute the obscurity of al-Shidyaq's first maqama. Its redundant, self-signifying title has confounded scholars. Kazim goes as far as arguing that it has no title—for him, the title "A Maqama, or a Maqama on 'Chapter 13" does not mean anything substantial.[128] Humphrey Davies, who did the first (and excellent) English translation of the colossal work, was himself uncertain regarding a few elements in the text. For example, as al-Shidyaq writes that his fictional narrator, al-Haris ibn Hitham, grabbed a book written by "Abu Rushd 'Brains' ibn Hazm" to ward off insomnia, Davies glosses this part by footnoting that "the name evokes two of the best known writers of the Maghreb – Ibn Rushd, known in the West as Averroes (520-95/1126-98), and Ibn Hazm (384-456/994-1064)—*although the significance of the choice of these writers is not obvious* [emphasis added]."[129] I intend to unravel some of this obscurity. I seek explicatory support from al-Shidyaq's own experience as a translator in his account from *Kashf*; as well as from other volumes in *Leg.* While I do not totally resist the argument that al-Shidyaq's maqama is indeed a literary ritual that is meant to instate him as a recognizable author, I argue that this maqama also can be viewed as al-Shidyaq's platform where he advanced his philosophical view of language, most importantly by resisting language's "metaphysical" foundation.

So, what happens in al-Shidyaq's first maqama? In terms of narrative, the very aspect for which the classical maqama was generally viewed to be inferior by some

[128] Kazim, *al-Maqamat wa-l-talaqqi*, 114.
[129] al-Shidyaq, *Leg over Leg*, 339.

orientalists,[130] the "story" in this maqama has remained just as simple. Struck by insomnia on a cloudy night when "stars were concealed," narrator al-Haris ibn Hitham struggles to fall asleep. Fancying it for a solution, he tries to imagine "a person drowsing or yawning or snoring." After several unsuccessful attempts to ward off sleeplessness, ibn Hitham randomly picks up a book to read, whose subject matter is a comparison of "man's two states of wretchedness and leisure, of joy and care, of gain and loss, of sorrow and pleasure" presented in the form of two tables set side-by-side.[131] Excited and incited by the "knowledge and wisdom" of the yet unconvincing words of the compiler of these tables, ibn Hitham decides to consult individuals known for their "skills in debate and for [their] insightful critique." He seeks answers from a metropolitan, then from a teacher who teaches children basic knowledge and the alphabet, then from a jurisprudent, a poet, and finally, he speaks to the scribe of the *emir*. With each one of these individuals giving him unsatisfactory answers reflective of their respective worldviews, ibn Hitham finally seeks advice from the Faryaq, who offers a contemplative input in poetry. Satisfied and impressed, ibn Hitham thanks the Faryaq, after which the two disengage, thus signaling the end of the maqama.[132]

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[130] This argument becomes clearer when one considers the "physiological" role of recognition scenes in the classical maqama, an aspect I will return to at the end of the chapter. While recognition encapsulates the rhetorical and linguistic crux of the maqama, its mechanical repetition throughout the entire classical collections privileges the reader with a narratological foreknowledge, enabling her to predict the form of the resolution which brings the narrative to a closure in the maqama. Repetition of the same (recurring recognition scenes) in the narrative structure of the maqamas has been viewed as secondary or in nullifying lens by nineteenth century orientalists. That the reader may interact with the "eventless" maqama in a way that minimizes his curiosity was viewed somewhat unfavorably by modern standards of narration. For example, Thomas Chenery, who was one the nineteenth century earliest translators of the maqamas of al-Hariri observed that: "the setting, if it may be called so, of the Makamah [maqama] s unimportant, the adventure related is often trivial, the diction is all in all." al-Hariri, *Assemblies,* 20.
[131] al-Shidyaq, *Leg over Leg*, 192.
[132] al-Shidyaq, *Leg over Leg*, 196-200.

This is what happens in al-Shidyaq's first maqama. On the narrative level, and like the classical model, not much. Additionally, not so different from the classical model, the solution to the riddle is found in the poetic intervention of the "trickster," the Faryaq, who is not a trickster at all in this context. In this maqama, we do not see the Faryaq entreating his interlocutors, nor his audience (if any), for mercy, sustenance, money, or favors by using his linguistic wiles and tricks. Instead, we see him voluntarily offer ibn Hitham his consult. Despite the departure from the classical type of trickster, al-Shidyaq's Faryaqm in his material condition, still resembles fellow tricksters from the classical maqamas: he is wretched, emaciated, underfed, and exhausted. In the words of ibn Hitham,

> To the Faryaq then I went, to find him over his copying bent, on his visage the first signs of transmogrification, eyes, as I beheld, deeply sunken, hands suffering from desiccation, cheekbones as though from the face's surface hewn, skin as tight as the shade at noon, so I deplored his state and came close to staying silent for pity at his plight. When he saw me, though, he rose and came to me, saying 'Is there some service you require me to perform?[133]

Hence, contrary to the classical maqama in which *anagnorisis* constitute a basic component, this maqama drops the traditional element of "recognizing" or "exposing" the true identity of the riddle-solver. In other words, the absence of *anagnorisis* results

[133] al-Shidyaq, *Leg over Leg*, 199.

in the absence of articulate "rending" of "the veil of obscurity" as James Monroe[134] put it in *The Art of Badi' Az-Zaman Al-Hamadhani*, an aspect I further explore in the penultimate part of the chapter.

Al-Shidyaq's "A Maqama:" Questioning Metaphysics and Historical Literalism

What, essentially, is this maqama about? It could possibly be, as mentioned before, merely a passport to the class of premodern recognized *belle-lettrists*. Or, quite the opposite, it could be a *meta*-maqama, that is, an implied mockery (and a critique) of its former, classical self, of stylized writing. While these interpretations are valid, I depart from them. My augment in what follows is twofold. First, I demonstrate that this maqama operates on multiple linguistic levels to challenge the platonic views of language that predicate meaning on a metaphysical level of being. Second, while acknowledging the existence of "historical" and "literal" meanings,[135] this maqama banalizes the "historical" meaning and suggests that its existence is contingent upon and regulated by other layers of meanings, particularly the "metaphoric."

Although this maqama seems to be thematically focused on the existential question of man's condition in life, on whether man is fundamentally born in "sorrow" or in "pleasure," it has, like most classical maqamas, an encoded message centering around language. I find Jeffrey Sacks's analysis of al-Shidyaq's "insomnia" to be a good starting point, leading us to read this maqama as a philosophical allegory on how meaning operates in language. Basing his primary reading of al-Shidyaq's relationship

[134] Monroe. *The Art of Badi' Az-Zaman al-Hamadhani*, 87-101.
[135] I will analyze those terms below.

to language on the author's lexicographical work *Sirr al-layali fi al-qalb wa-l-ʾibdl* (Secret of the nights on metathesis and phonetic change) (1867), Sacks identifies this connection to be one of "love." In *Sirr*, al-Shidyaq writes, "if the ancients have worked on this noble language, I have loved it passionately [. . .] I've lit my candles for it and stayed up all night reflecting on it, searching for what is hidden and concealed in it."[136] "Insomnia," writes Sacks points to a relation of "exhaustion that is also a form of temporal discombobulation, and this discombobulation is reiterated and remarked in the excessive dimensions of his love for language."[137] The resonances between *Sirr* and *Leg* can be read as a continuity. Given its historical precedence (*Leg* was published twelve years prior, in 1855), al-Shidyaq's opening insomniac moment in "*A* Maqama*, or a* Maqama on 'Chapter 13" is possibly an earlier expression of his subsequent and more focused language obsession as we would know it in the book of *Sirr*.

Indeed, this maqama can be read as a space where al-Shidyaq negotiates his philosophical stance about how meanings work in language. Although the maqama itself casts the problem of meaning as unresolvable, I demonstrate that it does unequivocally question the "literalism" which predicates meaning on both "metaphysical" and "historical" referentiality of language. I will support my analysis of this maqama with aiding comments from useful historical surveys of the concept of "literal" meaning as given by Nikolai Popov, Brian Cummings, and authors Seong-Woo Yun and Hayang Lee. Their discussions examine the nuanced histories and

[136] Jeffrey Sacks, *Iterations of Loss: Mutilation and Aesthetic Form, al-Shidyaq to Darwish* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2015), 92.
[137] Sacks, *Iterations of Loss*, 92.

genealogies of "literal" meanings, whose problematics are crucial in the field of translation and meaning transfer across languages—the very contentious which al-Shidyaq navigated, and which motivated, in my view, much of his linguistic excess in *Leg.*

In order to examine how the maqama problematizes the "literal" meaning, we need to understand what is meant by the "literal." I examine the "literal" here, as it has been passed down from the medieval period and deployed in historical disputes over the translation and exegesis of the Bible. In his study of "The Literal and Literary," Nikolai Popov notes, echoing Northrop Frye, that "our sense of the 'literal' comes from medieval times, and 'may be due to the theological origin of critical categories. In theology, the literal meaning of Scripture is usually the historical meaning, its accuracy as a record of facts and truths."[138] "Indeed," he adds, "Augustin of Dacia says that the literal teaches the facts, the allegorical teaches what you should believe, the moral what you should do."[139] On his part, Brian Cummings, in "Literally Speaking, or the Literal sense from Augustine to Lacan," defines the "literal" in order to complicate and unhinge its very "literalism" later on. The "literal" for him, also verges on the "historical [the material]," for "the promise of the literal promises something even more than meaning, or the meaning of meaning, it promises *the thing itself*."[140] Cummings borrows from Paul De Man's reading of the questionable nature of the "literal" in its fluctuation between "itself" and it's very opposite, "the

[138] Nikolai Popov, "The Literal and the Literary," *The Iowa Review*. 32, no.3 (2002): 6.
[139] Popov, "The Literal and the Literary," 6.
[140] Brian Cummings, "Literally Speaking; or, the Literal Sense from Augustine to Lacan," *Paragraph: the Journal of the Modern Critical Theory Group* 21, no.2 (1998): 201.

metaphorical." Building on de Man, he asks, "What is the literal, the proper [. . .] if not itself a figure? A figure which is in denial of itself, to be sure, and which attempts to repress its figurative origins through further meta-philosophical tropes such as the appeal to a world of 'ideas,' 'truths.'"[141] Thus, the "literal" can be said to be an artifice of meaning whose very contrivance is based on its self-defeating promise to be "non-figurative." Similarly, tracing the "literal" back to the medieval literary theory, which was founded on a system of interpretation made up of four (sometimes overlapping) senses of meaning, Cummings remarks that the first of these senses, which concerns us for our purpose, might be called "*sensus litteralis*, or *grammaticalis*, or *historicus*."[142] al-Shidyaq's "A Maqama, or a Maqama on Chapter 13" dramatizes more than one aspect of "literalism." On the one hand, this maqama dramatizes and questions two senses of meaning: the "metaphysical" meaning, originating in platonic views of absolute truths, and the "historical" or the "literal." On the other hand, it sets those meanings in opposition to their "metaphorical" counterparts in a philosophical maze, where all these meanings complement rather than override each other.

On the representational level, what the maqama offers is outright "de-sanctification" of the "metaphysical" (the ideational) meaning as an epistemic modality enabling access to "truth." To advance this view, I borrow from both Nadia al-Baghdadi and Tarek El-Ariss, who conducted insightful readings of al-Shidyaq and his works from different yet overlapping perspectives. In her examination of al-

[141] Cummings, "Literally Speaking," 204.
[142] Cummings, "Literally Speaking," 209.

Shidyaq's book of *Mumahakat*,[143] al-Baghdadi observes that the use of "historical criticism" helped al-Shidyaq transact "change in the realm of ideas." She convincingly argues that we see in this work "the move from theocentric to an anthropocentric understanding of the Bible."[144] The linguistic re-orientation *downwards* was also noted by El-Ariss, who likewise took al-Shidyaq as one of his study cases. However, El-Ariss's purpose was to make a nuanced argument about the question of Arab modernity. In *Trials of Arab Modernity*, he reads Arab modernity through the shift towards the human body, which he used as a site to place the modern experience in a condition of open indeterminacy rather than in a closure. Examining al-Shidyaq's 1863 travelogue *Kashf*, El-Ariss notes that it is the body of the Arab traveler that is staged as a site upon which the encounter with modernity takes place, through processes of ingestion and expulsion, incorporation and rejection of European food and ideological models.[145] It is not my intention in this chapter to pursue al-Shidyaq's

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[143] *Mumahakat al-taʾwil fi munaqadat al-ʾinjil* (Altercations of Interpretation on Contradictions in the Gospels) (1851): a polemic treatise al-Shidyaq presumably wrote which demonstrates a number of contradictions in the Gospels, based on altercations between interpretations. As a contribution to the exegesis of the New Testament, the principal argument targets the historical credibility of the Gospels. The text deals with contradictions in the New Testament related to stories and contradictions in descriptions of Jesus. For more information on the treatise, see Nadia al-Bagdadi, "The Cultural Function of Fiction: from the Bible to Libertine Literature. Historical Criticism and Social Critique in Ahmad Faris al-Shidyaq." *Arabica* 46 (1999): 375-401.

[144] al-Bagdadi, "The Cultural Function of Fiction," 390.

It should be noted that Jeffrey Sacks partially agrees with al-Baghdadi. But the partial agreement can also be accounted for by the different primary sources they respectively chose as case studies. While al-Baghdadi is more focused on al-Shidyaq's *Mumahakat*, Sacks uses *Leg* as his source of critique. For that reason, his acceptance of al-Baghdadi's argument was not unconditional. He writes, "[i]f scholarship on al-Shidyaq has underlined, in different ways, an understanding of al-Shidyaq and his text as pointing to a change in an order of language and an understanding of world –Nadia al-Baghdadi has written, in relation to al-Shidyaq, of a transformation 'from a theocentric to an anthropocentric understanding' of language and time – this change is already interrupted in al-Shidyaq's text. *al-Saq* is said to have a 'unity of its own,' but this unity is promised and confounded in what Mohammed Bakir Alwan has called al-Shidysq's 'uncontrollable tongue.' This uncontrollability and its relation to language [. . .] suggests a reading of *al-Saq* as a poetic text [. . .] as an event of language that falls into pieces." Sacks, *Iterations of Loss*, 94.

[145] El-Ariss, *The Arab Renaissance*, 10.

soma-aesthetic experience of modernity. However, I find El-Ariss's argument and orientation useful for my analysis of the maqama. In fact, both scholars' observations lead, in different ways and out of different purposes, to the conclusion that al-Shidyaq's work reflects a shift in the conceptualization of meaning—away from "metaphysics."

Consistent with the observation that al-Baghdadi made about the shift away from the "theocentric" towards an "anthropocentric" understanding of language, "A Maqama" seems to anticipate[146] a skeptical view of the "metaphysical" foundation of meaning, a basic premise of Platonism. While "Platonism endows a higher ontological status to non-sensual [the ideational and conceptual] than to the sensual,"[147] "A Maqama," in a somewhat ludicrous style, questions that historically-well established differentiation. Echoing the idea that it is the "body" now that is the site for modern experience, Ibn Hitham's insomnia, a physiological condition, may be read as the author's way to stage his hero's search for an answer to a universal question: of whether absolute "concepts" and "images," categories which have their sustenance from abstract metaphysics, are superior to and can translate into "sensual" and "tangible" ontologies. Viewed within this basic framework, this maqama may well be understood as al-Shidyaq's attempt to put to the test the notion of "equivalence" in meaning (or of analogy in philosophical discourse), as understood through the lens of

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146 I use the term "anticipate" here since in the history of critical theory, notions subversive of "metaphysics" became more pronounced in the early twentieth century, as Lee Hyang and Yun-Seong Woo observe, "Deleuze once proclaimed that the task of modern philosophy it to overthrow Platonism." Hyang Lee and Seong-Woo Yun, "Antoine Berman's Philosophical Reflections on Language and Translation: The Possibility of Translating Without Platonism," *Filozofia*. 66, no.4 (2011): 342. A prominent modern figure challenging Western metaphysics was German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche, whom I briefly discuss at the end of the chapter.

147 Lee and Yun, "Antoine Berman's Philosophical Reflections on Language and Translation," 340.

platonic worldview. We are made aware from the outset that Ibn Hitham is up to something; and here al-Shidyaq uses the trope found in most classical maqamas, namely that of the "poetic veil" to gesture towards a specific kind of meaning-uncovering: "Sleepless I lay on a night on which the stars were *concealed,* the clouds *revealed*, a night never ending, full of worries to anguish trending."[148]

Desperate for a moment of sleep, Ibn Hitham resorts to abstract "imagination" as a way to overcome his insomniac condition: "Now on my back to sleep I tried, now on any other side, placing before my eyes the image of a person drowsing or yawning or snoring, or another into a drunken stupor falling. Imagination, they say, is conductive to the doing of the thing for which you burn, and stimulates the achievement of that for which you yearn."[149] In vain, however, does Ibn Hitham try to fall asleep by using "imagination" as a stimulus. The human body is adamantly irresponsive, for "despite [that] sleep to [his] eyes not a drop of salve applied, not a yawn spread wide [his] mouth, from top to bottom or from side to side."[150] "Abstract" thought fails to translate into the sensual experience; thus the maqama begins with a covert breach or disconnect between two worlds. Continuing in his line of "platonic" rationalization, Ibn Hitham fancies that "the people of the earth, without exception, were fast asleep, while [he] alone among them all no repose could reap, that all [his] neighbors were at rest, while [he] alone remained distressed."[151] Obliquely revealing this fancy to be flawed, the maqama again instigates a second breach. It reveals to us soon afterwards

[148] al-Shidyaq, *Leg over Leg*, 191.
[149] al-Shidyaq, *Leg over Leg*, 190.
[150] al-Shidyaq, *Leg over Leg*, 191.
[151] al-Shidyaq, *Leg over Leg*, 190.

the paradox that Ibn Hitham's search for an answer to his question leads him to meet with six different people, who also happen to be insomniac under the same sky.

An avid reader trying to fall asleep, Ibn Hitham picks up the book closest within his reach, titled "*The Book of Balancing Two States and of Comparing the Two Straits.*" The book happens to be on the universal and philosophical question of man's "states of wretchedness and leisure, of joy and care, of gain and loss, of sorrow and pleasure [. . .] all set in facing tables using a columnar system that comparison enables."[152] While the layout of the book, in the form of tables, seems to suggest its objective stance on a universal question, its ultimate answer which gave "an undue weight to pleasure" and which failed to "treat life's evils in equal measure" resulted from a crude (perhaps tyrannical?) metaphysical stance which predicated the "sensual" onto the "non-sensual:" "[the author]even asserts that pleasure is to be had from both deed and *thought*—unlike pain, in which thinking is of no import."[153]

However, if we as readers subscribe to the logic and laws of this maqama, we also understand that the author's answer belies a conflation of the "metaphysical" and the "literal," the "*sensus litteralis*," or the "*historicus.*" To be more precise, it is as if the totalizing and idealizing perspective of the author of "*The Book of Balancing Two States*" originates from the "literal," or the sensual, or, as we shall see from other interlocutors Ibn Hitham meets, the historical subject itself: for "the shaykh [had lived], as it seems to [Ibn Hitham], a life of goodly weal, with abundant fortune and energetic zeal [and thus] gave undue weight to pleasure."[154] Not very convincing for

[152] al-Shidyaq, *Leg over Leg*, 192.
[153] al-Shidyaq, *Leg over Leg*, 192.
[154] al-Shidyaq, *Leg over Leg*, 192.

Ibn Hitham though: he notices the incoherence of the author's judgement as he conducts his own experiment to verify: "I doubted his words upon this point [. . .] in my case, when I pictured the drunkard, the drowser, and the yawner, as I lay there trying to sleep, all that picturing didn't compensate for the actual thing by even a jot."[155]

Having just questioned the "metaphysical" as a valid base for knowledge, we move into different phase of the argument, whereby the over-determined "literal" reading of the "historical" (sense-based) meaning has the power to propel, shape, and condition more "historical" moves. Using analogies to investigate the conceptual dilemma even further, Ibn Hitham reasons that "[j]ust as [his] hand fell upon the nearest tome, so let [his] next choice be the neighbor closest to home."[156] Thus, Ibn Hitham reads "literally" into the arbitrary coincidence; hence, a random choice of a book from within Ibn Hitham's accessible collections dictates, with its very arbitrariness, his next "historical" move, i.e. asking the neighbor next door.

Ibn Hitham seeks advice from a number of individuals, whose answers to his question reflect their respective worldviews and who also, in their interpretation of the universal problem, bring the "literal" and "historical" as logical basis to their answers. To answer the question, the teacher who teaches children their ABC also thinks analogously.[157] His analogy radically appends the "universal" to the "literal-

[155] al-Shidyaq, *Leg over Leg*, 193.
[156] al-Shidyaq, *Leg over Leg*, 194.
[157] To be more specific, ibn Hitham first meets a metropolitan, whose response to Ibn Hitham's question is, to my judgment, deliberately cast as the most "stupefying" of responses he relates in the maqama. Ibn Hitham points at the metropolitan's feeble language, for the latter "was one of those whose ambitions never rose to rhyming prose." The metropolitan says "something to the effect" of the following: "I hadn't caught the [two tables'] implication or grasped their signification, though, had they been penned in hackneyed terms, I vouch, I'd have got them as easy as sitting on this couch." "لو كانا

historical," by suggesting to look at the material aspect of the book, the table itself and by "plac[ing] the two columns (minus the binding) in a scale." Whether man is happy or miserable depends on the column which "dips and [is] weightier."[158] A jurisprudent's answer follows a similar logic yet by reflecting how Islamic law-making works. He suggests using the force of preponderance after "add[ing] up the words of the two arguments and calculate[ing] the number of letters that in each column are disposed." As such, "whichever has more will then be weightier."[159] Not very different are the respective solutions of the poet and the *emir*'s scribe. The former suggests that the answer is to be found by looking at the source of *his* living and weighing panegyrics against love sonnets to determine whether man is fundamentally

"One may surmise then that these rhyming words in particular can't be the metropolitan's, for Ibn Hitham has just noted the metropolitan's inability to speak in stylized language, and that his language, and his level of comprehension cannot rise above *rakākah*, feebleness. Yet, although the prose itself displays a measure of rhyme characteristic of masterful maqama writers, in other words, although the prose itself does not suffer from the said *rakākah*, al-Shidyaq was yet able to represent (or preserve) the weakness of the metropolitan by offering a baffling *rakākah* on the level of analog itself. The connection between "hackneyed terms, I vouch" عبارة ركيكة and "I'd have got them as easy as sitting on this couch" أسهل من الجلوس على هذه الأريكة on the level of signification is not only banal but also irrational. While all other individuals Ibn Hitham meets in the maqama also offer farfetched analogies to solve the riddle, their analogies at least, unlike the analogy offered by the metropolitan, preserve a minimal degree of identity and reason between the dualism of the two-columned table, and the respective dualisms they offer to measure those two columns against. I read this part of the maqama as an allusion to the rivalry between al-Shidyaq and Metropolitan Atanasius al-Tutunji the Aleppine, author of *al-Hakakah fi al-rakakah* (*The Leavings Pile concerning Lame Style*). Fragments of the feud between the two are scattered throughout *Leg.* In volume three, al-Shidyaq writes, "when the Faryaq was left with no more dreams to interpret, he was charged with the translation of a book in the land of the English, so he translated it for them into this language of ours, according to its proper rules. It so happened that at the same time Metropolitan Atanasius al-Tutunjī traveled to the same country [. . .] and informed the committee that the Faryaq's language was utterly corrupt because of his failure to observe the conditions that he had laid down for translators and Arabize in the abovementioned book. He also told them that the Christians loved disorderly, disarranged discourse, that he had been raised in this craft since many a year, that he trained many others in it." al-Tutunji presumably convinced either the governing board of Church Missionary Society or the Society for the Propagation of Christian Knowledge to reject al-Shidyaq 's translation of the Hebrew Bible into Arabic on the basis that its "eloquence" ran against the feeble Arabic expression used in Christian religious teachings. This aspect of al-Shidyaq 's experience as a translator merits more attention and further research. بعبارة ركيكة، كان ذلك أسهل علي من الجلوس على هذه الأريكة

[158] al-Shidyaq, *Leg over Leg*, 194.

[159] al-Shidyaq, *Leg over Leg*, 196.

happy or miserable:

> Eulogies and love poems are all I write; in the first I express my pain, in the second my delight. Be patient while I review my *Collected Works,* leafing through it from cover to cover; if I find the panegyrics there more numerous than the sonnets, the good things of this world must be fewer.[160]

Likewise, the scribe of the *emir* conditions his happiness and contentment on those of his own patron's: "If you can wait for a month into the future, so I may inscribe in my ledger all that I meet with from him that is sweet and all that is sour, all that is gold and all that is pewter, I'll inform you of the answers in due time; till then, I must decline."[161]

What can be gleaned from Ibn Hitham's encounters with different individuals in the maqama is not only a skeptical view of the of "metaphysical" (abstract, ideational, as in "thought can be the source of pleasure") as a way of knowing, but also an implied critique of the platonization of the "historical" (the material, the *thing itself*) and what appears to be its crucial (re)instatement in modern epistemology at the time. The preoccupation of historical meanings is a dilemma that al-Shidyaq grappled with during his lifetime, and especially in his interaction with orientalists and European philologists who wrote about and read Arabic literature. In book IV of *Leg*, his final scathing "rant" on "Errors Made by the Teachers of Arabic Language in the School of

[160] al-Shidyaq, *Leg over Leg*, 196.
[161] al-Shidyaq, *Leg over Leg*, 198.

Paris," speaks of European professors and philologists who "[do] have a deep knowledge of literary[162] history, [who do] know, for example, that Abu Tammam and al-Buhturi were contemporaries and that the second took from the first, and that al-Mutanabbi came after them and that al-Hariri wrote fifty maqamas that advanced the *badīʿ* style and so on." Yet, the same knowledgeable individuals, he notes

> don't [. . .] understand the books these people wrote and cannot tell fine language from lame or established use from invention or recognize well-executed ideational and verbal devices or fine lexical differences or literary or grammatical jokes or poetical terminology. [Hence t]he most that can be said is that they have acquired a shallow knowledge of the scholarship of the Arabs via books written in French.[163]

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[162] I note here that the word "literary" is the translator's own interference, for the original Arabic says: "نعم إن لهم باعا طويلا في التاريخ" al-Shidyaq, *Leg over Leg*, 438.

[163] al-Shidyaq, *Leg over Leg*, 438.

The same problem arises again in al-Shidyaq's *riḥlah, Kashf*, where he gives several anecdotes of his encounters with orientalists and philologists also at Cambridge. al-Shidyaq comments on what seems to be an obsession with the historical, reducing Arabic literature to an archive of information— most widely common in the practice followed by orientalists in the 19th century. According to Antoine Berman, the 19th witnessed what may be referred to as the hegemony of philology, particularly in translation: "Philological translations have no literary ambitions; their sole purpose is to retrieve the meaning of texts [. . .] which is achieved by adopting a certain kind of literalism. [Thus] philological translations of classical texts [in the nineteenth century] produced *unreadable* texts [emphasis added]. Meticulous knowledge of a language or a particular text is not sufficient to offer a good translation or commentary on the text" Antoine Berman, *al-Tarjamah wa-l-harf aw maqam al-buʿd* (Beirut: Markaz Dirasat al-Wihdah al-ʿArabiyah, 2010), 157-9. Edward Greenstein has similar observations. His description of the philological style in translation suggests that it has an underlying interest in historical fact reconstructed from texts under scrutiny: "the nature of philology is to try to recover the basic sense of a foreign text and identify its meaning as precisely as possible, usually for the sake of reconstructing ancient history and a particular cultural milieu. The philological approach understands a text primarily as a medium of information, and it seeks to transmit that information through an accurate, contemporary equivalent in the language of translation." Edward L. Greenstein, "Theories of Modern Bible Translation," *Prooftexts* 3 no.1 (1983): 15. In his *riḥla,* al-Shidyaq critiques philologists whose preoccupation with history and information occludes possible appreciation for Arabic poetry. A philological reading of a line by Abu Tammam leads to digressive and sometimes anachronistic discussions of the Carl Linus's classification of living creatures, to Arab's conquest of Spain, their knowledge of cardinal directions prior to the discovery of the needle:

That said, we still cannot quite tell whether al-Shidyaq was adamantly against the "literal," i.e., historical knowledge— as a way of knowing, for after all his travel account, or *riḥla*, i.e. his book *Kashf*, can also be read as the historicization of his highly fictionalized autobiography in *Leg*. Thus, what we glean from his writerly choices is an implied acknowledgment of the "historical" as a valid epistemological capital. Yet, what is problematic for him is the "platonization" of that form of knowledge at the expense of other forms of knowing and layers of meaning, of which the "metaphorical" is one example.

Nonetheless, I argue that "A Maqama" is deliberately indeterminate in probing those meanings over each other for reasons which I will explain below from the perspective of the philosophy of language. The Maqama's end undermines the very claims it seems to want to make. Disillusioned by "the brains of those who hold high rank and office;" coming to the conclusion "there is nothing left for those who knock at their door;" Ibn Hitham finally comes to Faryaq, who reveals the "truth" that Ibn Hitham accepts more trustfully. Iterating Ibn Hitham's earlier skepticism over whether "ideas" are ontologically superior to "senses" and whether the latter are indeed

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و هاك مثالاً على علم هؤلاء الأساتيذ و على شرحهم لكتبنا تطفلا، فتصور مثلا أن قارئا يقرأ على الشيخ قول أبي تمام

همة تنطَحُ النُّجوم و جدٌ آلفٌ للحضيض فهو حضيض

فيقول الشيخ بلغته "النطاح" مختص بالحيوانات التي لها قرون كالثور و التيس و الوعل و نحوها و قد ذكر في التوراة مرات كثيرة، و يمكن أيضا أن ينسب إلى ما ليس له قرن، فقد روى ليناوس – الذي قسم جنس الحيوان إلى سبعة أقسام – ان الحيوانات الجماء (التي لا قرون لها) تتناطح بجباهها، و قد أطلقت العرب اسم الكبش على آلة من آلات الحرب، لما أنها تنطح الجدار. و "النجوم" معروفة، و قد كانت العرب تهتدي بها في أسفارهم قبل أن عرفت خاصية ابرة المغناطيس، و لما كانوا مشتغلين بالعلوم الفلكية و الطبية، لم يكن في أوربا من يشم لها رائحة، ثم لما فتحوا إسبانيا أو جزيرة الأندلس و ذلك سنة 750، أخذ عنهم العلم بعض الإفرنج، و منهم سرى في سائر بلدان أوربا، و كان انقراض الملك من قرطبة سنة 1031، بعد أن دامت العرب فيها أصحاب أمر و نهي و سيادة نحو مئتين و خمس و سبعين سنة.

Although it is difficult to verify the reliability of the account, it seems that the story is related to make a point on critiquing the orientalists and European philologists in what al-Shidyaq saw as a deficiency in their readings of Arabic literature. Faris al-Shidyaq, *Kashf*, 109.

contingent upon the former, Faryaq affirms, in poetic lines that "pleasure cannot come from thinking/ nor from recollection; that's naught but an illusion/ when you think upon it well – one that may occur/ to the dimwit or victim of delusion."[164] However, a more careful reading of the last part of this maqama suggests a more nuanced understanding of those lines. In the remainder of this section, I explain why we need to read Faryaq words with added scrutiny. I also analyze the rationale that he follows to make his anti-platonic claims and shed light on the "allegorical" aspect in the mathematical deduction he uses to articulate his stance. The conclusions I arrive at suggest that al-Shidyaq composed a maqama that sidelines the classical model foregrounding dualities of the "exterior," *ẓāhir* and the "interior," *bāṭin*. At the same time, this maqama embeds different kinds of "literalisms" and "metaphors" in a manner that renders their clear-cut separation and hierarchization difficult to transact if not impossible.

While the individuals whom Ibn Hitham meets leave the question unanswered by suggesting the need to return to some substantial historical truth in order tell whether man is fundamentally "happy" or "miserable," Faryaq gives out a definitive one. He does argue that "Good, compared to evil/ is, over a life span, as a drop to an ocean," which Ibn Hitham accepts: "I realized that these words of his are the most wise; those of the others mere drivel and lies."[165] However, we are told obliquely that Faryaq, in giving his answers, also relies on his own worldview, which his personal material circumstance dictates onto him: "[I] f[ou]nd him o'er his copying bent, on his visage

[164] al-Shidyaq, *Leg over Leg*, 200.
[165] al-Shidyaq, *Leg over Leg*, 200.

the first signs of transmogrification, eyes, as I beheld, deeply sunken, hands suffering from desiccation, cheekbones as though from the face's surface hewn, skin as tight as the shade at noon.[166]

In addition, and more significant for my purpose here, Faryaq, in line with the methods of analogy used by other individuals Ibn Hitham meets, deducts his answers by placing the object of his query in an analogical relationship with a number of "allegorical" meanings. He arrives at the "truth" (the literal meaning) of the question by giving examples from universal metaphor affirming that "evil" has more power than "good:"

> See you not how, if one man has the mange,
> to a whole city he spreads his disease,
> Yet no one infects his fellows, no matter how close,
> Who's healthy and lives a life of ease?
> How many a sickness afflicts the child from the day he cuts his teeth,
> And with him to the grave's consigned?
> [. . .]
> Any limb's more easy broken
> Than it is mended
> And that, like the eye, whose corruption will fast destroy you,
> You'll never fix, till time is ended
> [. . .]

[166] al-Shidyaq, *Leg over Leg*, 198.

This world of ours, to those who know,

Is naught but loss and tribulation that we must endure.

Man's born enslaved, not free,

And so he dies, of that you may be sure.[167]

In this answer, Faryaq gives a hint about how "literal" meanings work. In "The Literal Sense from Augustine to Lacan," Cummings argues that "the literal is habitually presented as the pre-existent meaning to which other meanings are added in layers,"[168] as opposed to the "metaphor" which is usually presented as "contingent," secondary, and calling for interpretation since it is a "deviation from the literal." Notwithstanding Aristotle's classic definition of metaphor as "giving the thing a name that belongs to something else," it is paradoxically the "thing itself," Cummings argues, that is found to be most difficult to explain. This difficulty, a "characteristic trope of the literal," has shaped "the history of the hermeneutics of the literal," in the sense that the "literal" was a term "discovered or invented only in the delineation of deviations [for] it is the deviations which seem describable, whereas the literal seems to be more and more evanescent, even further off." In that sense, it would be "no exaggeration to say that the literal is historically *posterior* to the other senses, however much it is represented as logically *anterior*."[169]

Taken as an analytical tool, the discovered posteriority of the "literal" may unpack the crux in the maqama we examine. It can explain the meanings of ibn Hitham's

[167] al-Shidyaq, *Leg over Leg*, 200.
[168] Cummings, "Literally Speaking," 213.
[169] Cummings, "Literally Speaking," 213.

itinerant moves in this maqama and the final resolution given out via metaphor by Faryaq. The "true" or "literal" meaning of ibn Hitham's existential enquiry is to be found not in the "literal" itself, but through the movement proceeding towards other senses of meaning, *away* from the "literal."[170] Therefore, the "literal" (also historical) in this maqama, is not the generic sense of meaning from which other senses emanate, but is the sense *arrived at* through *translatio* and movement. If the different individuals representing different institutionalized worldviews resort to their own versions of the "literal" (historical) senses to answer Ibn Hitham's question, thus leaving the question with indeterminate answer while making proposals on how it *could* be addressed, Faryaq's resort to multiple allegories enacts the movement *away* from the "literal" which not only reveals the complexity of defining the "literal" but also interrogates its presumed anteriority to other senses of meaning. That said, we still need to view this maqama as a labyrinth of meanings, for Faryaq's answer is also a bait: we meet him as an impoverished scribe with in an obviously unenviable

[170] It is worthwhile to note that al-Shidyaq was familiar with and impressed by British empiricism, especially John Locke's. Like Locke and Bacon, writes Nadia Bou Ali, in focusing much of their attention on purifying language to become a language of knowledge and science, and thereby a language of civilization, al-Shidyaq engaged with the question of language and society with the same impetus. Bou Ali, "Collecting the Nation," 49. Nevertheless, while that might be true for al-Shidyaq in his general project of reform, the maqama examined suggests an alternative view where the impossibility of purifying the Arabic language becomes the maqama's central subject. This is not beyond the realm of possibility, for even John Locke's earlier attempt to expurgate philosophical language from metaphor and allegory resulted in his self-defeating reliance on the very metaphors whose existence in language he combats. According to Brian Cummings, the critique of metaphor goes back to English speaking philosophical tradition, to the ages of Hobbes and Locke, the latter who notoriously denounced metaphor, "all the artificial and figurative application of Words Eloquence hath invented, are for nothing else but to insinuate wrong *ideas*, move the Passions, and thereby mislead the Judgment; and so indeed are perfect cheat." However, Cummings observes the paradox that for Locke, the figure which are 'wholly to be avoided' are avoided least of all in those passages where Locke attempts to fence off the boundary between the figural and the literal. His attempts to name "simple ideas" turn out to be neither so simple nor so very non-figurative. Cummings, "Literally Speaking," 202.

condition. Intriguingly, while subversive of the anteriority of the "literal," Faryaq's allegories are simultaneously motivated by the "historical" sense of his very own condition.

With Ibn Hitham meeting Faryaq, al-Shidyaq brings "A Maqama" to closure. Even though Faryaq illumines Ibn Hitham and takes him from a supposedly state of ignorance to one of knowledge,[171] their meeting is marked by an obviously untroubled encounter. Neither the readers, nor Ibn Hitham are subjected to the *anagnorisis* that customarily brings classical maqama to an end. Nor are there classical language tricks similar to those associated with the maqamas of al-Hamadhani and al-Hariri. We realize of course, through close reading, that Faryaq's words ought not be taken without scrutiny, but his input does not come off as a language trick as would that of Abu Zayd's in al-Hariri's maqamas, or of Abu al-Fath in al-Hamadhani's. In effect, one may describe the Faryaq as a trick-less "trickster."

In the next section, I unpack the implications of the absence of *anagnorisis* in "A Maqama." In order to do so, an overview of what function it fulfilled in the classical maqama is needed. Towards that end, I utilize Philip Kennedy's thorough and detailed study of *anagnorisis* and "recognition" in al-Hariri's maqamas.

Anagnorisis: Between the Classical Maqama and Al- Shidyaq's "A Maqama"

A "poetic veil,"[172] a "veil of obscurity"[173] (awaiting to be *rended*) are but two

[171] Philip F Kennedy, *Recognition in the Arabic Narrative Tradition: Discovery, Deliverance and Delusion*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2016), 5.
[172] Kilito, *al-Aʿmal*, 67.
[173] Monroe. *The Art of Badiʿ Az-Zaman al-Hamadhani*, 87-101.

examples of the myriad terms used to delineate the final scenes or sometimes even the entire literary system of the maqamas, whether of those by 10th al-Hamadani, or by his accomplished successor, al-Hariri. As suggested in the terms themselves, the "veil" is a façade, intercepting the readers', besides the audiences' as well as the narrator's, recognition of the "true" (literal) identity of the trickster: a ubiquitous man of linguistic wiles who outwits the audience by using various techniques of shape-shifting and language play. Phillip Kennedy's reading of "recognition" scenes in the maqamas pursues this "veil" in its mutable possibilities and intertextual connections to other literary forms and traditions. According to him, the most consistent defining feature of *anagnorisis* is its double-ness. In most of its uses, it corroborates the dichotomous view of "truth" and "fiction" (or truth's simulacra – as in the excerpt below) whereby the latter stands in the reader's way to capture the former:

> The picaresque [maqamas] which flourished from the tenth century AD onwards reveal the capacity of language to articulate at once the most persuasive visions of harmony and truth, and the most insidious simulacra of that truth. While exploring and toying with the idea that eloquence need not be commensurate with veracity, these anecdotes engage also in a number of intertextual diversions, parodying Hadith, pious sermons, stories of wise fools, romance form, aspects of theological discourse, Ismaili stories of initiation and [. . .] the mythic tales of Shiʿi Imamic hagiography [. . .] encounters with the Twelfth Imam, who was believed while in occultation to attend incognito the pilgrimage

in Mecca every year.[174]

This preoccupation with "truth" and its antithesis has further ramifications, which I believe reflect the worldviews underlying the rhetoric of the classical maqama. Allocating the largest portion of his fifth chapter to discuss the "Kafiyya" by al-Hariri, Kennedy pointedly notes, after Kilito in his study entitled "The Absentee," that the audience of Abu Zayd expose and preserve themselves as "the dull object lesson of the *perils of fiction*. [emphasis added]"[175] Deploying more than one event of *anagnorisis*,[176] this maqama in particular demonstrates a multivalent tension between "appearance" and "latency" which holds "morality in suspension until the truth emerges into light."[177] As the maqama is also a parody of Hadith, a type of literature which is traditionally founded on notions of "authority" "reliability," it is akin to the "moral tumble [. . .] turning on the kind of recognition that casts everything into doubt, and creat[es] for the reader the epistemological conundrum of the unreliable witness."[178]

Along the same lines, Michael Cooperson reads the genre as a characteristic sign of

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[174] Kennedy, *Recognition*, 248.
[175] Kennedy, *Recognition*, 247.
[176] There are in fact three of them: an early one in which Abu Zayd is identified by the narrator at the outset of the maqama. Since the recognition of Abu Zayd and his game a deception normally takes place at the closure of the anecdote, this maqama is consciously a variation upon theme. Since the readers' defenses are lowered as and her credulity are heightened before the ensuing narrative in which true deception supervenes, the second anagnorisis comes off as more real (despite its fictionality) when Abu Zayd recognizes his long forsaken son, Zayd in a story he tells to the audience in order to gain their sympathy. The last anagnorisis happens as both narrator and reader realize that Abu Zayd made up the entire story about him meeting his son. Kennedy, *Recognition*, 260-75.
[177] Kennedy observes that this is a general characteristic of stories of imposture by looking at Borges's tales such as "Tom Castro, the Implausible Imposture," and "The Masked Dyer, Hakim of Merv." Kennedy, *Recognition*, 253.
[178] Kennedy, *Recognition*, 259.

classical writers' struggle with "ambiguity," dissected and analyzed through the theme of "discovery." He argues that those writers were "fascinated by the carefully cultivated inscrutability of their fellow citizens." The maqama, he adds, "reveals a character to be other than she appears. [. . .] al-Hamadhani made the saint and the sinner into a single character and derived the plot of his stories from the narrator's obsessive curiosity about this character's true identity."[179]

There is agreement among most notable scholars who examined this genre and analyzed its poetic force. Also intrigued by consistent repetition of *anagnorisis,* Malcom Lyons, for example, contends that "what can't be doubted is that the repeated patterns of disguise and recognition underline the importance to their audience of the simple point that things are not what they seem and that the world cannot be taken at face value."[180] More intriguingly, Kennedy concludes the study by arguing that "deceit, lies, and delusion" have made the substance of the first self-avowed fictional genre in high Arabic literature. [181]

Between "lies" and "truth;" the "perils of fiction," "delusion," "illusion" on the one hand and "discovery," "recognition," and "reality" on the other: there is not only a profound moralizing stance. The almost unbreakable coupling of antitheses organized in this way, foregrounding the "shadow" as an ephemeral substance outlived by the endurance of the "real," fosters a semi-platonic view of existence. This view is based, largely, on an unwavering belief that the "real" is ontologically and epistemologically accessible. The "literal" Abu Zayd follows in a constantly predictable way his multiple

[179] Kennedy, *Recognition,* 254.
[180] Kennedy, *Recognition,* 306.
[181] Kennedy, *Recognition,* 306.

disguises, in other words, he follows the senses *other* than the "literal." On the surface of it, since the "literal" Abu Zayd emerges, by the laws of the narrative progression, at the end of each maqama, only when he had already deceived the audience with his disguise (the veil here being the metaphor), one may argue that the "literal" sense is the sense arrived at, and emerges in the classical maqama as posterior to the "metaphoric" sense. However, if we consider the maqamas collection in their entirety, the reverse argument unfurls. Since the maqamas in their collectivity lead to the inevitable exposure of one, single and unchanging identity of the trickster in an almost consistent manner of repetition, one may argue that the "literal" sense maintains a historically anterior status.

I now unpack the implications of the absence of *anagnorisis*, as we have just understood it in classical maqamas, in al-Shidyaq's maqama. In the classical maqamas, *anagnorisis* is used as a barometer of moral order, repeatedly disrupted and restored via recursive cycle of several anecdotes almost always ending on the same note of recognition. That *anagnorisis* reminds the audience that "things are not what they seem and that the world cannot be taken at face value" suggests that in the classical maqama, the conflict is mainly between two realms of being, the "real/true" and its "shadow," with the former made possible through the poetic thickness of carefully devised language and eloquence.

By contrast, the world of al-Shidyaq's maqama does not follow the same logic. Although the outright disavowal of "metaphysics" may suggest the elimination of the infinite *model*, "truth" and "idea(l)s," what is at stake for al-Shidyaq is not the question of "forms" and "shadows" (appearances) in the platonic sense. If one reads

his rejection of metaphysics at face value, the maqama of al-Shidyaq may be an earlier expression of the fall of "true forms" as the source of the world of "shadows" in the yet-to-come *Twilight of Idols* by Friedrich Nietzsche (1888). However, even Nietzsche's thesis is different: for him, fall of the "true" subsequently leads to the fall of the "shadow," and thus to the elimination of the very doubleness upon which the "true" world and the "apparent" one rest. But the ultimate result, for him is also the destruction of the "shadow," which constitutes the essence existential of nihilism.

al-Shidyaq, by contrast, was not a nihilist. The problem for al-Shidyaq inheres neither in doubelness, or its absence thereof, nor in questions of *anteriority,* or *posteriority* of historical meanings. "A Maqama" does not work in hierarchies or in terms of historic precedence. It rather lays out its linguistic logic horizontally. What "A Maqama" does in fact, is that it poses the problem of "equivalence" (between linguistic and cultural systems) as a major fiction in a world run on mobility, encounters, connections, and translation. We have seen Ibn Hitham question (or by implication ridicule) the concept of the *analog* altogether: the ABC teacher, the jurisprudent, the poet, and the *emir*'s scribe use their own analogies (presupposing equivalence) to suggest sometimes laughable answers to the same existential question. As Rebecca Johnson rightly observes in the foreword to the English translation of *Leg over Leg*: "the work['s] hermeneutic mode [runs on] interruptions, digressions [that] create an endless leg after leg of narrative, where text seems to generate only more text. It is *contiguity, not equivalence* that serves as the driving force behind meaning [emphasis added]."[182] We have seen how Ibn Hitham experiences a maze of meanings,

[182] Johnson, "Introduction," in al-Shidyaq, *Leg over Leg*, xxvii.

laid out together in a state of bordering and of being in contact with one another—with "metaphysical," "historical," "literal," and "metaphoric" meanings interplay in an endless web of contact.

Conclusion

In this chapter I read al-Shidyaq's first maqama by locating it in his larger project on the philosophy of language, a project which I would like to propose, is linked to his preoccupation with processes of translation during his time. No doubt, engaging in projects of translation does not only invite the translator to put to the test the capacities and potentials of the target language; it is also an empirical undertaking which puts to question the very assumption of "equivalence" between languages and cultures as well as notions of "translatabilty" of meanings out there. al-Shidyaq awoke to these dilemmas on his travels to Europe and through his encounter with different linguistic and cultural alterities. Just as it happens to the language when it moves away from itself via *translatio,* al-Shidyaq's understanding of the "literal" (a linguistic sense which may be stretched out to encompass the various facets of one's identity) is deeply gauged when other senses, e.g. the "metaphorical," are set with the "literal" in a relationship of contiguity. Therefore, one may argue that it was the distance al-Shidyaq traversed throughout his career, *away* from home, which enabled his complex and convoluted self-understanding.

If we situate this maqama in the general context of the intellectual's encounter with Europe (colonial or otherwise), we find that the notions of "equivalence" and "translatability" are at the heart of his cultural, linguistic and intellectual quests. As

Nadia Bou Ali observes, these two are major components of the Enlightenment narrative: "[this narrative] places the Arab in the position of translator and preserver of ancient knowledge, [a] position [so] intrinsic and attests to the modern Enlightenment fiction that claims that total translatability is even possible."[183]

Nevertheless, al-Shidyaq's intellectual and literary oeuvre also suggests that this Enlightenment narrative suffers from compelling contradiction. While it preaches "total translatability" and possible "equivalence" between cultures and languages, its deployment of "metaphysics" and high "models" surreptitiously creates hierarchies that "annex" one language and cultural code to another. One may argue that al-Shidyaq was dealing with a rhetoric of "literalism" in which the "original" had a uniquely daunting presence: it was seen to occupy a higher, more sublime status. The "original" was "sacred:" it was on the one hand embodied in the "spectre of Europe in which the Arab [intellectuals] dwelled [and which] necessitated their position as translators,"[184] and was, on the other, embodied in the ghosts of forefathers, the literary echelons represented by al-Hamadhani and al-Hariri and their likes, whose legacies were set as an example to emulate.

By working out a plot subversive to "metaphysics" in his maqama, al-Shidyaq was working consistently in his larger project that aimed at questioning higher and "original" "models" Indeed, his *Leg over Leg* resists generic classification; his maqama confounds the readers' expectations; even his *Kashf*, a text which was

[183] Bou Ali, "Collecting the Nation," 33.
[184] Bou Ali, "Collecting the Nation," 34.

deemed by many as a travelogue, does not squarely fit into the model of the genre.[185] While scholars have viewed him mainly through the lens of "revival," his revivalist stance came mainly, but not only, though subversive undertaking which emancipated language and thought from the "high model."

I now venture to ask, following the lead of Bou Ali, the question of why al-Shidyaq's work, like "the texts and bulk of literature that are said to have made up the Arab *Nahda*, ha[s] been excluded from Arab national pedagogies[?]"[186] According to Bou Ali, the "reason for this is because the literary project that has taken to define Arab nineteenth century thought [. . .] shows that the future anticipated by nineteenth century intellectuals is not really our present. [. . .] the literary nature of *Nahda* reveals that the Arab nation that is always yet to come might itself be the only possible nation for the Arabs." I hesitate to depart radically from Bou Ali's remarkable observation; yet, in my view, the question may also be linked with the language philosophy advanced by al-Shidyaq. A rhetoric that bases its philosophy on a revolutionary stance questioning the metaphysical foundation of language will not make it smoothly to the national archive during the subsequent century. Since the national imaginaries were highly predicated onto an "idealized" imaginary (messianic or otherwise), al-Shidyaq's project is precisely what these imaginaries would suppress in their compositions. The "nation" as we would know it later in the Arab world, predicates its

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185 "نظرنا إلى الكتاب الذي بين أيدينا "كشف المخبأ عن فنون أوروبا" ذلك الذي أدرجته جل الدراسات الأدبية ضمن قوائم كتب الرحلات، فأدركنا أن متن الكتاب لا يحوي مشاهدت مؤلفه و انطباعاته عن سياحته في انجلترا و فرنسا فحسب، بل هناك نص مصاحب تحمل دلالته دعوة صريحة إلى النهضة و اللحاق بالمدنية الأوربية، بنظرة تقليدية فاحصة للوجهين الثقافي و الحضاري للفكر الغربي، و نزعة انتقائية لانتخاب النافع و الأصلح لتجديد و تحديث العقلية العربية بمنحى توجيهي يعمد إلى نقض التقليد في كل صوره و رفض التعصب بشتى أشكاله."
Ismat Nassar, "Introduction" in al-Shidyaq, *Kashf*, 20.

186 Bou Ali, "Collecting the Nation," 35.

social and political ontologies onto an essentialist imaginary for identity, which may not be "translatable" in concrete terms. Historical experience of Arab nationalisms later on would evince a tendency to "forge" a translatability between the two realms, by forcing the "metaphysical" onto the "historical" reality of Arabs, sometimes even in violent ways. Given the emergence of the nation as a definitive modality of social and political organization, it may be understandable why al-Shidyaq's work, subversive and resistant to definitive classification, might be excluded.

I end this chapter with a question which I believe may offer a smooth and pertinent transition into the following section. As we have seen, al-Shidyaq's oeuvre demonstrates a particular language understanding which postulates that complete "equivalence" and "translatability" are not quite possible. It would be worthwhile to keep this argument in view as a contrastive basis when we examine the translation project of Rifaʿa al-Tahtawi in Egypt around the same time period. Unlike al-Shidyaq's maqama which I have read as translation of the classical model, al-Tahtawi's work is a translation of François Fénelon's 1699 didactic epic novel, *Les Aventures de Télémaque.* Al-Tahtawi's elaborate maqama, his 1850 *Mawaqiʿ al-aflak fi waqaʾiʿ Tilimak* is set in the nexus of genre translation and geographical reterritorialization. In my next chapter, I look carefully into this genre-transfer while I shed light on the different trajectories that translation projects took in Egypt during the *Nahda*.

CHAPTER TWO: FROM FÉNELON TO AL-TAHTAWI AND FROM *TÉLÉMAQUE* TO *TILIIMAK*: THE MAQAMA, INSULAR FORMS, AND NESOLOGICAL MODERNITY

"لا شك أن القارئ لمح الشكل الدائري للدولاب،و معلوم أن موضوعة الدائرة لها أهميتها في المقامة.
أما النسج (أو الغزل) فإنه يذكرنا [. . .] بحياكة الحكاية. لكنه يذكرنا أيضا بنساجة أخرى (بنيلوب)
شرعت أثناء غياب زوجها (أوديسيوس) في حياكة ثوب و استمرت في عملها سنوات عديدة.
و شب ابنها (تليماك) و هو يجهل مصير أبيه و يردد: 'لست أدري هل أبي حي في مكان أم ميت.'
وفي يوم من الأيام عاد أوديسيوس. كل هذا من 'عجائب الاتفاق' على حد تعبير أبي زيد. "

عبد الفتاح كيليطو، *الغائب*

> The reader must have noticed the round shape of the spinning wheel. It is well known that the circle trope has a significance in the maqama. As for the looming activity we in this image, it reminds us of [. . .] Abu Zayd's narrative, and of yarn spinning. But it also reminds us of another spinner, Penelope, who started spinning during Odysseus's absence and continued to do so for several years. Meanwhile, her son, Telemachus, grew up unaware of his father's fate. He would always wonder, "I do not know whether my father is dead or alive."
> But one day, Odysseus returned.All these links are no more than an "uncanny coincidence," as Abu Zayd would have said.
>
> Abd al-Fattah Kilito, on al-Wasiti's illustration of the "*Maqama* of Kufah" by al-Hariri

Introduction

What are the (uncanny) connections between the medieval maqama and the classical Greek sea voyage narrative? At first glance, there are multiple parallels. Both literary monuments are travel-oriented: on the one hand the peripatetic trickster in the maqama is well-known for his penchant for (sinful) wandering. On the other hand, both

Odysseus and Telemachus became icons of seafaring in the Mediterranean: the one using his memory to retrieve his identity and find his way home; the other tracing the footsteps of his father in the Aegean Archipelago. Moreover, both works deploy episodic and frame narratives. Every maqama starts with the narrator telling the audience the story of a trickster who, for his part, tells his own story of his travels. Likewise, Odysseus tells and retells his story, not only to Penelope as he re-unites with her, but on almost every shore he lands, even while we (as listeners) already know it, thus "helping us recall the details [but also] creating resonances and amplifying the themes of the narrative."[187] In addition, both works sublimate, in different ways, the theme of hospitality. Neither Abu Zayd, nor Abu al-Fath were ever denied the favors they sought. In some instances, their requests were over-honored by those they beseeched. As for Odysseus and Telemachus, both were navigating across an "extended archipelago in the Mediterranean [. . .] the most hospitable sea in the globe."[188] And although there are obvious parallels, there are fundamental inversive patterns in the works' respective structures. Most obviously, while the trickster in the maqama claims to come from a specific place in the Islamic world, he nevertheless demonstrates a ubiquitous belonging to every place he travels to. On the other hand, Odysseus, an epitome of "the homesickness of the moderns,"[189] continuously expresses his longing and belonging to one place, Ithaca. Unless homecoming is fulfilled, the narrative continues to unfold, ceaselessly.

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[187] Robert Foulke, *The Sea Voyage Narrative* (New York: Twayne, 1997), 28.
[188] Elaine Stratford, Godfrey Baldacchino, Elizabeth McMahon, Carol Farbotko and Andrew Harwood, "Envisioning the Archipelago," *Island Studies Journal* 6, no. (2011): 121.
[189] Margaret Cohen, *The Novel and the Sea* (Princeton: Princeton UP 2010), 2.

On the surface, this chapter partially responds to the question of connections between the maqama and the Greek sea travel narrative. Nevertheless, it sidesteps the speculative grasp that brings the works together via some form of *uncanny coincidence*. Instead, I focus on an actual moment of historical, but opaque and indirect, contact between the two literary monuments. I examine Rifaʿa al-Tahtawi's 1850 *Mawaqiʿ al-aflak fi waqaʾiʿ Tilimak* ("Orbits of the Stars in Telemachus' Adventures of Afar"), which was his maqama-inspired Arabic translation of Francois Fénelon's 1699 *Les Aventures de Télémaque.* In crude terms, there are two elements of investigation: the maqama form, and islands. In elaborate terms, however, it diagnoses the contact implicated between the maqama and Fénelon's text by focusing on the maqama, not only as an "insular" literary product, the result of a self-reflexive process that coincides particularly with how islands are aesthetically and functionally produced, but also as a genre that actually takes islands as its subject matter. To that end, I proceed in three stages. First, following circular modalities of "space in literature," as well as "literature in space,"[190] I analyze al-Tahtawi's visual, and poetic perception of the Mediterranean and demonstrate how both his grasp of the sea's insular geography as well as his composition of a maqama on his voyage reveals a homologous relationship between the classical maqama and the insular form. Second, with the insular form in mind as a tool for analysis, I draw on studies of the history of cartography in early modern France to argue that the French text of *Télémaque* needs to be read in relation to particular cartographic practices that represented islands on

[190] Franco Moretti, *Atlas of the European Novel, 1800-1900* (London: Verso, 1998), 3.

"portolan charts," a specific genre of maps that pre-dated the contemporary discourse of sovereign state territoriality. Third and ultimately, since the modality of "literature in space" is essential to preclude detaching the works I examine from their historical-geographic context, I examine al-Tahtawi's discursive production of insular forms, what this study refers to as "nesological modernity," during the period when Egypt produced its nationalism while it exercised imperial hegemony over and economic exploitation of the Sudan.

al-Tahtawi's Maqama in *Takhlis*: Genre, Insular Form, and Hidden Homologies

In the first essay from his travel account *Takhlis al-ibriz fi talkhis Bariz* (1830), entitled, "On the Mountains, Countries, and Islands We Saw," al-Tahtawi describes his journey from Egypt to France via the Mediterranean Sea. Under the spell of the highly anthropomorphizable seascape of the Mediterranean, al-Tahtawi, no different from "the ancient sailors," responded to the sea and its "striking seamarks that would catch the attention of any alert navigator."[191] Aware of both classical Greek mythologies and past descriptive geographies of the Mediterranean, al-Tahtawi views the sea with a focused eye on its state of *islandness*. Responding to the sea's geography as such, al-Tahtawi was a man of his own age, for indeed, the term *Adalar Denizi*, or "the Sea of Islands," was the term used to describe the Aegean Sea during the Ottoman period.[192] Making note of quite a number of islands he describes, al-Tahtawi views Sicily with special attention to its known past in the circulation of

[191] Foulke, *Sea Voyage Narrative*, 33.
[192] Christy Constantakopoulou, *The Dance of the Islands: Insularity, Networks, the Athenian Empire, and the Aegean World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007),1.

power and governance among major imperial forces. The island, an elemental, also visually discernible, geographical unit seems to be inevitably implicated in its extensive history as an object of competing powers and a symptom of shifting sovereignties:

> On the seventh day of our journey (20 April), we sailed past the island of Crete. From afar, we saw its towering mountain, which the Greeks call 'Ida,' and which is famous for the strange things that are recounted about it in their chronicles. On the 13th day of our journey we saw the island of Sicily, which is famous in Arabic under the name of Saqaliyya [. . .] one of the biggest and most fertile islands of the Mediterranean Sea, and because of this it is used to be known in former times as the granary of Rome. In past eras, it was the cause of war between the Romans and the people of Carthage, i.e. the inhabitants of the West. This ended when it came under Roman rule. Then, it was transferred to the kings of Greece, after which it was conquered by the Muslims, who were, in turn, vanquished by the Norman Christians, a French tribe. Then, some Spanish and Austrian kings ruled it. In the end, it became part of the Kingdom of Naples, which is called Puglia . . .[193]

In this account, al-Tahtawi maintains a register that is both aesthetically detached and intently de-rhetoricized. Although the text is occasionally interspersed with poetic

[193] Rifaʿa al-Tahtawi, *An Imam in Paris: Account of a Stay in France by an Egyptian Cleric (1826-1831)*, trans. Daniel L. Newman (London: Saqi, 2004), 140.

quotes taken from classical Arabic tradition, the account on the whole speaks with quasi-scientific authority, privileging "autopsia" and using the "visual" in mediating the travel experience. Nevertheless, it is noteworthy that in the same section, the account also suggests that al-Tahtawi was not entirely resistant to *literary whims* throughout his journey. He tells us, for example, that while in Messina,

> on one of [the] nights, while talking with some wits, [he] composed an amusing maqama, which comprised three thoughts. The first contains an argument that nothing prevents a healthy disposition from admiring something that is beautiful with chastity [. . .] the second is that the lover is drunk on the finest wine in the eyes of the beloved, and does not need real wine for his recreation. [. . .] the third one dealt with the influence the sound of the bell ringing has on the soul when he who rings is someone with taste and is proficient at it.

Although the maqama itself is not present in the account, vestiges of it seem to be deliberately left out in the narrative, thus signaling its presence *in absentia*. To provide evidence, al-Tahtawi includes the poetic verses he composed as a reflection on the main themes of his maqama. Thus, while the actual maqama does not appear in the text, we are made aware of its existence in al-Tahtawi's reference to it. The case we are confronted with is paradoxical. Although this essay from *Takhlis* is principally conditioned by its author's visual perception of constellation of islands in the Mediterranean, the author is still intent on referencing his creative intervention, which comes off as a maqama, an Arabic genre that is historically known for its normative

form.

While al-Tahtawi's juxtaposition of his perception of the insular geography in the Mediterranean and his subsequent composition of the maqama may at face value seem to be merely an arbitrary move, it is far from being unmotivated. To my mind, the juxtaposition rests on, and is revealing of, a homologous relationship between the insular geography and the maqama form. This homology, I argue, originates in the island's as well as the maqama's respective tendencies to "replicate in allegorical form the very operations though which [they are] discursively produced in the first place."[194] "Such is the case," argues Antonis Balasopoulos,

> with the correspondence between the *isolario*'s[195] or the portolan chart's tendency to aestheticize insularity and their own self-conscious isolation from a more functionally-oriented cartographical mainstream. Such, too, is the case with early modern poetic and dramatic corpus [. . .] which seems prone to celebrate the sublimity inherent in the comparative marginality and inconsequence of the British Isles at the same time that it draws attention to the self-mockingly peripheral and trivial status of Elizabethan poetry itself.[196]

[194] Balasopoulos, "Nesologies," 10.
[195] Isolarii are "coffee table books of the Aegean islands, published primarily in Italy in the fifteenth century, and present highly stylized pictorial maps of the islands, with one island per page and with no attention to scale or any reference to relative location. [here] islands exist solely as elemental spaces, bounded territories that through their very presence resist the construction of the ocean as a placeless space characterized only by vectors of movement." Philip E. Steinberg, "Insularity, Sovereignty and Statehood: The Representation of Islands on Portolan Charts and the Construction of the Territorial State," *Geografiska Annaler*. 87, no. 4 (2005), 253-265; 259.
[196] Balasopoulos, "Nesologies," 10.

The self-reflexive power of the insular figure, which comes from a homology that reiterates the famous circular formula of "world as text and text as world"[197] finds a parallel in the history of the maqama. Traditionally, "al-Hamadhani's maqamas were invented as a response to several noble genres of Arabic literature, among which are prophetic traditions (*ḥadīth*), and epic/romance (*sīra*)."[198] While set in a parodic relationship with the genres it responds to, every maqama after al-Hamadhani became a parody of its own model. In addition, while the maqama is known for incorporating within its frame major Arabic literary forms of prose and poetry, its all-embracing literary microcosm is self-conceiving of its own genre—thus it creates a self-contained and self-containing *form of forms* (or a *world of worlds*). Moreover, and even more interestingly, the outreach of this "*insular*" form of the maqama extends well beyond its own poetic being onto its historical fortune. As Kilito observes, "all countries of the world of Islam are, in the maqamas of al-Hariri, either mentioned or represented. Both of its heroes are tireless travelers themselves. Even more paradoxical is the fact that the book itself, since it appeared, had *traversed* all the places traveled by its heroes [emphasis added]. Ernest Renan made the point that 'very few works had exerted as great an expanse of literary influence as the maqamas of al-Hariri had: from the Volga to the Niger, from the Ganges to the Gibraltar Strait; it was the model of good writing style for all nations that believed in Mohammed."[199] As a book, the maqamas iterated the destiny of their heroes; it became the self-miming *traveling book of travel*. Finally, another connection can be located between the stories surrounding how the maqama

[197] Balasopoulos, "Nesologies," 9.
[198] Monroe. *The Art of Badi' Az-Zaman al-Hamadhani*, 20.
[199] Kilito, *al-Aʿmal*, 4: 276.

came into being and what Balasopolous calls a "insular consciousness" that he identifies in poetic processes in the west: "the western conception of poetics has owed much to metaphorics of insularity." Examples abound,

> from the translation of the early modern rhetoric of poetic 'impracticality' to the celebration of poetic 'distance' and 'detachment' in the New Critics, and from the critique of formalist poetics' vision of the text as an 'absolutely closed-off, self-sufficient world' to the critique of the 'bounded text' ruptured by the force of the 'Semiotic,' the discourse of western poetics has frequently evoked, affirmatively or critically, an insular geographical unconscious.[200]

In similar ways, metaphorics of insularity, isolation, and distance can be extrapolated from the narratives on al-Hariri's composition of his maqamas. Although medieval biographical dictionaries present the story as they would historical accounts, my approach foregrounds the representational aspect in Ibn Khallikan's account of al-Hariri's composition of his maqamas. There is nearly no single discussion of al-Hariri's literary life that does not make reference to his plight as an author who stood in the shadow of his predecessor, al-Hamadhani. In the introduction to his 1867 translation of al-Hariri's maqamas, English orientalist Thomas Chenery (1826-1884) draws on Ibn Khallikan's thirteenth-century *Deaths of the Eminent Men and History of the Sons of the Epoch* of al-Hariri and his maqamas. According to the account, al-Hariri had many detractors and opponents in medieval Baghdad, who not only

[200] Balasopoulos, "Nesologies," 10.

"asserted that the work was full of faults, [but] also affected to believe that it was not his [al-Hariri's] own." In contrast to al-Hamadhani, who had been a "real improviser," "al-Hariri was neither Abu al-Fath, nor Abu Zayd. He was a slow and painstaking writer, and his exquisite compositions required time and solitude." According to Ibn Khallikan,

> Hariri at first composed only forty Assemblies [maqamas]. Coming from Basra to Baghdad, he presented them as his work, but a number of the literary at Baghdad would not believe that he was the author, and said that the book was the work of a rhetorician of the Maghrib who had died at Baghdad, and whose papers had fallen into Hariri's hands. The Wazir sent for Hariri to the Diwan and asked him what was his profession; he replied that he was a munshi. The Wazir then bade him compose a *risāleh* [an epistle] on a subject which he named. Hariri retired with ink and paper to a corner of the hall, and remained long, but God inspired him with nothing, and he rose up ashamed. [. . .] on his return to Basra he composed ten more Assemblies, and sent them to Baghdad, excusing himself for his former incapacity, by alleging his reverential fear in the Wazir's presence. The number of the Assemblies was thus raised to fifty.[201]

The implications of this incident resonate beyond its own time, and the question of whether al-Hariri *was* in fact the real author persists until the present. In *In Invisible Ink*, Kilito raises similar questions. He relies on 13th century authority Yaqut al-

[201] al-Hariri, *The Assemblies of al-Hariri*, trans. Thomas Chenery (Farnborough: Gregg, 1969), 27-9.

Hamawi in his *Dictionary of Writers*, according to whom

> al-Hariri stayed in his home in Baghdad for forty days, but could not even combine two words or join two expressions; he even consumed plenty of ink on paper, to no avail. Then he came back to Basra [. . .] After a while he had written ten maqamas and added them to those [forty]; then he set for Baghdad again. Upon that, his merit was established, and they [his opponents] recognized these [maqamas] as being his.[202]

Notwithstanding the forty maqamas that al-Hariri had initially composed when his integrity was first questioned, it is the remaining ten maqamas, which he wrote afterwards, *sotto voce*, in an insular mode of production, that salvaged his reputation and established his authority over the entire work. What I find most compelling is that the episode surrounding the most decisive moments of writing is related rather mysteriously. There is a ubiquitous silence over al-Hariri's actual writerly deliberation. Both accounts of Ibn Khallikan and Yaqut dramatize many of the events which unfolded before al-Hariri's literary status was finally asserted; however, in both accounts, little or nothing is said about how the maqamas themselves came into being, as if the literary work is intently represented to be produced off-stage. And if al-Hamadhani was believed to have the extraordinary ability to publicly improvise his maqamas "on the spot" as related by al-Thaʿalibi in his *Yatimat al-dahr*,[203] al-Hariri's composition of his maqamas is, "closed off" and relegated to an insular sphere of

[202] Kilito, *al-Aʿmal*, 1: 324.
[203] Kilito, *al-Aʿmal*, 1:323

writing.

While evident from multiple viewpoints, the argument on the insular condition of the maqama so far depends mainly on the self-reflexive, form-oriented, and spatial grasp of the poetic processes that surround both the production and the reception of the genre. One question that arises from this analysis is whether the maqama, with its wide-spectrum and highly-dialogic literary capacity, *did* in fact represent or foreground the insular form as a subject of its travel narrative. The answer will naturally be in the negative if we take a quick look at the nature of the geographical swathe traversed by the most well-known tricksters of the classical maqama form, namely, al-Hamadhani's Abu al-Fath al-Iskandari and Abu Zayd al-Saruji, who were mainly land-trotters. One venue to explore the question is travel writing in the 10th century Islamic world (here I think of travel writing as one of the *rawāfid* [a tributary stream] for the maqama). A most "ambitious" medieval Muslim traveler would at best manage to make it to the edge of (land bound) sameness[204]—but not quite beyond. Kilito notes that up to twenty-one maqamas (of a sum total of fifty two) in al-Hamadhani's volume are named after famous towns and territories. Both the narrator (ʿIsa Ibn Hisham) and the hero (Abu al-Fath al-Iskandari) travel the medieval world of Islam in many directions. Although they never consistently venture to the Western side of the empire, they nevertheless reached the *tukhūm* (border limits) of its Eastern side, which was punctuated by the *thughūr* (frontier zone)[205]— beyond which forms of

[204] Houari Touati, "Journey to the Edge of the Same," *Islam & Travel in the Middle Ages,* trans. Lydia G Cochrane (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010).
[205] Ralph W. Brauer, *Boundaries and Frontiers in Medieval Muslim Geography* (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1995), 11-2.

"otherness" reigned.[206] In delineating such a geographically conservative itinerary, al-Hamadhani was a conformist; and to some extent the same can be said of his successor al-Hariri. al-Hamadhani was not different from Arab geographers of the tenth century, such as al-Istakhri, al-Muqaddasi and Ibn Hawqal who purposefully "confined their gaze to the kingdom of Islam."[207] Therefore, a quick look at the maqama titles in both al-Hamadhani's and al-Hariri's collections conveys the impression that the geographical extent of the classical maqama was mainly land-bound and hence highly introversive.

al-Hariri's "Maqama of Oman:" The Island within Itself

Whereas one may not anticipate any dramatization of insular forms, or by extension, sea-bordering geographical *topoi* in the maqamas, with the analysis above in mind, al-Hariri's "maqama of Oman," provides evidence for the opposite. As in the case of many of the classical maqamas, the story in the "Maqama of Oman" remains simple.[208] Called on some important business to Oman on the eastern coast of Arabia, Harith is about to cross the Persian Gulf.[209] At the moment of departure, an old man

[206] Abdelfattah Kilito, *al-Maqamat: al-Sard wa-l-ansaq al-thaqafiyyah* (Paris: Dar Sindibad, 1983), 11.
[207] According to "Djughrāfiyā" in the *Encyclopedia of Islam*, medieval Arabic geographical literature can be classified into two main categories. On the one hand there is the *Iraki* School which includes the writings of Ibn Khurradadhibbih, al-Yaʿqubi, and al-Masʿudi. Their works were written with the purpose of providing general information about the world as a whole. On the other hand, the Balkhi School which included the works of al-Istakhri, al-Muqaddasi and Ibn Hawqal, and which "gave positive Islamic coloring to Arab geography" and "restricted itself mainly to Islamic lands" by assigning "to Arabia the central place in the world." S. Maqbul Ahmad and Taeschner, F. "Djughrāfiyā", in: *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition.* Ed: P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, W.P. Heinrichs. Consulted online on 18 July 2016 http://dx.doi.org.proxy.library.cornell.edu/10.1163/1573- 3912_islam_COM_0194.
[208] Synopsis of this maqama is appropriated from Thomas Chenery's translation of al-Hariri's maqamas. al-Hariri, *The Assemblies,* 93-101.
[209] It is remarkable that in the Arabic text, there is no indication that the Persian Gulf is the waterscape that Harith crossed on his way to Oman; which means that the "Persian Gulf" is probably Chenery's

begs to be taken on board. Soliciting the passengers' kindness and hospitality, he offers, in return, a promise of safe passage by means of a magic spell in his possession against all dangers of the sea. Hearing the passenger's incantations, Harith recognizes the stranger to be his old friend, Abu Zayd. After relative calm at sea, the ship is suddenly overtaken by a violent storm, which forces the crew and the travelers to seek refuge in the port of an unknown island. On the island, they both come to a magnificent mansion, whose servants are grieving because the lady of the house is laboring in a difficult child-birth and here life therefore is endangered. Abu Zayd assures the servants that he can help, and to the effect he writes some poetic verses on a piece of meerschaum in which he warns the child of the evils of existence and the troubles of life awaiting it in the world. With delightful humor, these incantations work against themselves. Eventually, they act as an irresistible inducement for the child to be born and to struggle into the light of day. As the incantation works well, the lord of the mansion is overjoyed and overwhelms Abu Zayd with costly tokens of gratitude and attaches him to his household, with unlimited control over his wealth. Although Harith tries to persuade Abu Zayd to continue with him on the voyage, Abu Zayd refuses, suggesting in another piece of his poetry the notion that home is where one finds no hunger. At that point, Harith yields, and separates from Abu Zayd, albeit reluctantly. In the words of Thomas Chenery,

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own surmise. I read this as demonstrative of the translator's interest in making the text speak the terms of geographic verisimilitude. While elsewhere al-Hariri does mention waterscapes and even some of his maqamas are named after well-known rivers, i.e. the "Maqama of the Euphrates," in the "Maqama of Oman," it seems that his choice to keep the sea travelled in the story unnamed is deliberate. I offer a possible explanation to his authorial choice below.

> Harith [at the end] gives vent to his grief and disappointment in a wish, the savagery of which may playfully be converted into the essence of the milk of human kindness by the indulgent reader, who remembers the drift of Abu Zayd's magical verses, and the words of the Greek poet: 'best for man not to be born, second best, to die as soon as he can.[210]

How does al-Hariri use the insular form in this maqama? And what forms of relationship does he foreground between land and island, island and sea? What do we glean from Abu Zayd's adventure on the island; from images of difficult child-birth; and from the existential self-lamentation conveyed in the verses he uses to warn the child of coming to the world? While this maqama is titled the "Maqama of Oman," it is on the unnamed island that the events of the narrative take place. However, "Oman" functions as a locality to which the unmarked, unnamed, and unidentifiable island is literarily annexed and becomes the site for which most exegetical attempts by commentators are made. In particular, at the outset, Harith tells us that "once when [he] was weary of desert-travel, and some matter of importance cropped up for [him] at Ṣuḥār, [he] inclined to cross the billowy sea and to choose the swift-sailing ship."[211] Thus, the adventure takes place on an island *which happens* to be on the narrator's way to his destination, Suhar, "Oman's casaba by its mountain," and a coastal city on the gulf of Oman. A well-known authority in his commentary on al-Hariri's maqamas, 13th century al-Sharishi turns towards Oman and Suhar, defining the latter as "Oman's

[210] al-Hariri, *Assemblies*, 94.
[211] al-Hariri, *Assemblies*, 94.

souk, a large city on the seacoast." Identifying Suhar's merits by virtue of its existence in Oman, al-Sharishi draws on the old saying that "he who finds hardships in earning his bread must head to Oman."[212] And although the island *is* the locale where the events unfold, al-Sharishi does not gloss over its possible location, nor does he offer a speculation regarding its existence in any form.

Unnamed, unlocatable, and hence perhaps devoid of memory, al-Hariri's island easily translates into a metaphysical abstraction. Harith tells his listeners that while on the island, he and Abu Zayd proceeded to "scout within, and seek shade [. . .] until [they] came upon a lofty castle, with an iron gate, and a troupe of slaves in front."[213] After being asked about the source of their grief, one of the slaves answers that "the lord of this castle [. . .] the Shah of this territory [. . .] is not free from grief on account of his being childless. He ceased not paying honor to the seed-fields and selecting from partners of his couch the most exquisite, until he was hailed with the happy tidings of the pregnancy of a noble lady."[214] In a sense, the island that both travelers chance upon is not only biologically barren: the desperation for a child on the part of the king as well as his entourage is tantamount to desperation for memory that endows the island with a sense of persistence though time. Unlike other named parts of the world of Islam whose merits are invoked in forms of poetic verses or old sayings in al-Hariri's volume, this island lacks a capacity for *place-ness,*[215] making it impossible to

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[212] Sharishi, *Sharḥ Maqamat al-Ḥariri* (Cairo: al-Muʾassasa al-ʿArabiya al-haditha lil-tabʿ wa-l-nashr wa-al-tawziʿ, 1970), 291.
[213]al-Hariri, *Assemblies*, 97.
[214] al-Hariri, *Assemblies*, 98.
[215] For more on placeness, see "Introduction" in Simone Pinet, *Archipelagoes: Insular Fictions from Chivalric Romance to the Novel* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011).

historicize.

Supporting evidence can be further drawn from one of the most influential exegeses of al-Hariri's maqamas: the art of 13th century al-Wasiti, in which he represented his own readings of the collection in pictorial form. Kilito observes that al-Wasiti's reading of this particular maqama is unique because it is the only reading in which al-Wasiti devoted four miniatures instead of two. In one of the drawings (see Fig.1), which Kilito thinks is the most complex of the four, at the top there is the Shah of the island; to the left, we see Abu Zayd writing his amulet for the child to-be-born; and on the right, we see Harith holding an astrolabe. The meaning of al-Wasiti's interpretive choice in this miniature becomes clear as we consider how it is an anomaly in the mass corpus of his interpretive art. Remarkably, al-Wasiti is known for "tying the worldly and other-worldly realms of existence together [and] in his drawings there is emphasis on heavenly bodies such as stars and planets due to their significance in determining prayer times."[216] In a sense, al-Wasiti's use of an astrolabe in this drawing, combined with the lack of reference to any celestial bodies, may be read as an expression of a desire for an absent temporal cognizance. Here, the timeless condition of the island is enhanced is, a condition which is conjoined with the island's unidentifiable location. If Bakhtin's famous notion of "chronotope" in narrative indicates that "the representation of space always entails the representation of time and that time and space are intrinsically connected,"[217] both *chronos* and *topos*

[216] Badar al-Mamari, "Artistic and Social Visions in the Miniatures of Omani Maqama by al-Wasiti," *Jordanian Journal of Arts* 9, no. 1 (2016), 20.
[217] Margret Cohen, "The Chronotopes of the Sea," in *The Novel,* ed Franco Moretti (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 647.

collapse in this maqama, which leaves its denizens searching for alternative *latitudinal* and *longitudinal* signs in a way that may endow their experience with cardinal existence. In this maqama, it is in the poetic realm of language that narrator invents his chronograph:

> Thereupon Abu Zayd said to [the servant]: "Be still, O such a one, and of good cheer, and receive news of joy and proclaim them, for I possess a spell for childbirth, the fame of which is spread abroad amongst mankind." Forthwith the slaves hastened to their master, announcing each other the release from their calamity, when *it took no longer than to say "nay,"* that one sallied out who summoned us to him and as soon as we had entered unto him, and were standing in his presence, he said to Abu Zayd, "For sooth thy reward will prosper thee if thy say is true and thy presage fails not."[218]

Hence, since we are dealing with an island that is metaphysically outside modalities of space and time, we may wonder how the island of the "Maqama of Oman" comes into existence?

We have already noted that both the narrator and the trickster *chance* upon the island while on their way to Suhar in Oman, a place which in medieval imagination is, tellingly, the birthplace of Sinbad the Sailor. Therefore, to probe this question, it is perhaps useful to refer to one of the most famous stories from the *Seven Voyages of Sinbad.* On his first voyage, Sinbad and his crew land on a marvelous island to rest, but as soon as they begin to exercise their normal lives, the island shakes and starts

[218] al-Hariri, *Assemblies*, 98-99.

moving. They discover that that which they thought was an island was in fact nothing other that a fish which had for a long time anchored in the sand to the extent that trees now grew on top of its massive body. When the travelers lit a fire on its back, the island/fish moved. This incident confounded many literary critics, most famous among whom is Kilito, who viewed the disjuncture between perception and empirical reality as "linguistic" symptom of experiencing radical forms of alterity and difference.[219] This view derives forceful evidence from what happens next. When Sinbad is tossed in the sea, he barely survives, and would not have done so had he not chanced upon a wooden *qaṣʿah* (large bowl) that he uses as a boat to float shoreward.[220] In a sense, the first voyage dramatizes a world where not only are entities mistaken for what they are, it is also a world where different entities, with otherwise fixed functions in the empirical world, assume new ones.

While this mode of reading helps us reconstruct a potential medieval imaginary with regard to notions of difference and alterity, frontier-crossing and translation, it nevertheless neglects to factor in the geopoetic implications inherent in the alternating emergence and disappearance of the insular form from and into the sea. Here, I draw on Bill Ashcroft's take on Deleuze's critique of islands. "Islands force us," he writes, "to face the disturbing *contingency* of human habitation. According to Deleuze, 'Humans cannot live, nor live in security, unless they assume that the active struggle between earth and water is over, or at least contained' [. . .] the essence of the deserted

[219] Kilito, *al-Maqamat*, 1983.
[220] *Alf Laylah wa-laylah*, ed. Rushdi Ṣaliḥ and Husayn Bikar, 2: 820-25.

island is imaginary and not actual, mythological and not geographical."[221] In the Sinbad account, we are given an example of a *contingent* islandic event. It not only animates the struggle between land and water; it also challenges the intuitive definition of the island as a piece of land surrounded by seawaters. The collapse of the insular condition reverts the island to the realm of the water[222]—rather than to that of land. Moreover, it renders its initial existence not as an inevitable event, but as one conditioned by forces that cannot easily be predicted by rational laws of cause and effect.

Such insular geopoetics find resonance in the "Maqama of Oman." On the one hand, the storm which hits the ship of the travelers brings to life the conflict between sea and the (ship's) dry world. On the other, the accidental arrival at the unknown island brings to mind a conceptual contingency that seems to challenge essentializing views of the insular form. Moreover, and most important for my analysis of the maqama, the unsettling disjuncture between historical forces of cause and effect is set forth in a rather comical way. In this event, what seems to be a possibility for natural birth is trumped by Abu Zayd's interjections, which seems to suggest that the child's birth is rather the result of external (causative) infringement. Yet, even Abu Zayd's intervention is made banal when the verses he uses as an amulet exhorts the child to remain in the womb, rather than arrive. In these verses, he warns the child of the evils

[221] Bill Ashcroft, "Archipelago of Dreams: Utopianism in Caribbean Literature," *Textual Practice* 30, no.1 (2016): 89-112; 91.
[222] Interestingly, Phillip Steinberg studies how islands were represented (somewhat arbitrarily) on portolan charts between the thirteenth through the seventeenth centuries and makes revealing remarks on how this mode of representation is reminiscent of how islands were represented on medieval mappaemundi, in which "islands were viewed as solid but conceptually *mobile* [my emphasis] elements that were *part* [original emphasis] of the ocean-sea rather than distinct and permanently located swathes of land space that happened to be surrounded by ocean."259

of existence and the troubles of life awaiting it in the world: "Thereupon, it took no longer than the taste of drinking, or the interval that the milker makes in drawing the milk, when the body of the child slipped out, through the specific quality of the meerschaum and the might of the One, the Eternal."[223] Hence, presented rather as "gratuitous" event, as a result of an obstinate conflict between the elemental life forces of water (the womb) and land, man's birth in this maqama echoes the conflicted birth of Abu Zayd himself. The uncanny reflection invites us to think of the event as one in which Abu Zayd himself is born, or rather as an event *self-birthing*. In effect, the "Maqama of Oman" is unique among other maqamas particularly because of its self-reflexive drive. For not only does it dramatize the circular event of self-conception; in its preoccupation of islands, it singularly stands out, in isolation, from other maqamas in the collection. In other words, this maqama *is* the very world it *describes.*

From Fénelon to al-Tahtawi and from *Télémaque* to *Tilimak*: Equivalence, Fiction, and the Arabic Novel

Although originally written as an epic novel, Francois Fénelon's 1699 *Les Aventures de Télémaque,* reminded al-Tahtawi of al-Hariri's maqamas. For many scholars of Arabic literature, the work's significance derives mainly from the role it played in the development of modern Arabic literature during the *Nahda*. More particularly, viewed somewhat merely as an "afterlife" to Fenelon's "epic novel," the work was subsumed within the generic quality of its original. *Tilimak* was deemed a harbinger of the

[223] al-Hariri, *Assemblies*, 100.

Arabic novel. In their search for "beginnings" and "firsts," a number of Arabic literary histories identify al-Tahtawi 's work as the "first European novel Arabs read in Arabic translation during the nineteenth century [. . .] thus *Tilimak* introduced Arabs to new art coming from Europe, i.e. modern narrative art form [*fann al-qiṣṣa al-ḥadīth*]."[224] al-Tahtawi 's contribution came from his introduction of the genre to readers of Arabic. While potentially helpful in organizing a history of Arabic literature during a period of intensive contact with Europe, this view bypasses the contingency of the translational event, by reading it through the lenses of what came after as the novel increasingly became the normative medium of fictional expression in the twentieth century. Moreover, such a reading, in a sense, ignores al-Tahtawi 's stylistic choices, especially those that bring the maqama to the center of discussion.

Even while scholars were somewhat attentive to the question of "host" genre in the translation, other problems emerged. According to a number of scholars who wrote on *Tilīmāk* with the maqama in their view, the French "epic novel" inspired in al-Tahtawi to search for "equivalent" narrative forms within the Arabic literary tradition. Such readings draw evidence from al-Tahtawi 's own comments in his introduction to the Arabic translation. "Formally," writes Shaden Tageldin, "al-Tahtawi argues the *maqālāt* of Fenelon's text—by which he means the episodic narratives that compose the whole—resemble the celebrated maqamas (or largely rhymed-prose episodic narrative fictions) of al-Hariri, the eleventh-century virtuoso of Basra."[225] Tageldin offers no comment on the maqama beyond that. In fact, attentive to what she refers to

[224] Muhammad Hasan. *Athar al-maqamah fi nashʾat al-qissah al-misriyya al-haditha* (Cairo: al-Hayʾa al-Misriyya al-ʿammah li-l-Kitab, 1974), 79.
[225] Tageldin, "Fénelon's Gods, al-Ṭahṭāwī's Jinn," 16.

as a "crisis of comparison and [of] mediating a literary epistemic sea of change in modern Arabic fiction," Tageldin examines how analogies and motivated al-Tahtawi 's translational choice: "By arguing that the ancient Greek gods [of *Télémaque*] are analogous to Muslim *jinn* – spirits of smokeless fire understood to be real – al-Tahtawi rewrites as Islamized 'truth' what Muslims had long dismissed as pagan 'fiction.'"[226] For her, "al-Tahtawi 's rehabilitation of the mythological as the supernatural/historical real, of the idolatrous as possessed of a capacity to speak sacred as well as secular truths, reflects a parallel process of modern fiction-making in the Arabic speaking world."[227] By drawing attention to continuities embedded in creative processes of literary production, Tageldin asks her most revealing question in the concluding parts of her study: "with al-Tahtawi 's translation of Fénelon's *Télémaque*, does Arabic prose fiction enter what Georg Lukács would call the world of the novel?"[228] By invoking Lukacs's *Theory of the Novel*, Tageldin's study is certainly fixated on what forms Arabic literature *would* assume subsequently and on categories of "fiction" epitomizing the novel as the genre to dominate Arabic literary production eventually. Meanwhile, the question of how the maqama particularly connects to *Télémaque* remains unanswered.

Along the same lines of thinking, Sabri Hafez considers the publication of the book as the arrival of the "first signs of fictional literature." Sensitive to both asymmetry between the French original and the Arabic translation as well as to the category "equivalence" between Arabic and French literary systems, Hafez observes that

[226] Tageldin, "Fénelon's Gods, al-Ṭahṭāwī's Jinn," 5.
[227] Tageldin, "Fénelon's Gods, al-Ṭahṭāwī's Jinn," 5.
[228] Tageldin, "Fénelon's Gods, al-Ṭahṭāwī's Jinn," 14.

Télémaque was published at a time when

> translation works were nearer to adaptations than accurate literary translations [produced by] putting the foreign literary work into the nearest traditional Arabic form [. . .] in order to adapt the translated text to the readers' horizon of expectations [. . .] thus relating the fictional elements and techniques inherent in European literature to the fictional techniques and the familiar narrative strategies of *maqāmāt* (maqamas), *bābāt*, traditional stories and anecdotes.[229]

Hence, it is the "fictional technique" as well as "reader expectations" that provide an anchor hooking *Télémaque* to the maqama. This comparatist commonplace continues its presence even for ʿAbd al-Kaiar al-Sharqawi in 2016. In a lengthy discussion of the book, al-Sharqawi also views the "imaginative" as a binding link between Fénelon's work and the maqama. For al-Sharqawi, al-Tahtawi 's translation is a process of mediating referentiality, taking place between corresponding conceptualizations of "fiction" across various literary traditions:

> Fénelon's novel is, on the one hand, a continuation and a complication of the story of Ulysses, Telemachus's father, as well as of Greek mythologies and historical accounts associated with that story. In other words, Fénelon derived the substance of his narrative from this Greek tradition. On the other hand, he

[229] Sabri Hafez, *The Genesis of Arabic Narrative Discourse: A Study in the Sociology of Modern Arabic Literature* (London: Saqi Books, 1993), 58; 87.

presented it as an invented fictional account; which makes the work comparable to the maqamas of al-Hariri. For al-Tahtawi, then, the maqama genre *refers the translator to* [*yuḥīl al-mutarjim ilā*] fictional narrative forms. It is the closest of narrative forms to the novel as a genre.[230]

Les Aventures de Télémaque and the Geopoetics of Telemachus' Travels

François Fénelon (1651–1715), was a French Roman Catholic archbishop, theologian, poet and writer. He is best remembered for his epic novel, *Les Aventures de Télémaque.* Telemachus, the son of Ulysses is accompanied by his faithful tutor Mentor (an embodiment of Minerva, goddess of wisdom), and sail to many lands in search of his father, Ulysses. Throughout the eventful journey, Mentor teaches Telemachus that he must use reason and prudence to govern his passions and that he must possess virtues such as honesty, moderation, and benevolence. Fénelon's message in this work had a tremendous appeal in England as well as throughout Europe. In England alone, "it was translated more than a dozen times during the eighteenth century and was adapted in poems, an opera, and a masque, while certain episodes were elaborated for political and social purposes."[231] As a prose epic, the book was regarded as a great successor to the great epics and praised for both its

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[230] Abd al-Kabir al-Sharqawi, *Nahdat al-tarjama al-ʿarabiyya* (Casablanca: Dar tubqal li-l-nashr, 2016), 85.
"فرواية فنيليون هي، من جهة، تكلمة و تفريع لقصة أوديسيوس والد تليماك، و لقصص التاريخ و الميثولوجيا اليونانيين المرتبطين بها، أي أن فينيلون
قد استمد مادته السردية من هذا الرصيد، لكنه من جهة أخرى، صاغها سردا تخييليا مبتدعا مخترعا، و يقارن هذا العمل بعمل الحريري في وضعه للمقامات. نوع المقامات إذن يحيل عند رفاعة على مجال السرد التخييلي، و يرى أنها أقرب النصوص العربية إلى جنس الرواية."

[231] Leslie Chilton, "Foreword" in *The Adventures of Telemachus, the Son of Ulysses.* trans. Tobias Smollett (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1997), xx.

beauty and morality.

The story is both a derivative of and a sequel to Homer's Odyssey. In the Greek epic, Telemachus sets out on a search for his father who had been lost at sea for twenty years. The first four books of the Odyssey narrate the son's search for his father, until Telemachus reaches Sparta—after which he disappears from the narrative to reappear again only in Book Fifteen, arriving in Ithaca. With father and son reunion, Telemachus and Ulysses work out to rid their country of Penelope's (Telemachus's mother's) suitors. Telemachus's prolonged absence from Homer's epic, apparently, constitutes a narrative gap that Fénelon fills up in Télémaque. The book came with a host of Greek and Roman influences, for not only did Fénelon write in the shadow of Homer, he was in fact also inspired by Virgil's Aeneid, as well as by Sophoclean tragedies (Philoctetes and The Trachiniae). Yet, while drawing on Greek and Roman heritages, *Télémaque* had its own uniqueness. Its "pure elegant prose" epitomized the tastes and views of its own context, reflecting the literary and artistic sensibilities of Louis XIV's France.

In terms of reception, the work went from extreme popularity and critical admiration in the eighteenth century to a state of near neglect in the twentieth. Since the book at the height of its popularity was "translated into nearly every major European language," many scholars tended to focus on how the it was received across and beyond the Continent and rendered into its various linguistic destinations, thereby highlighting the significance of Fénelon for different national literatures. Leslie Chilton notes that in England alone the book was translated some twelve times (into both prose and poetry) during the eighteenth century and was further adapted into an

array of related works. But it was in the "nineteenth century," she notes, that "the work's impact began to wane" as symptomized by "rollicking 1834 pantomime adaptation that skewed its characters and pretensions." By the twentieth century, Chilton adds, "in English language studies, Telemachus was a historical and literary artifact of little interest."[232]

Within reception studies focusing on the work's translation into Arabic, two major views were dominant. The first is exemplified by the studies of Tageldin and ʿAbd al-Kabir al-Sharqawi. Both scholars tackle al-Tahtawi 's reading of the Greek epic with regard to the question of genre (a question which this study partially tries to address). Second, these studies also draw biographical parallels between al-Tahtawi 's history and that of Fénelon's. Fénelon's banishment from the court of Louis XIV resonates with al-Tahtawi 's since he too was exiled from Egypt to the Sudan during the time of Abbas I. As Abbas I took power in Egypt, he decreed the closure of the school of languages, the brainchild of al-Tahtawi. The school was closed in 1850 and al-Tahtawi was sent to an imperial outpost in Khartoum in the Sudan to open a language school there. al-Tahtawi considered this commission to be a form of banishment, an exile "brought about through the machinations of a high-ranking jealous rival."[233] It was during his exile in the Sudan that al-Tahtawi translated F*é*nelon's work. In the extended foreword to the translation, al-Tahtawi relays a sense of bitterness. As

[232] Leslie Chilton, "Two singularly moral works: Fénelon's the adventure of Telemachus and Smollett's the Expedition of Humphry Clinker," in *Beyond Sense and Sensibility: Moral Formation and the Literary Imagination from Johnson to Wordsworth*, ed. Peggy Thompson (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2015), 80.
[233] Powell, Eve T. *A Different Shade of Colonialism: Egypt, Great Britain, and the Mastery of the Sudan*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003, 419.

Shaden Tageldin puts it, that sense of bitterness was felt by a man who once enjoyed the favor of the quasi-independent viceroy of Egypt. With its personal tenor and emotional tone, the foreword to the Arabic translation complicates what would otherwise be viewed solely as an "objective" or a "neutral" translation. According to al-Sharqawi, the translation of Fénelon's work

> cannot be detached in abstract form from the life of its translator or from his personal and historical experience. Rather, the translation is a double enunciation. It can be read as part of al-Tahtawi 's political and intellectual performance while he suffered the unpleasant climate of Khartoum. Such a view can even be stretched to shape how we think of al-Tahtawi 's entire translated oeuvre, from which personal motives emanate as part of his own lifetime experiences, including his reformative, political, intellectual, and pedagogical stances. In other words, al-Tahtawi was not a neutral, or an unmarked mediator of meaning among languages. Rather, for him translation was an act which was grounded in the very history of his own life.[234]

A great number of scholarly contributions have also examined the work's "influence on the development and the spread of Enlightenment."[235] Reflecting on the present state of scholarship on Fénelon and the Enlightenment, editors Christoph Schmitt-Maab, Stefanie Stockhorst, and Doohwan Ahn write:

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[234] al-Sharqawi, *Nahdat al-tarjama al-ʿarabiyya*, 76.
[235] Brun J Le, Christoph Schmitt-Maass, Stefanie Stockhorst, and Doohwan Ahn, *Fénelon in the Enlightenment: Traditions, Adaptations, and Variations* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2014), 13

> From the 1970 onwards, the number of studies on Fénelon and the Enlightenment has increased. [. . .] the *Encyclopedia of the Enlightenment* [. . .] names Fénelon as "one of the great transitional, creative figures who helped French intellectuals move from 17th century into the century of 'les lumières.' The historical and philological studies in the last four decades have reevaluated the values of the era of the Enlightenment, which had been primarily considered 'rationalistic,' 'utilitarian' and 'mechanistic.' In the context of reevaluating the Enlightenment, Fénelon was 'discovered' as a 'precursor of the Enlightenment' or as a 'post-Enlightenment figure even before the Enlightenment had dawned. [. . .] four aspects are important for developing a clearer conception of Fénelon's significance for the Enlightenment, particularly his reception 'abroad:' the quarrel about quietism, the limitation of the power of absolute monarchy, the role of female education, and the simplicity in style.[236]

While reception studies are particularly useful in teasing out narratives of "influence" and the intellectual travel of *Télémaque* across the Continent and even beyond, they overlook the geopoetic register of the work itself. In fact, many of the work's earlier editions and translations feature a map of the Mediterranean with networks of dotted lines that trace Telemachus' and Mentor's itineraries at sea. We learn from Leslie Chilton that the work had a cultural agency extending beyond its literary, intellectual, and moral educational values: "Télémaque served a number of purposes; many

[236] Le, Schmitt-Maass, Stockhorst, and Ahn, *Fénelon in the Enlightenment*, 16.

editions featured dictionaries of place names and characters; another common feature was an 'interlinear' presentation—the original French on one page, and the English on the other to assist the reader in his or her French studies. Many featured maps of the Mediterranean, tracing Mentor and Telemachus's journey."[237] Evidently, the mythological world of the book does more than simply invoke a mythical cosmos; it speaks in concrete geographical terms:

> Though Télémaque takes place in a mythological world, Fénelon cites actual cities, rivers, regions, and peoples in and around the Mediterranean. Allusions also occur to various cities, regions, mountains, and rivers of the classical and mythological world visited by Telemachus and Mentor. It is little wonder, then, that many editions and translations of the work, in England and on the Continent, were published with maps, and the text itself was used to teach children geography of the ancient world.[238]

The spatial feature of the book is subtly highlighted by Aruz Meral in her study of the "Ottoman Reception of Fénelon's Télémaque." Meral observes that the book was read with geographical interest well into the nineteenth century. She notes that in Semseddin Sami's dictionary of history and geography, Qamusu 'l-A'lam (Dictionary of Notables), there are two separate articles, one on 'Fénelon' and one on

[237] Chilton, *The Adventures of Telemachus, the Son of Ulysses,* 83
[238] Chilton, *The Adventures of Telemachus, the Son of Ulysses,* 347.

'Télémaque.'[239]

Significantly, if the work, whether at the initial stage of its publication or later as a map of the Mediterranean was featured in it, spoke to its audience in spatial terms, then it was indeed speaking the language of its age. In "Monarchs, Ministers, and Maps in France before the Accession of Louis XIV," David Buisseret provides a typology of an extensive mapmaking culture prior to and through Louis XIV's start of his personal government in 1661. When Louis XIV came to the throne, he was able to benefit from a long period of map use by previous French monarchs and their ministers:

> Maps first came to be used for military ventures in the early sixteenth century. Henry II had a more extensive view of their possibilities, as did his widow Catherine de Medici, and under Henry IV the country came to be more or less systematically mapped for the first time. With Cardinal Richelieu we come to a period of consolidation, when no new principles were put forward, but old ones were used to fill in the gaps in the system. An excellent base was therefore laid for Louis XIV, under who France came to be very thoroughly mapped, eventually by the typographical survey that would be initiated by the first of the Cassinis.[240]

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[239] Aruz Meral, "Ottoman Reception of *Fénelon's Télémaque,*" in *Fénelon in the Enlightenment: Traditions, Adaptations, and Variations* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2014), 224.
[240] David Buisseret, *Monarchs, Ministers, and Maps: The Emergence of Cartography as a Tool of Government in Early Modern Europe* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 120-1.

Focusing on the personal reign of Louis XIV's, a period marked by an extensive practice of mapmaking, Christine Marie Petto examines the "evolving nature of the relationship between government and geography and the state interests and the map trade over the [early modern] period 1666-1789—defined by the rise of Paris as the commercial map center of Europe to the Revolution."[241] With state interest and mapmaking practices being aligned, a link between science (geography), and government (power) became more profound. Maps were produced for military planning, commerce, and governmental administration. It was a period of France' history during which the "government or state was centralized around the powerful image of the king." Alongside the cartographic practices, "all media contributed to the 'rhetoric of the image' and helped to fabricate the cult of the Sun King [. . .] in literature, painting, sculpture, architecture, and music."[242] At the time, map and atlas makers would, under the patronage of Louis XIV conceive of themselves as "messengers or mere presenters of knowledge brought to fruition by the grandeur of their patrons [. . .] the king [the dedicatee was made] the author of the work he received."[243] In other words, mapmakers were simply "depicting the scenes of Louis's glorious military victories, of his support for colonial merchant activity, or for his peaceful and orderly kingdom. They merely portrayed what Louis had created."[244] Portraying what Louis had created, cartographers were sustaining an "equation [made] between, on the one hand, the domain under the control of the sovereign (i.e. the state)

[241] Christine M Petto, *When France Was King of Cartography: The Patronage and Production of Maps in Early Modern France* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2007), 2.
[242] Petto, *When France Was King of Cartography*, 2a.
[243] Petto, *When France Was King of Cartography*, 23.
[244] Petto, *When France Was King of Cartography*, 23.

and a bounded unit of land (i.e. territory)," an equation that initially formed in sixteenth century.[245] Such a view, observes Phillip Steinberg, culminating ultimately in what we know as "the modern, Westphalian ideal of the state as territorially bounded, unambiguously governed by a sole authority and culturally homogenous," is profoundly insular. It joins the legal norm of the sovereign territorial state, with the modern ideal of the unified and isolated island.[246] With the "territorial states [being] conceived of as the building blocks of modern world society" in this mode of cartographic representation, historically preceding rationale of mapping movement on sea routes, epitomized by portolan charts, receded into the background.[247]

The notion that Fénelon's project needs to be read in the context of the rise of (a specific) French national consciousness, centered around burgeoning conceptualizations of French (territorial) sovereignty is well established. Andrew Michael Ramsay's laudatory "Discours sur la poésie épique," which came to be a common preface to the work as well as to many translated editions, epitomizes contemporary reception of the work. It reads Télémaque as a post-renaissance French national epic, since "the author of Telemachus has shown by this poem, that the French Nation, is capable of all the delicacy of the Greeks, and of all the great sentiments of the Romans [for] the elogium of the author is that of his nation."[248] By re-inscribing a bygone Greek mythic time in the delicateness of the French language, Télémaque presented the French Nation as an inheritor to the grandeur of the classical

[245] Steinberg, "Insularity, Sovereignty and Statehood," 255
[246] Steinberg, "Insularity, Sovereignty and Statehood," 255.
[247] Steinberg, "Insularity, Sovereignty and Statehood," 262.
[248] Andrew Michael Ramsay, "Discours sur la poésie épique" in *The Adventures of Telemachus, the Son of Ulysses*, Fénelon, François (London: Garland, 1979), Ixi.

world. With its claim for universal "reason and thought," the poem was one "for all Nations, for all ages," the work moved "foreigners [. . .] equally, [and] the translations that have been made of into languages less delicate than French, do not affect the original beauties." [249] Hence, while the work proclaims the mantle of universal language as it purports to speak the idioms of reason and timeless aesthetics, it gestures towards a contemporary view of a particular French national being that is associated with recognizable territorial swathe and that stands sovereign.

Fénelon's literary initiative does need to be positioned within a time period that witnessed cartographic standardization of territories enclosed within recognizable frontier lines, a standardization that organized political bodies visually into similar types, while emphasizing their defining uniqueness. Nevertheless, I take that view forward, by going backward, as it were. I argue that the map featured in the work invites us to also read the work through historically preceding cartographic practices that took the seascape as the default space of cartographic representation. In other words, Télémaque needs to be read in relation to earlier practices which represented islands on portolan charts, a specific genre of maps that pre-dated the contemporary discourse of sovereign state territoriality.[250]

Historically, portolan charts began to be produced in the late thirteenth century.[251] They mainly consisted of lists of directional headings and distances between communities along the coasts that were frequented by the Mediterranean sailors. A distinctive characteristic of a portolan chart is its use of a network of imaginary rhumb

[249] Ramsay, "Discours,", Iii
[250] Steinberg, "Insularity, Sovereignty and Statehood," 256.
[251] For a detailed study of this genre, see Steinberg, "Insularity, Sovereignty and Statehood."

lines that cross over the ocean space. So if one wished to travel from a point on one shore to a point on the opposite shore, a sailor could simply find the rhumb line that paralleled the chosen course as necessary as one detected the ship's heading being influenced by winds or currents. While the need for rhumb lines waned eventually as seascapes became less crucial in cartographic representation, Steinberg observes that some world maps, well into the mid-eighteenth century continued to have rhumb lines for their (aesthetic) significance as a testimony to the power of symbolic association between early European oceanic exploration, accumulation of scientific knowledge, and the continuing process of European expansion.[252] Fundamentally, portolan charts represent the world mainly as one of marine routes and terrestrial destinations; for that reason, those charts had no orientation. In a highly interactive mode of use, "one simply turns the chart around, until it is facing in the same direction that one's ship is heading, and then follows the chart until one reaches one's destination."[253] Both chart and the world represented in it become mutual extensions of one another. As Steinberg puts it: "the chart becomes an extension of the ocean one is sailing on; [and] one navigates the chart as one navigates across the sea."[254]

Although those charts represented the world mainly as a seascape interspersed by land chunks, islands especially received remarkable representation on them. While characterized "neither by routes nor by destinations," islands are drawn as "metaphysical abstractions, with their bays stylized, peninsulas portrayed as perfectly

[252] Steinberg, "Insularity, Sovereignty and Statehood," 257.
[253] Steinberg, "Insularity, Sovereignty and Statehood," 257.
[254] Steinberg, "Insularity, Sovereignty and Statehood," 257.

shaped outcrops."[255] Recognizably dramatized on portolan charts, islands are typically made too large in a way which defies scale and are drawn as bounded political territories in which a sovereign has control over a unified space or territory, a visual representation which foreshadowed subsequent grammar of territorial state representations on world maps.[256]

So in what way(s) does the map (see Fig.2)[257] in Télémaque modify its user's perspective towards the sea-scape as if in a portolan chart? And how does it invite the moment of reading en arrière to transpose the user's gaze into a preceding ocean-oriented mode of cartographic representation? A quick look at some translations, as well as original French texts reveals that the map included in the work is uniform in all editions. The only features that change across different translations are the language in which names of places, map title (A Map of the Travels of Telemachus), as well map legend are written. The map depicts a part of the Mediterranean Sea, covering the area extending from the Italian peninsula on the northern coast of the sea all the way to the eastern coast of the basin in the Levant, and in the same direction from the shores of present day Libya on the southern coast, hence projecting a part of north Africa. Interestingly, the garish lines, which function as contours to the basin of the sea (including the Aegean and the Adriatic) and the extensive archipelago including relatively large islandic units (Cypress, Crete, Peloponnese, and Sicily), obscure rather than illuminate the divide of land and sea. The visual effect generates a circular

[255] Steinberg, "Insularity, Sovereignty and Statehood," 258.
[256] Steinberg, "Insularity, Sovereignty and Statehood," 258.
[257] I have examined the map from the Huntington Library 18th century collection, San Marino, California

reading that foregrounds contingency: one is invited to ask whether the space presented is a swathe of sea-scape interrupted by masses of land units or is it rather masses of land units from which sea waters have retracted. In a sense, the (Mediterranean) Sea on this map conjures an impression of being its own other, i.e. land. Hence, as the land/sea distinction collapses, we are left with a conglomeration of bounded, circular (visually sovereign) and repetitive forms of enclosure highlighted by shaded lines that challenge the normative view of the divide at the very moment they endorse it.

In the midst of the ambiguity that results from such a mode of representation, and what seems to be an estranging take on the divide between land and sea, what stands out in this map is the dotted line that is intended to guide the reader/viewer through the adventures of Telemachus. This line serves as a reminder of the adventurous nature of the narrative. It suggests that what is being depicted here is, as Margret Cohen puts it, "action rather than psychology." Combined with the book's episodic organization, the dotted line "measures plausibility by performance rather than mimesis."[258] And while the discursive dialogic events of the story take place mainly on the islands scattered throughout the Mediterranean, this line foregrounds a centrifugal movement outward to the edges of the known world—which makes Télémaque stand in contrast with narratives that exhibit a "centripetal pull inward toward the metropolis and closure."[259] And rather than civic or liberal freedoms usually experienced by land trotters, the ruling freedom here is an "amoral" type of sea freedom.[260]

[258] Margret Cohen, *The Novel and the Sea* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010) 11
[259] Cohen, *The Novel and the Sea*, 11.
[260] Cohen, *The Novel and the Sea*, 11.

Yet, what seems to be a purely aesthetic motivation in this map is far from innocent. Indeed, while the map sets the sea as an essential topos for conceptualizing Telemachus's adventures, it politically manipulates the ways in which the text is read—and rather cunningly too. As both Phillip and Juliana Muehrcke observe in "Maps in Literature," maps are attractive to writers because written communication has its own limitations. "Written language is linear. It has a beginning and an end and between the two flows predictably, according to the rules of grammar [. . .] Maps, on the other hand, involve far less transcription from reality and less formatting than idioms do, primarily because the position of maps on the gradient between reality and abstraction is closer to reality."[261] In Télémaque, while the map obviously breaks the linearity of the elaborate narrative by enabling a comprehensive "visual" capture of the adventure's spatial scope, it uniquely activates what Antonis Balasopoulos refers to as the "synoptic gaze" of islands, the type of gaze that captures while it simultaneously elides the relatively small sizes of islands, through which islands appear on the map not merely as ideal states but as 'ideal colonies,' as bite-size parcels of territory, which, in effect can stir fantasies of symbolic possession. [262] In other words, the way in which these islands are represented on the map flirts with "colonial desire," a desire that "quite literally," in the words of Rod Edmond and Vanessa Smith, "is the engine that mobilizes the cartographical vision of islands in an era of maritime colonialism [so that] islands 'look like property.'"[263] By presenting islands

[261] Phillip C. Muehrcke and Juliana O. Muehrcke, "Maps in Literature," *Geographical Review* 64, no. 3 (1974): 318-9.
[262] Balasopoulos "Nesologies," 11.
[263] Balasopoulos "Nesologies," 11.

as such, what the map ultimately does is that it foregrounds an expansionist drive through translatio insuli: a thematic structure through which "imperialism is geopoetically cast as the process though which 'an expanding isle [. . .] extends its insular geography through [. . .] empire building."[264] And indeed, it was through repetition[265] of enclosed forms that Greek maritime colonization of the central Mediterranean occurred: "by cloning from the eighth though the sixth centuries B.C.; [for] typically an Aegean city would reproduce a largely independent duplicate of itself, especially in Sicily and the lower Tyrrhenian coast of Italy." [266] The representation of islands as such in the Télémaque map, where emphasis on the insular form is simultaneously juxtaposed with an emphasis on the formal containment of the insular thus reveals to us one of the most distinctive paradoxes of insularity. The map dramatizes the inevitable tension between the "centripetal pull of the insular territoriality," and "the centrifugal energies of expansionist worldliness,"[267] a tension which, we shall see, is geopoetically implicated in al-Tahtawi 's translation of the work while in the Sudan.

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[264] Balasopoulos "Nesologies," 15.
[265] Repetition of islandic form is a recurring discourse which subtends even more recent histories of colonialism. On the subject matter writes Elizabeth Deloughrey, who observes that, in relation to British colonialism and empire building, the construction of the English isle was part of Britain's imaginative discourse on colonial processes—for Britain was "articulated as an expanding isle as it extends its insular geography through global empire building. The tension between the contained English isle and its propensity to expand outwards by maritime domination draws attention to the relationship between a limited island space which, in imperial rhetoric, is destined to send its overcrowded populations into colonial lands. [. . .] Great Britain is then discursively refashioned as a 'repeating island' throughout its colonies in the Caribbean and the Pacific, as suggested by the toponyms New Albion, New Britain, New Hebrides, New Ireland, and 'Little England." Elizabeth Deloughrey, "'the Litany of Islands, the Rosary of Archipelagoes': Caribbean and Pacific Archipelagraphy," *ARIEL: A Review of International English Literature* 32, no. 1 (2001): 25.
[266] Foulke, *The Sea Voyage Narrative*, 45.
[267] Balasopoulos, "Nesologies," 11.

The Island Next-door? al-Tahtawi 's *Tilimak* as a Case of Nesologic Modernity

To argue that the translation of *Télémaque* into Arabic simply reveals a homologous relationship between the French work and the maqama that rests on the works' corresponding insularities does not, in logic, differ from the ways in which this translation has been read by scholars who anticipated the arrival of the modern novel in Arabic literature. Indeed, there is no difference between, on the one hand, the claim that *Télémaque* and the maqama form coincide in their insular energies and, on the other, the claim that al-Tahtawi found in the maqama the form that is closest to *Télémaque* in its use of "fiction." To trace forms of insularity in both the maqama and Fénelon's work as well as the poetic overlap between them runs the risk of offering a tautological input that, again, iterates "equivalence" in studying translation among literary systems. While I contend that the study of the insular form helps in shedding light on patterns of intersection among different literary systems for purposes of comparison in world literature, I am also mindful of the illusion of "equivalence" in the transfer of literary meaning and how it rests on a "positivistic [as well as a-historical] view of translation."[268]

Nevertheless, the circular formula, "world as text and text as world," invoked at the outset of the study provides us with valuable outlet for al-Tahtawi 's translation of *Télémaque* in a way that does not reduce his translation merely to an a-historical poetic transfer across forms. For my purpose here, I make use of two illuminating contributions by scholars who work on geography, literature, and translation. On the

[268] Federico Italiano, *Translation and Geography* (London: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2016), 3.

one hand, Antonis Balasopolous's bisected definition of geopoetics is particularly useful:

> Geopoetics [. . .] is limned by the encounter between two epistemologically independent but insistently cross-pollinating strands of enquiry. The first concerns the *textuality of geography*, and focuses on the semiotic, rhetorical and ideological energies that inform the domain of geographical knowledge and representation. The second addresses the reverse problematic of *geography of textuality* and takes the stock of the representational and narrative uses of spatial form, or delves into the geographies underlying the distribution, consumption or reception of imaginative texts.[269]

On the other hand, I utilize Federico Italiano's emphasis on the "spatial turn" in translation studies as a means to overcome the positivism of "equivalence:"

> As Michaela Wolf [. . .] has distinctly pointed out, translation is not only a matter of transfer between cultures but 'a *place* [original emphasis] where cultures merge and create *new spaces.*' In short, a new perspective is making itself conspicuous within translation studies today, one we might refer to as the geography of translation [elsewhere defined as the spatial turn], or what Lawrence Venuti defined as the 'ethics of location,' in translation studies, that

[269] Balasopoulos, "Nesologies," 9.

is, the question of 'where' translation happens.[270]

For the remainder of the chapter, I am proposing that we read al-Tahtawi 's composition of a maqama while seafaring in the Mediterranean as a case of the *textuality of geography*. I consider al-Tahtawi 's translation in relationship to his geographical location while he was exiled in the Sudan. Referencing excerpts from the introduction to his translation of *Télémaque* as well as from his subsequent 1869 work *Manāhij al-Albāb al Miṣrīyah fī Mabāhij al-Ādāb al-ʿAṣrīyah* ("The Methodology of Egyptian Minds with Regard to the Marvel of Arabic Literature"), I argue that the metaphorics of insularity subtending the text of *Télémaque* as well as the maqama extend beyond their formalist and aesthetic reach to generate an Egypto-nationalist and imperialist discourse. With its political drive, this discourse works simultaneously to foreground a "*centripetal pull of the insular territoriality"* of Egypt while it subjects the Sudan to "the centrifugal energies of [Egypt's] expansionist worldliness". Paradoxically though, this discourse works, in a self-miming fashion, particularly by applying on the Sudan metaphorics of insularity[271] that are founded on myriad economies of alterity and difference (e.g. distance, timelessness). Participating in and

[270] Italiano, *Translation and Geography*, 4.

[271] In this context, I should note that, following Elaine Stratford and her co-authors, I advocate the deployment of the island as a "model," rather than as a "site" of investigation. Elaine Stratford, Godfrey Baldacchino, Elizabeth McMahon, Carol Farbotko and Andrew Harwood, "Envisioning the Archipelago," 114. In fact, an abstract of the insular form was commonly used in colonial discourse and was applied on spheres of colonial hegemony that did not always geographically and physiologically coincide with the insular form proper. According to Phillip Steinberg, "island imaginaries played such an important role in British idealization both of itself and its colonial 'others' that island designations were sometimes invented for colonial territories that, by no stretch of imagination, met the physical definition of an island [. . .] After 300 years of exploration and colonization the British were still sometimes referring to British Guiana as an 'island' and [. . .] the fact that British Guiana could not be circumnavigated by ship by ship was simply ignored by British colonialists who sought to construct this colony within the colonial 'island' category." Steinberg, "Insularity, Sovereignty and Statehood," 255.

competing over global mercantile capitalism, Egypt, we shall see, becomes in al-Tahtawi 's thought a conversant in an epoch of nesologic modernity—a modernity that is profoundly grounded in the discursive production of insularity that foregrounds "naturalness," establishes "sovereignty" and "centrality" for political physiology of Egypt while asserting it via practices of hegemony over the Sudan.

The episode of Egypt's colonial practice is well-known. In 1820, writes Eve Powell, the Egyptian ruler Muhammad Ali Pasha launched a military campaign to conquer the Sudan. Striving for an Egyptian empire, that push necessitated a particular form of mapping of the Sudan:

> [it was] one created by officially employed government agents, geographers, explorers, engineers, and scholars. They projected new images of the Sudan with their carefully drawn maps and their ethnographic accounts of the African people of the Nile Valley [. . .] whether the surveyors were conscious on otherwise, [replicated in addition to the environment] the territorial imperatives of a particular political system [that rested on exercise of] power.[272]

With the official expansionist campaign of Egypt into the Sudan, Muhammed Ali "institutionalized the relationship between Egypt and the Sudan." Ali hoped to discover the origins of the Nile; whether the Sudanese gold existed; and whether the inhabitants of the uppermost regions of the Nile would be suitable as slaves for his

[272] Eve T Powell, *A Different Shade of Colonialism: Egypt, Great Britain, and the Mastery of the Sudan* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 27.

increasingly modernized military.[273] Following his return from the Sudan to Egypt, it was in his work *Methodology* that al-Tahtawi gave a clear sense of Egypt's design to partake in global capitalism and "entry into the international metals market , then dominated by Russia, Austria, and South America." [274] In this book, al-Tahtawi compares Africa to America in its sources, which was the reason why Muhammed Ali invested much in metal extractions in the Sudan, due to its "universal utility in the Egyptian homeland."[275]

As a pioneering figure, sometimes even labeled the father of Arab nationalism, al-Tahtawi theorized on waṭan in a way that is inseparable from his geographical description of Egypt, his homeland. In his 1868 *Anwar tawfiq al-khalil fi akhbar misr wa tawthiq bani Ismaʿil* (The Lights of the Illustrious Outcome of the History of Egypt and the Authentication of the Children of Ismail), his first essay, entitled "*fi takhtit diyar misr*" opens with a "Demarcation of the Land of Egypt and its Nature." In this geographical definition, Egypt is located "to the north east of Africa and is bordered in the north by the Mediterranean Sea, also called *Bahr-i Sefid* [the sea of Islands] or the sea of Rum. In the east, it is bordered by the Red Sea, also called the sea of Clysma or the Gulf of Arabs; to its south is the land of Nubia in the south; and to its west are the deserts of Burqa."[276] Well-defined by natural geography on its four cardinal points, Egypt is depicted insularly as a sovereign territorial state. al-Tahtawi 's language

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[273] Powell, *A Different Shade*, 29.

[274] Powell, *A Different Shade*, 29.

[275] و أمهات معادن الذهب المستخرجة في هذا العهد هي معادن بلاد الأمريكة، تخرج من جوف الأرض أو من تنظيف الرمال الذهبية، و في بلاد إفريقيا التبر فرع عظيم في تجارة السودان، و ليس في بلاد أوروبا إلا معادن سيبرن ببلاد الموسقو، و معادن بلاد المجر في ممكلة النيمسا، و في آسيا معادن الذهب و رماله، و اما معادن الفضة الشعيرة في في بلاد أمريكة بإقليم بيرو و غيره، . . . ففي بلاد مقسيقا أريد من ثلاثة ألاف معدن مستخرج، و كذلك معادن بلاد بيرو. . . و معادن كاليفورنيا . . . فبلاد افريقيا لها شبه بأمريكة. 216

[276] Rifaʿa al-Tahtawi, *Manahij al-albab al-misriyya fi Mabahij al-adab al-ʻasriyya* (Cairo: al-majlis al-Aʿla li-l-Thaqafa, 2002), 31.

draws on island geography to furnish in elemental form the state ideal of Egypt subtended by a rhetoric on a "homogenous, sharply demarcated, and singular political entity."[277] The moment of defining the "sovereign" is marked here by a tendency to naturalize the conflation of both political and geographical boundaries.[278] In addition, while his demarcation of Egypt's boundaries enhances the pull of centrality inward, his way of pictorializing Egypt by using an insular grammar of *natural* separateness provides al-Tahtawi with a definition of a *waṭan* that had emerged, not only inevitabl, but also organically.

As Antonis Balasopolous observes, the same identitarian fiction of the territorial state in nesologic modernities oftentimes extends outward towards "zones of otherness."[279] We see similar fictions at work as al-Tahtawi describes his exile in the Sudan. When al-Tahtawi turns southward in his literary construction, his imagination becomes romantically imperial. As Egypt was producing the Sudan as a historical space[280] that is materially involved in global capitalism, al-Tahtawi confers on the country an insular quality that utopianizes it as a "conquered and dependent territory whose resources could help Egypt achieve Muhammed Ali's goals."[281] What I find most remarkable in his description of the Sudan, is his emphasis on the distance which

[277] Balasopoulos, "Nesologies," 11.
[278] Balasopoulos, "Nesologies," 11.
[279] Balasopoulos, "Nesologies," 11.
[280] Analyzing the role of Utopia in theorizing imperialism, Bill Ashcroft observes that all colonial utopias are simultaneously and paradoxically distant but historicizable: "although far distant, Utopia is located in historical space, the space in which imperialism, centered on the imperial city, brings the world into history as it constructs the world space as a mercantile network. Paradoxically, the location of Utopia on an island manages to bring colonized space into history while keeping at a distance." Ashcroft, Bill. *Utopianism in Postcolonial Literatures.* London: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2017, 21.
[281] Powell, *A Different Shade*, 48.

sets it apart from Egypt. In his recent study of postcolonial utopias, Bill Ashcroft writes, "it is arguable that, as distant and ambivalently historicized spaces, islands are by their very nature objects of desire, and although not all utopias are located on islands, their distance coincides the imperial spread of European influence."[282] Notwithstanding its geographical contiguity to Egypt, the Sudan in al-Tahtawi 's imaginative economy becomes the island next-door, whose "distance" from Egypt confirms its otherness to and isolation from the conquering sovereign, while casting it as a source of benefit for Egypt. In his prelude to the Télémaque translation, al-Tahtawi indicates that the Sudan "was not only far geographically, but its distance from Cairo seems to have been temporal as well."[283] In Methodology, he includes a poem he wrote as a lament for his state of exile, in which he indicates that the Sudan was never a place for someone like him, nor a place for his safety and happiness. He depicts its inhabitants in degrading and stagnant imageries, for half of its men are like "beasts" and the second half are like "stones." This coerced insularity becomes even racially motivated, for "if it had not been for the white Arabs, the inhabitants would have been blacker and blacker and blacker."[284] Hence, even though the Sudan is black, as the rest of Africa is, it is insulated from other African territories by its alleviated

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[282] Bill Ashcroft, *Utopianism in Postcolonial Literatures* (London: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2017), 22.
[283] Powell, *A Different Shade of Colonialism*, 52.
[284] Powell, *A Different Shade of Colonialism*, 52.
وما السودان قط مقام مثلى ولا سلماى فيه ولا سعادى
بها ريح السموم يُشم منه زفير لظىً فلا يطفيه وادى
عواصفها صباحا أو مساءً دواماً فى اضطراب واطّراد
ونصف القوم اكثره وحوش' وبعض القوم أشبه بالجماد
[. . .]
ولولا البيض من عرب لكانوا سواداً فى سوادٍ فى سواد
al-Tahtawi, *Manahij al-albab,* 226.

shade of blackness due to the stream of Arab blood that runs in its veins. It is, in other words, the Arab blood, which rescued the Sudan from sinking into a sea of blackness.

Conclusion

لا تعني الغرابة الشيء الذي لم تره العيون و لم تسمعه الآذان،
إنها على العكس متعلقة بشي معروف و مألوف،
إلا أنه منسي و مدفون في أعماق النفس.
ووظيفة الشعر هي نشر هذا المطوي و إبراز هذا المخفي.

بد الفتاح كيليطو، *الحكاية و التأويل*

> The strange is not necessarily that which no eye had seen; nor is it necessarily that which no ear has heard. To the contrary, the strange may well be that which is quite known and familiar yet hidden within the depth of the self. And it is the function of poetry to unveil the hidden and shed light onto it.
>
> Abd al-Fattah Kilito, *Story and Interpretation*

One may argue that the maqama's encounter with *Télémaque* stirred the inner energies of both and revealed the works' respective capacities for insular behavior. The case of al-Tahtawi 's translation of *Télémaque* uncovers the homologies that bind these literary monuments and unsettles the way both works are read. Upon encounter through translation, both the maqama and *Télémaque* are set in a condition of mutual influence, after which neither one retains its past "form." In other words, the maqama's insularity becomes contingent upon its historical marriage with *Télémaque*, as much as the opposite is true. Yet, while it would take the maqama nearly eight centuries to discover its insular "gene," it would take *Télémaque* only a couple of

centuries to do the same.

The narrative that unfolds from this encounter, however, may offer additional insight into how Arab nationalism came into being in the 19th century. Reading al-Tahtawi, scholars have ranged in their analyses of to the origins al al-Tahtawi 's notion of *waṭan*. For some, this idea was, notwithstanding its various geographical origins, uniformly land-bound. While for Eve Powell "the perspectives about national community and identity [al-Tahtawi] gained [came mainly] from his experiences in France and [were] promoted eloquently in Egypt,"[285] for Ellen McLarney "this was not an imported political imaginary [but was rather] rooted in Arabic and Islamic concepts and especially in ethics of *adab*."[286] In less cardinalized language, and since al-Tahtawi was an itinerant across the Mediterranean and navigated different epistemological worlds in Europe and Egypt, scholars have argued that the answer may, as Tageldin put it, "lie somewhere between," in the trans-Mediterranean space of ideas.[287] Yet as we have seen, the marriage of *Télémaque* with the maqama foregrounds the Mediterranean not merely as passageway for the influx of ideas. With its constellation of islands, the Mediterranean emerges as the very site where *waṭan* derives its aesthetic and political forces. And in that, al-Tahtawi was no different from Abu Zayd, who concluded his resolution to remain on the unnamed island with a poem that repeats the word *waṭan* three times. Such connections, as well as others, are no more than an "uncanny coincidence," as Abu Zayd would phrase it.

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[285] Powell, *A Different Shade of Colonialism*, 30.
[286] Ellen McLarney, "Freedom, Justice, and the Power of *Adab*," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 48 no. 1 (2016), 25.
[287] Tageldin, "Fénelon's Gods, al-Ṭahṭāwī's Jinn," 18.

Figure 1 **al-Wasiti's Illustration of al-Hariri's** "Maqama of Oman" with the figure of Harith holding an astrolabe on the top right corner.

Figure 2 **Map of the Travels of Télémaque**
Les Aventures de Télémaque fils d'Ulysse, Amsterdam, 1751.

<http://www.bnu.fr/images/les-aventures-de-telemaque-fils-d%E2%80%99ulysse-amsterdam-1751?size=_original>.

CHAPTER THREE: ON ADHERENCE TO THE ANCIENTS: NASIF AL-YAZIJI'S DRAMATIZED MIMESIS IN *MAJMAʿ AL-BAHRAYN* (MEETING OF TWO SEAS)

> Traditionists [in early Islam] believed that, in order to get as close as possible to the Prophet in genealogical sense, they needed to produce the highest possible chains of transmission. [. . .] Tradition gave certain narratives a normative meaning by exemplifying them. In one of these narrations, it is said of a "golden chain" (*silsilat al-dhahab*) of a Tradition that it is so perfect that its holder can almost hear the Prophet in person speaking to him.
>
> Houari Touati, *Islam & Travel in the Middle Ages*

Introduction

In the previous chapters, I examined two different models of the maqama from the mid-19th century. I demonstrated that Faris al-Shidyaq's "Maqama on Chapter 13" was not merely an imitation of the previous classical model: both structure and plot of this maqama enact the philosophical questions in translation that dominated al-Shidyaq's conversations and debates with the orientalists and European philologists of his time. In this maqama, while the transfer, or translation, from abstract ideas and concepts into historical meanings is ruptured and rendered banal, the absence of *anagnorisis* brings different ontological realms into a mode of contiguity. Hence, whereas for orientalists the obsession with historical (and literal) meaning reflects their belief in its higher ontological status, for al-Shidyaq , both *letter* and *metaphor* are entangled into a relationship of contiguity. Attacking metaphysical values assigned the model

altogether, al-Shidyaq created a problem for subsequent Arabi nationalist narratives, which led to his work being excluded from 20th century Arabic national pedagogies.[288]

If the work of al-Shidyaq 's did not fit the agenda of nationalist Arab imaginations, the work of Rifaʿa al-Tahtawi was, by contrast, intimately linked to Egypt's imperio-nationalist ambitions. His maqama -inspired translation of Francois Fénelon's epic novel *Les Aventures de Télémaque* uncovers a poetically insular force that has been heretofore overlooked both in the classical maqama and in Fénelon's work. We saw how the age-old Arabic genre and the French work are both implicated into a discourse that produces islands aesthetically and functionally. Aesthetically, I argued that the maqama has the literary self-awareness by which it creates a correspondence between itself as a genre and its own subject matter, thus resonating with both early modern *Isolarii* and European portolan charts. We have also seen that *Les Aventures de Télémaque* similarly foregrounds the insular form aesthetically as an ideal land unit with natural sovereignty. Functionally however, *Les Aventures* represented those forms as "zone of otherness," viewed as objects of imperial desire and colonial control.

Beyond the iteration of meaning across different languages, al-Tahtawi 's translation of Fénelon's work, is also as a geo-poetic event. The geopoetics of the emerging Arabic text, combined with the insular condition that it reveals in both the classical maqama and the French work articulates al-Tahtawi 's imperio-nationalist vision. Examining al-Tahtawi 's other works, we saw that inasmuch as Egypt was viewed as a

[288] For more information on what led to al-Shidyaq 's exclusion from national pedagogies, see Bou Ali, "Collecting the Nation," 33-56.

well-defined territory, the same Egypt projected its own sense of discrete territoriality onto the Sudan to be able to "other" and conquer it.

Despite the differences between al-Shidyaq 's and al-Tahtawi 's respective adaptations of the maqama, there is much that both *Nahda* figures share. Not only were they noted for their extensive traveling during their intellectual careers, they were also multilingual and engaged in inter-linguistic translation projects. In addition to Arabic, al-Shidyaq knew French and English, and besides those he had a formidable knowledge of Hebrew and Syriac, which he utilized as he worked on his Arabic translation of the Bible. On his part, al-Tahtawi learned French during his five-year residence in France. When he returned to Egypt, he established his pioneering program for training translators—known as the school of languages (*madrasat al-ʾalsun)*. In addition to his translation of a significant number of works from French into Arabic, al-Tahtawi oversaw and directed the work of translator trainees at the school. Therefore, while both figures diverged in their use of the maqama and in the (a-)nationalist imaginations they conjured, we may argue that they both converge in their experience of various forms of linguistic and cultural difference.

In this chapter, I read the work of a third *Nahda* figure. The Lebanon-born poet and philologist (Shaykh) Nasaf al-Yaziji (1800-1871) wrote his maqama collection, titled *Majmaʿ al-bahrayn* (*The Meeting Place of the Two Seas*) (1856), which he modeled after al-Hariri's collection. Like al-Shidyaq and al-Tahṭawi, al-Yaziji also contributed in the translation wave that swept the region in the 19th century. Particularly, al-Yaziji was involved with Western missionary movements in Lebanon and was a leading member of the literary and cultural society called *al-Jamʿiyya al-suriyya* (The Syrian

Society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge), established by the missionaries in Beirut in 1847. From 1849, "despite knowing no European languages himself, he worked as a proof-reader for the American missionaries on a new translation of the Bible [known as the Van Dyck Bible]— a project in which Buṭrus al-Bustānī and Yusuf al-Asir were also involved."[289]

Described by Paul Starkey as "conservative rather than an innovator;" and by Kilito as "a man of adherence to the ancients,"[290] al-Yaziji stands at variance with al-Shidyaq and al-Tahtawi. He never travelled outside his home country Lebanon, nor did he have, apart from his interaction with the western missionaries,[291] a firsthand experience with articulate forms of difference. Commenting on *Majmaʿ*, he made no secret of the fact that his aim was to produce a work that would emulate that of al-Hariri's, "both in form and in content."[292] His lack of "concern with 'originality' marks his approach as a traditionalist rather than modernist."[293] While it is difficult for an author to achieve success if he places himself in a competing position with al-Hariri by emulating him, al-Yaziji left a long-lasting literary impression that some

[289] Paul Starkey, "Nāṣīf al-Yāzijī," in *Essays in Arabic Literary Biography, 1850-1950*, ed. Roger Allen (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2010), 337. Butrus al-Bustani (1819-83) is one of the most famous Arab Nahḍah figure, not only for his major role in the Arabic translation of the bible, but also for his Arabic lexicon *Muḥīṭ al-Muḥīṭ* and the first Arabic encyclopedia. Moreover, he is well knowns for developing the concept of Modern Syrian nationalism. Yusuf al-Asir (1915-89) was a Syrian Sunni Muslim sheikh from Sidon who was associated with the American mission and also participated in the Van Dyck translation project. He was hired by Van Dyck because he wanted "a native Arab speaking Muslim without many preconceptions about previous Christian terminology or Arab Christian cultural baggage. Grafton, *The Contested Origins of the 1865 Arabic Bible*, 23; 39-40.
[290] Kilito, *al-Aʿmal*, 1: 243.
[291] The American missionary movement of the 19th century was a product of the Great Awakening that had swept across England in the middle of the eighteenth century and then blew across the Atlantic. In Syria, the western missionaries that oversaw the translation project that came to be known as the Van Dyck Bible were Henry H. Jessup (1830-1910), Eli Smith (1801-57), and Cornelius Van Dyck (1818-94). Grafton, *The Contested Origins of the 1865 Arabic Bible*, 1-41.
[292] Starkey, "Nāṣīf al-Yāzijī," 377.
[293] Starkey, "Nāṣīf al-Yāzijī," 379.

commentators even began to speak of the "three great collections of maqama:" in reference to al-Hamadhani's, al-Hariri's, and al-Yaziji's himself.[294]

In this chapter, I look at al-Yaziji's work mainly through the prism of mimesis and emulation. I examine two of his maqamas from *Majmaʿ*, namely "of Tihama" and "of Yamama" tellingly set the Arabian Peninsula, what is believed to be the *terra prima* of the Arabic language. Because al-Yaziji's work is linked explicitly to al-Hariri's, I examine both maqamas in relationship to three maqamas in al-Hariri's collection, namely, "of Meraghah," "of Ahwaz," and "of Samarkand." Set in various locales where linguistic difference or *ʿujmah* is predominant, al-Hariri's maqamas feature patterns of variegation (*tarqīsh*) and (*tanqīṭ*) in the Arabic alphabet, which, as I demonstrate, function as a *palimpsest* upon which the historical contact of Arabic (therefore Arabs) with other linguistic identities and communities is inscribed. By looking at the compelling connections and remarkable deviations between al-Hariri's maqamas and al-Yaziji's, I illuminate aspects of al-Yaziji's vision for a nascent Arab nation that grounds its (proto)national project mainly in language. In this chapter I trace the shift from poetics of difference in al-Hariri's collection to poetics of sameness that al-Yaziji's work adopts to unsettle the ontological grounds of the Arab nation.

al-Hariri's Speckled and Spotless Maqamas: What Do We Glean from a Condition of Variegation?

For some "Europeans," these have exemplified "laborious trifling;" for some

[294] Starkey, "Nāṣīf al-Yāzijī," 379.

"Orientals" however, they are works of "ingenuity and scholarship"[295] and a model of "peculiarity:"[296] thus observed 19th century orientalist and translator Thomas Chenery, who spoke favorably of three particular maqamas by al-Hariri: namely the maqama "of Meraghah" or "the Diversified," *al-merāghiyyah* or *al-khayfāʾ*, the maqama "of Ahwaz," also entitled "the Spotted" or *al-raqṭāʾ*, and the maqama of "of Samarkand" or *al-Samraqandiyyah*. Indeed, what distinguishes these assemblies from the rest in al-Hariri's collection is that while they typically demonstrate al-Hariri's unusual skill in the profound diction he uses to weave amusing anecdotes through rhymed prose, they also evidence his ability to compose impeccable and meaningful prose that is either "spotted" or "spotless," by following carefully-chosen patterns of variegation. Whether through compositions of variegated addresses featuring an alternation of *al-ḥurūf al-muʿjamah* (dotted Arabic letters) and *al-ḥurūf al-muhmalah* (undotted Arabic letters) within its words; through eulogies featuring an alteration of entirely dotted and undotted Arabic words, or even through a sermon whose idiom is completely undotted that it may be compared to a "spotless bride," these three maqamas stood out as al-Hariri's signature and earned him "numerous imitators in every succeeding age."[297]

Therefore, while the stories in these three maqama vary, they all rest, in one way or another, on a meticulously calculated pattern of variegation. As suggested by its secondary title *al-khayfāʾ*, the maqama "of Meraghah" or "the Diversified" exhibits a scrupulous arrangement of "spotlessness" and "spotted-ness" that stands out as a rare

[295] al-Hariri, *Assemblies*, trans. Thomas Chenery, 132.
[296] al-Hariri, *Assemblies*, trans. Thomas Chenery, 8.
[297] al-Hariri, *Assemblies*, trans. Thomas Chenery, 132.

condition. The adjective *al-khayfāʾ* refers al-Sharishi,[298] one of the most important commentators on al-Hariri's maqamas, to an anomalous case in the animal world by which a horse is described as *ʾakhyaf* when "one of its eyes is blue; the other dark" (a heterochrome).[299] On a visit to Meraghah in Azerbaijan, narrator Harith ibn Hammam finds a congregation of literary men lamenting the decline of learning and deprecating the status of contemporary authors who, in their views, have fallen short of their predecessors' literary merit. At the margin of the company, an elderly man is seated, whom Harith recognizes as Abu Zayd. Abu Zayd takes up the conversation and claims, contrary to the men's views, that there is one person who can rival the literary echelons of a preceding age, whether in scholarship or in the arts of composition. A man in the company is skeptical of Abu Zayd's claim and therefore challenges him (Abu Zayd) to substantiate it. He tells the company his own story: having been himself an author at the court of a governor, the governor once declared that he would cease to support him financially unless he would compose an address in which the words he uses should alternative between "pointed and unpointed letters: that is, that the first, third, fifth words and so fourth should consist of letters without a point, while the

[298] Abu al-ʿAbbas Kamal al-Din Ahmad b. ʿAbd al-Muʾmin al-Kaysi, grammarian, philologist and littérateur of Muslim Spain (557-619/1181-1222), born at Sharish in the province of Cadiz and died in his natal town. He functioned mainly as a teacher of Arabic language, but like many of his compatriots, went to the East, probably to make the Pilgrimage to Mecca and probably search of knowledge. He is above all known as author of a commentary on the maqamas of al-Hariri, which soon became known in Spain and, from the opening of the 6th/12th century, formed part of the program of studies for Andalusian scholars. He produced three commentaries on the Maqamas: a large one, literary; a middle-sized one, philological; and a small one, a résumé. Ben Abdesselem, A., "al-Sharīshī", in: *Encyclopaedia* of Islam, Second Edition, Edited by: P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, W.P. Heinrichs. Consulted online on 27 August 2018 http://dx.doi.org.proxy.library.cornell.edu/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_SIM_6850 First published online: 2012.

[299] Ahmad Sharishi, *Sharh maqamat al-Hariri* (Cairo: al-Muʾassasa al-ʿarabiya al-haditha li-l-tabʿ wa-l-nashr wa-l-tawziʿ, 1970), 1: 238.

second, fourth, sixth, and so forth should have only pointed letters."[300] The man challenges Abu Zayd to compose such address. Taking up the challenge, Abu Zayd instantly dictates an address in praise of the governor, in which the condition set by the man is met perfectly. At that, the company is delighted and intrigued; they ask Abu Zayd about his family and abode. In verse, Abu Zayd answers that he is of the tribe of Ghassan and the city of Saruj. Since the incident establishes his fame for his ingenious composition, Abu Zayd is offered the place of a public writer at the governor's court. Yet, he declines the offer as he believes that "life of freedom and poverty is better than dependence on the great."[301]

If the alternation of the dotted and the undotted s is presented only as secondary in the subtitle to the maqama of "Meraghah," it is foregrounded in the maqama of "Ahwaz," which al-Hariri gives the primary title of "the Spotted" or *al-raqṭāʾ*. In terms of composition technique, this maqama is slightly different from the maqama of "Meraghah." "The Spotted" features a written address whereby the alternation of the dotted and the undotted happens at the level of letters within the single word. As in "of Meraghah," where the adjective *al-khayfāʾ* illuminates an analogy with an anomalous case in the world of animals, *al-raqṭāʾ* similarly evokes analogies from nature. In al-Sharishi's view, *al-raqṭāʾ* (synonymous with *al-raqshāʾ*) is an attribute of a speckled chicken (*al-dajājah al muraqqashsah)*. In Kilito's view, the adjective *raqṭāʾ* is "both referentially and phonetically akin to the adjective *raqshāʾ*, [for] a speckled snake [*al-ḥayyah al-raqshāʾ*] is a chicken that is variegated with dark and light spots." Drawing

[300] With adjustments, the account is adapted from Thomas Chenerey's synopsis of this maqama. al-Hariri, *Assemblies*, trans. Thomas Chenery, 1: 132-3.
[301] al-Hariri, *Assemblies*, trans. Thomas Chenery, 2:133.

on Ibn Manzur's *Lisān al-ʿarab*, Kilito brings this association to the next level, for "*raqsh* [v.] and *tarqīsh* [v.noun] mean both writing and dotting."[302] In this maqama, narrator Harith is in a state of poverty in the town of Ahwaz[303] and therefore decides to seek his fortune elsewhere. On his way out, he comes across a tent whose owner invites him in to rest himself. Harith immediately recognizes the owner as no other than Abu Zayd and asks the reasons of his amazing prosperity. Abu Zayd responds that it was on account of his composition of an improvised elegant address that was rewarded by a great personage. Intrigued, Harith desires to hear the address, but Abu Zayd will consent if only Harith will accompany him to Sus, which is a day's journey from Ahwaz. Harith agrees to accompany Abu Zayd to the said place, yet once there Abu Zayd detains him in the city on various pretenses. When Harith finally loses his patience and decides to leave, Abu Zayd tells him his entire story. When Abu Zayd had been oppressed once by a creditor, he decided to seek the help of the governor of Ṭūs in Khorasan. Composing a eulogistic address in which the alternate letters within words were dotted and undotted, Abu Zayd was not only relieved from the debt but also rewarded with a load of presents. To reward Harith for his patience, Abu Zayd asks if he would prefer a sum of money or a copy of his spotted compositions. As Harith chooses the latter, Abu Zayd dictates the letter to Harith and gives him a present to ease his distress.[304]

While both the maqama of "Meraghah" and "the Spotted" of Ahwaz articulate different patterns of variegation, "of Samarkand" (*al-Samraqaniyyah*) to the contrary,

[302] Kilito, *al-Aʿmal*, 3:302.
[303] A place in the southwest of modern day Iran.
[304] al-Hariri, *The Assemblies of al-Hariri*, trans. Thomas Chenery, 258.

brings that condition altogether to full negation. Having arrived in Samarkand on a Friday morning, Harith refreshes himself in a public bath before he rushes to the main mosque for Friday prayer. At the mosque, he listens to an eloquent sermon on the uncertainties of human destiny and the inevitability and terrors of death. Besides recognizing its lofty diction, Harith notes the sermon's unique merit. Using his meticulous listening skill, Harith fathoms that all the words used in the sermon script consist of letters without diacritical points—a uniqueness that he enhances visually to by calling it a "spotless bride," *ʿarūsan bi-ghayr(i) nuqaṭ*. Examining the preacher's face, Harith once more realizes that he is no other than Abu Zayd. When the sermon concludes, the two meet affectionately. Following that, Abu Zayd invites Harith to accompany him to his place. When the night falls, Harith is shocked at learning that Abu Zayd drinks wine. In response to Harith's bewilderment, Abu Zayd responds in philosophical verse, commending men who seize from life moments of pleasure whenever possible. Under the influence of the cup, Harith pledges to secrecy what he had seen of Abu Zayd, and even endorses his friend for his wisdom, and for his philosophical take on the ephemerality of life and its fleetness.[305]

As intimated earlier, the various states of (non)variegation have implications beyond showing al-Hariri's masterful use of and control over Arabic. Building these three maqamas around such particular mode of "laborious trifling" becomes all the more meaningful when the geographical sites of these anecdotes are factored in. Renowned scholars of this literary art view the maqamas mainly as a manifestation of

[305] al-Hariri, *The Assemblies of* al-Hariri, trans. Francis Joseph Steingass (Farnborough: Gregg, 1969), 8.

their authors' inward gaze—a gaze that surveys the then known world of Islam. Such readings build on the social and cultural realities of the Islamic world in the 11th and 12th centuries and take into consideration the extent and scope of geographical knowledge, interest, and discourses at that time. For example, Kilito argues that although the tricksters of the maqamas navigate in all directions in the Islamic world, they hardly make it to its eastern frontiers, beyond which more radical forms of alterity[306] and difference are dominant.[307] Indeed, readers do not come across pronounced acts of "translation" in al-Hariri's maqamas. Nevertheless, al-Hariri's choice to represent a "conservative" itinerary in his maqamas becomes somewhat perplexing if we take into consideration that during his time, in the 11th and 12th centuries, various non-Arab communities had either long converted to Islam upon the political spread of empire and hence adopted the Arabic language as an integral part of its newly-founded identity, or adopted Arabic mainly for pragmatic purposes. Notwithstanding the cultural, linguistic and social mosaic of the Islamic world, most of the trickster's and the narrator's adventures in those maqamas nearly always herald "safe" forms of "encounter."[308] Thus, the monolingual world represented in the

[306] In contemporary social and critical theory from the 1980s, alterity means 'otherness.' Popularized in the work of the philosopher Emmanuel Levinas in the 1970s, it originally meant a sense of the non-self, of something that is outside of, and therefore different from the self. It is now used as one of a semantic pair with 'ipseity' (the sense of one's self, self-awareness). In the context of postcolonial studies, the term is deployed to convey the sense of a radical racial-cultural otherness and the processes though which this 'otherness' is constructed. Pramod K Nayar, "Alterity," in *The Postcolonial Studies Dictionary* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 2015). Accessed August 26, 2018. ProQuest Ebook Central. I draw attention that since I am interested in the early Arabs' encounter and contact with other communities, "alterity" for my purpose denotes a sense of non-Arabness, whereby Arabness is defined primarily as a linguistic category, rather than a racial or ethnic one. The introversion or conservativeness of the maqamas I analyze here is mainly a linguistic one that confines, regulates, and mediates encounter with otherness mainly through the prism of language as shall be seen.

[307] Kilito, *al-Aʿmal*, 3:13-4.

[308] What I mean "safe encounter" is the negotiation of "difference" and the struggle for comprehension among value systems at the contact zone that does not involve contestation. To illustrate this point, I

maqama stands at odds at least with the hetero-linguistic reality of the world that the maqama purport to be in conversation with.

So, where do we find traces of the linguistic alterities that the maqamas seem to have suppressed? In answer to this question, I argue that what seems to be a "safe" navigation in these anecdotes does not lack internal differentiation that index the heterogenous cultural and social environment of al-Hariri's time. Although the maqamas homo-lingualism[309] seems to level out what could have been an articulate form of difference that sets Arabo-phones in a contested relationship with the various non-Arab communities, this homo-lingualism is challenged here in these three maqamas. The various instantiations of "variegated" Arabic letters here function as a see-through *palimpsest*[310] upon which the historical contact of Arabic (therefore Arabs) with other linguistic identities and communities is inscribed.

In "of Meraghah," Abu Zayd composes an address where dotted and undotted Arabic words alternate—a pattern that visually evokes the image of a heterochrome

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give as an example of "unsafe encounter" the stories of Sinbad the Sailor. In this cycle, Sinbad faces perilous seas, leading his own value systems to be unhinged. This requires, therefore, articulate forms of translation. In the maqama, by contrast, the repertoire of images that surface in these anecdotes remains more familiar and also and predictable. While "disguise" is integral to the maqama's composition, it often operates as a shield that separates the narrator from an all-too-familiar trickster whose disguise tools are usually borrowed from the *available* and familiar cultural, linguistic, and ethical systems. Consequentially, the narrative substance between the beginning of the narrator's narration and the *anagnorisis* (usually at the end of the story) is usually the part that requires dense interpretive effort.

[309] I have chosen to use the terms "homo-lingualism" المثلية اللغوية and "hetero-lingualism" التباين اللغوي over the terms "mono-lingualism" الأحادية اللغوية and "multilingualism" التعدد اللغوي since my analysis of the maqamas here is more focused on the questions of sameness and differentiation than on unity (or oneness) and multiplicity.

[310] A palimpsest is a manuscript written on a piece of any material (paper, parchment, stone, vellum, etc.) which has previously been written on, but whose surface has been cleaned to make way for the new text. Common in the Middle Ages before paper became widely available, today it is generally used as a metaphor for a text with more than one layer of meaning, an allegory for example. Ian Buchanan, "Palimpsest," *A Dictionary of Critical Theory*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018) Date Accessed 2 Sep. 2018 <http://www.oxfordreference.com.proxy.library.cornell.edu/view/10.1093/acref/9780198794790.001.0001/acref-9780198794790-e-505>

horse; in "the Spotted," set in Ahwaz, that alternation is implemented onto smaller units in language and the form that emerges evokes the image of speckled snakes or chicken. However, in "of Samarkand," a negative form of variegation—a speech whose written script is totally devoid of any dots, evokes images of purity as would a "spotless bride." Noticeably, all three anecdotes are set in various geographical locales that are inhabited by what was called *ʿajam* in the medieval Arabic idiom. According to the Francesco Gebrieli, the adjective *ʿajam* means "people qualified by *ʿu*[~~d~~]*jma*[*h*] [noun],[311] a confused and obscure way of speaking, as regards pronunciation and language."[312] In this sense, "*ʿu*[~~d~~]*jma*[*h*] is therefore also the contrary of the Arabic *faṣāḥa*[*h*], and the *ʿa*[~~d~~]*jam* are the non-Arabs."[313]Consequentially, *ʿujmah* is a term that is used to denote distance in linguistic identity, a state of otherness that is marked by linguistic unintelligibility.

By looking at these three maqamas together, we recognize that *ʿujmah* in the customary definition is not something that the maqamas, in their homo-lingualism employ. In fact, no references are made to signal the different linguistic identities that are likely to be encountered at the three locales designated. Rather, as I will argue below, *ʿujmah* in the maqamas under study is a condition within the Arabic language itself. It denotes the early historical change that befell the Arabic alphabet as a

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[311] I strikethrough the sound [d], [~~d~~] in the word "*ʿa**dj**am*" so as to modify Francesco Gabrieli's transliteration of the word *ʿajam* (see next footnote), which is a standard way of transcribing the [j] (as [dj]) sound in most entries in the *Encyclopedia of Islam.*

[312] Francesco Gabrieli, "ʿAǰam,"in: *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition,* Ed. P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, W.P. Heinrichs. Consulted online on 14 June 2018 http://dx.doi.org.proxy.library.cornell.edu/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_SIM_0322

[313] Gabrieli, "ʿAǰam," in: *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*.
Kilito's translator, Abdulkabir al-Sharqawi, compares the dichotomy *ʿarab* and *ʿajam*, to that of *Hellenic* and *barbaric*— the latter which denoted incomprehensibility and bestial enunciation. See footnote in Kilito, *al-Aʿmal*, 1:15.

response to the spread of the Islam beyond Arabia, which necessitated Arab contact with other language communities. Particularity, *ʿujmah* in these maqamas dramatizes different stages of how the Arabic alphabet transformed visually from a state of complete *ihmāl*, whereby the earlier form of the alphabet is entirely undotted, to a complex state of *iʿjām,* whereby certain sounds sharing the same orthographic shape became differentiated through specific patterns of dotting and diacritical marks below or above the letters.

Emerging from the Arabs' earlier encounter with other language communities, that historical change aimed to eliminate phonemical confusion via visual means. During the earlier days of the Islamic empire, the Arabic alphabet had neither dots nor diacritical marks. As such, a word with no dots could inspire multiple meanings. However, most early readers of Arabic had no qualms about such challenging obscurity in the script because they were aided by their own language instinct. However, when Islam spread beyond Arabia, large groups of non-Arabs joined the Islamic community and adopted Arabic mainly for liturgical purposes or for practical needs. As outsiders, individuals from these communities were challenged by undifferentiated Arabic script; hence frequent mispronunciation emerged as a problem. Therefore arose the need to develop a differentiated form of the alphabet via specific regulations. Implementing this change, the philologists intended to put an end to Arabic script ambiguity for non-Arabs and maintain uniformity in pronunciation.

Known as *ʾiʿjām,* "dotting" meant to rid Arabic letters of their ambiguity. In al-Sharishi's commentary on "Of Meraghah, *ʾiʿjām* as a verb that indicates the act of eliminating *ʿujmah* (obscurity) by plotting the dots over the letter: "*yuʿjamna, i.e.*

yunaqqaṭna; ʾaʿjamt(u) al-kitāb, i.e., ʾazalt(u) ʿanh(u) ʿujmatah(u)."[314] In other words, letters suffering from *ʿujmah* (obscurity) are subject to acts *ʾiʿjām*: they are given idiosyncrasy by adding dots. Similarly, when a book undergoes a process of *ʾiʿjām*, its *ʿujmah* is eliminated. Along those lines, the accusative form *ʾaʿjama* is simultaneously the act of adding differentiating dots to the Arabic alphabet as well as the act of eliminating *ʿujmah* from a given text. Thus, the notion of *ʿujmah* is concurrently associated with two antithetical meanings. It is both the "disease" and "antidote" *within* the Arabic letter system. And while it is customarily used as a term to designate non-Arabic speakers, it is in fact a concept that registers how the Arabic script, prior to dotting, was visually obscure in the eyes of non-Arab reading communities. Ambiguity in this sense is an aspect that is visually felt in the text, particularly as it is viewed via the non-Arab gaze—and a default (if one may call it so) that can be rectified through "variegation."

In both "of Meraghah" and "the Spotted," there are narrative elements that encourage reading the anecdotes as al-Hariri's decision to stage that crucial phase in the visual transformation of the Arabic alphabet. To explore this aspect further, I follow Phillip Kennedy's example who, in his study of *anagnorisis* in medieval Arabic literature, relies on al-Sharishi's commentary that draws on Arabic classical materials. Al-Sharishi's habit of "overindulging the relevance of an entire tradition in his detailed commentary" and his status as "a marvelous curator of cultural and literary curios"[315] as much as he is an interpreter of al-Hariri's work help us view the

[314] Sharishi, *Sharh maqamat al-Hariri*, 1:238.
[315] Kennedy, *Recognition*, 260-1.

maqamas beyond their discrete literary space. Rather than as an isolated literary phenomenon, the maqamas are viewed in a continuity that links their author to elaborate discursive practices in literary and cultural Islamic tradition. In "of Meraghah," the narrative foregrounds the shift of Arabic words from the oral (and aural) into the written medium, in a manner that captures, visually, Abu Zayd's success in composing his variegated address. Having heard the story of the former governor's scribe and accepted the challenge imposed onto him, Abu Zayd undertakes to compose an address that fulfills the condition of alternating between words that are entirely dotted and others that are undotted: "*al-karamu* [undotted] *thabbata* [dotted] *allāhu* [undotted] *jaysha* [dotted] *suʿūdika* [undotted] *yazīn* [undotted]. [Generosity, may God establish the host of thy success, adorns]…"[316] However, before dictating his address, Abu Zayd makes demands that transpose both readers and dramatic personae in the anecdote into a different modality of knowledge, one that is based on writing: "Then answered the elder [Abu Zayd], 'Thou hast put a good steed to the pace, thou hast sought water at a full stream.' [. . .] And he thought a while till he had let his flow of wit collect, his milchcamel fill her udder: -- and then he said, Wool thy ink-flask, and take thy implements and write: . . ."[317]

Commenting on this part, al-Sharishi incorporates a separate section on the merits and the demerits of "the Flask, the Ink, and the Pen." In this section, he evokes literary tropes, from various classical authorities and sources, that associate writing, writing tools, and sight with notions of 1) permanence (the pen leaving a lasting trace through

[316] al-Hariri, *Assemblies*, trans. Thomas Chenery, 136. See also Sharishi, *Sharh maqamat al-Hariri*, 1: 251.
[317] al-Hariri, *Assemblies*, trans. Thomas Chenery, 136.

ink beyond its own life), 2) with rectification and disambiguation (of a book), 3) with embellishment (deceptive ambiguity and equivocation), 4) with power (the word has a power as destructive as the sword), 5) with mobility (across long distance), 6) and with creation.[318]

Relevant to my focus is al-Sharishi's reference to the verse of 9th century poet Abu Tammam, who eulogizes the writing of 8th century scribe and author Muhammed ibn ʿAbd al-Malik al-Zayyat. Intriguingly, in these verse, figures of speech iterate associations made between the pen and the snake, between written form and the agency to mobility, and between writing and clarity:

luʿāb(u) ul-ʾafāʿi al-qātilat(i) luʿābuhu

To the enemy, its saliva (ink) is as fatal as a snake's deadly venom[319]

waʾary(u) al-janāʾishtārat.huʾayd(in) ʿawāsil(u)

But to the loving ones, its ink is like honey, if only their hands know how to gather

lahu dīmatun ṭallun, wa lākinna waqʿahā

Like a fleeting cloud, it may not ooze in plentitude, but

biʾāthārih(i) fī al-sharq(i) wa-l-gharb(i) wābil(u)

Its impact sure can reach the edges of the world

faṣīh(un) inʾistanṭaqtah(u) wa huwa rākib(un)

It flows with clarity as it mounts [on paper]

[318] For a comprehensive account on the merits of the pen, ink, and the flask, see Sharishi, *Sharh maqamat al-Hariri*, 1:241-51.
[319] translation provided here as well as (any) errors are mine.

wa ʾaʿjam(un) in khāṭabtah(u) wa huwa rājil(u) 320

But once dismounted, it becomes obscure

Even later in the 19th century, the association of the pen with the snake continues in Silvestre De Sassy's commentary on al-Hariri's maqamas. The association rests, mainly, on both the snake's and the pen's primary appeal to sight: "the pen is given the name 'the black one' because it resembles the snake [. . .] for part of it is white and the other part is black owing to the ink in it, similar to the speckled snake."[321] Adding to De Sassy's remark, Kilito argues that a pen may bite and spit venom as a snake would.[322]

Similarly, in "the Spotted" of Ahwaz, Abu Zayd tells Harith of a eulogistic composition that earned him the governor's support against his oppressive creditor. Describing the governor's reaction to the composition's remarkable sequencing of dotted and undotted letters, Abu Zayd uses language that makes literary recognition of his composition contingent upon visual absorption of the address: "now when the governor had *discerned* the pearls of my address, and *caught a glance* of the secret committed to it, he made a sign at once for the paying of my debt."[323] When asked by Abu Zayd whether he prefers "a gift" or "a copy of the address," Harith responds that "the dictation of the address will be more pleasing to [him]." Eventually, when Abu Zayd gives Harith both a copy of the variegated address and a gift, the latter takes both

[320] Sharishi, *Sharh maqamat al-Hariri*, 1:247.
[321] Quoted in Kilito, *al-Aʿmal*, 3:303.
[322] Kilito, *al-Aʿmal*, 3:303.
[323] al-Hariri, *Assemblies*, trans. Thomas Chenery, 264.

and makes a concluding comment involving a pun on the word "eye" or *ʿayn*, thus he locks up the narrative around visual contentment: "I returned to my home, cool of eye [*qarīr al-ʿ**ayn***] through having gotten both the address and the coin [*bimā ḥuztu mina al-risālati wa-l-ʿ**ayn***]."[324] Therefore, together, the two maqamas visually "foreground geometrical and spatial relationships among the different signs [of ink]."[325] By staging different patterns of variegation in the alphabet, they intimate an ambivalent take on the meaning of *ʿujmah*. Rather than attributing alterity to "other" linguistic identities, *ʿujmah* in the context of al-Hariri's maqamas denotes the obscurity that the Arabic alphabet suffered from in the gaze of non-Arabs before diacritical marks were added.

al-Hariri's Maqama "Of Samarkand:" Listening, the Contraction of Distance, and Mimesis

Unlike "Of Meraghah" and "the Spotted," "Of Samarkand" reinstates both the aural and the oral as primary sources of knowledge. While on the surface "Of Samarkand" centers around an earlier mode of language experience represented by Friday sermon, i.e. *khuṭba* as well as in Harith's careful listening practices, this maqama, in the entirely undotted compositional form that Abu Zayd offers, is far more ambiguous than the previous ones. Therefore, it can pose manifold interpretations. In Samarkand,

[324] al-Hariri, *Assemblies*, trans. Thomas Chenery, 1:264. See also Sharishi, *Sharh maqamat al-Hariri*, 3: 295.

[325] هناك حالات تتحرر فيها الكتابة من وضعيتها الثانوية و من تبعيتها للقول. هذه الحالة هي ما يسمى بالألعاب الكتابية التي تخاطب العين و تمنح الأسبقية للعلاقة الهندسية أو الفضائية بين العلامات. في إحدى مقامات الحريري ينشيء أبو زيد رسالة قهقرية، اي رسالة يمكن أن تقرا من البداية إلى النهاية و من النهاية إلى البداية. [. . .] و هناك مقامة للحريري عنوانها "الرقطاء" سميت هكذا لأنها تشتمل على رسالة تتعاقب فيها حروف منقوطة و حروف غير منقوطة. Kilito, *al-Aʿmal*, 3:302.

Harith listens to a sermon delivered by Abu Zayd for the Friday prayer. Unlike the addresses presented in the two preceding maqamas, the sermon, in its written form, has not a single diacritical mark—a condition that al-Hariri compares to a "spotless bride," *ʿarūsan bilā nuqaṭ*.[326] Moreover, this maqama is uniquely predicated on deliberate abbreviation of distance as well as on presence, both of which are mediated through listening and Harith's ability to hear the sermon. A careful, maybe even pious, listener, Harith "hasten[s] [. . .] to the mosque so as to join those who *near* the prayer-leader [. . .] happily he [runs] foremost in the race and elect[s] the central place for hearing the sermon."[327] When the sermon concludes, Harith is amazed that it was "a choice thing without a flaw, and a bride without a spot," meaning that the script of the sermon is composed of Arabic letters none of which has a single diacritical mark.[328] When Harith scrutinizes the face of the preacher, he recognizes him as no other than Abu Zayd.

But how could Harith discern that subtle mode of compositional perfection? There are two possible answers to this question. On the one hand, if he is endowed with a memory (or in other words, if we could read the maqamas with a sense of continuity)[329] one may argue that Harith is trained to recognize the various language tricks made by Abu Zayd from previous incidents of *anagnorisis*. On the other hand, Harith's careful listening to the sermon and his recognition of the ubiquitous state of

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[326] Sharishi, *Sharh maqamat al-Hariri*, 3:353.
[327] Emphasis added. See al-Hariri, *The Assemblies of al-Hariri*, trans. Francis Joseph Steingass, 9.
[328] The first few lines of the sermon go as follows:
الحمدُ للهِ الممْدوح الأسْماء. المحْمودِ الآلاء. الواسع العَطاء. المدْعُوّ لحَسْمِ اللأواء. مالِكِ الأمَمِ. ومصوّرِ الرّمَمِ. وأهْلِ السّماح والكرَمِ. ومُهلِكِ عادٍ وإرَمَ. أدْرَكَ كلَّ سِرٍ عِلمهُ. ووَسِعَ كلَّ مُصِرٍ حِلمُهُ. وعَمّ كلَّ عالَمٍ طَوْلُهُ. وهدّ كلَّ مارِدٍ حولُهُ. أحمَدُهُ حمْدَ موَحِّدٍ مُسلِمٍ. وأدعوهُ دُعاءَ مؤمِّلٍ مسَلِّمٍ.
Sharishi, *Sharh maqamat al-Hariri*, 3:337-352.
[329] I briefly discussed this aspect of the maqama in the introduction.

ʾihmāl in it (had it been presented in written form) is a re-enactment of the historical phase during which Arabs relied on language intuition to understand the meaning of a written text before diacritics were even introduced. In this sense, this maqama may be read as a dramatization of the homo-lingual moment preceding the Arabs' encounter with different linguistic communities. That this maqama is set in Samarkand is revealing: al-Hariri's choice might reflect a purposeful strategy to invoke a past, *pure* orthographic moment of Arabic. By transposing that moment into a non-Arab locale, al-Hariri presents a maqama that reminds us of what initially had necessitated subsequent diacritic spotting onto the "bride."

I have previously suggested that this maqama has a more oblique poetic momentum than the previous ones discussed in this chapter. The anecdote is subtler than it seems to be. Indeed, we are also invited to rethink the images of purity and innocence associated with the textual substance of the "spotless" sermon. While Harith recognized the purity of the sermon through his masterful listening skill, al-Hariri's maqama still features a written form of the sermon's script; yet, this time it is provided mainly for the reader's own sake and is not part of the narrative scenario itself. Such move further complicates Harith's recognition of the sermon's uniqueness, by making it solely the result of his ability to match the sound of the letter with its image mentally.[330] As readers, we are also allowed to verify Harith's claims and will not fail

[330] This moment in the maqama remarkably resonates with Derrida's critique of Western metaphysics. According to Barbara Johnson, "Western thought, says Derrida, has always been structured in terms of dichotomies or polarities: good vs. evil, being vs. nothingness, presence vs. absence, truth vs. error identity vs. difference, mind vs. matter, soul vs. body, life vs. death, nature vs. culture, speech vs. writing. These polar opposites do not, however, stand as independent and equal entities. The second term in each pair is considered the negative, corrupt, undesirable version of the first, a fall away from it. Hence, [. . .] the two terms are not simply opposed but arranged in a hierarchical order which gives the first term priority, in both temporal and the qualitative sense of the word. [. . .] His critique of Western

to visually recognize that his amazement at the preacher's ingenuity is meaningful. Therefore, we are given the script: an impressive text that runs from beginning to end with undotted Arabic letters while conforming to the thematic and generic rules of Friday preaching. While the merits of the sermon confirm to us Abi Zayd's (or rather al-Hariri) language skill, the events that unfold prove Harith's aural ability.

However, because of its geographical setting in Samarkand, this maqama also forces us to think beyond such reading. While "of Samarkand" presents us with a perfectly undotted Arabic text, this condition also reverses ʿ*ujmah*, making it a condition of the Arabic alphabet itself prior to diacritical intervention. Indeed, as unadulterated as it stands, the script of the sermon re-enacts how Arabic alphabet would have stood visually indistinct for the different linguistic communities of ʿ*ajam* had the diacritical marks not been introduced. In other words, while comprehensible in the ears Harith and in the eyes of us the readers, the undotted script *mimetically* performs the vagueness of an earlier orthographic moment of Arabic, when the alphabet was completely unmarked.

Thus, this maqama is more intricate than "Of Meraghah" and "The Spotted"

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metaphysics focuses on its privileging of the spoken word over the written word. The spoken word is given a higher value because the speaker and the listener are both present to the utterance simultaneously. There is no temporal or spatial distance between speaker, speech, and listener, since the speaker hears himself speak at the same moment the listener does. This immediacy seems to guarantee the notion that in the spoken word we know what we mean, mean what we say, say what we mean, and know what we have said [and this logocentrism dominates Western culture irrespective of whether or not] there is understanding. [. . .] Writing, on the other hand, is considered by the logocentric system to be only a representation of speech, a secondary substitute designed for use only when speaking is impossible." Barbara Johnson, "Translator's Introduction," in Jacques Derrida, *Dissemination* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1981), viii-xi. Yet for Derrida, "the very fact that a word is divided into a phonic signifier and a mental signified and that, as Saussure pointed out, language is a system of difference rather than a collection of independently meaningful units, indicates that language as such is constituted by the very distances and differences that it seeks to overcome." Johnson, "Translator's Introduction," in Jacques Derrida, *Dissemination*, ix.

because it finely double-gestures towards two possible readings. On the one hand, given its dependence on listening and on Harith's shrewdness in recognizing the purity of the script, "Of Samarkand" shifts the temporal focus and take us to the moment that preceded Arabs' cultural encounter with different linguistic communities, thus registering an unadulterated moment of homo-lingualism. On the other hand, the setup in Samarkand simultaneously enacts the Arabs' encounter with linguistic difference by representing a script that emulates the pre-diacritic indistinctness of Arabic alphabet in the view of non-Arabs. As suggested earlier, the diacritical marks of the alphabet may be read as a vestige of hetero-lingualism in Arabo-Islamic culture and are associated with clarity and distinction. Thus, opposed to the "spotless bride" in this anecdote is a host of variegated animals: heterochrome horses, speckled snakes and spotted chickens that stand not only as tropes of how hetero-lingualism in the Islamic society inscribed onto the Arabic alphabet the diacritical marks, but also as indexes of differentiation that conferred clarity onto the Arabic orthography itself.

In effect, these three maqamas enact the different stages of the poetic shift from vague sameness to the perceptible difference. Read together, they seem to deliver a counter-intuitive statement. Intriguingly, how states of obscure homo-lingualism and differentiated hetero-lingualism are relayed via the changes befalling the Arabic alphabet seems to invert classical understanding of the post-Babel state of confused tongues. In what follows, I situate these maqams in the context of the debates surrounding the origin of tongues in classical Islamic imagination. Once more, Kilito's take on the question is revealing.

Hetero-lingualism in Early Islamic Imagination: the Confusion that Perfected God's Creation

In *The Tongue of Adam,* Kilito compiles lectures he delivered at the Collège de France in 1990, where he focused mainly on such questions as, "what was the language spoken in Eden?" "What happened after Babel?" "Who wrote the first poem in Arabic,"[331] among others that revolve around "the Tongue of Adam." Kilito resorts to what he calls the "literary manifestations," of the "Tongue of Adam," in discourses taken from classical Arabo-Islamic corpus that also verged on "the brinks of philology, philosophy, history, and theology [*ʿilm al-kalām*]."[332] Drawing on classical Arabic works and on a "rich reservoir of marginal texts that have not yet received attention," Kilito attempts to understand how Islamic imagination dealt with the question of language at "the time of the first creation [*zaman al-badʾ*]."[333]

Examining the mythic narrative of hetero-lingualism in the Biblical tradition, Kilito dwells on the mournful tone with which the story of Babel is customarily told. He draws on the words of French structuralist anthropologist Jean-Pierre Vernant who, examining Greeks' ethnocentrism, concluded that they saw linguistic diversity as the base of confusion and misunderstanding:

> for all their curiosity, the ancient Greeks don't seem to have troubled themselves to wonder what language men of Golden Age spoke . . . but perhaps the answer

[331] Marina Warner, "Foreword." In Abdelfattah Kilito, *The Tongue of Adam* (New York: New Directions Publishing Corporation, 2016), viii.
[332] Kilito, *al-Aʿmal,* 1:8.
[333] Kilito, *al-Aʿmal,* 1:8-9.

> to this question was so obvious it did not need to be asked: what else would they have spoken but this language, Greek, the only real one, unlike the babble of those called *barbarians* precisely because the sounds they make have no more sense than confused gibberish?[334]

Dwelling on the dichotomy of Greek and "Barbarian," Kilito observes that the distinction between the two categories implies

> a rupture, a lack of harmony, between communities. It is an admission of discord, widespread miscomprehension. [And i]f there was such time when such disharmony was unknown, then it was when the earth spoke one language, just prior to Babel. [. . .] It is only after the drama of Babel—[that] mankind scattered to the winds, [that] multiple languages took the place of a single language, [that] linguistic barriers arose."[335]

Seen from this perspective, the confusion of tongues then seems to be God's curse inflicted upon mankind, as a punishment for their ambition to build a tower "whose top would touch heavens."[336]

But how does the classical Arabic tradition view multiplicity in languages, or the state of "confusion" (*balbalah*) thereof? In *Lisān al-ʿArab* (The Tongue of Arabs) Arabic lexicon by 13th century Ibn Manzur, one finds under the entry "*b-l-l*:"

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[334] Abdelfattah Kilito, *The Tongue of Adam*, trans. Marina Warner (New York: New Directions Publishing Corporation, 2016), 14.
[335] Kilito, *The Tongue of Adam*, 15.
[336] Kilito, *The Tongue of Adam*, 15.

> *balbalah*: is disagreement among opinions; when tongues are in a state of *balbalah*, they are in a state of confusion (*ikhtilāṭ*). In the tradition, the land of Babel was given this name because when God had decided to bring difference to [make distinct] the tongues of Adam's children, he sent down a wind and crammed them from all horizons in Babel and confused their tongues. Then, the wind scattered them again on earth.[337]

Commenting on this entry, Kilito observes

> In *The Tongue of Arabs*, the great 13th century dictionary of Ibn Manzur, under the entry *b-l-l*, the story of confusion of tongues is rapidly summarized, but with two important details added. First, the wind that brings mankind together at Babel subsequently disperses them over the earth (*fī al-bilād*). Second, God is said to have a specific goal, or design: 'When God wanted to make distinct the tongues of man . . .' Here is an affirmation of intent, of divine decision. . .[338]

For Kilito, it does not seem from Ibn Manzur's entry that God's decision is "a reaction to some outrageous sin mankind has committed."[339] Confusion (understood here as

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[337] "البلبلة: تفريق الآراء، و تبلبلت الألسن: اختلطت. البلبلة: اختلاط الألسنة. و قيل: سميت أرض بابل لأن الله تعالى حين أراد أن يخالف بين ألسنة بني آدم بعث ريحا فحشرهم من كل أفق إلى بابل فبلبل اللهم بها ألسنتهم، ثم فرقتهم الريح في البلاد."
Ibn Manzur. *Lisan al-ʿArab* (Beirut: Dar Sadir, 1993. *al-Maktaba al-shamila*) XI:68-9. Accessed on Web. 20 May, 2018.

[338] Kilito, *The Tongue of Adam*, 22.

[339] Kilito, *The Tongue of Adam*, 22.

multiplicity and sundry-ness) is a perfection of a *then* unfinished deed: "it is obviously not to punish man that God confounds their tongues at the ceremony to which he has invited them. Instead, it is as if his creation were incomplete, as if it lacked some important feature in order to be finished satisfactorily."[340] Both separation and bringing difference as acts of creation stretch beyond languages:

> After creating the heavens and the earth, after differentiating the various elements, a corresponding differentiation within mankind is needed. Creation is an act of separation [*al-khalq(u) fitq*]. Heavens are parted, the earth is divided from the heavens, and *men must also be distinguished* from one another by their colors and tongues [emphasis added]. . . No curse [it is,] but a divine sign, like man's geographical dispersal. God purposefully introduces diversity into his creation [. . .] otherwise, ambiguity, disorder, and misunderstanding would reign. [As such, plurality and heterogeneity] are conditions of knowledge. Knowledge of names and mutual recognition flow from distinctions that exist between men, whether on the level of their voice, or the color of their skin.[341]

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[340] Kilito, *The Tongue of Adam*, 22.

[341] Kilito, *The Tongue of Adam*, 23-4. Notably, these views must not indicate that the views on hetero-lingualism in early Arabo-Islamic imagination were uniform. At the time of the empire, questioned were raised about what languages Adam spoke in paradise in order to make a proto-nationalist statements about the Arab's superiority among other linguistic groups. Kilito mentions that while the "Arabs' reflections on the origins of language are governed by the famous Quranic verse, "he taught Adam the name of all things [in all languages,]" Ibn ʿAbbas from seventh century contended that "Adam spoke Arabic in the garden." Contrary to Ibn ʿAbbas, 10th century grammarian Ibn Jinni believed that "Adam spoke all the languages [. . .] God taught Adam the names of all creatures, in all languages: Arabic, Persian, Syriac, Hebrew, Greek and others as well. Adam and his children spoke them, and afterward the children scattered across the earth: each adopted one of the languages which marked him more and more deeply until he forgot others." If in the beginning, Adam and his children knew all the languages, then "multilingualism was the rule [. . .] and the plurality of tongues was synonymous with cohesion – diversity with unity [. . .] the harmonious multilingualism [of Adam and his progeny] slowly began to change, from the unity in the diversity of tongues came disunity in the

From this we glean that "of Meraghah," "the Spotted," and "of Samarkand" subtly dramatize (in non-linear fashion), via various levels of variegation, the "confusion" that brings an end to the "ambiguity" that is inherent in conditions of indistinctness. One may argue that al-Harīrī's maqamas enact a narrative of differentiation transcribed onto the Arabic alphabet itself in a manner that, first, animates difference as integral to existence, and second, proposes ʿ*ujmah* as a condition of the Arabic alphabet until differentiated by *alterity*'s gaze. Through levels of variegation and (dis)ambiguation, these maqamas reflect the processes by which the "self" remains undifferentiated, like a "spotless bride," until it is differentiated via encounter with its other, upon which it solidifies into a definite being. In this sense, although al-Hariri's maqamas do not engage with classical acts of interlinguistic translation, "of Meraghah," "the Spotted," and "of Samarkand" insinuate the notion that a hetero-linguistic world is the world of perfect creation.

Al-Yaziji's *Majmaʿ al-bahrayn* and the Transfer of ʿ*ujmah* to Arabia

Majmaʿ al-bahrayn consists of a preface, sixty maqamas and an epilogue that tells us, in al-Yaziji's own voice, that the collection was finished in 1855.[342] While most

monotony of single tongues." Structurally, this development (or regress) recalls Babel's confusion of languages, by turning the story inside out. In the Babel legend, the people who began by speaking one tongue end by speaking many; multiplicity follows unity. In the version of Ibn Jinni, it's the reverse that happens, unity follows multiplicity, insofar as those who initially spoke all languages end by speaking only one." Kilito, *The Tongue of Adam*, 27; 30-1.

[342] "و كان الفراغ من تبييضه في شهر نيسان سنة ألف و ثماني مئة و خمس و خمسين"
Nasif al-Yaziji, *Majmaʿ al-bahrayn* (Beirut: Dar Bayrut, 1966), 325.

classical maqamas collections have a clearly marked end, whether in the death of hero or his repentance, al-Yaziji's collection has, in addition to a finalizing maqama on the trickster's repentance, a clear beginning. The first maqama in the collection, titled "of the Bedouin" (*al-Badawiyyah*), is a dramatis personae: it introduces the trickster as well as his daughter and boy (servant). The narrator, Suhayl Ibn Abbad comes to a tent and recites three verses of poetry, wondering who may inhabit it. From behind the curtain comes the voice of the hero:

> I am Maymun [ibn Khizam], from the tribe of al-Khizam
> And this is Layla, my daughter in front of me
> Yes, and here is my boy [ghulām] Rajab
> Whoever comes under my patronage
> Will be safe from the vicissitudes of Fate[343]

Unlike al-Hariri's collection, where the ploy is usually both devised and executed by picaresque hero Abu Zayd al-Saruji, al-Yaziji's collection features Rajab and Layla as Maymun's accomplices in his tricks. However, despite some clear divergences between the collections, both have been subjected to almost the same mode of reading that correlated the geographical knowledge and travel experiences of their respective

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[343] إني ميمون بني الخزام
و هذه ليلى ابنتي امامي
نعم و هذا رجب غلامي
من رام ان يدخل في ذمامي
يأمن من بوائق الأيام
See al-Yaziji, *Majmaʿ al-bahrayn*, 11.
Synopsis of this maqama is appropriated from Jaakko Hämeen-Anttila, *Maqama: a History of a Genre* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2002), 353.

authors with the spatial amplitude of their respective tricksters' movements. Because al-Yaziji composed his maqamas in the mid-19th century, at a time-period that is characterized by Arab intellectuals' increased traveling to Europe, his work was particularly evaluated first, by the fact that al-Yaziji, unlike his fellow authors of the *Nahda* , never traveled outside his homeplace Lebanon and second, by his lack of knowledge in foreign languages. On both his limiting monolingualism as well as his unadventurous domestic travelling biographers agreed.[344] Indeed, some of those views are tenable, for like the author, al-Yaziji's trickster Maymun *does* demonstrate a relatively more average geographical ambition. Although he does, like Abu Zayd al-Saruji traverse a somewhat large expanse of geographical space, his scope is yet more limited than Abu Zayd's. While Abu Zayd surveyed the then-known Islamic world in his adventures, thus occasionally coming across some incarnations of *ʿujmah* in non-Arab lands, Maymun, on the other hand pointedly confines his travels to Arab cities and provinces, many of which bear local references to towns and regions within Lebanon, Syria, and Palestine.[345]

Hence, due to the collection's more limited scope of traveling, one expects that it diminishes the range of "difference" encountered even further. However, by examining al-Yaziji's maqamas closely, we have a different story. In fact, in two of the maqamas, intriguingly set in two of the major provinces of Arabia,[346] al-Yaziji does engage with instantiations of *ʿujmah*. Yet, while al-Hariri deployed *ʿujmah* as a passageway to reflect on "difference," al-Yaziji uses *ʿujmah* as means to problematize

[344] Starkey, "Nāṣīf al-Yāzijī," in *Essays in Arabic Literary Biography, 1850-1950,*
[345] Sheehi, *Foundations of Modern Arab Identity,* 122.
[346] The five provinces of Arabia are the Yemen, Hijaz, Tihama, Najd, and Yamama.

"sameness," an aspect of his intellectual positions that I will explore further below. Moreover, since al-Yaziji was also viewed by critics as "conservative" "adherent" to the "ancients"[347] his work was dismissed to be no more than an iteration the classical authors' work. In what follows, I challenge this particular take on his work. I extract meaning from iteration or repetition. To my mind, al-Yaziji's adherence to the ancients can be meaningfully explored, particularly because of the way he stages mimesis in *Majmaʿ al-bahrayn*.

In the maqama "Of Tihama," or *al-Tihāmiyyah*, narrator Suhayl Ibn Abbad takes lodging at the dwelling place of a noble tribe in the Tihama valley in western Arabia. While entertaining themselves and exchanging curious jokes at night, the assembly learns of the arrival of the orator of the Arabs (*khaṭīb al-ʿarab*) (Rajab in disguise), followed by an old man (Maymun) who "stammers with distorted Arabic marked by incorrect pronunciation typically characteristic of the *ʿajam*" (*wa huwa yartaḍikhu luknatan aʿjamiyyah*). On the next morning, Rajab delivers a sermon where he urges the then-warring Arab tribes to make peace, seek unity over enmity, avoid impetuous decisions and, particularly "to not equal the voices of wisemen with the incoherent noise of the camel" (*wa lā yakun ʿindakum ṣawt(u) al-nadhīr(i) ka ṣawt(i) al-baʿīr(i)*).[348] Since Rajab uses the same generic word "sound" (*ṣawt*) to signify both the voice of wisemen as well as the noise of the camel, Maymun intervenes and draws the orator's attention that he had used a rather vague word item to refer to a camel's sound. He clarifies by adding that that in Arabic, there is an extensive nomenclature

[347] Kilito, *al-Aʿmal*, 1:243.
[348] al-Yaziji, *Majmaʿ al-bahrayn*, 236.

that precisely designates sound types based on their sources: "o master, sounds have, in fact, names that bind them" (*yā mawlāy, inna li al-aṣwāt(i) quyūd(an) fi al-ḥaqāʾiq*).[349] Performing his role in the drama, Rajab asks Maymun to share with him, as well as the assembly, the list of Arabic words used to name different sounds of animals, of natural phenomena, and of different human bodily reactions and functions. After presenting a perfect poem that sums up those words, Maymun is then recognized by the crowd as an authority of language despite his foreignness. Afterwards, he is awarded by the group, when his poem had been recorded in written form by narrator Ibn Abbad and is therefore preserved.

Conversely, in "Of Yamama," Maymun and his boy Rajab exchange positions as authorities in language. In this anecdote, Ibn Abbad seeks the "land of pure-blooded (genuine) Arabs where most astute poets and orators, eloquent men of letters, and profound nobilities are to be found."[350] Seeing a crowd from afar, Suhayl gleans that people have gathered around two disputing men: a clamorous lad, Rajab as well as his old master, Maymun, who is scolding him. When asked about the causes of the dispute, Maymun claims that his boy has repeatedly failed to speak proper Arabic in spite of his master's careful and strict language instruction, for "although this boy is of an Arab up-bringing, he is of Romaeanz origin" (*inna hādha al-fatā ʿarabiyy(u) al-dār, lākinnah(u) rūmiy(u) al-nijār*).[351] To preclude any objections by the assembly, Maymun then asks Rajab to repeat a number of Arabic verses after him, in order to bring evidence to his own claims. Consenting to his master's command after moments

[349] al-Yaziji, *Majmaʿ al-bahrayn*, 237.
[350] al-Yaziji, *Majmaʿ al-bahrayn*, 280.
[351] al-Yaziji, *Majmaʿ al-bahrayn*, 283.

of feigned hesitation and reluctance, Rajab repeats the same verses by, first, replacing certain Arabic sounds whose letters are undotted with their dotted counterparts and by, second, replacing guttural sounds with glottals in a way that not only irritates the hearing of the audience but also distorts the meaning and detracts from the noble tenor of the original verse. Responding to Maymun's wish to sell the useless boy to anyone in the assembly, some of the gathering men agree to buy Rajab, only after they recognize that despite his provocative error, there has no fault in his written verse compositions. When Maymun receives the money, the new masters command Rajab to guide their camels; then Rajab and Maymun part company. Aware of the stratagem, Ibn Abbad follows Maymun at a distance to find him waiting for Rajab to arrive on a stolen mare afterwards. The anecdote ends with Rajab telling his master, as well as Ibn Abbad, that he had escaped from his new owners and left them in a state of complete vexation over his sudden disappearance.

Together, both "Of Tihama," and "Of Yamama" are discursively linked to al-Hariri's maqamas that were discussed earlier. Specifically, these maqamas resonate with "Of Samarkand" from multiple standpoints. First, while "Of Samarkand" presents an undotted script that covertly enacts a vagueness in written form that mimes the Arabic script in the pre-diacritical, homo-lingual moment, al-Yaziji's maqamas on the other hand bring mimetic performance to a more articulate level. In the classical maqama model, the trickster customarily resorts to masks of disguise that consistently belong to a familiar cultural paradigm; in al-Yaziji's collection by contrast, Maymun and Rajab stretch the game of pretense to its limits by impersonating men of *ʿajam* and particularly by speaking *as if* (they were Arabs).

Second, staging a snapshot of the narrative of the Arabic alphabet, "Of Samarkand" engages with two modalities that are intimately linked with mimesis and the creation of "the same:" namely, hearability of sound and abbreviation of distance. We have seen how in this maqama that an association was created between the aural element in the narrative and spatial proximity through Abu Zayd's earnest choice to be seated at the center of the mosque within an earshot distance from the orator. Since sameness is determined by conceptual manipulations of proximity and distance, Abu Zayd's ability to listen to the sermon, achieved decisively by his closeness to the orator, is linked with the mimetic discourse that this maqama stages obliquely. As mentioned earlier, the script of the *khuṭba* stages *ihmāl* in the alphabet to reproduce a script that behaves *as if*. In its performance of this vagueness, the script recreated the moment at which the *ʿajam* viewed the Arabic alphabet prior to the introduction of diacritics.

In similar ways, both "Of Tihama," and "Of Yamama" are predicated on the creation of the same. They both intimate sameness in their manipulation of distance and engagement with sound and hearability. Intriguingly in dialogue with "Of Samarkand," both "Of Tihama," and "Of Yamama" develop their narratives either by deploying a nomenclature of sound qualities in the Arabic language or by simulating an aural dissonance in Arabic that disquiets the listeners' hearing.

al-Yaziji's Maqamas of Arabia: Mimesis, Sound, and Anxiety of Sameness

If al-Hariri's maqamas place *difference* at the center of their cultural and social enquiry, I argue that al-Yaziji's maqama, by contrast, foreground *sameness* as a tool to

problematize Arab (proto)nationalism in the 19th century—a question I will return to below in this chapter. Deploying various instantiations of *mimesis* in the Arabian Peninsula, "of Tihama," and "of Yamama" eventually intimate anxieties that unhinge the quietude that customarily attends the production of the same. No longer a condition that is grasped visually, *ʿujmah* in al-Yaziji's maqama is conveyed through acts mimesis (*as if*) that are particularly achieved through Maymun's and Rajab's sound-oriented performances. We shall see that through intricate forms of oral and aural configurations, al-Yaziji's maqama dramatizes sameness poetically by manipulating distance to fulfil proximity—a proximity without which narratives of the maqamas themselves would not proceed.

In both "Of Tihamah" and "Of Yamamah" the reader is made aware that ibn ʿAbbad is undertaking a purist quest after an "unadulterated" form of the Arabic language in Arabia, the place that is believed to be the mythic *terra prima* of the language.[352] While in Tihama, he stays with an honorable Arab tribe: "I took lodging at the dwelling place of a noble people" (*nazaltu bi qawmin minʾulī al-shahāmah*).[353] Similarly, when in Yamama of Najd he explicitly expresses his desire to seek the language from its purest sources: "I have always been fond of the land of pure-blooded (genuine) Arabs, where most astute poets and orators, eloquent men of letters, and profound nobilities are to be found." (*wa kuntuʾahwā diyār(a) al-ʿarab(i) al-ʿarbāʾ, limā fihā min(a) al-shuʿarāʾ(i) wa-l-khutābaʾ, wa-l-fusahāʾ(i) wa-l-ʾudabāʾ,*

[352] I borrow Rana Issa's term, in Rana Issa, "The Arabic Language and Syro-Lebanese National Identity Searching in Buṭrus Al-Bustānī's Muḥīṭ Al-Muḥīṭ," *Journal of Semitic Studies* 62, no.2 (2017): 465-484.
[353] al-Yaziji, *Majmaʿ al-bahrayn*, 235.

wa-l-bulaghāʾ(i) wa-l-nujabāʾ."[354] How this quest is made does not only iterate early language missions undertaken by the founders of the Arabic grammar in the 9th century, of which listening, or *samaʿ* was the primary tool for acquiring knowledge.[355] In fact, Ibn Abbad's quest presents sound and hearing as a means to convey proximity and curtail of distance that can be unpacked in a twofold way. First, we are made aware that ibn ʿAbbad's ability to narrate the events of the incident depends mainly on his proximity to Maymun and Rajab as they perform their roles and, subsequently, on his ability to recognize the idiosyncrasies of the acoustic experience. At the same time and conversely, predicating the narrative on the elements of sound and hearing enables the author to reflect on the proximity that is constituted in conceptualizing the *same*. Second, we will see that the proximity that enable two or more entities to be connected through relationships of *sameness* is simultaneously overwhelmed by an anxiety that unsettles the quietude usually produced in such relationship. If that proximity, as we shall see, unfolds into a rhetoric of *mimesis*, we also realize that no sooner is *sameness* intimated between entities than it is also disquieted.

"Of Tihama" speaks squarely in the terms just delineated. Endowed with strong memory, Ibn Abbad recognized the newcomers to be both Rajab and old Maymun, who in this incident pretends to be a man of the *ʿajam*, stammering in speech blemished by incorrect pronunciation: "*wa huwa yartaḍikhu luknatan aʿjamiyyah*." [356] Upon seeing Maymun, ibn Abbad resorts to a type of imagery that resonates with the

[354] al-Yaziji, *Majmaʿ al-bahrayn*, 280.
[355] For more on that phase in the early Islamic world, see Houari Touati, *Islam & Travel in the Middle Ages*, trans. and Lydia G Cochrane (Chicago: University of Chicago Press), 2010.
[356] al-Yaziji, *Majmaʿ al-bahrayn*, 235.

images invested by al-Hariri in his poetic take on *ʿujmah*: "I knew who he was the moment I saw him despite the foreignness in his tongue. Upon that, I thought to myself: 'tis but the beginning of it; 'tis an harbinger of evil" (*fa ʿaraftuhu ʿinda ʿiyānih, alā ʿujmati lisānih. wa qult: hādhihi fātiḥat al-māsaʿī, wa fāliyat al afāʿī*). If "speckled chicken" and "spotted snakes" signified "difference" as an organizing principle in al-Hariri's worldview, al-Yaziji's reference to "*fāliyat al afāʿī*" intimates an anxious take on the "same." From the fauna of Arabia Ibn Manzur defines *fāliyat al afāʿī,* known as the domino beetle, as a black beetle with white spots that is known to occupy natural sites adjacent to snakes' places of dwelling.[357] In nomadic Arab imagination, its appearance in the desert is usually taken as an ominous occurrence, presaging the coming out of dangerous snakes. Indeed, as the company gathers, Ibn Abbad tells us, old Maymun stands up and begins to deliver a most dissonant speech, with his tongue flicking inside his mouth *as if* he were a speckled snake. As such, the eeriness suggested by Ibn Abbad comes from a troubling sense of sameness: Maymun's flicking of his tongue apprehensively vacillates between two approximating phonemic entities: "then he flicked his tongue, as would a spotted snake, and as he spoke, he replaced *ḍād* with *ẓāʾ*": (*wa jaʿal(a) yunaḍniḍ(u) ka al-ḥayyat(i) al-raqṭāʾ, wa ʾidhā takkalam(a) yubdil(u) al- ḍād(a) bi al- ẓāʾ*). Using the verb *naḍnaḍa* ن.ض.ضto draw an image of Maymun's speech, al-Yaziji invokes certain meanings associated with it. According to Ibn Manzur: "when something is described as *naḍnāḍ* نضناض; it is of a fidgety, restless nature."[358] On their part, given

[357] Ibn Manzur. *Lisan al-ʿArab*, (Beirut: Dar Sadir, 1993) XV: 164. Accessed through *al-Maktaba al shamila*. Web. 18 July 2018.
[358] Ibn Manzur. *Lisan al-ʿArab*, VII: 237. Accessed through *al-Maktaba al shamila*. Web. 15 June 2018.

their physical proximity to Maymun, the congregation responds repulsively to the aural dissonance of his speech, which they view as a sign of collapse in language: "The assembly thereupon looked down onto Maymun, and turned both their gaze and hearing away from him" (*fa ʾiqtaḥamat(hu) ʾaʿyun(u) al jamāʿah, waʿāfu maẓarah(u) wa samāʿah*).[359]

In "Of Tihama," the anxiety intimated in the fluctuation between the two approximate sounds carries over, in mimetic forms to the collective aural experience of the audience. While it truncates distance by transacting closeness, it also dissolves boundaries between self and other. Moreover, this anxiety provides the terms with which we may rethink modernity's idealization of rationality and its claims of overcoming an age-long tradition of *mimesis*, a question that is particularly relevant for understanding al-Yaziji's literary interventions in the mid19th century.

To explain further, I borrow from Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno's critique in *The Dialectic of Enlightenment.* Debunking modernity's claims to originality as well as its insistence on superseding a mode of archaic thought that is predicated on repetition and *mimesis,* Adorno[360] argues that, in privileging abstract reason over senses and emotion, Western philosophy "violently distances the self from nature, and subjects the outer world of things and the inner world of thought to the totalitarian administration of the isolated individual."[361] For Adorno, modern ways of knowing are very much predicated onto *mimesis*, the very tendency that is "repressed underside of

[359] al-Yaziji, *Majmaʿ al-bahrayn*, 235.
[360] I refer to Adorno mostly because he is responsible for the theoretical account of mimesis in *Dialectics.*
[361] Potolsky, *Mimesis*, 144.

the Enlightenment, [and] the biological prehistory of humanity from which [the very] reason [of Enlightenment] arises, but which rational thought rejects."[362] "Where Enlightenment rationality seems to standardize and classify," Adorno adds, "*mimesis* does not respect the rigid divisions between subject and object. It is therefore akin to "touch, soothing, snuggling up, coaxing."[363] As opposed to "sight," which functions best at a distance from the object, *mimesis* is like "smell; [it] mingles self and other [for] when we smell we are taken by otherness."[364]

As Adorno reinstates *mimesis* in the workings of modernity, he compares it with smell, due to smell's liquidating force, but contrasts it with sight, which is mainly associated with control and subjugation. Unlike sight, which stands out as a "rational" faculty that is predicated onto distance, smell is more subversive and is contingent upon the contraction of distance. Building on and appropriating for my purposes this homologous relationship between smell and *mimesis*, I argue that al-Yaziji's account in this maqama foregrounds sound hearing as a means to inflate the force of *mimesis.* If "touch" and "smell" collapse boundaries between subject and object primarily through to their truncation of distance among entities, so does sound hearing in this maqama. Hearability in this anecdote connotes the curtail of distance between Maymun, Ibn Abbad and the audience. With its mimetic thrust in the maqama, sound hearing transacts sameness and works affectively to dissolve the boundaries between a man of *ʿajam* who shrieks his language dissonance and the "pure" Arabs whose hearing is upset by his discombobulating utterance: "The assembly thereupon looked

[362] Potolsky, *Mimesis*, 144.
[363] Potolsky, *Mimesis*, 144.
[364] Potolsky, *Mimesis*, 145.

down onto Maymun, and turned both their gaze and hearing away from him" (*fa ʾiqtaḥamat(hu) ʾaʿyun(u) al jamāʿah, waʿāfu maẓarah(u) wa samāʿah*).[365] In this poetic transaction of sameness, there is a subversive circularity that further confirms the identitiarian collapse suggested above. Rather than setting the world at a distance, mimesis here brings it closer. Conversely, the physical proximity between Maymun and his audience enables that mimetic performance to be grasped fully. In other words, in this maqama the cause and the effect are in continuous reversal of positions. And in contrast to al-Hariri's maqamas where the logic is one of visual differentiation, this maqama makes "resemblance a means of affecting the world."[366]

Besides using resemblance to liquidate and de-sanctify the boundaries of the self, "Of Tihama" also brings forth acts of *mimesis* in a way that confirms its essential role in primordial language production and use. When Rajab delivers a speech in which he urges the warring Arabs to seek peace and distinguish the voices of reason from those of irrationality, he uses the same generic word *ṣawt*, i.e. sound, to refer to both the voice of presaging men as well as the sound of the camel. Aiming to rectify the orator and establish his own image as an authority, Maymun interrupts Rajab and observes that in Arabic (also as in all languages) is an elaborate nomenclature for different sounds. In an impressive poem, Maymun gives a list of Arabic words used for that purpose. He enumerates words that refer to sounds of animals, of natural phenomena, or of human body functions and reactions: "of the wind, it is called *hazīz*; of the tree leaves, it is called *ḥafīf*; of thunder, it is called *hazīm*; and of rain it is called *dawiyy*. .

[365] al-Yaziji, *Majmaʿ al-bahrayn*, 235.
[366] Potolsky, *Mimesis*, 145.

."[367] Drawing on Walter Benjamin's speculative history of *mimesis* in "The Mimetic Faculty," I argue that this maqama dramatizes what Benjamin refers to as "nonsensunous similarity." Rather than advocating a theory on the decay of mimesis in modernity, Benjamin argues that the mimetic faculty is still active and that mimesis has not disappeared from modernity: "Children's play, sympathetic magic, and astrology [. . .] are all instances of 'nonsensuous similarity' [a] similarit[y] that exists not just between things that materially resemble one another, but between the animate and the inanimate." For Benjamin, "the crucial means for the formation of nonsensuous similarities in modernity is language [for] language is fundamentally mimetic. Onomatopoeia is the most obvious instance of linguistic mimesis."[368] Whether this onomatopoeic poem must be read as a lexical turn in the *Nahḍhah* is moot, 369 what I observe in relation to mimesis is that the words Maymun enumerates

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[367] هزيز ريح و حفيف شجر وهزيم رعد و دوي مطر
وسواس حلية صليل النصل قلقلة المفتاح ضمن القفل
رنة قوس و صريف الناب صرير أقلام على الكتاب
جعجعة الرحى و خفق النعل غطغطة القدر نقيض الرحل
قعقعة القيد عزيف الجن زفير نار نغم المغني
[. . .]
al-Yaziji, *Majmaʿ al-bahrayn*, 238.

[368] Potolsky, *Mimesis*,141.

[369] What is referred to as "the lexical turn" of the *Nahda* has been a subject of disagreement between Nadia Bou Ali and Rana Issa. In her "Collecting the Nation: Lexicography and National Pedagogy in al-Nahḍah al-ʿArabiyya," Bou Ali writes "the nineteenth century literary movement has left us an extensive archive constituted of dictionaries, encyclopedias, and lexicons, along with other works of translations and treatises on history and society [that] constitute an *arche* and *techne* of national memory insofar as they have the propensity, once given voice, to control a past that they themselves imagine. Engaging with the archive as a subject rather than as a source shows how the lexicographical turn that has been generally overlooked in scholarship on Arab history is the first instance of formation of the imaginary institution of the Arab nation." On her part, Rana Issa objects to Bou Ali's view of the lexicographic projects of the period as a "turn." In line with her purposes to examine Buṭrus al-Bustānī's interventions in *Muḥīṭ Al-Muḥīṭ* in relation to an extensive tradition of dictionary making in the pre-Nahdha period, Issa writes "the process is not an isolated Nahḍah phenomenon. And Arabic lexicography has a history of lexical production that had accompanied large political shifts, questions and upheavals in the Nahḍah as well as in earlier periods." In my view, while lexicography in the *Nahda* might not be a uniquely isolated phenomenon at the time, what was remarkably common among many *Nahda* intellectuals is what I would like to call a "thematization" of lexicographical discourse in

to signify different sounds exemplify the self-miming side to language whereby sound is used to imitate itself: "of the wind, it is *hazīz*. . ." Once again, sound in this maqama is used as a medium of bridging distance, of approximation that seems at a glance to consolidate, but in fact hacks established boundaries. Since onomatopoeia is a function in human language that consists in the formation of a word from a sound associated with what is being named, it defies the arbitrariness in language and replaces it with a motivation, or an underlying mimetic power that unhinges humans' superior position in their world. So far, unsettling: although "Of Tihama" does not dramatize *mimesis* in its storyline, *mimesis* here unfolds indirectly. This maqama creates a narrative where imitation is mainly achieved through a spatial contraction, and it does so in two ways: first via audibility and hearability, and second in sound that is used to self-index. However, the contraction of distance; the poetic emergence of "the same" (or rather its discovery?) do not vouch for quietude. The emerging sentiment is permeated by anxiety and affect[370] that disturb or collapse established boundaries among different

literary works. For example, both al-Shidyaq and al-Yaziji dwelled at length in their creative works on extensive enumerations of lexical items that either belong to specific semantic domain or that are at defining or antonymous relationships among themselves. al-Shidyaq's *Leg over Leg* invests in countless lists of synonymy governed by specific phonemic sounds that in Arabic have certain semantic qualities. On his part, al-Yaziji, as we have seen in "of Tihama," thematizes names that give an identity to different sounds. The literary choice of name enumeration is not unique to "Of Yamama;" several other maqamas in his collection feature the same technique—thus combining the elements of language instruction along with literary entertainment. Bou Ali, "Collecting the Nation," 36. Also see Issa, "The Arabic Language and Syro-Lebanese National Identity Searching in Buṭrus al-Bustānī's Muḥīṭ al-Muḥīṭ," 470.

[370] El-Ariss's *Trials of Arab Modernity* elaborates on affect as a tool for understanding modernity's trials, especially for the Arab subject. He writes, "*Trials of Arab Modernity* draws both on classical and modern Arabic literature and thought, and contemporary theory and philosophy. Reading affects as a counterpart to the question of representation, which has governed literary studies for so long, is key for identifying new crossings between the literary and the political, experience and writing. These links are inscribed in the body, a site of literary and cultural narratives and histories. In *Body Consciousness: A Philosophy of Mindfulness and Somaesthetics*, Richard Shusterman reads the body as the 'organizing core of experience.' He introduces the notion of Somaesthetics, employing the word soma to denote 'the living, feeling, sentiment, purposive body rather than a mere physical corpus of flesh and bones. [. .

entities.

To better understand the implications of *mimesis* in *Majmaʿ al-Baḥrayn*, I examine what happens in "Of Yamama," which takes *mimesis* to a more articulate level. In this maqama, al-Yaziji builds a comic anecdote that unfolds around staged mimesis. While imitation here establishes a hierarchy between what we are encouraged to view as the "original" and the "copy," we are also led to rethink that relationship inversely. Besides collapsing the division among copies and originals; this maqama also reverses the hierarchy established between them in a manner that renders the "original" as an image that provides an anticipatory model for the "copy."

Also driven by a quest after "pure" Arabic, Ibn Abbad lands in the town of Ḥijr in Yamama, hoping to meet some of its astute poets and orators, well-spoken men of letters, and profound nobilities. At a distance, he sees a crowd gathered around Maymun and Rajab, with the former scolding the latter for his failure to master the Arabic language and speak it properly despite careful instruction. Describing his effort to teach Rajab, Maymun bemoans the enormous amount of education he had put into this boy. In his words,

> This boy is born and raised in Arabia, but his origins are of *al-Rūm*. On him I have spent every *dinār*, and every *dirham*, amounts which even the most generous would never spend. I took pains to refine his tongue and balance his

.] The body expresses the ambiguity of human being, as both subjective sensibility that experiences the world and as an object perceived in the world. The body has agency and thus cannot be reduced to a medium, prison, or object of representation in critical discourse." El-Ariss, *The Arab Renaissance: a Bilingual Anthology of the Nahda*, 4-5.

speech. Yet, the edifying snaffles I placed in his mouth he broke, and the speech of ʿ*ajam* he always spoke. He calls the *muʿallim* [teacher] *muʾallim* [pain inflictor], the *qalb* [heart] *kalb* [dog], the *ḥīṭān* [walls] *khīṭān* [threads] [. . .] and all the like which no sound literary instinct can accept, and no pure Arab ear can bear or expect. God be my witness: I only want to cultivate rather than torture him and wish to educate rather than rebuke him. But inasmuch as I also take pains to rectify him, he trips; and inasmuch as I desire to straighten him, he deviates.[371]

Offering the assembly a chance to verify the truth of his claims, Maymun urges them to test Rajab's language competence: "If in doubt, you may test him to see for yourselves, or I will test him before you, so you may be assured."[372] Once again, the maqama here facilitates the narrative progression by collapsing distance and by obliquely intimating the same. As the gathering cedes that it is the master who has authority to test Rajab, Maymun, after a moment of silence, commands Rajab to repeat the following verses

ʾanā al-khizāmī al-raqīq(u) al-kalim(i)

I am the son of the tribe of Khizām, the one endowed with gentle speech

masaḥtu rukn(a) al-masjid al-muḥarram(i)

[371] إن هذا الفتى عربي الدار، لكنه رومي النجار. و قد بذلت فيه الدينار و الدرهم، ما لا يبذله خالد بن الأيهم، و أفرغت جهدي في تهذيب لسانه و تعديل ميزانه، فلم يزل يكسر شكيمة اللجام، و ينزع إلى ألفاظ الأعجام. فيدعو المعلم بالؤلم، و يسمي القلب بالكلب، و الحبطان بالخيطان. و هذا مما تأباه السجية الأدبية، و تستك منه المسامع العربية، و شهد الله أني أريد تهذيبه، لا تعذيبه، و أرغب في تثقيفه لا تعنيفه. لكنني أجتهد في تسديده فيعثر و أروم تشديده فينفر. al-Yaziji, *Majmaʿ al-bahrayn*, 282.

[372] al-Yaziji, *Majmaʿ al-bahrayn*, 282.

I touched the Yemeni corner of the Holy Mosque

wa lī ghulām(un) min nitāj(i) al ʿajam(i)

And have a lad who was born of ʿ*ajam* descent

yushriq(u) fī fuʾādih(i) wa fī al-fam(i)

With a heart and talk that glow with light

awjadah(u) bārī al-wara min ʿadam(i)

Whom the Creator had created from dust

wa ḥātahu bi al-qadar(i) al-muṣamam(i)

But whom He destined to live among the noblest

fa lam yazal fī ḥaras(in) mutammam(i)[373]

Since then he is attended with perfect care

Obliquely, this performance resonates with al-Hariri's variegated maqama. Responding to his master's command, the son of the ʿ*ajam* iterates Maymun's poetry by 1) replacing certain Arabic sounds whose letters are undotted with their dotted counterparts, as in replacing every *ḥāʾ* with *khāʾ*; by 2) replacing guttural sounds with glottals such as using ʿ*ayn* instead of *alif*, and by 3) replacing the heavy *qāf* with the softer *kāf*, and the heavy *ṣād* with the softer *sīn*:

ʾanā al-khizāmī al-rakīk(u) al-kalim(i)

I am the son of tribe of Khizām, the one with feeble speech

masakhtu rukn(a) al-masjid al-mukharram(i)

[373] Errors in translation are mine. al-Yaziji, *Majmaʿ al-bahrayn*, 282.

I littered on the Yemeni corner of the perforated Mosque

wa lī ghulām(un) min nitāj(i) al ʾajam(i)

and have a lad who was born of beastly origin

yushrik(u) fī fuʾādih(i) wa fī al-fam(i)

Who is also blasphemous both in heart and talk

awjadah(u) bārī al-wara min ʾadam(i)

Whom the Creator had created from base flesh

wa khātahu bi al-kadar(i) al-musamam(i)

And sealed his life with bitter misery

fa lam yazal fī kharas(in) mutammam(i)

And ever since he is terminally mute

The parody staged here does not only transform what seems to be the "original" verse. In fact with its aural dissonance, it *affects* the Arabs' hearing: "when the gathering sensed the sickness of his utterance, and the crude imports they conveyed, they sought refuge in God from the evil of that lisp."[374] The juxtaposition of the two poems, combined with Maymun's hypothetical role as a teacher of Rajab, encourage us to read the assembly's felt irritation as a consequence of their denunciation of Rajab's "deviant" tongue and his transgressive sacrilege. In this sense, it appears that the difference intimated in Rajab's poem engenders the assembly's incantation.

But what if this anxiety rather comes from an unsettling sense of sacrilege inherent

[374] "فلما رأى القوم سقم هذه الألفاظ، و ما أدت إليه من المعاني الفظاظ، تعوذوا بالله من سوء تلك اللثغة، و قالوا ما هذا الكلام الذي لا يشترى بفشغة؟"
al-Yaziji, *Majmaʿ al-bahrayn*, 283.

in the same? We have already noted the curtail of distance implicated in the hearability of Rajab's minute deviations and argued that the shrinking distance is key for creating the same. Indeed, this incident may be read as the dramatization of the unsettling force of the same. Rather than viewing the generational gap between Maymun and Rajab in prescriptive terms that appoint Maymun's poem as the "original" and Rajab's as a defective and different "copy," we may also rethink this generational gap in a different light if we view Rajab's verse as a performance of an infantly utterance. Hence, if narrative progression sets Maymun's poem as ontologically anterior, as a preexistent standard from which Rajab's verses can be read as a degenerative descent, looking at the intricate phonetic shifts between Maymun's and Rajab's respective verses through the prism of the age difference encourage us to envision the opposite: the master's poem can be viewed as a model that mimetically *anticipates* the future of the infant's.[375]

To better understand this relationship, I borrow, with adjustment, from Jacques Lacan's theory on the formation of human subjectivity (I) in its specular recognition of itself through the mirror. Like Theodore Adorno, Lacan views the mimetic faculty to be central and at the heart of human experience of modernity. His psychoanalytic theory of identification that shape human identity suggests that the instinct for

[375] That said, I push against any reading that concludes from this analysis that *ʿujmah* in al-Yaziji's collection is used as a token of primordialism in language "development." By drawing on notions of mimesis manifest in imitation of parents by children, I do not suggest a linear progression from incomprehensibility to a lucid state of comprehension. After all, the poetic verse that Rajab performs does not obliterate the meaning altogether but shifts it and creates a resonance of sameness that unsettles the audience. My analysis is grounded in the argument that al-Yaziji uses *ʿujmah* in his maqamas as a tool for dwelling on "the same"—a concept that is aesthetically and ideologically linked to formative discourses on the nation.

imitation is implanted in man from childhood.[376] Building on the legacy of Sigmund Freud, for whom identification, the role model humans imitate in shaping their personality and choices,[377] is the origin of the self, Lacan extends that process of identification by asking "who or what comes before the primordial choice of a role model."[378] Because "Freud never clearly explains how identification begins or what comes before the structuring act of imitation,"[379] Lacan devoted most of his thought to understanding what comes before that moment Freud defined as identification through imitation. In other words, he tried to explain where and how does the chain of imitation that define selfhood begin.[380] For the formation of identity, Lacan identified three orders in the psyche: the "Symbolic," the "Imaginary," and the "Real."[381] For my present purpose, I focus specifically on the "Imaginary."

In "The Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function of I" (1949) Lacan identifies visual human fascination with forms to be a founding moment for the psyche. He describes this moment and traces it back to the infant's early life as it recognizes its image in the mirror. "The baby forgets how weak it is and identifies jubilantly with the wholeness of a reflected form."[382] In this sense, the human self comes into being

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[376] Potolsky, *Mimesis*, 115.
[377] Lacan's analysis of the formation of the ego is a response to the question that asks if there is an "unconscious self before the ego that knows that boys should identify with their fathers rather than with their mothers, siblings or stuffed animals"? As Matthew Potolosky observes, "Freud obliquely addresses this problem in his account of hysterical imitation, since hysterics 'choose' their role models unconsciously. This idea explains why children tend to identify with the parent who most resembles them physically. But this account begs the question of how the child knows this particular resemblance is relevant and leaves the primordial identification that structures the self largely unexplained. Where and how, then, does the chain of imitations that define selfhood begin?" Potolsky, *Mimesis*, 125.
[378] Potolsky, *Mimesis*, 125.
[379] Potolsky, *Mimesis*, 125.
[380] Potolsky, *Mimesis*, 125.
[381] Vincent B. Leitch, *The Norton Anthology of Theory and* Criticism, (London: Norton, 2010), 1158.
[382] Leitch, *The Norton Anthology of Theory and* Criticism, 1159.

through a fundamentally aesthetic recognition. Accordingly, the self-image that causes identification and recognition is no more than a fiction, set *over there*, dictating the efforts of the subject (I) toward a totality and autonomy it can never attain. Through an external medium (a mirror), the child's fragmented body is made whole and the newly fashioned specular "I" precedes the social "I."[383]As a moment of identification, Lacan refers to the mirror stage by the term *imago*: the transformation that takes place in the subject when she assumes an image.[384] In Lacan's words "the important point is that this form situates the agency of the ego, before its social determination, in a fictional direction which [. . .] will only rejoin in the coming-into-being of the subject asymptomatically [coming ever closer, but never reaching]."[385]

Remarkably, the dramatized parody in "Of Yamama," speaks simultaneously to two compelling modern views of identification and of the emergence of subjectivity. On the one hand, the setup through which Maymun and Rajab are presented as generationally apart iterates Freud's notion of imitation of a human role model as a "beginning" to identification. On the other hand, and even more intricately, since the maqama is principally motivated by a curtail of distance that is philosophically symptomatic in the construction of sameness, we may also rely on Lacan's theory of identification informed by the specular (I) and mediated through a reflex in the mirror. In this sense, we are invited to view both Maymun and Rajab through the prism of simultaneous reflection, and to examine the poetic iterations (or imitations) in this maqama in circular trajectories rather than in chrono-logical terms.

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[383] Leitch, *The Norton Anthology of Theory and* Criticism, 1159.
[384] Leitch, *The Norton Anthology of Theory and* Criticism, 1164.
[385] Leitch, *The Norton Anthology of Theory and* Criticism, 1165.

At a glance, the maqama seems to suggest that Maymun's verse is ontologically anterior to that of Rajab's from two standpoints. First, the age difference foregrounded and the power-dynamic implicated in this difference provide the ideal setup for Maymun's verse to be viewed as the "original" that Rajab brings down with his "distorted" performance. Second, because the maqama has its own chronotope,[386] the narrative development sets both reader and listener to accept the proposition that Maymun's verses *are* the beginning and that Rajab's come later—with decadence. However, seen through the simultaneity of reflection between Maymun and Rajab, Maymun's verse functions as the "specular" (I), the supposedly "perfect" totality, that Rajab aspires to achieve but may never attain. The infantilized utterance of Rajab, suggested both through age difference and Rajab's performed *ʿujmah*, proposes a reversal of the maqama's chrono-logical arrangement. Replacing every *qāf* with *kāf*, every *ḥāʾ* with *khāʾ*, every *ʿayn* with *alif*, and every *ṣād* with *sīn*, Rajab does not inspire a condition of distortion as much as he inspires an infant's larynx and a vocal

[386] literary chronotope is a concept introduced in the by Mikhail Bakhtin that relayed his idiosyncratic view of temporal and spatial relationships in narrative. In in "Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel: Notes toward a Historical Poetics," Bakhtin responded to formalist or structuralist approaches to narrative time and space by arguing that these two categories constitute a fundamental unity. This "intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships" denoted by the term "chronotope" is tantamount to the world construction that is at the base of every narrative text, comprising a coherent combination of spatial and temporal indicators. In Bakhtin's own words, "in the literary artistic chronotope, spatial and temporal indicators are fused into one carefully thought-out, concrete whole. Time, as it were, thickens, takes on flesh, becomes artistically visible; likewise, space becomes charged and responsive to the movements of time, plot and history. The intersection of axes and fusion of indicators characterizes the artistic chronotope." Nele Bemong and Pieter Borghart, "Bakhtin's Theory of the Literary Chronotope: Reflections, Applications, Perspectives" in *Bakhtin's Theory of the Literary Chronotope: Reflections, Applications, Perspectives* (Gent: Ginko Academia Press, 2010), 3-4. In my view, the maqama's centered-ness around specific geographical locales enhances the spatial amplitude of narrative. Inseparable from this inversive reflex in temporality between Maymun and Rajab is the fact that "Of Yamama" is set at the heart of Arabia. I will speak to this issue in the concluding part of the chapter.

tract that aims towards a totality that Maymun represents. As such, Maymun's status in the chronological hierarchy changes: his representation of the totality that Rajab aspires to attain is a fiction that places Maymun at the future of Rajab's presumed trajectory. If the maqama's chronotope suggests Maymun's historical precedence over Rajab's and makes the latter a fictional iteration of the former, the phonemic shifts among the two poetic forms destabilized Maymun's precedence and renders Rajab as a point of departure, rather than of arrival. What the maqama presents as the "aesthetic" configuration of a perfect and fascinating verse then is no more than a fiction, with Maymun receding into the ethereal condition of a fantasy.

Conclusion: When the *Nahda* Trickster Disappears at the Hall of Mirrors & the Chamber of Echoes

Outwitting his audience in linguistic powers and skills of shapeshifting; preparing them for the often-unsettling moments of recognition; acutely highlighting the fact that, in the words of Malcom Lyons, "things are not what they seem" and that "the world cannot be taken at face value,"[387] trickster in the classical maqamas has for the most part functioned as the morphological wall that made possible the representation of a morally deceptive world. Despotic in discourse, penetrably opaque, monopolizing of meaning: Abu Zayd is, on the whole, the center of the stage that al-Hariri sets up for his dramas. No maqama is possible without his obscure veil being *rended*; likewise, no meaning is possible, however differentiated and variegated, without Abu Zayd endorsing it with his logocentric blessing. If the maqama, as Phillip Kennedy

[387] Kennedy, *Recognition*, 306.

convincingly argues, makes "deceit, lies, and delusion" the substance of the first self-avowed fictional genre in high Arabic literature, it does so by ironically precluding any doubts about the "truth" of Abu Zayd. Through thickness in his moonshine, Abu Zayd emerges as a sincerely "honest" liar.

Yet, all of this is possible particularly because Abu Zayd is a lone rogue. This may explain to us why al-Yaziji's trickster Maymun, in contrast to Abu Zayd, almost disappears while in Arabia of the 19th century Arab *Nahda*. Accompanied by his boy Rajab, Maymun partakes in a dialogue that compromises his position as the center of the stage in the maqama. Congruent with the desert he traverses, Maymun has a mirage-like persona that retracts into a fiction whose totality continues to drift away from Rajab while he approximates his alleged master "asymptomatically," as Lacan would phrase it. That this retraction takes place in the mythic *terra prima* of the Arabic language is telling, particularly because it happens in that peninsula during the Arab *Nahda.*

Underlying such conceptual notions as "the Arab mind, Arab thought, Arab subjectivity, Arab identity, and Arabism,"[388] the *Nahda* manifests itself via a nationalist project in which the Arab was, at least as al-Shidyaq and al-Yaziji viewed it, a "phonetical condition of existence within a universe of languages as much as is was a condition for existence of a society within a universe of other societies."[389] Therefore, Suhail Ibn ʿAbbad's search for pure Arabic in the desert speaks the terms of a proto-nationalist attempt to retrieve the edenic linguistic "innocence" typically

[388] Bou Ali, "Collecting the Nation," 33.
[389] Bou Ali, "Collecting the Nation," 47.

associated with a quest for origins. We saw how "innocence" was dispersed in "of Yamama" rather paradoxically. On the one hand, Maymun's Arabic utterance is an uncorrupt (hence innocent) original through which Rajab's is viewed as a subsequent decadence. On the other hand, and more importantly, the age gap between the two renders Rajab's seemingly decadent utterance an infantly "innocent" one whose trajectory is *yet to be* fulfilled in the future—with Maymun's poetry rendered an anticipatory model at the end of that trajectory. The Arabia staged in al-Yaziji's maqamas is a cloistered space where distance is contracted, and sameness is therefore conceptually engendered. Embracing reflexive repetitions, varieties of resemblances, and affective oscillations among closely related phonemic entities, Arabia works as a chamber of echoes, or a hall of mirrors, in which the nation for the Arab nationalist exists as phantasmagoria, deriving its power particularly from its masked non-existence. And just as Maymun recedes into a fantasy without which the maqama ironically cannot proceed, the Arab nation exists ontologically, precisely because, in the first place, it is never there.

CONCLUSION

"كتب البديع إلى معلمه (أحمد بن فارس) جواباً:
الشيخ الإمام يقول: 'فسُد الزمان.'
أفلا يقول متى كان صالحاً؟"[390]

ياقوت الحموي، *معجم الأدباء*

> "Badīʿ once replied in a letter to his mentor (Ahmad ibn Faris): Our venerable teacher says, 'The times are decadent.'
> Can he tell us when they were ever otherwise?"
>
> Yaqut al-Hamwi, Dictionary of Learned Men

This epigraph captures one of al-Hamadhani's under-examined view of universal time, which he articulated in his epistles, *rasāʾil*. Writing to his mentor, Ahmad ibn Faris, al-Hamadhani refuses to view "decadence" as *the* narrative that explains existence. While the teacher, as al- Hamadhani writes, contends that *this* present moment is a corruption of a previous one that was purer, al-Hamadhani rejects such a worldview. He asks, in a rhetorical question, whether there had been at all a past moment in universal time that was uncorrupt or pure to begin with. By suggesting an answer in the negative, al-Hamadhani runs against the dominant medieval Islamic worldview, which postulated that the time of the prophet Muhammad was the purest of all, and that all subsequent historical moments are but degenerations of that ideal moment. As

[390] Yaqut al-Hamawi, *Muʿjam al-udabaʾ* (Beirut: Dar al-gharb al-islami), 1:252.

Kilito notes, the traditional Islamic belief was that "as generations come, pure light [centered around the figure of the prophet and his companions] fades away" and that "it continues to do so until it loses its sheen entirely."[391] He observes that this notion is rooted in one of the early *hadiths* by the prophet.[392] Commenting on this *hadith* in his epistles, al-Hamadhani writes, "[I do not believe] that mankind has become more corrupt; rather, it is man's tools of judgement that have become more subtle. Can anything become corrupt unless it had been pure in the first place? And can a man enter the dark evening unless he passes through the lights of dawn first?"[393] Yet, for al-Hamadhani, that past moment of "pure" light was nonexistent altogether. al-Hamadhani's words reflect the notion that since the times of the first man, "corruption" has always been the same, and that it continues to exist at the same level without increasing or diminishing. Whether al-Hamadhani's worldview means he was a pessimist is debatable. However, through such perception of time, we can tell that he rejected determinism, the notion that historical processes lead to a preordained end-result, therefore inhibiting other possible outcomes.

Based on his interjection, did al-Hamadhani find anything from the past to use as a source of pride in the present? Did he find answers to existential questions by drawing on traditional wisdom? If, as is presumed, the world was corrupt from the moment God created Adam and decreed that he should descend on earth, one would not

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[391] Kilito, *al-Aʿmal,* 3:53.

[392] عَنْ عَبْدِ اللَّهِ بن مسعود ، عَنِ النَّبِيِّ قَالَ: " خيرُ النّاس قَرني، ثُم الَّذِين يَلُونَهُم، ثُمّ الَّذِين يَلُونَهُم، ثُم يَجِيء أَقْوَام تَسْبِق شَهادَة أَحَدهم يَمِينَه، وَيَمِينه شَهَادَتَه"

[393] "وقد قالت الملائكة أتجعل فيها من يفسد فيها و يسفك الدماء، و ما فسد الناس، و إنما اضطرد القياس، و لا أظلمت الأيام، و إنما امتد الظلام. و هل يفسد شيء إلا عن صلاح، و يمسي المرء إلا عن صباح؟" al-Hamadhani, *Rasaʾil Abi al-Fadl Badiʿ al-Zaman wa bi-hamishiha maqamatuhu*, 4th ed (Cairo: Matbaʿat Hindiyyah, 1928), 252-3.

expect al-Hamadhani, nor his trickster Abu al-Fath al-Iskandari to look back to the past as a source of meaning from which to theorize an identity in the present. As Kilito observes, traditional (classical) self-eulogies conventionally emphasized values venerated by ancestors, reading identity at any given moment as an extension of a previous one over generations.[394] By contrast, he adds, self-eulogies in the maqamas insist on discontinuities, signifying a crisis in identity: what a persona in the maqama represents at any given moment *is not* what that persona had been prior to that moment, nor what it will become after. In al-Hamadhani's "Maqama of the Blind," the narrator ʿIsa ibn Hisham asks Abu al-Fath about his identity. Abu al-Fah responds with verses that affirm the synchronicity of his multiple beings: "I am Abu Qalamun, in every hue do I appear" (*anā Abū Qalamūn, fī kulli lawn(in) akūn*).[395] The term "Abu Qalamun" refers to a type of fabric that reflects multiple colors when perceived under sunlight.[396] In the maqama therefore, the one constant is non-stop transformation.

It is through these two main features of the maqama, the rejection of determinism and continuous transformation, that use of the genre in the 19th century by Arab authors becomes crucial to understanding Arab modernity. We can see these notions articulated clearly by al-Shidyaq and al-Yaziji —both of whom questioned determinism in their own ways. al-Shidyaq rejected hierarchies and refused to venerate models altogether. While he refused to assign a superior ontological value to any point of departure (origin), he also refused to assign such value to any destination.

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[394] Kilito, *al-Aʿmal*, 3:23.
[395] "The maqama of the Blind," in *The Maqamatt*, trans. Prendergast, 73–75.
[396] Ibn Manzur. *Lisan al-ʿArab*, XIII: 347.

By doing so, he neutralized the relationship between various forms of knowledge (historic/scriptural and literary; religious and secular) and proposed that what binds them together is contiguity, rather than hierarchy. Although his knowledge of established literary forms was evident, it did not cause him to invent another teleological narrative among the myriad array of teleologies the *Nahda* had evinced. Rather, it paved the way to foreground *form-lessness*, as the only way to challenge the various teleologies that the *Nahda* intellectuals struggled with. An itinerant among numerous languages, geographies and religions, al-Shidyaq became cognizant of the many promises that master narratives of his time offered his generation. As such, his work came to dispel different forms of determinism: from teleological eschatology, propagated by Anglo-American missionaries about the end of time, to the more secular determinisms that promised progress.[397]

While al-Shidyaq was obviously subversive, al-Yaziji was, by contrast, a conformist. He followed the classical maqama model more faithfully. Although his maqamas articulate more clearly the author's pursuit of the "pure" linguistic origin, with Arabic advanced as a basis for modern Arab identity, they nevertheless cast that pursuit as impossible. His maqamas uniquely tamper with time, inverting the temporal positions of the pure original and the distorted copy, of the event and its iteration. The original is moved to the future and the copy presents itself as an original that is yet to be determined, striving to be fulfilled in a moment that continues to drift away. As such, the pure original becomes viable inasmuch as it cannot be attained. With this troubled temporality, al-Yaziji's maqamas debunk deterministic reasoning. They

[397] Issa, "Scripture as Literature," 31; 34.

reveal the fictional foundations of teleological narratives that drive nationalist projects—of which 19th century Arabism is one example.

To argue that the maqama problematizes Arab modernity through its non-teleological bent is, however, a story half-told. If this genre served al-Shidyaq and al-Yaziji by offering them narrative forms that disturb linear temporalities, how to account, then, for the functional role it plays in al-Tahtawi's nesologic and colonial imagination, an imagination that runs on linearization of time enabling narratives of progress? The answer, in my view, rests in the maqama's ambivalence: while it resists teleology in narrative, its discrete form lures into the sense of singularity that attends most imperial projects. This singularity of form, itself, is fraught with its own contradictions and is analogous to the contradictions around the way islands have been perceived in early modern imagination. The lure of integrity, originating in the visual boundedness of the island form, is compromised by the ever-present speculation about the islands' resistance to narrativity: "were islands the detritus of crumbling continents or the seeds of new ones? Did they constitute points of ending or of origin?"[398] Similarly, the maqama (as a genre itself) is privileged with formal singularity: all authors examined in this study prelude their maqama compositions with clear statement about the form while tracing it to their literary master al-Hariri. However, the integrity of form itself is ever compromised by what the historiography of the genre tells us about the maqama's "fluffy" beginnings. In *Muʿjam al-udabaʾ* (Dictionary of Learned Men), Yaqut tells us that al-Hamadhani wrote his maqama

[398] Rod Edmond and Vanessa Smith, *Islands in History and Representation*, (London: Routledge, 2003), 1.

impromptu, leaving us no literary manual about how to write one nor where the genre came from. Therefore, although it became an established form after al-Hamadhani at the hands of al-Hariri (who labored over his maqamas rather than improvised them), it remains laden with stories about its origin that obscure rather than illuminate. From early biographical accounts of al-Hamadhani, his maqamas emerge as the *origin-less* origin of the genre. If al-Shidyaq and al-Yaziji's use of the maqama problematize teleologies of narratives of modernity by looking forward, al-Tahtawi 's use of the genre, by contrast, invites us to look backward, and renders problematic the origin/birth myth that sustains (proto)nationalist narratives.

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