
“Teaching the Abbasid *Muḥdathūn* at the Global Turn”¹

ABSTRACT This essay addresses the challenges of teaching the poetry of the Abbasid modernizers (*muḥdathūn*) in a global context. The historicist approach to Arabic poetry in general, and to pre-modern Arabic poetry in particular, makes it difficult to engage with the work of these revolutionary poets poetically. A creative and comparatist approach to translation and an insistence on foregrounding this poetry's relevance beyond its historical moment are ways of overcoming the hegemony of the historical imperative and inviting students to connect with this body of literature rhetorically and creatively. My observations are grounded in readings of samples from the work of Abbasid poets Abū Nuwās (d. 815) and Abū Tammām (d.845). **KEYWORDS** Abbasid, modernist, *qaṣīda*, translation, area studies, global turn

“Turns” are exciting. They bring about a new perspective, a new view of the landscape we have already been navigating. But just as they can refresh and stimulate, they can also derail and obscure. It seems to me that for a turn to be made safely and responsibly, the entity turning (a whole field of study, in this case) should be willing to accept the new perspective in its entirety, with the awareness that what we are now “turning” toward had always existed even before our gaze fell on it. In its “Global Turn,” the field of Medieval Studies is not illuminating previously dark spots in the world, but dark spots in its constructed image of the world. If the global turn is to be more than a haphazard imposition of an already established perspective on the entire globe, it ought to comprise of a rigorous and daring questioning; it ought to involve a process of unlearning, if real learning is to follow.

The two words “global” and “turn” make me anxious in and of themselves, but moreso in their effect on a field of study that is already identified by a similarly anxiety-producing label: Area Studies. My focus here is on Literary Studies under the umbrella of Medieval Studies, and especially the study of non-European literary traditions. Literary traditions like Arabic, placed in Area Studies, the cultural niche of the academy, are on the margins of literary studies as a discipline. They are more readily approached as symptoms of cultural or ethnic or gender complexes, and rarely if at all acknowledged as art or literature with aesthetic merits worthy of study.

Theoretically, the “global turn” in Medieval Studies carries with it the promise of inclusion, of finally finding a place for others in the landscape of Medieval Studies;

1. I would like to thank my students in the seminar on Abbasid Poetry at the University of Pennsylvania in spring 2019, Ali Noori, Ben Notis, and Rawad Wehbe, for their companionship in poetry and for their illuminating discussions of the poems presented here.

these are other areas, traditions, and cultures which were previously excluded from the Medieval lens and existed outside of time. In the case of the Abbasid poets, the “turn” promises to save them from that marginalized corner and place them on the timeline of global Medieval “poetic events.” There are, however, a few challenges ahead.

The Abbasid Age (eighth-eleventh centuries CE) in Arab history is often described (in retrospect) as a Golden Age of Arabo-Islamic rule. The period witnessed an astounding radical poetic movement: the *badīʿ* poetry (the New Style) of the Abbasid modernizers (the *muh̄dath* poets). Suzanne Stetkevych argues that the *badīʿ* poetry served “as a linguistic correlative to the unprecedented might and dominion of the Arabo-Islamic rulers.”² Studies of the Abbasid panegyric, for example, claim that these poets, when they wrote in service of authority, constructed the Abbasid world view. Beyond that, however, the Abbasid modernizers are poets who also composed subversive poems which challenged the *status quo*. They were artists who had complicated and sometimes contradictory relationships with power and with the multilingual, multiethnic societies they lived in. They intervened in the life of the Arabic language and created, in their poetry, linguistic events which are enduring in their consequences. All subsequent modernist projects in Arabic poetry conjure up the modernizing moment of the Abbasid age, not as history or as a past now lapsed but as a poetically charged moment perpetually present. The Abbasid moment thus remains a participant in the “present moment of the past,”³ to borrow from T.S. Eliot. It is a moment that is not one of consecutive stations in a line of progression but rather a moment from which time radiates in all directions. This is the very moment in which a poet stands at the intersection of beginnings and ends, and all of time radiates out of the poem; a view of history as history in the wake of the poem, best described by the following line from Abū Tammām:

Of a beauty for which tomorrow yearns
and for which yesterday avidly longs.⁴

If applied to poetry, this line by Abū Tammām invites us as readers and students of poetry to consider the arbitrariness of historical periodization. If a poem can only be read as a medieval poem, then it has failed as poetry and survived as something else. There is no time before or after the poem; both future and past yearn for that moment in the present that brings them together, collapsing them into each other. In the verse above, both “tomorrow” (*al-ghad*) and “yesterday” (*al-ams*) are stimulated and moved to action by beauty. The poetic event is what dictates the direction of time in this context. Unlike the

2. Suzanne Stetkevych, “Abbasid Panegyric: *Badīʿ* Poetry and the Invention of the Arab Golden Age,” *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* (2016): 48; see also Suzanne Stetkevych, *Abū Tammām and the Poetics of the Abbasid Age* (Leiden: Brill, 1991).

3. T.S. Eliot, “Tradition and the Individual Talent,” in *Selected Essays* (New York: Harcourt, 1932), 11.

4. Abū Tammām, *Diwān Abī Tammām*, ed. Muḥyī al-Dīn Ṣubḥī, (Beirut: Dār Sādir, 1997), 1:362. This line comes from a praise poem dedicated to al-Ḥasan b. Wahab. I argue that regardless of his subject matter, which in this case is the patron, the subtext of much of Abū Tammām’s poetry is a meditation on poetry itself.

historical imperative, the aesthetic imperative, as Abū Tammām shows us, can reconfigure poetry's relationship to history, poeticizing history.⁵

Nevertheless, Medieval Arabic (Abbasid) poetry is often the victim of a historicist approach which relegates it to the pre-modern, the classical and the old, casting it as irrelevant and archaic. This approach also propagates a myth of development or progress, with the "pre-modern" as a phase from which a tradition should graduate or develop. The label "classical," in its application to pre-nineteenth-century Arabic poetry and especially the poetry of the Abbasid age, assumes a rigid antiquated literature that is to be read and studied but eventually overcome. As Jaroslav Stetkevych points out in a 1967 lecture delivered to an audience of Arabists, the result of this historicist literary approach is a literary history, which becomes at its best a cultural history and at its worst a tiresome chronological and biographical index.⁶

Abbasid poets were haunted by questions of function and relevance concerning the poetic form they wrote in, the *qaṣīda*, and its conventions. The creative consciousness of the inherited literary tradition and their commitment to working within its parameters led to some sharp and penetrating observations which were less stated than displayed in practice. We cannot begin to understand the extent of their poetic innovations if we do not read them as rewriters of a long tradition which preceded them. The Medieval moment acquires much of its meaning and motivation from the pre-Medieval. The extent of its consequences, moreover, becomes more evident in the Post-Medieval. Our new perspective thus has to accommodate Medieval others not as flat representatives or tokens of diversity or globalism, but as thick textured others with histories and afterlives which inform them. For no matter how well we disguise it, the fact remains that in order for Arab poets (as is the case for poets of other "nascent literatures") to find a place on the new Global stage (Medieval or otherwise), they have to prove themselves to be active participants in Western literatures and thought. If this is the case, we should at least allow these poets to enter the arena equipped and armed with the context that gives meaning to their poetic contributions beyond adaptation or emulation.

Decontextualized translations which present themselves as "faithful or accurate" while obscuring their role as interventions and manipulations can be insidious and oppressive. In Arabic, the poem can speak for itself and it is the reader's responsibility to listen to the entirety of its voice, but in translation, the voice of the poem is not all carried across. As we welcome the Abbasid poets into English and thus on to the global stage, we should attempt translations of Arabic poetry, especially Medieval Arabic poetry, which aim at that distant meaning, the meaning the poem acquires from its context and the poetic landscape it grows into and out of. Even if we decide to explore the original and creative turns that translation/interpretation can take when one decides to de-contextualize or de-territorialize a text or poem, should we first not acquaint ourselves with the context before we abandon it? A translator can only tap into the creative potentials of a poem in

5. Huda Fakhreddine, "The Aesthetic Imperative: History Poeticized," in *Outsider Imperatives: Manifestos for the Future of World Thought*, ed. Jason Mohaghegh and Lucian Stone (New York: Rowan and Littlefield, 2017), 147–154.

6. Jaroslav Stetkevych, *Arabic Poetry and Orientalism*, ed. Walid Khazendar (Oxford: St. John's College Research Centre, 2004), 22.

translation when she sees herself as a student of a whole tradition and not as the creator of figures or works of choice.

In addition, just as the poem is a transformation of the whole of its native tradition, we must imagine the translated poem as a transformation of the whole of its target tradition. The effort to imagine roots for the translated poem in its target language will result in layered, textured translations that make meaningful connections and pave the way for a vibrant conversation between languages and cultures in their wake. Even if the end results are always going to be lacking, the effort to make them complete is enough to transform what we do from translation of poetry into translation as poetry. As translators of “peripheral” poetic traditions, we can no longer inhabit liminal positions in the two poetic traditions they engage but rather should strive to occupy a larger space of intersection which harkens to the core of both traditions. We need translations of Arabic poetry which provoke the target literature into which they are translated, creating a “happy fruitful commerce”⁷ in which a medieval poem and its translation are allowed to be transformations of our sense of meaning, form, language, and even time.

In what follows I will present examples of medieval poems that transcend their historical moment and offer us invaluable lessons on the power of poetry in its confrontation with history. The New Style poets of the Abbasid age were modernist poets par excellence. Detached from its historical or chronological denotation, when we use the word “modernist” we are signaling a specific poetic attitude or a certain type of poetic engagement. These poets’ relationship with their tradition was interrogative and deeply critical in a destructive and creative sense. The Abbasid poets Abū Nuwās and Abū Tammām are two of the first modernists from which the Arabic modernist poetic movement of the twentieth century took some of its cues.⁸ We continue to hear resonances of the Abbasid modernists’ work in twentieth-century modern poetry in Arabic and beyond. Many contemporary poets in Arabic still gesture towards Abū Tammām and his generation in order to signal a poetic or a critical continuity.

As teaching moments, the following two cases allow access to Abbasid poetry as poetry, which can connect to urgent and relevant concerns, and which can impose itself upon us as poetry and not merely as an artifact of times past.

ABŪ NUWĀS’S WINE SONG

Abū Nuwās⁹ (d. 815) is one of the most celebrated and provocative poets of the Abbasid age and perhaps of the entire Arabic poetic tradition. He was a daring rewriter of his poetic tradition and an agitator of the social and political norms of his time. His poetic contribution remains relevant and immediately called upon every time a break or

7. Jorge Luis Borges, “The Translations of the “Thousand and One Nights,”” in *Translation Studies Reader*, ed. Lawrence Venuti, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2000), 94–108.

8. Huda Fakhreddine, “Two Projects of Modernism in the Arabic Tradition,” *Journal of Arabic Literature* 48 (2017): 38–38.

9. For more on Abū Nuwās, see Philip Kennedy, “Abū Nuwās,” in *Arabic Literary Culture 500–925*, ed. Michael Cooperson and Shawkat Toorawa (Detroit: Gale, 2005).

a rebellion is sought, whether linguistically, socially, poetically, ideologically, sexually . . . He is most famous for his *khamriyyāt*, Bacchic wine poems, in which he not only challenges the religious and political institutions of his time, but also inverts, toys with, and re-invents established poetic conventions and motifs.

Abū Nuwās's experimentation with poetic form offers a critical in-depth examination of Arabic poetic conventions through their inversion and substitution with new motifs that perform the same poetic functions. Moreover, his wine songs, and the ethos of rebellion that they affirm, reach out across the stretch of time to convey a message of inclusivity against discrimination, of individual freedom against despotic oppression, of experimentation against limitations. Picking apart selections from his wine songs in a classroom teaches us much about the diverse multi-ethnic and multilingual milieu in eighth-century Baghdad and Basra. One of his wine songs, which opens with "An honest group of noble youth whose mounts I steered to the tavern at noon",¹⁰ not only display his insistence on the motif of wine as a tool of rebellion both poetically and socially, but also sheds light on the life of minorities in the Abbasid Empire. We discover, as this piece unfolds, that the tavern keeper is a Jewish man named Samaw'al, although most call him by the name of 'Amr. Although the Arabic name is easier to pronounce, the tavern keeper is bitter and resents this act of erasure which forcibly rewrites his identity. Abū Nuwās's persona and his drinking companions establish a sense of comradeship with this subaltern subject, as they all inhabit a space on the margins of authority, a space brimming with subversive possibilities.

What stands out most about Abū Nuwās's wine poems is his daring, straight forward statements affirming individual freedom and protesting blind dogmatic authority. In the poem which opens with "Stop blaming me for blame is temptation, and cure me with that which is my illness,"¹¹ he allows us access into the debate-driven intellectual environment of the Abbasid age. He argues against a man who denies him redemption from the sin of drinking wine. The piece ends with the triumph of reason and the exposition of the opponent's hypocrisy:

Tell him who claims knowledge of philosophy,
you know one thing, but many others elude you.
Do not deny me redemption, for your denial
is an insult to religion.¹²

Most striking about Abū Nuwās's poetic project is his playful, sarcastic tone which at the same time delivers penetrating criticism and establishes a deeply subversive stance vis-a-vis power and its institutions. This is an attitude that remains urgent and relevant across time. Abū Nuwās is invoked whenever a stance against the dark forces of despotism and dogma in society is called for. The following example is a resonant translation of the ethos of Abū Nuwās's work in a song titled "Indie" by the Algerian singer and activist Rachid

10. Abū Nuwās, *Diwān*, 61.

11. Abū Nuwās, *Diwān*, 6.

12. Abū Nuwās, *Diwān*, 7.

Taha (d. 2018). The song opens with the call “*maḥkama!*” (the calling of a court to order). The chorus and Taha then proceed to sing, in Arabic and in English translation, variations on two famous and instantly recognizable verses from two different poems by Abū Nuwās:

Tell him who claims knowledge of philosophy,
you know one thing, but many others elude you.

Give me some wine, and tell me its wine
Don't let me drink in secret if it's possible to drink in public.¹³

This song and the music video that accompanies it were produced in 1993, during the decade known as Algeria's “Black Decade.”¹⁴ In the 1990s, Algeria witnessed waves of militant insurgencies, hijacking Islam and terrorizing the country with bloody violence. The music video is all shot on a moving train and the song is interrupted more than once by the call to order: *maḥkama!*, a clear reference to the arbitrary and violent demonizing of others who are different, both in courts and in political and social life in Algeria at that time. These judgments most often led to bloody sentences. The song is a mix of languages and voices, both male and female, a perfect tribute to Abū Nuwās and his times. Most resonant about the song, however, is the English line sung by a woman with an American accent: “Give me some wine and tell me its wine!” The casualness and matter-of-fact-ness with which the line is delivered underscore the immediacy of Abū Nuwās's original line, its relevance, and its power in calling out hypocrisy with a mere shrug of the shoulder.¹⁵

ABŪ TAMMĀM'S SPRING

Abū Tammām (d.845) is probably the model of the poet-critic of the Arabic poetic tradition. He was a poet and anthologist who reshaped his poetic tradition and motivated the critical apparatus of his age more than any other poet. Critics were divided between advocates and opponents of his ground-breaking, unprecedented imagery.¹⁶ His verses describing spring in his praise poem to al-Mu'taṣim, the 8th Abbasid caliph, are some of his most memorable. They are often cited as examples of his unprecedented metaphors and his innovation of new meanings. In reading Abū Tammām's “Spring Poem” and especially in attempting to translate it, the challenge of metaphor stands out. And thus, I read and translate this poem with an eye to metaphor. And, I think here of modernist metaphor as the eleventh-century critic 'Abd Al-Qāhir al-Jurjānī or T.S.

13. Abū Nuwās, *Dīwān*, 28.

14. For more on Algeria in the 1990s, see: <https://www.npr.org/2011/04/25/135376589/algerias-black-decade-still-weighs-heavily>

15. The song is from an album titled Rachid Taha, the label is Barclay and the release date is 1993: Rachid Taha, *Rachid Taha (Album)*, Barclay, 1993. The video was produced later in 1997 by the production company Universal Music: “Indie” (Official Video Clip), Universal Music/Barclay, 1997. See: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0XblD8lhIk>.

16. For more on the debates around Abū Tammām's work, see Abū Bakr Muḥammad al-Sūlī, *The Life and Times of Abū Tammām*, ed. and trans. Beatrice Gruendler (New York: New York University Press, 2015), and “Abū Tammām and the Arabic Critical Tradition,” in Suzanne Stetkevych, *Abū Tammām and the Poetics of the Abbasid*, 3–105.

Eliot or Adūnīs would describe it, as the creation of new, unprecedented connections between things and ideas, connections which make up a rival new world or correlative to the world as we know it.¹⁷

This is metaphor, or metamorphosis as Wallace Stevens prefers to call it,¹⁸ which does not enunciate an identity but constructs a resemblance, a resemblance which “completes and reinforces what two different things have in common. It makes them shine.”¹⁹ And the poet, as Wallace Stevens tells us in his poem “Someone Puts a Pineapple Together”,

[. . .] must defy
The metaphor that murders the metaphor.
He seeks as image a second of the self . . .²⁰

And Abū Tammām certainly defies metaphor that murders metaphor. His metaphors do not reduce the world but multiply it. He offers in his poems a second or double self of things. It is difficult to read his work without being incited towards, not new images or meanings, but more so new forms of thought. In his poem about spring, Abū Tammām “speaks of things that do not exist without words,”²¹ or things that are the product language thinking/stringing itself into new forms and by that producing unprecedented meanings.

As I sit to translate Abū Tammām’s spring, I conjure up examples of modernist metaphor in English that can be of assistance to me. I think of poets like Wallace Stevens, Seamus Heaney, and Philip Larkin. Conjuring up such poets is not to suggest that English has claim to “modernist” or “modernism,” which are borrowed and imposed on Arabic poetry. But rather it is an exercise for the benefit of English, an exercise in making room for Abū Tammām in the English language by calling on poets who like him have twisted their language’s neck and offered metaphors which, like his, tug at the forms of our thoughts.

When Wallace Stevens invites us to behold the “nothing that is not there and the nothing that is,”²² I hear an echo of Abū Tammām. When Philip Larkin sees “the trees coming to leaf/ Like something almost being said,”²³ I hear an echo of Abū Tammām. When Heaney imagines the scent of mint invading a place, “heady and defenceless/ Like inmates liberated in the yard,”²⁴ I hear an echo of Abū Tammām. And thus, I surround myself with Steven’s “Snowman” and Larkin’s “Trees” and perhaps Seamus Heaney’s “Mint” and other such poems to place my English in a mind of Abū Tammām.

17. See Al-Jurjānī, ‘Abd al-Qāhir. *Dalā’il al-ijāz*, ed. Maḥmūd Aḥmad Shākir (Cairo: Maktabat al-Khānjī, 1992); T.S. Eliot, “The Music of Poetry,” *The Partisan Review* 4 (1942): 450–465; Adūnīs, *al-Shi’riyya al-‘Arabiyya* (Beirut: Dār Al-Ādāb, 1985); and *Al-Thābit wa-l-mutaḥawwil*. 4 vols (Beirut: Dār al-Sāqī, 2006).

18. Wallace Stevens, *Collected Poetry and Prose*, eds Frank Kermode and Joan Richardson (New York: Library of America, 1997), 687.

19. Judith Balso, *The Affirmation of Poetry*, trans. Drew Burk (New York: Univocal Press, 2014), 27.

20. Wallace Stevens, *The Palm at the End of the Mind*, ed. Holley Stevens (New York: Vintage, 1990), 295–296.

21. Balso, *Affirmation of Poetry*, 28.

22. Wallace Stevens, “The Snowman,” *Collected Poetry and Prose*, 8.

23. Philip Larkin, “Trees,” *High Windows* (New York: Faber and Faber, 2015), 6.

24. Seamus Heaney, *Opened Ground: Selected Poems 1966–1996* (New York: Farrar, Strauss, and Giroux, 1998), 372.

The poem at hand is one of Abū Tammām's praise poems addressed to al-Mu'taṣim (d. 842), the 8th Abbasid caliph. The magic of this poem lies not only in the meanings that unfold in the reader's mind or the things that are turning into their opposite, but also in its sounds: the music of words which participates in the making of meaning here. The poem is divided into two sections: an opening section which describes the advent of spring and the transformation of the world into a spectacle (verses 1–22) and a praise section (verses 22–32) in which Abū Tammām praises the caliph and compares him to spring. There is an interjection and interruption in the first section (verse 8) which reveals the connection between the two sections. However, his direct address to the caliph ("O spring of ours") does more than just reveal the connection between the two parts of the poem. It calls upon the caliph and puts him on the spot. By addressing him as spring in the midst of this astounding description of spring's power to mold time and smooth out its jagged edges, the stakes of this praise are set. The caliph is being challenged here and his power confronted and balanced not only against spring but more so against the power of metaphor that can portray spring in this way.

This poem, especially in its second section, performs the traditional, well-recognized ritual of praise. However, in the subtext of this poem, Abū Tammām flaunts the power of metaphor in the face of political and military power. He confronts political power/dominion with the power of metaphor as its equal, as its rival and even its better in ordering and disordering the world; in capturing it and reigning it in. The two rivals revealed here as well are poetry/metaphor and history/time.

And there is nothing more powerful than the invitation to look in this poem (verses 11–13). The expanse of line 11, which harnesses the sounds of the address in the dual, comes at a crucial point in the poem and plays an important role in setting up the praise. Before we turn to what the patron has done and can do, we pause here at the work of spring which shapes and transforms the whole world for us. We are invited to look and see the world fashioned as it is, for the very first time, and the sound and the gaze that accompany us as we look are singularly Abū Tammām's. It is as if a curtain is drawn and the whole world is revealed to us. Look, here it is, transformed into something other than itself (verse 13) by the arrival of spring. It is this presence of spring that the caliph should aspire to if he were to live up to this praise. It is a face of spring only revealed in Abū Tammām's poetic language, and thus, before we arrive at the praise proper, the poet has fully unsheathed his sword of metaphor.

When we arrive at the patron's work, which is praised as unforgettable and lasting across the stretch (24), we are acutely aware that it is the power of this poem that will carry the name of the caliph across the stretch of time. The caliph can live up to the challenge of this praise if his actions correspond to the praise bestowed on him, starting with his rewarding of this poem deservingly (this is what happens in every panegyric exchange). But more importantly here, he is being challenged to resemble spring, especially in his confrontation with time/history. It seems that he can only live up to that resemblance if he can transform into an Abū Tammāmian metaphor, one which can smooth out the jagged edges of time and reign it in.

I will not comment on every line of the poem and the translation that follows. I will only comment on the opening line to shed light on the thought process involved in translating it. I have to say that in translating this poem, I benefited from the earlier translation done by Julia Bray.²⁵ Because the Abū Tammāmian metaphor is a complex knot of associations, where she drew out one strand, I intentionally tried to draw out a different one, knowing that both strands of meanings and more exist in the original metaphor. With Bray's translation in mind, I also imagined myself participating in what Translation Studies theorists would call a tradition of translating this poem in English, where all the attempts, the readings and the rewritings will together create a more nuanced and dimensional reputation or image for this poem in English, more than what one translation operating alone ever could. Where Bray translates the first line by highlighting the image of cloth, trims of a dress shaking, swaying, quivering, I see stone. I have always read this line with special attention to the word *tamarmar*, which the dictionary tells us is to soften or become loose. Still, I cannot shake off the association with *marmar* (marble). I like the image of marble being worked and smoothed out as in sculpture. My initial translation was: "The edges of time now rounded like marble". I opted against it eventually because it includes a simile. I think Abū Tammām's opening metaphor is more direct, sudden, and immediate. A simile would weaken it. Still, if I were to comment on this line, I would like to defend my initial choice to read stone/marble in the opening line of this poem. In my mind, time, especially in the Arabic poetic landscape, is jagged and sharp. It is the agent that wears out everything else and renders it effaced ruins (*dāris* and *'āfi*). Here, time itself becomes the softened, smooth stone. Stone imagery is central to the *qaṣīda* and especially in its opening and its central motif of the ruined abodes (*aṭlāl*).²⁶ Stone is always the witness to the work and power of time in the *qaṣīda*, the landscape of Arabic poetic time.²⁷ This poem accomplishes a very beautiful and satisfying inversion of that. Time itself becomes the stone being worked.

1. The edges of time now rounded and quivering,
and the earth softened by issuing ornament.
2. The blessed beginning of summer is here,
and the stayed hand of winter fresh and lingering.
3. Summer would have reaped nothing but chaff
were it not for what that hand had sowed.

25. Julia (Bray) Ashtiany, "Abū Tammām's Spring *Qaṣīda*," *Journal of Arabic Literature* 25.3 (1994): 213–219.

26. For more on the opening of the archetypal Arabic *qaṣīda*, see Renate Jacobi, "Nasīb," in *Encyclopedia of Islam*, Second Edition, ed. P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, W.P. Heinrichs, P.J. Bearman (Volumes X, XI, XII), Th. Bianquis (Volumes X, XI, XII), et al. doi: http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_COM_0849 (Accessed July 16, 2019); and F. Krenkow, G Lecomte, C.-H. de Fouchécour, Abdülkadir Karahan, and R. Russell, "Qaṣīda," in Bearman et al., ed., *Encyclopedia of Islam*, doi: http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_COM_0461 (Accessed July 16, 2019).

27. For more on stone in the Arabic *qaṣīda*, see Jaroslav Stetkevych, "Toward an Arabic Elegiac Lexicon: The Seven Words of the Nasīb," in *Reorientations/Arabic and Persian Poetry*, ed. Suzanne Stetkevych (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), 58–129.

4. Many nights, winter consoled the land, held it close.
Many days, his rains swelling forth.
5. Rain from which blue skies melt
and after it, a clearing so lush, it almost drips.
6. Two rains: one that pours, its face revealed
and another that hides in a clear intending sky.
7. Dewdrops hanging on the tips of spears, you'd think
the clouds had bent down to the soil, beseeching.
8. O spring of ours! Nineteen springs have come and gone
and you remain our one and most blooming spring.
9. Days would never be robbed of joy
had the beauty of spring lasted forever.
10. Don't you see how change makes things crude,
except for the earth which transforms in beauty.
11. Come, my friends. Let your eyes wander.
See how the faces of the land take shape.
12. You'll see a day sunny yet blemished
with prairie flowers as if moonlit.
13. This earth is man's toil and sustenance,
but when spring arrives, it becomes a spectacle.
14. Its depths fashion lights for its surface,
blossoms with which hearts brighten.
15. Every flower dripping with dew
is like an eye weeping tears.
16. On its stem, it appears, then hides in the shrubbery
like a maiden, now here, then gone.
17. Then all the land, its highlands and low,
becomes two bands strutting in robes of spring.
18. In red and yellow, like two armies,
Yemenis and Mudaris, clashing in the field.
19. Succulent splashing flowers
like pearls split then dipped in saffron,
20. or bright red ones, the air around them
powdered with safflower.
21. All of it His work, He without whose touch
no green would have ripened into gold.
22. A mood of spring looms and in it
the Imam's disposition and his bountiful ways.
23. The just Imam's generous hand and the spring's
fertile work both are lanterns that light the earth.

24. Blooms are forgotten but the fruit of his hands
is forever remembered across the stretch of time.
25. When disaster casts its shadow, the caliph is
the eye of guidance and his throne its orbit.
26. With his will, it sees in all directions even if
at times it may seem to pause in meditation.
27. I know truly, if it were ever to choose,
the caliphate would hand him its reins.
28. Time quiets and its flocks graze undisturbed,
the hand of calamity stayed.
29. He has strung the land like a necklace
in his hand with justice as its centerpiece.
30. The wild deserts are quenched by his name
Now lush, settled and reigned.
31. He's a king who puts praise at a loss.
All that is much in his presence seems less.
32. How tried time will be, now that he is here,
in its attempts to afflict us with its trials.

Just as spring transforms the world into something other than itself, this poem presents to us time like it has never been before, unlike time in any other Arabic poem. The afflictions, vicissitudes, and calamities which usually open the archetypal *qaṣīda* are now only negated at the end of this one. From the beginning to the end of this poem, three lines trace the submission of time to metaphor/poetry: line 1, line 28, and line 32. And thus, time submits to poetry. It surrenders and obeys the new aesthetic imperative.

Literary studies nowadays are clearly global in their stated aspirations but persistently Eurocentric in their methods and approaches.²⁸ We are thus invited to negotiate a complex dialectic of understanding literatures on their own terms without falling into nativism or isolationism. This challenge invites us to examine the adequacy of the tools available to us as literary scholars of marginalized traditions. While the theoretical frameworks often applied to the study of Medieval Arabic poetry are borrowed and initially developed for other purposes, one approach presents itself as tailored for “other” traditions: translation. And although translation is not engaged with as a theoretical or critical lens, but rather presented as a practical need for understanding the foreign, it plays a crucial role in shaping, if not “creating” the image and the reputation of the “other” traditions for the global or the world stage.

To study Abbasid poets as active players in this newly acknowledged Global Medieval moment is in part simply to remember that the Abbasid poets were very much citizens of the world. Their Abbasid moment was informed by a global perspective. They produced poetry with an awareness of other linguistic and literary traditions with which they were

28. Rebecca Gould, “Telling the Story of Literature from Inside Out,” *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa, and the Middle East* 38.1 (2018): 170.

actively engaged. They thought of themselves, as all true poets do, as contributors to poetry in the broadest sense: poetry as a global human endeavor which ultimately strives to transcend time. And thus, before we assign them a place on the new map of the globe and a spot in this new imagined history, it might give us some perspective to remember that they, like us, thought that they were the center of the world. ■