Essay

Hugo, Translated: The Measures of Modernity in Muḥammad Rūḥī al-Khālidī's Poetics of Comparative Literature

SHADEN M. TAGELDIN

In memory of my beloved father, who gave me a life in translation

One wonders what to make of a text with so ungainly a title: تاريخ علم الأدب عند الإفرنج والعرب وفيكتور هوكو (*Tārīkh ʿIlm al-Adab ʿind al-Ifranj wa-l-ʿArab, wa-Fīktūr Hūkū*; *History of the Science of Literature among the Europeans and the Arabs, and Victor Hugo*).[1] The irruption of Victor Hugo (1802–85) therein seems a jarring afterthought: a sudden narrowing of artery to capillary, of a vast comparative field—read transhistorically and translingually across French and Arabic—to the particularity of one nineteenth-century French writer. Can Hugo bear the weight of the comparison he is made to carry? The title wobbles to a close, aware of its precarity yet determined to walk, on the appendage "and Victor Hugo."

For the Arabic-language reader, Hugo's irruption confounds not only sense but sound: *wa-Fīktūr Hūkū* breaks the end rhyme of *adab* and *ʿArab* characteristic of the *sajʿ*, or rhymed prose, that often graced the titles of Arabic texts from the twelfth to the early twentieth centuries. In the preface to his *Les Orientales* (1829; *Oriental Poems*), Hugo had asked, "A quoi rime l'Orient . . . ?" ("With what does the Orient rhyme . . . ?"; iv). Muḥammad Rūḥī al-Khālidī (1864–1913), the Ottoman-Palestinian intellectual who authored *Tārīkh* at the dawn of the twentieth century, answers him: with a broken chime. By breaking the rhyme of his book's title and thus also the sound-correlation of *adab* ("literature") and *ʿArab* ("Arabs"), al-Khālidī unhinges literature itself from exclusively Arabic claims. The sign of this rupture of the

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PMLA 138.3 (2023), doi:10.1632/S0030812923000573

https://doi.org/10.1632/S0030812923000573 Published online by Cambridge University Press

modern “Orient” with select parts of its literary past is *Fīktūr Hūkū*: the figure of Victor Hugo, Arabized and translated.

Al-Khālidī penned his study of comparative French and Arabic literatures in Bordeaux, where from 1898 to 1908 he served as consul general of the Ottoman Empire.[2] Published in 1904 under the pseudonym “al-Maqdisī” (“the Jerusalemite”), then reprinted in 1912 under al-Khālidī’s name, the monograph collected and completed a series of articles (1902–04) in the Cairo periodical الهلال (*al-Hilāl*; *The Crescent Moon*). Championing “natural” language, its author argued for something of a vernacular revolution in Arabic letters. This revolution, I suggest, is also a return: a movement toward the new and a reinvention of the old. In a French-language preface to his Arabic-language study dated 1906 and intercalated in the 1912 edition, al-Khālidī rejects a premodern prose style he identifies with the “vain luxe de mots inutiles” (“vain luxury of useless words”; “Au lecteur” 7). Better “être clair précis et accessible à la masse des demi-lettrés sortis des écoles, d’Orient organisées à l’Européenne” (“to be clear, precise, and accessible to the mass of semiliterates emerging from schools—from an Orient—organized on the European model”; 7).[3] His intent was “propager les idées modernes parmi ses coreligionnaires et tous les lecteurs de la langue du Coran” (“to propagate modern ideas among his coreligionists and all readers of the language of the Qurʾān”), to show Muslims and readers of Arabic what a properly “modern” literature looks like by introducing them to “la littérature française en particulier et des littératures européennes et mondiales en general [sic]” (“French literature in particular and European and world literatures in general”; 7)—in a more transparent language that ideologically refracted the turn to “nature” in post-Enlightenment European literatures, where Romanticism, realism, and naturalism brought language down to earth, flirted with empiricisms “tender” and hard.[4] In a modern world in which empiricism and empire traveled together, he suggests, language no longer could revel in itself; it had to point, clearly and precisely, to life.[5]

In *Tārīkh*, we hear the broken chime that sounds the rise of modern comparative literature in translation: across the epistemic and political chasms—and bonds—between continents. Thinking from the centers of empire (Istanbul, Paris) in which he had studied and to whose sway much of the Arabic-speaking world was then subject, al-Khālidī estranges the Arabic literature of his day from literatures of “الامم المتمدنة” (“civilized nations”; *Tārīkh* 31), those of modern Europe (French) and a Eurasia fast modernizing along Western lines (Ottoman Turkish). He predicates “civilized,” modern literature on clear language. To that end, he calls on Arabic literature to shun rhetorical gymnastics, alienating it from the sonic and semantic play of its past. Many a speaker of Arabic, Ferial J. Ghazoul observes, once imagined the language “incomparable”: as the language of the Qurʾān, it incarnated the inimitability of the word of God; as the language of a revered poetic tradition, it seemed without rhetorical parallel (114). Al-Khālidī, I argue, suggests that literary Arabic cannot be “modern” without becoming comparable—to French and other arbiters of linguistic modernity. Arguing that literary “البلاغة لا تختص باللسان العربي وحده” (“eloquence is not particular to Arabic alone”; al-Khālidī, *Tārīkh* 32), he maintains that such eloquence now inheres in a modern potential, common to all languages, to make words mirror worlds: to transact

> مطابقة اللفظ للمعنى من جميع وجوهه . . . سواء كان المقال أي اللفظ عربيًّا فصيحاً باعراب أو حضريًّا بلا اعراب أو عجميًّا
> (al-Khālidī, *Tārīkh* 32)
>
> the exact correspondence of word [*lafẓ*] to meaning [*maʿnā*] in every dimension, . . . whether the utterance [*al-maqāl*]—that is, the *lafẓ*—is in formal, grammatically inflected Arabic; in grammatically uninflected Arabic; or foreign.

This redefinition of eloquence, worldly in all senses, binds the interlingual comparability of Arabic with other tongues—al-Khālidī names Ottoman Turkish, English, French, and Persian—to the intralingual comparability of grammatically inflected

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written Arabic (*fuṣḥā*) with uninflected "vernacularized" Arabic (*ḥaḍariyya*).

Yet this comparability dances with the imagined incomparability of Arabic. Insofar as the Qurʾān embodies, for al-Khālidī, the "natural" language and critical spirit he hails as marks of literary-political modernity, it retains some measure of incomparability. Further, in representing certain strands of premodern Arabic poetry and Arab-Islamic thought—those he imagines in tune with the lucidity of Qurʾānic style and its hypothesized idiom, the ancient Arabic of Muḍar—as precursors of the modernity of European languages and literatures, al-Khālidī similarly accords some primacy to Arabic expression of a "secular" stripe, beyond the Qurʾānic. Indeed, the Arab-Islamic conquest of Spain and the subsequent historical effects, through the Andalusian tradition, of Arabic letters on European literature are linchpins in his argument. For he contends that from the Arabs of Andalusia, French poetry gained rhyme, and that Hugo—born in Besançon (a French city historically inflected by Spanish dominion) and partly reared in Spain—inaugurates a literary modernity breastfed by Arabic literature.

I would suggest, then, that al-Khālidī threads modern literary comparability through the logic of Arabic's past "incomparability," sacred and secular. Yet in relocating the Qurʾān to the philological folds of literary history and criticism, he also moves the sacred text from incomparability to comparability.[6] If other texts are held to its measure, so too is it measured against other texts. This fate also greets Arabic letters. Eager to usher into the modern world an Arabic literature supposedly lost in arcane language and fallen, like Arab-Islamic polities, to the autocracy of established authority, al-Khālidī ultimately positions modern Europe, figured in Hugo, as the measure by which literary value is to be selected from the Arab-Islamic past—plucked from the pages of the Qurʾān or premodern poetry and theory—and retained in the present. Staging semiotic transparency as that which underwrites the equality of signs, their utterers, and their receivers, al-Khālidī affirms Hugo's conviction that poetry lies in ideas, not forms. Moreover, he places Hugo's literary republicanism at the heart of a properly modern conception of literature. As al-Khālidī writes of Hugo, "وقال بان جميع الالفاظ سواءٌ" ("He declared that all words are equal"; *Tārīkh* 186). If, in modernity, all words are equal—none superior unless it better reflects meaning—small wonder that Arabic becomes a language among many. Revaluing the Qurʾān on new terms, al-Khālidī now prizes it for preaching a poetics that calls on poets to walk the talk. After all, he reminds his readers, the critique that the Qurʾān levels at poets—thereby defining the truth-value of its idiom against theirs—is that many "يقولون ما لا يفعلون" ("say what they do not do"; Qurʾān 26.226, qtd. in al-Khālidī, *Tārīkh* 48).[7] The equivalence of word, meaning, and deed the Qurʾān enjoins, then, marks for al-Khālidī the best of what Arabic letters once were. To the extent that nineteenth-century European literature approximates "nature," meaning what it says and making meaning transparent to common readers, such is what Arabic letters once more should be. Hugo thus incarnates the lost "nature" to which Arabic letters must return if they are to (re)discover their modernity.

As Yaseen Noorani argues, al-Khālidī's *Tārīkh* exemplifies "the process of translation that brought Arabic into world literature by bringing world literature into Arabic" (236). Haifa Saud Alfaisal perceptively remarks, however, that that translation is "colonially inflected," unfolding within the inter-imperial relation of the French and Ottoman Empires ("Liberty" 540).[8] For Alfaisal, liberty is the problematic crux of al-Khālidī's critical project in *Tārīkh*, which ties political freedom to liberation of literary form (after all, al-Khālidī championed the Ottoman constitutional revolution of 1908). As an imperial official himself, Alfaisal argues, he was deaf to the fundamental "coloniality" of the French *liberté* ("liberty") he celebrates in Hugo ("Liberty" 539). While I accent, like Alfaisal, the imperial logic of comparison and concede the undeniable prominence of liberty in al-Khālidī's literary-political thought, I argue that *égalité* ("equality") precedes liberty in *Tārīkh*. What animates al-Khālidī's comparatism is the translational drive to equalize power both among and within empires. Thus his reduction of languages—and literatures—to solid states of equivalence. In this regime of

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comparability, trafficking in what Lawrence Venuti might call "instrumentalist" translation, words must be cut to the measure of their meaning, and meter—poetic measure—tuned to the "natural" rhythms of speech. As equality (with justice) secures freedom within measure in modern politics, in the liberal constitutional republicanism al-Khālidī championed, so the level word—equal to its meaning, the (political) equal of all others, and equally available to its receivers—defines the sensibility proper to the modern republic of letters. Here the world's expressive traditions can be read on equal footing as "literatures": commensurable, hence comparable. Al-Khālidī's history—his *Tārīkh*—thus times literary comparatism to the measures of modernity, to whose standard different languages and modes of poiesis henceforth must be calibrated. At stake in such comparisons are ends poetic and political: the equivalence not only of Arabic to other languages and literatures, but also of Arab-Islamic empires (the Ottoman Empire in particular) to their European rivals, of world powers "soft" and "hard."[9] In its translation between Arab-Islamic and French epistemologies, the language of modern comparative literature is born: a language of knowable life, a medium that trades excess for exactitude and thereby evades extinction.

Measure for Measure: From the Prosody to the Prose of the World

In tune with the long-nineteenth-century Arab intellectual *nahḍa* ("revival"), *Tārīkh* is a project of epistemic and temporal as well as literary translation.[10] At play is the Arabic word *tarjama*, in senses modern ("translation") and premodern (alongside "translation," "interpretation" and "biography"). Hence the *Victor Hugo* of al-Khālidī's title: Hugo's biography (*tarjama*) is an interpretation or translation (*tarjama*) of the *Science of Literature among the Europeans and the Arabs*. For like other *nahḍa* thinkers, notably the Egyptian intellectual Rifāʿa Rāfiʿ al-Ṭahṭāwī (1801–73), al-Khālidī strives to equate Arabic and European (especially French) literatures, even as he recognizes the problem of (in)commensurability at the heart of translation and comparison. Where al-Ṭahṭāwī, however, arguably reoriginates Arabic literary history in ancient Greece, al-Khālidī reoriginates French literary history between early Islamic Arabia and Arab-Islamic Andalusia. Indeed, "by placing Arabic poetry at the origin of European poetry," as Noorani provocatively argues, al-Khālidī challenges Pascale Casanova's thesis in *La république mondiale des lettres* (*The World Republic of Letters*) (252). "For Casanova," Noorani writes, "the French break from Latin inaugurated the world republic of letters with France at the centre. Al-Khalidi makes Arabic poetry and its prosodic forms the actual origin of this break with Latin" (257).

A paradox arises: it is by recalibrating prosody, al-Khālidī hints, that the world turned prosaic. After the Arab-Islamic conquest of Spain, Arabic poetry broke the measures of Latin and sparked fission and fusion in the Romance dialects, at once estranging them from Latin and infiltrating them with Arabic. Arabic poetry thus entered Europe as a vernacularizing force, making ordinary languages—the Romance dialects—literary languages in their own right. Al-Khālidī reads Hugo's nineteenth-century poetics through this history. Thanks to Hugo's childhood years in Spain, he says,

> هذا الشاعر الحكيم نفح بنفحة من النفس الاندلسي واغتذى بلبان
> من ارتضع قديماً ثدي الادب العربي
>
> (*Tārīkh* 38)

> that wise poet was imbued with a gust of the Andalusian spirit and nourished by the milk of those who nursed, long ago, from the breast of Arabic literature.

As a mother tongue—via Andalusia—of Europe and its modern literatures, imperial Arabic turned Dantean vernacular: in Dante's words, the language "infants acquire . . . by imitating [their] nurses" (3).[11] Indirectly, Hugo and nineteenth-century French Romanticism imbibed "nature"—as art—from Arabic literature. And through modern European empires, al-Khālidī intimates, history comes full circle—summoning European literatures to vernacularize Arabic, to recall it from artifice to "nature."

Indeed, while al-Khālidī concedes the centrality of drama (and the novel) to Hugo's oeuvre, he sees it

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as largely foreign to Arabic. Thus, he turns to lyric poetry, which Arabic and European literatures ostensibly "share," to find the common measure that will propel Arabic's (re)turn to prosaic transparency—though to translate "lyric" into Arabic, he must coin the neologism "الشعر الموسيقي" (*al-shiʿr al-mūsīqī*; literally "musical poetry"), whose very novelty whispers, sotto voce, that its chime might be broken. This pivot punctuates al-Khālidī's translation of a key passage from Hugo's 1827 preface to *Cromwell*, foundational to French Romanticism:

> وقد حض فيكتور هوكو في تلك المقدمة على تأليف روايات (الدرام) بالشعر لا بالنثر وقال : بان بيت الشعر يحيط بالمعنى احاطة الثوب الافرنجي بالبدن ويضيق عليه ويوضحه معاً. ويعطيه شكلاً الف وادق وأتم من شكل النثر. ويديره علينا كانه نوع من انواع الاكسير الذي استخرجه الكيميائيون من خمير الذهب وزعموا ان فيه لذة للشاربين وشفاء للاجسام من جميع العلل والاسقام. فبيت الشعر على رأي فيكتور هوكو هو القالب الشفاف للمعنى. واذا تلطف الشاعر في نظمه وانشائه اكسب المعنى رونقاً لولا بيت الشعر لمرّ ذاك المعنى غير ملتفت اليه. فالشعر هو العقدة التي تربط سلك المعاني أو المنطقة التي تضم حواشي الهدم على الجسم وتطويه طيات متناسبة بالهندام. والشعر يزيل من الالفاظ ما هو سوقي مبتذل أو عامي سخيف ويكسب المعاني حلاوة وطلاوة ورشاقة. سيما اذا اقتصر الشاعر على استعمال الالفاظ المتعارفة بين الناس المتداولة على الالسن. وترك ما كان وحشيًّا غريباً في اللغة. وعرض فيكتور هوكو بالذاهبين الى ان "أعذب الشعر اكذبه" بقوله ليت شعري ما الذي يضيع من الشعر ان دخلت فيه الطبيعة والحقيقة؟ وهل تنقص الخمر صفة من اوصافها ان وضعت في اباريق الزجاج وختم عليها؟ كلا بل تصير رحيقاً معتقة [sic] ختامها [sic] مسك يتنافس بها [sic] المتنافسون. وختم المؤلف مقدمة كروموبل ببيان المقتضى للشاعر من النسج على منوال الطبيعة (لان كل ما في الطبيعة هو في صناعة الشعر).
>
> (*Tārīkh* 164)
>
> In this preface, Victor Hugo urged the composition of dramatic narratives [*riwāyāti (al-drām)*] in verse [*shiʿr*], not in prose [*nathr*]. A line of poetry, he said, encircles meaning as European dress hugs the body, its tight fit clarifying it. It gives [meaning] a fuller, more precise, more complete form than prose. It circulates [meaning] among us like some elixir the alchemists extracted from gold ferment, claiming that it would delight its drinkers and heal bodies of all defects and maladies. Thus, the poetic line, in Victor Hugo's view, is the transparent mold for meaning [*al-qālibu al-shaffāfu li-l-maʿnā*]. If the poet arranges and composes it with care, he imparts luster to meanings; were it not for the poetic line, that meaning would have gone unnoticed. For poetry is the knot that ties the thread of meanings, or the belt that gathers the hems of old, worn garments around the body and tucks them neatly into proportionate folds. Poetry wipes from utterances whatever is vulgar and hackneyed [*sūqiyyun mubtadhalun*] or simplemindedly colloquial [*ʿāmmiyyun sakhīfun*], and imparts sweetness, polish, and elegance to meanings. Especially if the poet restricts himself to using expressions customary [*mutaʿārafa*] among people, in circulation on the tongue [*mutadāwala ʿalā al-alsuni*]. And abandons whatever, in language, is savage and strange [*waḥshiyyan gharīban*].[12] Thus, Victor Hugo indirectly indicted those who maintain that "the sweetest poetry is the falsest" with his assertion: I wish I knew! What is lost from poetry if nature and reality enter it? Does wine lose any of its traits if it is put in glass jugs and sealed? No! It becomes an exquisite aged wine whose parting note is musk, to which the aspirants aspire [*raḥīqan muʿattaqatan* [sic] *khitāmuhā* [sic] *miskun yatanāfasu bihā* [sic] *al-mutanāfisūna*]. And the author of the preface to *Cromwell* concluded [*khatama*] by elucidating the requirement that the poet weave [his compositions] on the loom of nature: ["]for all that is in nature is in the art of poetry.["]

Compare Hugo:

> Chez lui [Molière] le vers embrasse l'idée, s'y incorpore étroitement, la resserre et la développe tout à la fois, lui prête une figure plus svelte, plus stricte, plus complète, et nous la donne en quelque sorte en élixir. Le vers est la forme optique de la pensée. Voilà pourquoi il convient surtout à la perspective scénique. Fait d'une certaine façon, il communique son relief à des choses qui, sans lui, passeraient insignifiantes et vulgaires. Il rend plus solide et plus fin le tissu du style. C'est le nœud qui arrête le fil. C'est la ceinture qui soutient le vêtement et lui donne tous ses plis. Que pourraient donc perdre à entrer dans le vers la nature et le vrai? Nous le demandons à nos prosaïstes eux-mêmes, que perdent-ils à la poésie de Molière? Le vin . . . cesse-t-il d'être du vin pour être en bouteille? (Preface [*Cromwell*] xlv–xlvi)

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> With him [Molière] the verse line embraces the idea, tightly incorporates it, at once contains and develops it, lends it a svelter [and] more exact [yet] more fully fledged figure, and gives it to us as something of an elixir. Verse is the optical form of thought. That is why it suits, above all, stage perspective. Crafted in a certain way, it brings into relief things that, in its absence, would pass as insignificant and ordinary [*vulgaires*]. It makes the fabric of style [both] stronger and finer. It is the knot that arrests the thread. It is the belt that supports the garment and gives it all its folds. What, then, would nature and truth have to lose by entering into verse? We ask our prose writers themselves, What do they lose in the poetry of Molière? Does wine . . . cease to be wine for being bottled?

For Hugo, drama stages a Christian form of "le réel" ("the real"), at once ethereal and carnal (xxiv–xxv). His insistence that verse, no less than prose, can capture this "real" appears in a discussion of Molière (xlv). Abridging that discussion, al-Khālidī accents Hugo's urging that drama be written in verse. In so doing he is able not only to assimilate drama (a genre Hugo names as the apotheosis of Western literary modernity) to a "musical poetry" that links Arabic and European literatures, but also to argue that verse—rooted in Arabic's influence on Europe—is the bedrock of that modernity. His rendition evokes Karen Emmerich's redefinition of translation as "translingual editing" (2): not a transfer but an interpretation of meaning, just as the "original" it interprets is also both editing (interpreting prior texts, producing new variants) and edited (the work of many hands) (3–5, 15–17, 192–93). The translation nips and tucks Hugo's "original," interleaving commentary and allusions to Arab-Islamic intertexts. While it appears "one with the original" in "interlinear" form—to invoke Walter Benjamin's "Die Aufgabe des Übersetzers" ("The Task of the Translator"; 82)—its unity is a deceptive straight face. Marshaling the multivalent concept of measure to negotiate the force-field between Arabic and French, the passage is what Lydia H. Liu calls a "super-sign" (*Clash* 13): "a hetero-linguistic and hetero-cultural movement of the signifying chain" (14) that "crisscrosses the semantic fields of two or more languages simultaneously and makes an impact on the meaning of recognizable verbal units" (13), silently rewriting one as "the destiny and destination" of the other (37). Against ahistorical theories of translation as "transfer," Liu's super-sign recharges translation—and comparison—with the polarity of power. Which way, then, does the super-sign of al-Khālidī's translation point? Is Arabic reaffirmed as origin so that French might be its destination?

Al-Khālidī's translation responds—in riddles. Where Hugo fleetingly likens text to a "vêtement" ("garment") and verse to the "ceinture" ("belt") that delineates its folds, al-Khālidī expands the metaphor into a leitmotif. From Hugo's intimation that meaning—thanks to verse—cuts a svelte figure, al-Khālidī conjures the image of a verse that hugs meaning with "European dress." On its face, his insistence, after Hugo, on the virtual inseparability of word from meaning chimes with Benjamin's conception of the language-content relation in an "original," before one crosses the threshold into translation. "While content and language form a certain unity in the original, like a fruit and its skin," writes Benjamin, "the language of the translation envelops its content like a royal robe with ample folds" (75).[13] In al-Khālidī's ideal literary Arabic, as in Hugo's ideal literary French, meanings must wear tight-fitting words, akin to the skin of Benjamin's fruit. Yet al-Khālidī's word as "European dress" is not equivalent to Hugo's unmarked garment. Hugo's image shades seamlessly into the words and worlds his readers know, and beyond; indeed, it universalizes. Al-Khālidī's, by contrast, bursts at its seams with foreignness; it particularizes. Nor is al-Khālidī's image equivalent to Benjamin's skin of a fruit. The latter is a simile drawn from nature; the former, one that points to artifice, fashion cut to measure by human or machine. The word al-Khālidī calls a "transparent mold for meaning," then, is not so transparent: from its pretense to "nature," artifice slides out. Thus, its foreignness is redoubled: nature turns alien (European) and artful or artificial (tailored dress). Indeed, al-Khālidī's translation charges the word-meaning relation whose desirability he argues with a decidedly European current. Arabic no longer wears pasha

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pants, billowing with polysemy. European dress cinches such "old, worn garments," imparting measured "proportionate folds" to language and grooming it for modernity. Interestingly, then, al-Khālidī's properly modern Arabic word folds the French of "translation" into its Arabic "original." This translational Arabic wears no "royal robe with ample folds." In this super-sign, French goes native, clinging to Arabic's skin—indeed, cutting its figure.

Al-Khālidī's similes, however, also invite Arab-Islamic referents into French. Elaborating Hugo's image of verse-distilled meaning as an "elixir," al-Khālidī adds a nod to the history of alchemy absent from the French, hinting at the Arabic origin of the term *elixir* (*al-iksīr*) itself. As elixir turns into wine, al-Khālidī's translation takes a striking turn. Implying that verse might be as "transparent" a medium as prose for "la nature et le vrai" ("nature and truth"), Hugo poses a rhetorical question: "Le vin . . . cesse-t-il d'être du vin pour être en bouteille?" ("Does wine . . . cease to be wine for being bottled?"). Answering it, al-Khālidī puts the Qurʾān in Hugo's mouth: "No! It becomes an exquisite aged wine whose parting note is musk, to which the aspirants aspire." This rejoinder adapts Qurʾānic verses describing the dwellers of Paradise:

> يُسْقَوْنَ مِن رَّحِيقٍ مَّخْتُومٍ \ خِتَـٰمُهُۥ مِسْكٌ وَفِى ذَٰلِكَ فَلْيَتَنَافَسِ ٱلْمُتَنَـٰفِسُونَ
>
> (*al-Qurʾān* 83.25–26)
>
> They will be given to drink a pure wine, sealed / whose parting note is musk, and to this let the aspirants aspire.

Significantly, these verses appear in the chapter "المطففين" ("al-Muṭaffifīn"), which M. A. S. Abdel Haleem translates as "Those Who Give Short Measure" (413). The chapter's opening verses read,

> وَيْلٌ لِّلْمُطَفِّفِينَ \ ٱلَّذِينَ إِذَا ٱكْتَالُوا۟ عَلَى ٱلنَّاسِ يَسْتَوْفُونَ \ وَإِذَا كَالُوهُمْ أَو وَّزَنُوهُمْ يُخْسِرُونَ
>
> (*al-Qurʾān* 83.1–3)
>
> Woe to those who give short measure, / who demand of other people full measure for themselves, / but give less than they should when it is they who weigh or measure for others! (*The Qurʾan* 83.1–3)

Tacitly, the Qurʾānic wine al-Khālidī transposes to Hugo's poetic meaning—the better to imagine Arabic drinking from the same clear vessel—is promised to those who give just measure: materially, giving the equivalent of what they receive in exchange; morally, giving others the justice to which they believe themselves entitled. Al-Khālidī thus links the equation of word and meaning within one language—and across languages—to Qurʾānic commands to social and political justice. This move redeems not just French but all poetry in Qurʾānic eyes, limning a poetic word that means (and does) what it says.

Al-Khālidī's conflation of the *raḥīq* ("wine") of poetic meaning in Hugo's preface with the *raḥīq* of Paradise in the Qurʾān makes Arabic—and Islam—the measure of French literature, sacralizing Hugo's French wine. It makes Hugo's poetics speak a Qurʾānic Arabic. As super-sign, al-Khālidī's translation arguably points now to Arabic, sliding Arabic under the skin of French. Yet it also nearly controverts Qurʾānic inimitability by restaging Hugo's precepts as imitations of Qurʾānic writ. Al-Khālidī's off-key quotation (Emmerich would say editing) of the Qurʾān—adding the adjective *muʿattaq* ("aged") to *raḥīq* ships the wine of Qurʾānic Paradise to the cellars of Bordeaux—desacralizes the Qurʾānic text and sacralizes Hugo's, conflating, too, the clashing materiality of a wine Christianity permits but Islam proscribes with the chiming metaphoricity of the wines of meaning (in Hugo) and paradise (in the Qurʾān). Does the polarity of power in the super-sign, then, still point to French? To which eloquence are al-Khālidī's readers to aspire: Hugo's "wine" or the Qurʾān's? Are both now "equal," trailing the same scent?

In al-Khālidī's pursuit of political equality through intralingual or translingual equivalence lurks what Emmerich and Venuti dub a communicative or instrumentalist model of translation, where translation is "a (failed) transfer of an invariant meaning via the construction of textual equivalents" (Emmerich 1n2) or "an invariant form,

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meaning, or effect" that is "contained in or caused by the source text" (Venuti 1). Both al-Khālidī's instrumentalism and the countervision of language implied by the hermeneutic model of translation Venuti espouses—where translation, as "an interpretive act that varies the source text" (8), mediates the source text's form, meaning, and effect in relations of "variable equivalence" (ix)—enjoy a long history in Arab-Islamic thought. Rebecca Gould has argued that medieval Arab-Islamic theories of literary language double as tacit theories of translation. Comparing the ninth-century polymath al-Jāḥiẓ (ca. 776–868/9) and the eleventh-century literary theorist ʿAbd al-Qāhir al-Jurjānī (d. 1078 or 1081), Gould notes that while al-Jāḥiẓ posited "a singular relation between word and meaning"—such that a word in one language might be declared superior to its counterparts in that language or in another tongue, hence untranslatable—al-Jurjānī decoupled word and meaning from static relation (90; see 87–92).[14] Turning from words as such to the ways words mean, al-Jurjānī accents *naẓm*: the precise relation—arrangement, articulation—between words and meanings (Gould 95). Gould calls that relation "dialectical" (95), implying its contingency. In *naẓm*, she explains, al-Jurjānī locates poetic craft. Implicitly, and prefiguring Hugo, words themselves are "equal," insofar as they bear no intrinsic relationship to their meaning. It is how words are motivated to make meaning, typically within the context of a line, that lends them a provisional singularity. In the limit case of the Qurʾān, that singularity takes the form of inimitability (*iʿjāz*). Indeed, as Lara Harb argues, al-Jurjānī framed what Harb calls the "poeticity" of language not as transparency—though he decried gratuitous artificiality—but as difficulty: the imaginative-interpretive stretch (*takhyīl*) it compels its listener or reader to make in order to "translate" figures of speech, to move from obvious to hidden meaning, "'the meaning of meaning' (*maʿnā al-maʿnā*)" (*Arabic Poetics* 174; see 44–74). In Gould's counterintuitive reading, then, for al-Jurjānī what is inimitable is not untranslatable, but most translatable, precisely because it demands interpretation—as the nearly-the-same-but-not-quite Qurʾānic verses in Hugo's mouth attest (95). Anticipating Benjamin yet eschewing his nostalgia for "pure language," al-Jurjānī reenvisions translation "as an interpretive technique . . . which, far from overcoming polylingualism, makes it legible" (Gould 94). Pace Venuti, who argues that instrumentalism has dominated "translation theory and commentary for more than two millennia" (1), "fostering an illusionism of immediate access to the source text" (5), Gould reveals an alternative history.

Tārīkh gestures to that history. Curiously, however, while al-Khālidī cites al-Jurjānī, he bends him toward al-Jāḥiẓ and others who valorize the transparent signifier, including the tenth-century theologian and jurist Abū Bakr Muḥammad al-Bāqillānī (d. 1013) and the fourteenth-century polymath Ibn Khaldūn (1332–82). Al-Khālidī's acts of translation may belie what Venuti calls the "illusionism of immediate access" to meanings through words, exposing its fallacy as much within one language as across two or more languages in translation. Yet the metronome of his thought continually swings al-Jurjānī's polysemic *naẓm* back to al-Jāḥiẓ's invariability. The latter recalls, conceptually, another sense *naẓm* carries: verse or versification, as opposed to prose. *Tārīkh* invokes *naẓm* as verse—the regular measures of prosody—to fix Jurjānīan *naẓm*, to constrain interpretive possibility in the "transparency" of prose. Taking the measure of measure, al-Khālidī equates poetics East and West:

> قال الباقلاني "وكانت العرب تعلم اولادها قول الشعر بوضع غير معقول يوضع على بعض اوزان الشعر . . . ويسمون ذلك الوضع الميتر [sic] واشتقاقه من المتر وهو الجذب او القطع يقال مترت الحبل بمعنى قطعته او جذبته". والفرنساويون يسمون العروض ميتر وميتريك ويقولون انه مشتق من معنى القياس باليونانية . . . وعبر العرب عن قول الشعر ونظمه بالقرض وعن الشعر بالقريض. ومعنى القرض القطع لان الشعر مفصل قطعاً قطعاً متساوية في الوزن متحدة في الحرف الأخير من كل قطعة.
>
> (47)
>
> Al-Bāqillānī said, "The Arabs taught their children poetic speech to an astonishing degree, composed to various poetic measures . . . ; they call this composition *al-matīr* [al-Khālidī writes, *al-mītar*]; it derives from *al-matr*, which is stretching to the breaking point or cutting; one says, 'I cut the rope' [*Matartu*

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al-*ḥabla*], meaning ‘I severed it’ or ‘I stretched it [to the breaking point].’” The French call prosody *mītr* [i.e., *mètre*] and *mītrīk* [i.e, *métrique*]; they say that it derives from the idea of measure [*al-qiyās*] in Greek. . . . And the Arabs described poetic speech and its composition with [the word] *cutting*, *severing* [*qarḍ*] and poetry with [the word] *the cut*, *severed* [*al-qarīḍ*]. The meaning of *al-qarḍ* is cutting [*al-qaṭʿ*], because poetry is composed piece by piece [*qiṭʿan qiṭʿan*], equal in measure and unified by [the same] final letter in each line.

Notice the stealthy homology—sonic, then semantic—al-Khālidī forges between Arabic and French prosodies. Citing al-Bāqillānī’s إعجاز القرآن (*Iʿjāz al-Qurʾān*; *Inimitability of the Qurʾān*), al-Khālidī hints that the French *mètre* (“meter”) might derive, contra French dicta, not from the ancient Greek word *métron* (“measure”) but from the Arabic *matr*—or, perhaps, that French and Arabic both derive their terms from Greek. He juxtaposes al-Bāqillānī’s words with French parlance and lets his reader divine a comparative conclusion from the sonic convergence of the Arabic *matīr*, *matr*, *matartu* and the French *mītr*. Yet true to his accent on signified over signifier, al-Khālidī does not rely on morphology alone. He summons meaning, too, to clinch his point, showing his reader how other Arabic words for poetry—*qarḍ* and *qarīḍ*, both emphasizing cutting—align with *matr*, which also means cutting (or stretching to the breaking point). Having created a shared world from the weave of language—where the measures of poetry in French and Arabic, and thus the epistemic ground of comparison, are one—al-Khālidī can argue for a modern Arabic in sync with European languages.

Thus, poetic meter interests al-Khālidī less as such than for the metacritical force of its animating concept: measure.[15] After all, language, for him, *dies* by metrical cuts—by stretchings of “truth.” He aims, instead, to move the prosody of the world toward common measure. Of the Arabs he writes,

وكانت عنايتهم في الجاهلية مصروفة للكلام على المنظوم من شعر وسجع لان تأثيره في النفوس اشد لما يحدثه من النغمة التي تطرب لها الاذن وتلهو بها عن تمحيص الحق من الباطل في الكلام

(*Tārīkh* 47)

In pre-Islamic times, they devoted their care to versified discourse, poetry and rhymed prose, because its effect on souls is stronger, given its melodic strain, which transports the ears and distracts them from discerning truth from falsehood in speech.

Poetry is suspect for its music, for measures too artful to be truthful. Tracing an arc from metrical rhymed poetry to rhymed prose to unrhymed metrical discourse, al-Khālidī reaches his ideal: prose (47).

وأما المرسل فهو الذي يرسل فيه الكلام ارسالاً بدون تقييد بقافية أو سجع أو وزن أو شيءٍ ما بل يطلق اطلاقاً

(48)

As for prose [*al-mursal*; i.e., *kalām mursal*], it is that in which speech is dispatched with ease, without the constraint[s] of rhyme, rhymed prose [*sajʿ*], meter [*wazn*], or something else; rather, it is set completely free.

While prose may assume “وجه بديع” (“elegant form”), it “شبيه بالكلام الذي لا يتعمل ولا يتصنع له” (“resembles speech that neither goes to great trouble nor puts on artificial airs”; 47). Liberation, for al-Khālidī, stems from the equality of words he hears in Hugo, from a leveling of language to the “natural,” from equation of word with thing, deed, truth:

فلما سلك الشعراء في الجاهلية على حفظ الالفاظ وتصنيعها دون ضبط المعاني وترتيبها عرض بهم القرآن الكريم فقال "والشعراء يتبعهم الغارون ألم تر انهم في كل واد يهيمون وانهم يقولون ما لا يفعلون"

(48)[16]

Thus when, during the Jāhiliyya, the poets took to memorizing turns of phrase and to fashioning these without making meanings precise and organizing these, the noble Qurʾān exposed them, saying, “And the poets—[only] the errant follow them; do you not see that in every valley they wander; and that they say what they do not do[?]”

In critiquing the poetics of the pre-Islamic Arab past that post-Islamic parlance dubs الجاهلية (*al-Jāhiliyya*; “Age of Ignorance”) and pronouncing the Qurʾān the origin of a truth-telling Arabic, al-Khālidī diverges somewhat from his Syro-Lebanese contemporaries

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Najīb al-Ḥaddād (1867–99) and Sulaymān al-Bustānī (1856–1925). As Noorani argues, the Jāhiliyya is the center of gravity in both al-Ḥaddād's three-part series of essays (1897) comparing French and Arabic literatures—which also centered Hugo—and al-Bustānī's critical introduction to his translation of Homer's *Iliad* (1904). Contending that pre-Islamic Arabic poetry in particular rivaled modern French poetry in its "simplicity," al-Ḥaddad prefigured al-Bustānī's equation of pre-Islamic Arabic and ancient Greek poetics on a similar axis of "naturalness" (see Noorani 241–42; 244). By contrast, I suggest, al-Khālidī stages the Qurʾān not only as a moral corrective to the perceived waywardness of poets and their language, but also as a stylistic corrective to the perils of rhymed or metered language, and an embodiment, *avant la lettre*, of linguistic and literary modernity:

> ثم ظهر الاسلام وجاءَ القرآن بأفصح لفظ وأبلغ معنى على أسلوب جديد يخالف اساليب العرب في النظم والنثر فلا هو مرسل ولا مسجع. . . . ووقع اللفظ في القرآن تابعاً للمعنى ولذا فاق كلام الكهان. . . .
>
> (49)
>
> Then Islam appeared and the Qurʾān came with the purest word and most eloquent meaning, following a new style that diverged from the styles of the Arabs in poetry and in prose, for it is neither pros[aic] nor rhymed. . . . In the Qurʾān, word follows meaning; for this reason, it surpassed the speech of priests [and composers of poetry]. . . .

Ultimately, al-Khālidī damns poetry (and rhymed prose) not just for sacrificing moral truth on the altar of artifice but for spurning the real language of human beings:

> ان الشعر اذا تهذب ووفي له بجميع الاسباب لم يقاربه من كلام الادميين كلام. . . . ولكن قلما يفلح الشاعر المجيد الا في بعض الابيات لا سيما في الشعر العربي حيث ضيق فيه النطاق على الشعراء والزموا باتباع القواعد التي تخطاها شعراء الافرنج. على ان اكثر فحول الادب في البلاد المتمدنة صارفون عنايتهم في يومنا الى النثر المرسل دون النظم كما فعل فيكتور هوكو في آخر عمره وكما يفعل اليوم اميل زولا وغيره مثل تولستوي اديب الروس
>
> (48–49)
>
> When poetry takes refined form and all its [metrical] connections are fulfilled, no words will draw it near to the speech of human beings. . . . Only rarely does the great poet succeed, save for in a few verses—especially in Arabic poetry, where the sphere for poets was narrowed, and they have been forced to follow rules that European poets have overstepped. On the other hand, the majority of the great literati in civilized nations are turning their attention, in our day, to fluid prose [*al-nathr al-mursal*] without meter, as Victor Hugo did at the end of his life, and as Émile Zola and others—such as Tolstoy, the littérateur of the Russians—are doing [now].

In the final translation, then, the language of the Qurʾān—for al-Khālidī, the language of God—again draws close to the language of "civilized" (read "European") men.

Synching "Nature": Antiquity as Modernity

Beyond prosody, wordplay is the bane of the "natural" language that would reconcile Arabic literature with its modern counterparts. Lambasting Arab literati for highbrow imitation—in his wry words, adding an eighth ode to the seven Suspended Odes (*al-Muʿallaqāt al-sabʿ*) of pre-Islamic Arabia or a sequel to the rhymed-prose fictions (*maqāmāt*) of the tenth- to eleventh-century masters al-Hamadhānī and al-Ḥarīrī—al-Khālidī urges them to make meaning instead (35). This critique of artificial writing catalyzes a call for literary comparison as cure. As al-Khālidī writes,

> لا يكمل علم الادب للمتبحر فيه الا بعد ان ينظر في ادب الامم المتمدنة ولو نظرة عامة يطلع بها على مجمل تاريخ ادبهم وعلى بعض ما ترجم من مؤلفات المشاهير من كتبهم
>
> (31)
>
> The science of literature [*ʿilm al-adab*] will never be complete for one who dives deeply therein until he looks to the literature of *civilized nations*, if even by way of a general glance that imparts the sum of their literary histories and some of what has been translated from the writings of their most famous.
>
> (my emphasis)

The more precisely languages mean, the higher their literatures on the " سلم الحضارة " ("ladder of

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civilization"; 32). And the precise word is the most "natural":

> خير اللفظ ما جاء بالطبع والبداهة بلا تكلف ولا تحر في القواميس
> (35)
>
> The best word is the one that comes naturally and instinctively, without pretense or pursuit in the dictionaries.

This literary regime ties meaning to two faces of nature: outer (the empirical world) and inner (the felt world). To make meaning, says al-Khālidī, is

> اظهار اسرار هذا الكون الذي نصبح فيه ونمسي ونحن غافلون عن كثير من حقائقه. ولا ندري باي عبارة نترجم عنها ولا كيف نوضح شعورنا واحساسنا بهذا الوسط الذي نحيه وهو سجن لنا.
> (35)
>
> to reveal the secrets of this universe we greet morning and night, even as we are unaware of many of its truths/facts [*ḥaqāʾiq*] and *have no idea which expression we should use to translate it* [*bi-ayyi ʿibāratin nutarjimu ʿanhā*], nor how to make clear our feelings in this milieu in which we find ourselves, and which for us is a prison. (my emphasis)

Al-Khālidī articulates the mutism of modern Arabic speakers as a crisis of translation: Arabic's inadequacy to the (earthly) world, modernity's terrain. He glosses their problematic sensibility by half quoting a saying (*ḥadīth*) of the Prophet Muḥammad: "والدنيا سجن المؤمن" ("The (earthly) world [*dunyā*] is the prison of the believer"; qtd. in al-Khālidī, *Tārīkh* 35). Omitting its punch line, "وَجَنَّةُ الْكَافِرِ" ("and the paradise of the non-believer"; qtd. in al-Qushayrī 210), which critiques worldliness, al-Khālidī bends the *ḥadīth*'s meaning to his message. Might the believer, he hints, need to see prison as paradise?

To synchronize the ideology and practice of modern literary Arabic with those of "civilized nations," al-Khālidī reaches to the primeval: to the Arabic of Muḍar, one of two major constellations of tribes in ancient North Arabia. Tradition held that the Prophet Muḥammad, who hailed from the tribe of Quraysh, descended from Muḍar (see Kister), and Ibn Khaldūn describes the language of Muḍar as the Arabic in which the Qurʾān was revealed (*al-Muqaddima* 253–54, 259 and *Muqaddimah* 346, 353). Thus, the language of Muḍar represents an Arabic that at once belongs to recorded "history"—through the Qurʾān and pre-Islamic poetry—and predates it. Al-Khālidī's stratagem uncannily recalls the position of the nineteenth-century French Orientalist Ernest Renan (1823–92). In his *Histoire générale et système comparé des langues sémitiques* (*General History and Comparative System of the Semitic Languages*), first published in 1855, Renan argues that Semitic languages were once analytic (simple) but became synthetic (complex). Restored to the analytic mode that their ancient forms purportedly share with contemporary Indo-European languages, Semitic languages would be kin with the "modern" (Renan 427–28). Intent on submitting Arabic letters to the epistemic dominion of a European world order that equates vernacularity with reason, Renan insists that Arabic's deepest antiquity holds the key to its potential modernity. He enlists no less a native informant than Ibn Khaldūn. Writes Renan:

> L'arabe vulgaire n'est pas de l'arabe littéral désarticulé, si on peut le dire, puis reconstruit sur un nouveau modèle; c'est *une forme de la langue arabe plus simple, plus facile et plus antique en un sens, qui seule est restée vulgaire*, tandis que la forme littéraire est devenue de plus en plus l'apanage des savants. . . . Ibn Khaldoun s'attache à prouver que l'on peut, sans observer les désinences, parler un arabe correct et tout à fait différent du langage vulgaire des Arabes domiciliés; il cite, par exemple, les Bédouins de son temps, qui, sans observer les désinences, parlent au fond l'idiome pur de Modhar. (408; my emphasis)
>
> Dialectal Arabic is not disarticulated from written Arabic, so to speak, then reconstructed on a new model; it is *a simpler, easier, and in a sense more ancient form of the Arabic language that alone remained vernacular*, while the literary form became more and more the preserve of scholars. . . . Ibn Khaldūn strove to prove that one could, without observing grammatical inflections [case endings], speak an Arabic [at once] correct and entirely

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> different from the dialectal Arabic of the settled Arabs; he cites, for example, the Bedouins of his time, who, without observing grammatical inflections, speak, at bottom, the pure idiom of Muḍar.

Like Renan, al-Khālidī maintains that language must be analytic to be modern—and comparable. He too asks, How do we restore written Arabic from morbid complexity to healthy simplicity—return a synthetic language that uses (too) many morphemes to express an idea to an analytic language that assigns one morpheme to one idea? And like Renan, al-Khālidī argues that the first Arabs possessed the linguistic clarity that Europeans now evince—that antiquity was modern. Indeed, he introduces the problem of literary comparison in *Tārīkh* by pondering the relationship of the language of Muḍar (*lughat Muḍar*) to the language of sedentary urban life and settled civilizations (*lughat al-ḥaḍar*). For al-Khālidī, if the "pure" ancient Arabic of Muḍar once bound word to meaning, the complex Arabic of *ḥaḍar* has severed that bond. Positing *lughat Muḍar* as the quintessential Arabic—thus recalling Renan's construction, from Ibn Khaldūn, of "the pure idiom of Muḍar" as the grammatically simplified yet "correct" language that contemporary Arabic must resurrect—al-Khālidī makes it the measure of Arabic's past and potential modernity. This modernity takes Arab antiquity and European(ized) actuality as its touchstones. If *fuṣḥā*, like the "pure idiom of Muḍar," once interposed an airtight seal between word and meaning, the "corruption" of erudition has since torn that seal open. Modern Arabic can revert to an ancient Arabic that "donn[e] à chaque idée et à chaque relation son expression isolée" ("grant[s] to each idea and to each relation its isolated expression"), to borrow Renan's words (422), only through the vernacular: here defined, counterintuitively, as a standard written Arabic gutted from within, stripped of "useless" flourishes to a realist plainspokenness.

Ibn Khaldūn's imprint on al-Khālidī's ideology of language is profound. In his المقدمة (*al-Muqaddima*; *Prolegomena*) of 1377, Ibn Khaldūn premised both sound science (*ʿilm*; that is, knowledge writ large) and good poetry on the tight correlation of word to idea.[17] He writes,

> واللغات إنما هي ترجمان عما في الضمائر من تلك المعاني،. . . .
> والألفاظ واللغات وسائط وحجب بين الضمائر
> (*al-Muqaddima* 233)

> Linguistic expression is merely the interpreter [*turjumān*] of ideas that are in the mind. . . . Words and expressions are media and veils between the ideas. (*Muqaddimah* 316)

If such is true of oral discourse, how much truer, he argues, of the written word, where the further "حجاب آخر بين الخط ورسومه في الكتاب وبين الألفاظ المقولة في الخيال" ("veil . . . that separates handwriting and the form of letters (found) in writing from the spoken words (found) in the imagination"; 234; 316–17) must be lifted for ideas to shine and readers to grasp "مباحثها فقط" ("the problems inherent in the (ideas)"; 234; 317). Ibn Khaldūn transposes this demand for transparency from science to poetry:

> ولا يستعمل [الشاعر] فيه [أي في الشعر] إلا الأفصح من التراكيب والخالص من الضرورات اللساية [sic] . . . .
> فليهجرها، فإنها تنزل بالكلام عن طبقة البلاغة. . . .
> وليتجنب أيضاً المعقّد من التراكيب جهده، وإنما يقصد منها ما كانت معانيه تسابق ألفاظه إلى الفهم . . . .ولا يكون الشعر سهلاً إلا إذا كانت معانيه تسابق ألفاظه إلى الذهن.[18]
> (286)

> (The poet) should use only the most correct word combinations and a language free from all (poetic) license. . . . He should avoid it, because it might deprive (his) speech of eloquence. . . . (The poet) should also keep away, as much as he can, from involved word combinations. He should try to use only those whose meaning can be understood more quickly than the (individual) words they contain. . . . A poem is easy only when its ideas are more quickly grasped by the mind than its words. (385–86)

In Ibn Khaldūn, al-Khālidī hears modernity untimed: the fourteenth-century thinker's accent on immediacy—"translation" as transfer—announces Hugo. So too do seventh-century speakers of the Arabic in which the Qurʾān was revealed. Clarity and uncontrived eloquence, al-Khālidī writes, once were second nature—habit—for the Arabs; devoid of artifice, the figurative language of Muḍar prefigures "الكلام البديع

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"لفيكتور هوكو" ("the elegant tropes of Victor Hugo"; *Tārīkh* 34).[19] Then artificiality strangled Arabic until its poetry barely registered authentic emotion, unlike "الروايات المضحكة او الفاجعة" ("the comedies or tragedies") of Greek, Roman, or European (*ifranj*) writers,

> عرضوه في المراسح على انظار الجمهور فقدره الخواص حق قدره واستفاد منه العوام
>
> (34)
>
> who staged [these] for public viewing, such that the elites [*al-khawāṣṣ*] appreciated [their] true value and the masses [*al-ʿawāmm*] [also] benefited from [them].

A return to ancient Arabic would usher in comparability with the world's modern (Western or Westernizing) literatures and their roots in (Western) antiquity—and forge a literature whose fundamental "nature" would be the great equalizer, appealing (if differently) to elites and masses alike.

Enter Victor Hugo: The *Égalité* of Words

Victor Hugo thus embodies a resurrection of the "lost" simplicity of Arabic letters and a suppression of large swaths of the Arab-Islamic past in the name of a modernity in which Arabic and French literatures must converge to compare. In a chapter aptly titled "نظم فيكتور هوكو" ("Naẓm Fīktūr Hūkū"; "The Poetry [*Naẓm*] of Victor Hugo"), al-Khālidī's *Tārīkh* further transacts complex equivalences between Arabic and French meter and meaning. Keen to prove the virtuosity that non-Arabic poetry demands—thereby claiming, for Hugo, a genius reserved for Arabic—al-Khālidī defines the dominant French meter, the alexandrine, then observes:

> والنظم في هذا البحر صعب يحتاج الى نفس عال وتلطف كثير ومهارة زائدة وبه تظهر قوة الشاعر واقتداره على التصرف في الكلام
>
> (182)
>
> [composing] poetry in this meter is difficult; it demands high style, great subtlety, and greater skill; with its use, the power of the poet and his way with words reveal themselves.

Even Hugo's trespass of the conventional alexandrine proves the "rule" of French-Arabic comparability:

> ولم يراع الوقوف على الهجاء السادس بل قسم البيت الى شطرين غير متساويين وجوز تكميل معنى البيت الاول بالفاظ من البيت الثاني. مع أن العرب يشترطون ان يكون كل بيت من ابيات الشعر تامّاً في بابه مستقلّاً في معناه. ويمكن تشبيه البحر الاسكندري بالبحور العربية الستة عشر. . . .
>
> (182)
>
> [H]e did not observe the caesura after the sixth syllable but divided the [twelve-syllable] verse line into two unequal hemistichs and transgressed completion of the first line's meaning by [finishing it] with words from the second line. Although Arabs require that every line of verse in a poem be complete in itself, independent in its meaning. We might liken the alexandrine meter to the sixteen Arabic meters. . . .

The French alexandrine, al-Khālidī suggests, echoes Arabic poetics in demanding the metrical and semantic self-sufficiency of each verse line, barring enjambment. Thus, Hugo's transgression underscores the comparability of (classical) French and Arabic prosodies. And in Hugo's "excess" lies a modernity to which the measure of Arabic poetry, now out of sync, must be reset. First, however, al-Khālidī must further domesticate the alexandrine. He likens the singular alexandrine *baḥr* ("meter") to the plural Arabic *buḥūr* ("meters"), equating the alexandrine with the sum of Arabic meters, sixteen in all. Compare Sulaymān al-Bustānī. Likening the alexandrine to the *rajaz*, the simplest Arabic meter, al-Bustānī writes,

> وهذا القياس البسيط يقوم عند الافرنج مقام جميع ابحر الشعر وتفاعيله عند العرب.
>
> (94)
>
> For the Europeans [*al-ifranj*], this simple measure [*al-qiyās al-basīṭ*] takes the place of all the poetic meters and metrical feet of the Arabs combined.

Al-Bustānī intimates the simplicity of both a single meter and the metrical system it exemplifies. While he later notes that stress complements syllable in Western prosody, he ascribes no difficulty to the

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alexandrine as such. By contrast, al-Khālidī harmonizes French and Arabic metrics on the common chord of difficulty. No matter that he posits a nonequivalent equation between one meter and many, not unlike the unequal halves of Hugo's transgressive alexandrine. The point is to make Arabic and French comparable so that Arabic can accept Hugo's excess.

So far complexity—exemplified by the alexandrine—has grounded French-Arabic comparability. Now al-Khālidī shifts the ground of comparability to other meters, beyond the alexandrine, in which Hugo composed poetry: forms distinguished by their simplicity, which he describes as closer to those of the formal Arabic strophic songs (*muwashshaḥāt*) and colloquial Arabic strophic songs (*azjāl*) of Andalusia—that "translation zone," beloved to *nahḍa* intellectuals, between the medieval Arab-Islamic world and modern Europe, between the erstwhile imperial supremacy of the former and the present imperial supremacy of the latter.[20] Simplicity, not difficulty, becomes the measure of literary virtuosity, as well as of comparability:

> ومن شعر فيكتور هوكو ما هو على اوزان متخالفة تتألف من ستة أو ثمانية أو عشرة هجاءات نظمت أسماطاً أسماطاً واغصاناً اغصاناً وجعل لها ادواراً ولازمات على نسق ما استحدثه الاندلسيون وبقية شعراء العرب المتأخرين من الموشحات والازجال. وهي اسهل طريقة واقرب تناولاً من البحر الاسكندري كما ان الموشحات والازجال العربية اسهل من بقية البحور. . . . واقتبس الفرنساويون هذه الاعاريض من شعراء التروبادور. وهؤلاء تلقوها عن عرب الاندلس كما اخذوا عنهم علم القوافي. فان شعراء الافرنج على الاطلاق لم يكن لهم معرفة بالقوافي وانما كانوا يعتاضون عنها في اشعارهم بما يسمونه (اسونانس). . . .
>
> (al-Khālidī, *Tārīkh* 182–83)
>
> Among Victor Hugo's poetry is some in varying measures, consisting of six, eight, or ten syllables—two rhyming hemistichs at a time [*asmāṭan asmāṭan wa-aghṣānan aghṣānan*; literally "string by string and branch by branch"].[21] To these he imparted both turns and fixed phrases, in the manner of what the Andalusians and other Arab poets innovated in formal strophic songs [*muwashshaḥāt*] and colloquial strophic songs [*ajzāl*]. It is an easier mode, more readily grasped than the alexandrine meter, just as Arabic formal strophic songs and colloquial strophic songs are easier [to grasp] than other [Arabic] meters. . . . The French adopted and adapted these prosodies from the troubadour poets. And the latter learned these from the Arabs of Andalusia, just as they took from them the science of rhymes. For the Frankish poets, without exception, did not possess knowledge of rhymes but compensated for these, in their poems, with what they call *assonance*. . . .[22]

Hugo's departure from the alexandrine to simpler meters—seeded in Andalusia—heralds Romanticism's democratizing revisions of poetic word, sense, and sensibility. Writes al-Khālidī:

> هوكو . . . تساهل جدّاً في جانب الالفاظ واستحدث من عند نفسه انواعاً جديدة ووضع هذه القاعدة وهي: "ان الشعر ليس في قوالب المعاني وانما هو في المعاني نفسها. فالشعر هو الامر الباطني لكل شيء في الوجود"[.]
>
> (183)
>
> Hugo . . . greatly simplified the expressive dimension [and vocabulary of poetry] and himself innovated new forms. He laid down this foundational principle: "Poetry is not in the molds that meanings take but in the meanings themselves. For poetry is the hidden principle of everything in existence[.]"

This pronouncement translates Hugo's preface to *Odes et poésies diverses* (1822; *Various Odes and Poems*): "la Poésie n'est pas dans la forme des idées, mais dans les idées elles-mêmes. La Poésie, c'est tout ce qu'il y a d'intime dans tout" ("Poetry is not in the form of ideas but in the ideas themselves. Poetry is all that is innermost [*intime*] in everything"; Hugo, Preface [*Odes*] ii). Rendering *intime* ("innermost") as *bāṭinī* ("hidden"), al-Khālidī invokes the concept of *al-bāṭin*—the Qurʾān's hidden meaning—to suggest a poetry that "voir dans les choses plus que les choses" ("see[s] more than things in things"; Hugo, Preface [*Odes*] ii). A poetry that lifts the veil of words from ideas decrypts and demystifies empirical "existence."

Al-Khālidī thus frames metrical simplicity and its semiotic corollary—the turn to words that convey meaning simply—as translations in broken time. In a metrical view of literary history, medieval Europe

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translated new schemas of rhyme and prosody—through the troubadours—from Arab sources. In a semiotic view, the modern Arabic-speaking world, mired in literary artificiality, must back-translate the rhetorical "naturalness" the Qurʾān enshrines from a modern European literature Hugo exemplifies. What distinguish medieval European translation of the Arabic "science of rhymes" and the desired back-translation by early-twentieth-century Arabs of modern European literary epistemologies, in other words, are uneven temporalities. While medieval Europeans supposedly knew nothing of what they translated from their Arab counterparts, modern Arabs once did know—but forgot—what they now are called to translate from their European counterparts. Al-Khālidī grants the Arabic-speaking world a past knowingness denied to Europe, but grants Europe a present knowingness that the Arabic-speaking world has lost and must retrieve: in part from its past, in part from a European-defined present. This logic yokes Arab one-upmanship over Europe—the Arabs have always already been (at least partially) modern—to Arab subordination to Europe: Arabic-language writers must catch up to and project a literary modernity that Europe now defines and lives.

Ultimately Hugo incarnates that modernity—namely, the idea that a properly "modern" literary language makes meaning universally legible, hence democratic:

> وكما ان فيكتور هوكو غير افاعيل الشعر وتفاعيله واصلح عروضه . . .، فقد أصلح كذلك الفاظ الشعر ومعانيه. وابطل جميع اصطلاحات الادباء . . . التي لا يفهمها الا أهل الغوص على المعاني وهم خواص الناس. وقال بان جميع الالفاظ سواءٌ. لا فرق فيها بين اللفظ الذي وقع اختيار الادباء عليه وبين اللفظ الذي رفضوه وقالوا عنه سوقي مبتذل. وجوز للكتبة والشعراء الاخذ بكل واحد من نوعي الالفاظ المختارة والسوقية واستعمالهما بلا فرق في النظم والنثر. على شرط موافقتهما لقواعد النحو والصرف. . . . ولم يرض من جميع ذلك الا . . . [با] لمعنى الحقيقي الدال على خصوصية الموضوع. . . . فلا حاجة للاستعارة. . . .
>
> (al-Khālidī, *Tārīkh* 186–87)
>
> Just as Victor Hugo changed poetry's feats [*afāʿīl*] and feet [*tafāʿīl*; i.e., metrical feet] and reformed its prosody . . . , so too did he reform the words and meanings of poetry. He invalidated all of the literati's specialized terms, . . . [which] no one except those who dive deep for meanings understands—and they are the elites of humankind. And he declared that all words are equal. There is no difference between the word the literati happened to choose and the word that they rejected and called plebeian or vulgar and hackneyed. Further, he authorized writers and poets to take words of each type, the select and the plebeian or vulgar, and to use them both—with no distinction—in poetry and in prose, on the condition that they follow the rules of grammar and morphology. . . . From all this he desired nothing but . . . the true meaning that shed[s] light on the topic's specificity . . . . There is no need for metaphor. . . .

This passage is arresting, not least for the French republicanism al-Khālidī detects in Hugo's literary ethos: "he declared that all words are equal." Al-Khālidī identifies at the heart of modern literature a new aesthetics of nondiscrimination, whose radical republic of words rattles distinctions between "literary" and "common" language. The two are now eminently translatable. Yet not interchangeable, for the message that "Victor Hugo" imparts to Arabic-language writers is clear: if a plebeian word will do, the everyday is preferable to the recherché. Thus, the common accrues a shade of valorized difference in the new global regime of modern literature, a (political) edge that makes it more than equal to the rarefied word it replaces. With one caveat: such an "exchange," al-Khālidī stresses, should not violate grammar or morphology. That caveat holds open space for an emergent (vernacularized) modern standard Arabic in which formal and colloquial registers converge but do not interconvert: the medium of the *demi-lettrés* ("semi-literates").[23] Assimilating Hugo's modernity into the long-historical continuum of Arab-Islamic theory, al-Khālidī cites al-Jurjānī's أسرار البلاغة (*Asrār al-Balāgha*; *Secrets of Eloquence*) to this effect:

> ذكر الجرجاني . . . ان تكون اللفظة مما يتعارفه الناس في استعمالهم. ويتداولونه في زمانهم. ولا يكون وحشيّاً غريباً. او عاميّاً سخيفاً وسخفه بازالته عن موضوع اللغة وإخراجه عما فرضته من الحكم. . . .
>
> (186n1)

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> al-Jurjānī noted . . . that the word should be [chosen] from among those that people find customary from their own usage and circulate in their time. And that it not be savage [or] strange. Or simplemindedly colloquial, its nonsense stemming from its divorce from linguistic convention and departure from the rules that [language] imposes. . . .

Thus summoned to prove the eloquence of the ordinary, al-Jurjānī chimes with Hugo: all words are equal. Yet, al-Jurjānī hints, in literary language some words are more equal than others.

"Licit Magic": Translating "Grenade"

What of Hugo's words? Of the poems in his *Les Orientales*, al-Khālidī translates only "Grenade" ("Granada"), fruit of Hugo's eyewitness to Spain, for only "القسم المتعلق بالاندلس واسبانيا" ("the section [of the volume] related to Andalusia and Spain") fulfills the Romantic dictate that writing issue "عن رؤية وانفعال نفسي" ("from vision and a [passionate] stirring of the soul"; 201). Arab-Islamic Spain thus mediates the supposed immediacy of Hugo's "nature." Indeed, in the gardens of Andalusia, al-Khālidī declares,

> فصار ذهنة [sic] كانه آلة بديعة تفي بوظيفة السينماتوغراف والفوتوغراف معاً. فيصور ما يمر به من مشاهد الكون ويطبع ما يسمعه
>
> (143)
>
> [Hugo's] mind became like a figurative machine [*ālatun badīʿatun*], fulfilling the function of a cinematograph and a pho[n]ograph combined. Thus, it films the sights of the universe on which it alights and imprints [*yaṭbaʿu*] what it hears.[24]

Through al-Khālidī's sleight of hand, Arab-Islamic Spain seeds a European literary modernity shading from Romantic to realist technoscience. For the neo-Eden of Andalusia's gardens makes of Hugo a neo-Adam poised to rename the world "aright," precisely by translating his mind into an instrument of exact empirical observation, measure, and capture. From this transmedial apparatus unspool figures of speech (*badīʿ*) that are less metaphoric conjurations (Jurjānīan *takhyīl*) than they are mechanical reproductions: audiovisual recordings of the real. Andalusia is thus prime mover of the machinery of Hugo's modern poiesis, which translates signifier (sound image), signified, and referent into equivalence. In this old-new *naẓm* of *lafẓ* and *maʿnā*, words (re)turn transparent: one with ideas—and now flush with knowable life.

Even as al-Khālidī writes Arabic into European literary history, however, he writes Hugo into the annals of Arabic literature. Pronouncing "Grenade" "السحر الحلال" ("licit magic"; 201)—long an Arabic metaphor for poetic power (Abu Deeb 368; Pomerantz 208)—he inducts Hugo among the Arab greats. Yet in "licit magic" is a double entendre, calling Arabic to heed Hugo's siren song. After all, al-Khālidī sees only *useful* poetry as "licit magic" in modernity. He admires Hugo's "Grenade" as "كتاب في الجغرافية أفرغ في قالب شعري" ("a book on geography poured into a poetic mold"; 201–02)—poetry harnessed to science. Moreover, although al-Khālidī translates "هذه القصيدة لتعلم اساليب الشعر الافرنجي" ("this ode [*qaṣīda*] so that you [the reader] know the stylistic conventions of French [*ifranjī*] poetry"; 202), his translation renders Hugo's French in Arabic prose. The magic of "Grenade" now dwells not in forms but in ideas.

Listen, nonetheless, to these closing lines from al-Khālidī's translation. Surely new resonances sing from its Arabic words (and form):

> فهذه المدن الاسبانية اما منتثرة في السهول او مرتفعة على الجبال. وفي جميعها قلاع لم تضرب يد الاعداء فيها بالنواقيس. وفي جميعها كنائس جامعة لها جرسيات حلزونية الشكل. ولكن غرناطة فيها الحمراء
> الحمراء وما ادراك ما الحمراء . . . . غرناطة فيها من العجائب اكثر ما في الرمانة من الحب الذي لونه كلون العقيق وينبت الرمان في وديانها بكثرة. غرناطة اسم على مسمى غرناطة اذا اشتعلت نار الحرب فقعت في وجوه اعدائها اشد من فقع القنبلة الحمراء بمائة مرة
> . . . .
> جزيرة العرب جدتها. والعرب الرحل المقتحمون انما قطعوا اسيا وافريقيا من اجلها فقط. ولكن غرناطة كاثوليكية. غرناطة ضحكت منهم . . . .[25]
>
> (203–04)
>
> These Spanish cities are either scattered across the plains or elevated on mountains. All contain

https://doi.org/10.1632/S0030812923000573 Published online by Cambridge University Press

> fortresses whose bells no enemy hand has rung. And all contain cathedrals, with spiral bell towers. But Granada has the Alhambra.
>
> The Alhambra! What can make you know what the Alhambra is? . . . In Granada are more wonders than the ruby-hued seeds of a pomegranate—and pomegranates grow in its vales with abundance. Granada lives up to its name! If the fire of war flares, Granada explodes in the face of its enemies with a force a hundred times greater than a red bomb.
>
> . . . .
>
> The Arabian Peninsula is its grandmother. And the Arab voyagers are its conquerors; indeed, for its sake alone they cut across Asia and Africa. But Granada is Catholic. Granada laughed at them. . . .

When al-Khālidī renders Hugo's "L'Alhambra! l'Alhambra!" ("Grenade" 292) with "الحمراء وما ادراك ما الحمراء" ("The Alhambra! What can make you know what the Alhambra is?"), he echoes a distinctly Qurʾānic interrogative style, of which these verses from "سورة القارعة" ("Sūrat al-Qāriʿa"; "The Striking Hour") are but one example: "ٱلْقَارِعَةُ / مَا ٱلْقَارِعَةُ / وَمَآ أَدْرَىٰكَ مَا ٱلْقَارِعَةُ" ("The Striking Hour. / What is the Striking Hour? / What can make you know what the Striking Hour is?"; *al-Qurʾān* 101.1–3).[26] Al-Khālidī's Qurʾānic style slyly expels Hugo's Catholicism and returns the Alhambra—and by extension Granada—to Islam, centuries after the Castilian reconquest of 1492. Echoing the apocalyptic tenor of the Day of Judgment in "Sūrat al-Qāriʿa," his translation breaks Hugo's chimes, making Granada's untolled fortress bells ring with the return of the Arab-Islamic repressed—and its tolled cathedral bells go silent, "bell towers" tacitly primed for the Islamic call to prayer. Witness his strategic revisions to Hugo's poetico-political "geography." Translating "Dont sous des mains infidèles / Aucun beffroi ne vibra" ("Of which, under infidel hands / No belfry vibrated [with a ringing bell]"; Hugo, "Grenade" 292) as "وفي جميعها قلاع لم تضرب يد الاعداء فيها بالنواقيس" ("All contain fortresses whose bells no enemy hand has rung"; al-Khālidī, *Tārīkh* 203), al-Khālidī refuses Hugo's "infidels" (*infidèles*)—intending Muslims—and substitutes the religiously neutral "enemies" (*aʿdāʾ*). And to his translation of "Toutes sur leurs cathédrales / Ont des clochers en spirales" ("All, on their cathedrals, have spiral bell towers"; Hugo, "Grenade" 292) as "وفي جميعها كنائس جامعة لها جرسيات حلزونية الشكل" ("[A]ll contain cathedrals, with spiral bell towers"; al-Khālidī, *Tārīkh* 203), he interposes an arch footnote: "لانها كانت مآذن" ("Because they were minarets"; 203n2). Hugo's preface to *Les Orientales* yearned for a poetics of "la mosquée" ("the mosque"; vii). Al-Khālidī fulfills Hugo: he reattaches the very word (and its referent) to the idea.

Still, while al-Khālidī's Arabic prose translation of Hugo's "Grenade" strikes new notes, one wonders if form is as unimportant as Hugo and his translator suggest. In translating verse into prose al-Khālidī makes Hugo's language yet more ordinary, beyond the Frenchman's dream of radical semiotic equality. As the lines "Toutes ces villes d'Espagne / S'épandent dans la campagne" ("All these cities of Spain / Are scattered across the plain"; Hugo, "Grenade" 291) become the prose sentence "فهذه المدن الاسبانية . . . منتثرة في السهول" ("These Spanish cities . . . are scattered across the plains"; al-Khālidī, *Tārīkh* 203), the rhyme *Espagne / campagne* disappears, and with it "artifice." Meaning becomes plain. Yet silenced is the music that gives meaning resonance. So too Hugo's wordplay. In ensuing lines the proper noun *Grenade* flirts with two senses of *grenade*: the pomegranate (the local fruit that gives the city its name) and the hand bomb that resembles it (bursting—on detonation—into "arils"). Whispering, too, is another French name for the fruit, *pomme-grenade* ("apple of Granada"), which chimes with *paume-grenade* ("palm [hand] grenade"): not the actual French word for "hand grenade," *grenade à main*, but what a poet's imagination, indulging in wordplay, might call the weapon. When Hugo writes, "Grenade a plus de merveilles / Que n'a de graines vermeilles / Le beau fruit de ses vallons" ("Granada has more marvels than / The beautiful fruit of its vales / Has seeds vermilion"; "Grenade" 292–93), or "Grenade, la bien nommée, / . . . / Cent fois plus terrible éclate / Que la grenade écarlate" ("Granada, the well named, / . . . / One hundred times more terrible bursts / Than the scarlet grenade"; 293), he activates the *naẓm* of words and meanings that *grenade*

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evokes. In Arabic, however, the words for *pomegranate* (*rummān*) and *grenade* (*qunbula yadawiyya*; literally "hand bomb") do not chime with the word for Granada (*Gharnāṭa*). Absent this Jurjānīan dialectical relation (to reprise Gould), al-Khālidī is left with meanings unhinged from the resounding word.

And yet, al-Khālidī's "red bomb" detonates Hugo's "Grenade," giving Arabic the last laugh. This too is poetry. Indeed, his rendition proves that translation—as an interpretation that, in Venuti's words, "releases an endless semiosis that is delimited by . . . changing, interrelated, and mutually determining contexts" (3)—need not "rob" a text of its savor. If we believe Hugo and al-Khālidī, appeals to sense perception attach to meanings, not forms. Thus, as Emmerich reminds us, they might assume, in translation, transformative new words (3)—and conjure, unbidden, the extraordinary through the ordinary. Witness Hugo:

> Qu'un vers ait une bonne forme, cela n'est pas tout; *il faut absolument, pour qu'il ait parfum, couleur et saveur, qu'il contienne une idée*, une image ou un sentiment. L'abeille construit artistement les six pans de son alvéole de cire, et puis elle l'emplit de miel. L'alvéole, c'est le vers; le miel, c'est la poésie.
> ("Ymbert Galloix" 202–03; my emphasis)

> That a verse should have a beautiful form is not all; *for it to have fragrance, color, and flavor, it absolutely must contain an idea*, an image, or a sentiment. The bee artfully builds the six walls of its cell from wax, and then she fills it with honey. The cell is verse; the honey is poetry.

Words matter less than what they carry. Indeed, Hugo argues that ideas trigger sense perception. Just as wine exceeds bottle in his preface to *Cromwell*, so too does honey here escape the cell. Effects like scent, color, and flavor are created not by vessels—cell and bottle—but by their contents, honey and wine: that is, not by words but by ideas.

Hugo's cracked vessels fracture his "equivalences" with Ibn Khaldūn. For Ibn Khaldūn holds that ideas are democratic—"فالمعاني موجودة عند كل أحد" ("everyone may have ideas")—but words are not, since literary composition "المحتاج للصناعة" ("requires a technique"; *al-Muqaddima* 290; *Muqaddimah* 392). Speech, he writes,

> هو بمثابة القوالب للمعاني. فكما أن الأواني التي يُغترف بها الماء من البحر منها آنية الذهب والفضة والصدف والزجاج والخزف، والماء واحد في نفسه
> (290–91)

> is like a mold for ideas. The vessels in which water is drawn from the sea may be of gold, silver, shells (mother-of-pearl), glass, or clay. But the water is one and the same. (392)

Words differ in eloquence, then, as vessels vary "باختلاف جنسها لا باختلاف الماء" ("according to the material from which they are made, and not according to the water (in them)"; 291; 392). Words matter. Still, like water, "المعاني واحدة في نفسها" ("the ideas are one and the same"; 291; 392). How then to reset Ibn Khaldūn to Hugo's measure? Anticipating Nadia Al-Bagdadi's observation that Ibn Khaldūn wishes for literature "the homogeneity of science" (444)—a philosophical consistency in which ideas govern words—al-Khālidī registers Ibn Khaldūn's suspicion of the vessels that bear ideas. He commandeers this passage to argue that Arab literati revel in synonymy at the expense of ideas. However precious their words, their water is unchanging (*Tārīkh* 69). Thus, al-Khālidī cracks Ibn Khaldūn's vessels to release Hugo's honey and wine: the equality of words, the poetry of ideas.

Inimitability, Translation, Infinity

We risk entrapment, however, in the indifference of words Hugo supposes and the indifference of meanings Ibn Khaldūn proposes. The seal of language is always its undoing. I return to al-Khālidī's translation of Hugo's preface to *Cromwell*. There, just after he puts the Qurʾān in Hugo's mouth, he intercuts Hugo's assertion—from a prior passage that refers modern poetry to Christian roots—that "tout ce qui est dans la nature est dans l'art" ("all that is in nature is in art"; Hugo, Preface [*Cromwell*] xxv). Al-Khālidī's translation gives Hugo nearly the last word, smuggling his

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Euro-Christian poetics of "nature" into Arabic under Islamic cover. Yet in the Qurʾānic verses Hugo has just "spoken," the echo of *makhtūm* ("sealed") and *khitām* ("end") vaporizes the very closure that secures "pure wine, sealed" (*raḥīqin makhtūmin*) into a scent that escapes containment: its "parting note[,] musk" (*khitāmuh*[*u*] *miskun*; al-Khālidī, *Tārīkh* 164). As Hugo concludes (*khatama*), his voice turns inconclusive; French wine turns Arab musk. In this Jurjānīan *naẓm*, the balance of power between "West" and "East" tips.

I have said that al-Khālidī continually bends al-Jurjānī's *naẓm*, the dialectical relation of words and meanings, back to al-Jāḥiẓ's and Ibn Khaldūn's dream of the transparent signifier. Yet the imaginative power of literary translation—the perpetual flight of meanings from words—defies containment. Worded, meaning is at once closed and open. If Arabic too often is imagined a limit case of comparison—"untranslatable"—I would argue that it preserves some measure of incomparability by infolding the comparable, as al-Khālidī infolds French in Arabic. If, as al-Jurjānī intimates, inimitability permits endless translation, incomparability can issue a laissez-passer to comparability. While that act does not dissolve the pressures of empire, it dislocates the epistemic horizons of language from post-Enlightenment Europe and partially reattaches them to an alternative genealogy in earlier Arab-Islamic thought. Revising the "old" under the world-facing guise of the "new," al-Khālidī's *Tārīkh* absorbs French postulates on language and literature yet reroutes them—through Arabic antecedents—to translational conclusions that sound some conceptual "phonemes" in each, and silence others. In these sounds and silences, we hear the measures of modern comparative literature as translations: continuities in death, broken chimes.

Notes

I completed this essay with support from an American Council of Learned Societies Frederick Burkhardt Residential Fellowship at the Kluge Center of the Library of Congress; a National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) Fellowship; and grants from the University of Minnesota, including an Institute for Advanced Study Residential Faculty Fellowship. Any views, findings, conclusions, or recommendations expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect those of the NEH. Between 2013 and 2021, I presented parts of this research at Brigham Young University, Brown University, Columbia University, the Library of Congress, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, New York University, Northwestern University, the University of Chicago, and the University of Oregon, as well as at American Comparative Literature Association, Interdisciplinary Nineteenth-Century Studies, Middle East Studies Association, and Modern Language Association conferences. For invitations and insights, I thank Michael Allan, Emily Apter, Brian James Baer, Orit Bashkin, Elizabeth Benninger, Matthew Brauer, Peter Brooks, Roy Chan, Tamara Chin, Ziad Dallal, Anatoly Detwyler, Tarek El-Ariss, Omnia El Shakry, Nergis Ertürk, Marlene Esplin, Maziyar Faridi, Peter Gran, Gal Gvili, Hala Halim, Lara Harb, Ghenwa Hayek, Valerie Hegstrom, Dina al-Kassim, Marena Lear, Jason Lester, Lydia Liu, Leah Middlebrook, Lanie Millar, Muhsin al-Musawi, Taymaz Pour Mohammad, Nasser Rabbat, Kritish Rajbhandari, Kamran Rastegar, Jeffrey Sacks, Spencer Scoville, Johanna Sellman, Stephen Sheehi, Emily Sibley, Meriam Soltan, Mayssoun Sukarieh, Veli Yashin, and Yurou Zhong. I am especially grateful to Baer, Brooks, Esplin, Hegstrom, and Scoville for responding in depth to a 2017 version, as well as to C. Ceyhun Arslan for astute comments on the current essay. Unless otherwise noted, all translations are mine.

1. The term *ʿilm* glides between "science" and "knowledge." *Ifranj* encodes a complex transhistoricity, signifying the modern French; their medieval forebears, the Franks; and, more generally, Europeans or Westerners. Per al-Khālidī, I opt for "Europeans" ("Au lecteur" 6).

2. On al-Khālidī's life and career, see Khalidi 72–87; Campos 45–47, 120–26, 228; and al-Asad. For an early appraisal of al-Khālidī's *Tārīkh* and its significance for Arabic literary comparatism, see al-Khaṭīb, *Āfāq* 130–40 and "Rūḥī al-Khālidī."

3. My translation here earlier appears in Tageldin, "Beyond" 128. Al-Khālidī lifts, without attribution, the phrases "vain luxe de mots inutiles" and "accessible à la masse des demi-lettrés sortis de l'école primaire" from Huart's *Littérature arabe* (Huart 436, 435). Tellingly, *Tārīkh* half fulfills the French Orientalist's "avenir de la littérature arabe" ("future of Arabic literature"), implicitly answering Huart's call for a "recherche de la clarté et de la simplicité de l'expression" ("pursuit of clarity and simplicity of expression"; Huart 434) but not his wish that Arabic fully vocalize "mots qui peuvent prêter à double entente" ("words that may be open to double interpretation"; 436).

4. See Goldstein on Romantic science and Goethe's "tender Empiricism" (7).

5. See Liu on biomimesis, "literary figuration," and "life as form" ("Life" 24, 25); and Bhattacharya on the role of the vernacular in making "literature . . . identical with life, its organicity, and its vitality" (569).

6. See Ahmed on philology's reduction of the embodied Qurʾān to written text (82–83); and Allan on the new protocols

https://doi.org/10.1632/S0030812923000573 Published online by Cambridge University Press

of reading the Qurʾān introduced by the French occupation of Egypt (1798–1801), "likening it as a 'work' unto other works" and "mak[ing] of scripture literature" (51, 52).

7. This verse, Qurʾān 26.226—from "سورة الشعراء" ("Sūrat al-Shuʿarāʾ"; "The Poets")—is a refrain in al-Khālidī's *Tārīkh*. Qurʾān 26.227 excepts poets who believe, do good, and resist oppression.

8. On "inter-imperiality," see Doyle.

9. For al-Khālidī, epistemic equality empowers the Arab-Islamic world to resist subsumption by European empires. Elsewhere, for example, he critiques Arabic newspapers for overwriting old Arabic names of North and West African cities with French ones; Arab-Islamic knowledge, he argues, counters French mastery of Africa with another dominion ("al-Dāhūmī" 521–22)—of course, no less imperial.

10. For recent revaluations of the *nahḍa*, see Alfaisal, "Politics"; Allan; Arslan; Bou Ali; El-Ariss; Fieni; Hanssen and Weiss; M. Hill; P. Hill, "Arguing" and *Utopia*; Holt; Johnson; Kesrouany; Kīlīṭū, *Lan* and *Thou*; Levy; Mahmoud, "Glocalizing" and "Is"; al-Musawi, "Republic [Pt. I]" and "Republic [Pt. II]"; Patel; Rastegar; Sacks, "Futures" and *Iterations*; Scott Deuchar, "Loan-Words" and "'Nahḍa'"; Selim; Sheehi, *Foundations* and "Towards"; Tageldin, "Beyond," *Disarming*, "One," and "Proxidistant"; and Yang.

11. The language of Andalusian poetry is translated: Arabic "Romanced." While the principal strophes of the *muwashshaḥa* adhered to standard Arabic, Menocal notes, its "final strophe, the *kharja*, did not; it was composed in the Romance vernacular of al-Andalus, Mozarabic" (95). Thus, the Andalusian milk that nourishes Hugo issues not from a purely Arabic "mother" but from an Arabic mixed with Andalusi Romance (i.e., Mozarabic), itself a hybrid European vernacular: laced with Arabic, often written in Arabic script.

12. On the pairing of *waḥshī* ("uncultivated," though also "wild" and "primitive"—hence "savage," which captures all senses) and *gharīb* ("strange"), see Harb, *Arabic Poetics* 5n11.

13. On garment metaphors and Benjamin's instrumentalism, see Venuti 20–26.

14. Harb exfoliates the complexity of al-Jurjānī's shifting views on *lafẓ* ("form"), *maʿnā* ("content"), and their relation, noting that he at times shares with al-Jāḥiẓ an insistence that *lafẓ* ("word") imparts eloquence to the otherwise common *maʿnā* ("idea"); see "Form" 301, 304. I simplify the terms *lafẓ* and *maʿnā* to "word" and "meaning," respectively; *lafẓ* can also denote "form," "utterance," "articulation," "signifier," and *maʿnā*, as Key contends, "mental content."

15. On the anti-colonial potentials of poetic meter, see Chin.

16. Al-Khālidī quotes from Qurʾān 26.224–26 ("Sūrat al-Shuʿarāʾ").

17. On *ʿilm* and *ʿilm al-adab* in Ibn Khaldūn, compare Al-Bagdadi 440, 442–44; Alfaisal, "Liberty" 531–32.

18. Ibn Khaldūn tacitly associates "poetic license" (*al-ḍarūrāt al-lisāniyya*; literally, "linguistic exigencies")—twisting Arabic grammar or morphology to suit the exigencies of, say, rhyme and meter—with "corruptions" of Arab *ethnos* and Arabic *logos* after the spread of Islam.

19. For al-Khālidī, Namık Kemal ("Kamāl Bey"), the doyen of Ottoman Turkish letters, equally exemplifies "natural" style (*Tārīkh* 34). On the "Ottoman literary biome" and al-Khālidī, see Arslan 300–02, 320–23.

20. The term "translation zone" is Apter's.

21. The phrase "string by string and branch by branch" (*asmāṭan asmāṭan wa-aghṣānan aghṣānan*) is an allusion to Ibn Khaldūn, who writes that the Andalusians developed a poetic form "سموه بـ'المُوَشَّحْ'، ينظمونه أسماطاً أسماطاً وأغصاناً أغصاناً" ("[they called] [t]he *muwashshaḥ*[,] which consists of 'branches' (*ghuṣn*) and 'strings' (*simṭ*)"; *al-Muqaddima* 317; *Muqaddimah* 440; literally, "they called the *muwashshaḥ*, which they compose string by string and branch by branch"). See also *Muqaddimah* 414n1626, where a translator's note to Ibn Khaldūn's remarks on a similar "vernacular" poetic form among the Bedouin Arabs states, "*Ghuṣn* 'branch,' actually is the technical term for the first three lines of a *muwashshaḥ*, whereas the fourth is called *simṭ*."

22. As Noorani observes, al-Khālidī's broader argument—namely, "that the Arabic poetry of Islamic Spain gave rise to the Provençal poetry of the troubadours" and thus "stands as the origin of European lyrical poetry as a whole"—rests on his "claim that European poetry before the ninth century relied on assonance rather than rhyme, and that rhyme and strophic forms came into European poetry through the influence of Hispano-Arabic poetry" (256). Noorani notes that al-Khālidī may have derived this claim from an article he had read in طرابلس الشام (*Ṭarābulus al-Shām*; *Tripoli of Syria*) on Fīlīb Qaʿdān al-Khāzin's edition (1902) of a North African manuscript collection of Andalusian poetry that al-Khāzin had discovered in Rome (Noorani 256; see al-Khālidī, *Tārīkh* 75). Al-Khāzin, in turn, attributes the theory to the French scholar Pierre-Daniel Huet [*Huwīt*], bishop of Avranches (*dāl*; Noorani 264n68 does not identify Huet). As Dainotto notes, Huet's hypothesis—articulated in passing in a letter of 1670—was more rigorously elaborated by two scholars writing in Italian: the Italian humanist Giammaria Barbieri (ca. 1560) and the Spanish Jesuit Juan Andrés (1782), both of whom placed Arabic, not Latin, at the origin of European rhyme (281–82). More recently, Hassan has argued that Andrés is a neglected progenitor of a modern comparative literature that valorizes Arabic.

23. For his part, Hugo stretched literary French to encompass even street slang (*argot*), cheek by jowl not only with standard French but also with Latin, as Bellos notes of Hugo's 1862 novel *Les Misérables* (see 207–20). Yet Hugo himself, while insisting that *argot* is "a regular language," grew anxious for that very reason, recognizing that "the only thing that distinguishes *argot* from French is its vocabulary, because its grammar and morphology conform to the standard" (Bellos 212). For Hugo, as later for al-Khālidī, "grammar and morphology" are the red line that literary language cannot cross—although in French that line equates colloquial and formal registers, threatening their conflation, whereas in Arabic it distinguishes the two. Hugo affirms popular French, then, only to expel it across the equal sign that exchanges it for standard: pronouncing *argot* the "natural" expression of poverty, he declares "that abolishing the one will rid society of the

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other," demanding an end to the systemic inequalities that shunt the masses to the margins of standard French (Bellos 212). "What began as an apparent defence of the richness and dignity of a special vernacular," Bellos contends, "turns into an argument to banish it by teaching the ragged how to speak proper French"—perhaps even Latin, which *Les Misérables* interlaces in an effort to bring common readers (al-Khālidī's "semiliterates"?) into the ambit of universal education in "the foundation of the [European] humanities" (212, 219). In a different key, al-Khālidī registers similar literary-political ambivalences, anxieties, and aspirations for Arabic.

24. Al-Khālidī's Arabic reads "الفوتوغراف" (*al-fūtūghrāf*; "photograph"); however, as the sense of the passage makes clear, he may have intended "الفونوغراف" (*al-fūnūghrāf*; "phonograph"). In Arabic, only one additional dot marks the difference between ت (*tā*ʾ, or *t*) and ن (*nūn*, or *n*). Yet the French printer Édouard-Léon Scott de Martinville (1817–79)—who patented the first sound-recording device, the phonautograph, in 1857—saw his invention as "a photography of sound"; see Feaster. And the verb al-Khālidī uses to describe sound recording, *yaṭbaʿu* ("prints" or "imprints"), invokes a play of *ṭabʿ* in two senses, as "nature" and as "print" technology.

25. Compare Hugo, "Grenade" 291–93, 294–95.

26. My translation here approximates that of al-Hilâlî and Khân (*Noble Qur'an* 101.1–3).

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Abstract: In the Ottoman-Palestinian intellectual Muḥammad Rūḥī al-Khālidī's *Tārīkh ʿIlm al-Adab ʿind al-Ifranj wa-l-ʿArab, wa-Fīktūr Hūkū* (1904, 2nd ed. 1912; *History of the Science of Literature among the Europeans and the Arabs, and Victor Hugo*), the figure of Victor Hugo marks the uneven chime and dissonance of select notes in Arabic and French literary epistemes and histories. Tracing Hugo's dictum that poetry inheres not in forms but in ideas to Arab-Islamic antiquity, al-Khālidī incarnates in Hugo the lost "nature" to which a fallen, "artificial" Arabic literature must return. In this regime of comparability, words must be cut to the measure of their meaning, and meter—poetic measure—tuned to the "natural" rhythms of speech. With al-Khālidī's translations of meter across time and language, this essay reads his translations of Hugo's theory and poetry ("Grenade") to argue that the underlying concept of measure encodes a drive to equate the world's literatures and empires.

https://doi.org/10.1632/S0030812923000573 Published online by Cambridge University Press