

## Pastorals of Elsewhere: *Al Muallaqat*

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### Abstract

Nature was a prominent motif in Ancient Near Eastern cultures. In fact, David Halperin claims that the *Epic of Gilgamesh* shares many pastoral elements with Theocritean bucolic poetry (117). Furthermore, Arabic Andalusian poetry specifically focuses on different elements of nature (Aburqayeq). Walter Andrews states that gardens constituted the “ecology” of ghazal poetry, an Arabic poetic tradition that originated in the 7<sup>th</sup> century (Andrews). gardens and garden parties were incredibly important in Ottoman and Arabic arts and culture (Calis-Kural). In fact it is a matter of curiosity why Arabic, Ottoman, and Persian nature poetry are not recognized in the criticism of pastoral poetry. For instance, library and web searches with the keywords “pastoral” and “near Eastern poetry” yield very few productive results. One of the most comprehensive works on pastoral, *What is Pastoral?* by Paul Alpers, fails to look beyond European pastoral tradition, while a book that is meant to capture what’s left beyond Alpers’s book, Ken Hiltner’s *What Else Is Pastoral?*, doesn’t seem to be interested in regions other than Europe. This exclusion is also apparent in conferences and syllabi focused on the pastoral. Taking all of this into consideration, I aim to expand the definition of pastoral by focusing on Imru’ Al Qays’s *Al-Muallaqat*, in comparison with Theocritus’s *Idyll 1. Al-Muallaqat*, meaning The Hanging Poems, is a collection of seven qasidahs from pre-Islamic Arabia that were hung in the Kabaa temple in Mecca. Imru’ Al Qays’s *Al-Muallaqat* was orally composed around the mid-sixth century. I study the pastoral elements in Imru’ Al Qays’s *Al-Muallaqat* in an effort to expand the limit of pastoral poetry and consequently formulate it as a productive ground for a heterogeneous formulation of world literature. Even though *Idyll 1* and *Al Muallaqat* both have pastoral elements, *Al Muallaqat* has not received much scholarly attention for its use of the pastoral. This neglect is rooted in the circulation and distribution of *Al Muallaqat* in the world literary space. The Orientalist translations of *Al Muallaqat* have rendered its poetic language and value inaccessible and, therefore, irrelevant.

**Keywords:** *pastoral literature, Theocritus, Pre-Islamic poetry, world literature, Orientalism*

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Walter Andrews states that gardens constituted the “ecology” of ghazal poetry, an Arabic poetic tradition that originated in the 7<sup>th</sup> century (Andrews). gardens and garden parties were incredibly important in Ottoman and Arabic arts and culture (Calis-Kural). In fact it is a matter of curiosity why Arabic, Ottoman, and Persian nature poetry are not recognized in the criticism of pastoral poetry. For instance, library and web searches with the keywords “pastoral” and “near Eastern poetry” yield very few productive results. One of the most comprehensive works on pastoral, *What is Pastoral?* by Paul Alpers, fails to look beyond European pastoral tradition, while a book that is meant to capture what’s left beyond Alpers’s book, Ken Hiltner’s *What Else Is Pastoral?*, doesn’t seem to be interested in regions other than Europe. This exclusion is also apparent in conferences and syllabi focused on the pastoral. Taking all of this into consideration, I aim to expand the definition of pastoral by focusing on Imru’ Al Qays’s *Al-Muallaqat*, in comparison with Theocritus’s *Idyll 1. Al-Muallaqat*, meaning The Hanging Poems, is a collection of seven qasidahs from pre-Islamic Arabia that were hung in the Kabaa temple in Mecca. Imru’ Al Qays’s *Al-Muallaqat* was orally composed around the mid-sixth century. I study the pastoral elements in Imru’ Al Qays’s *Al-Muallaqat* in an effort to expand the limit of pastoral poetry and consequently formulate it as a productive ground for a heterogeneous formulation of world literature. Even though *Idyll 1* and *Al Muallaqat* both have pastoral elements, *Al Muallaqat* has not received much scholarly attention for its use of the pastoral. This neglect is rooted in the circulation and distribution of *Al Muallaqat* in the world literary space. The Orientalist translations of *Al Muallaqat* have rendered its poetic language and value inaccessible and, therefore, irrelevant.

Two important elements of the pastoral, nature and the sense of the idyllic, are frequently associated with “the Golden Age, innocence, and nostalgia” (Alpers 28). These characteristics, according to Friedrich Schiller, are available in every culture. “All peoples who possess a history have a paradise, a state of innocence, a golden age” (qtd. in Alpers 33). Therefore, my investigation of pastoral poetry across regions incorporates Édouard Glissant’s notion of poetics as a way to think about the interconnectedness of the form with the world. The state of Relation, according to Glissant, is “an open totality evolving upon itself,” and the state of Relation indicates that “the whole is not the finality of its parts: for multiplicity in totality is totally

diversity” (192). The totality of multiplicity prevents understanding poetics through universalizing homogenizations. Instead, Relation, through “the infinite interaction of cultures,” changes all the elements that come together, eliminating the probability of homogenization (172). Additionally, the Other is central to Relation because “each and every identity is extended through a relationship with the Other” (11). However, Glissant warns his readers that Relation becomes a tool of decolonization only when it goes beyond the duality of these self-perceptions (self vs. Other) (17). Errantry, defined as “wandering with a sense of sacred motivation,” helps eliminate these binaries by destabilizing the nation-states’ emphasis on the root and forming relational identities through movement (211). Glissant’s theory facilitates the necessary framework to expand the limits of pastoral by bringing out the differences in pastoral imaginary and by centering literatures from the peripheries of the world literary space without falling into the trap of Orientalism. The concept of Errantry facilitates a critical approach to the circulation of literary works through translation as well as the power of translation in defining and reinforcing certain Orientalist stereotypes.

In his book dedicated to Theocritus and bucolic, David Halperin dedicates a section to different usages and meanings of pastoral and bucolic which eventually comes to the conclusion that “no one has been able to distinguish precisely the meaning” of bucolic and its modern versions (Halperin 15). Therefore, attempting to precisely differentiate between bucolic and pastoral exceeds the scope of this paper. Even though pastoral poetry as we know it was not conceptualized, there was still a pastoral imaginary both in Ancient Greek and pre-Islamic Arabia. According to Paul Alpers, pastoral is “a mode, not a genre” (44). Mode is “the literary manifestation, in a given work, not of its attitudes in a loose sense, but of its assumptions about man’s nature and situation” (50). Based on this definition of mode, the pastoral mode would reflect the circumstances that shape its existence, the context in which the nature of beings is represented. The pastoral mode, as I approach it, enables the coexistence of diverse elements from different genres within a text. Hence, its emergence within a text is not predictable; instead, it can manifest in unexpected and less readily identifiable contexts, rendering it more elusive and challenging to pinpoint. One common theme in pastoral literature is the portrayal of life in the Golden Age, “free and modest, honest and ingenuous” (17), or the lamentation over the loss of the Golden Age. This state of mind is reflected through an idyllic landscape, herdsmen, and

atmosphere of *otium*; it is, in a way, the “*representation of the ideal*” (29, italics in the original). Yet, this innocent and ideal image of life in the past leaves us with a melancholic awareness of something valuable that has been lost or is no longer attainable (33). Thus, pastoral is a process of “putting the complex into the simple” (Empson qtd. in Alpers 37), conveying complex realities and emotions through simple and ordinary imageries.

The inaugural poem of Western pastoral, Theocritus’s *Idyll 1* from the early third century B.C., presents these defining characteristics in two main parts: first, the description of a decorated drinking-cup, and second, the elegiac song to Daphnis. The poem begins with a dialogue between two herdsmen in the countryside, an unnamed goatherd and a shepherd named Thyrsis. Thyrsis asks the goatherd to play his pipe, but the goatherd is afraid of Pan hearing his music (14-20). Instead, he begs Thyrsis to perform the song for Daphnis in return for this decorated cup which he proceeds to describe at great length (29-64). His description substitutes for the pipe playing and almost parallels Thyrsis’s song, which conveys a sense of symmetry right from the start. These two ordinary characters exchange words, gifts, and songs in harmony with each other and their surroundings. Furthermore, Alpers states that the goatherd’s description of the cup recalls Homer’s description of Achilles’s shield (139). When Theocritus was composing the *Idylls*, the intellectual community that was reading these poems would classify them according to their meters (Halperin 15). Theocritus’s *Idylls* are written in hexameters, also known as heroic verse, which would classify them as *epos* (ibid.). Therefore, Theocritus stretches and challenges the boundaries and conventions of the heroic verse as a method of critique. This criticism of “sophisticated ways of life” is intrinsic to the pastoral (Alpers 30). Theocritus replaces the treasured position that the wars and conflicts hold in the epic tradition with ordinary and simple elements/characters. He emerges as a figure who, in the pastoral, mirrors the importance that Homer holds in the epic tradition.

Going back to the cup’s description, the unnamed and ordinary goatherd is the one who possesses this heroic item. There is a clear class difference between the pastoral hero and the epic hero that the intellectual circles of the time would be able to immediately recognize. The image of a pastoral hero is a recurrent theme throughout the poem, starting with the description of the cup. The drinking cup portrays three different stages of life: childhood, adulthood, and old age (Alpers 140). First, the goatherd depicts the young suitors around a damsel, and yet, their

efforts are all in vain because she doesn't reciprocate the affection (40-46). The woman laughs at the fruitless efforts of these suitors. In this erotic scene, there is an indication of playfulness, confusion, and rejection, and it reveals how Theocritus regards this labor of love in comparison to other type of labors depicted on the cup. He, then, moves on to a detailed image of an old fisherman:

An aged fisher, too, thereon is wrought,  
Who standing on a reef, with mighty net  
Drawn bravely backward for another throw,  
Toils with a will. His every limb seems set  
On fishing, and each sinew on his neck  
Swells, for the old man's strength is like a youth's. (47-52)

With an unwavering dedication, the fisherman devotes himself entirely to his task, unfazed by any sense of urgency or external interruption. This intense absorption is a direct parallel to nature and a simpler way of living because animals exhibit a similar undistracted commitment akin to that of the fisherman; there is no rush and that's what keeps him young. A sense of admiration arises from witnessing this harmonious alignment with purpose. The readers reflect on their own alienated and detached consciousness while they envy the simplicity of the fisherman's connection with nature. The fisherman is dignified, like a Homeric hero, yet his heroic pains come not from wars, injuries, or battles but from his labour. After the fisherman, there is the description of a little boy:

A boy sits on the rude fence watching them.  
Near him two foxes: down the rows of grapes  
One ranging steals the ripest; one assails  
With wiles the poor lad's scrip, to leave him soon  
Stranded and supperless. He plaits meanwhile  
With ears of corn a right fine cricket-trap,  
And fits it on a rush: for vines, for scrip,  
Little he cares, enamoured of his toy. (53-60)

Like the old fisherman, the boy is also absorbed, creating a cricket-trap. He is more engrossed in his makeshift toy than in the immediate challenges presented by the foxes and potential hunger. The passage captures a moment of innocence, playfulness, and detachment from the more practical concerns of the world. This is another aspect of the absorption of labour. This can also be seen as a metaphor for the poet's creative process: Theocritus is also weaving a home for his characters. Theocritus's pastoral imagination provides a home for Thyrsis and his songs, just as the boy does for nature's singer, the cricket. In this context, the boy on the fence, much like

Theocritus, finds joy and purpose in the rustic setting, focusing on a small and simple pleasure—the creation of a cricket-trap. Alpers considers Theocritus’s scenes as “static – fixed in single places” (140). They do not feature individual stories or plots; rather they explore certain ideas. The combination of these three scenes, then, conveys a clear idea about different kinds of labour. The fisherman’s noble labour in nature with the utmost attention and the boy’s artistic process are fruitful endeavours compared to the suitors’ pursuit of love in vain. Erotic love is acknowledged not as an honourable goal but as part of the human life cycle. On the other hand, the lives the fisherman and the boy lead represent the real, naïve and innocent life idealized in pastoral poetry.

Theocritus’s moral principles become more apparent once the description of the cup is consolidated with Daphnis’s song because, as mentioned previously, the cup as a work of art is a metaphor for Thyrsis’s song. Pastoral poetic convention invokes the idea of coming together. Alpers considers these figures as literary herdsmen, including Theocritus himself, because they invoke sentiments by imitating, echoing, and adapting the poet’s own masters and predecessors. Hence, Thyrsis sings about the sufferings and the death of Daphnis, who is considered the inventor of pastoral poetry in Greek mythology. There is not a clear reason why Daphnis dies but it clearly indicates that the Golden Age is long gone and memory is fading as the time moves forward. Considering the framework of Thyrsis’s singing and reference to Aphrodite, Daphnis appears far removed from reality as he says, “For surely I am torn from life by Love” (139). Charles Segal explains,

Even before the artificial and sophisticated Alexandrian literary circles which Theocritus knew, the poet in Greek society had ceased to occupy the clearly defined social and public position of a Tyrtaeus, a Solon, an Aeschylus. The poet’s world becomes more inward, self-conscious, self-reflective. Thus he inevitably becomes aware of his ambiguous relation to reality. Indeed, from Euripides on, he is persistently engaged in the task of questioning just what “reality” is. (20)

Consumed by internal feeling and self-exploration, Daphnis loses his harmonious connection to the external world and nature. Thyrsis, as a stand-in for Theocritus, mediates between the internal world of the self and the external world. Rooted in nature and simplistic life, Thyrsis is the one who laments for Daphnis and his decaying art. In other words, it is the harmony of opposites that allows for creativity and poetry to flourish. In the end, Thyrsis offers a humble conclusion to his song and ends simply with a “farewell” (154).

*Al Mu'allaqah*, or *The Seven Odes*, is a collection of pre-Islamic *qaṣīdah* first compiled by Hammad al-Rawiya of Bakr ibn Wa'il Arabic tribe in the 8th century. This section will focus on the earliest poem in the collection by a Bedouin prince called Imru' al-Qays (520 AD – 565 AD). As pre-modern Arabic poems do not usually have titles, this poem is formally called “the *Mu'allaqah* of Imru' al-Qays” (Gelder xvii). The existence of pre-Islamic poetry is highly contested, however it is clear that pre-Islamic poetry was oral, sung aloud (Puerta Vílchez 29; Adūnīs 13). Similar to the metaphor of literary herdsmen in Western pastoral, the poets who recite their works were usually compared to singing birds in the Arab literary tradition (Adūnīs 15). In both traditions, the poet has a connection with nature. However, the Arabic tradition emphasizes the poet's distinct role as the embodiment of aesthetic pleasure; the poet is specifically celebrated for encapsulating and personifying the experience of aesthetic delight. Pre-Islamic poetry required listeners; in fact, “the encounter between poet and listener was not only an act of participation in life and in the emotions: it was also a collective festival” (Adūnīs 31).

Imru' al-Qays's poem is an example of desert poetry in the Jahiliya (meaning ignorance) period around the 6<sup>th</sup> century. The pastoral landscape in the European tradition is a green one; however, in Umru' al-Qays' poem, the desert landscape becomes a space of nostalgia and innocence, as well as an indicator of the ancient (nomadic) way of living during the *Ummayyad* period (Ormsby 28). In other words, the poet uses the landscape and animals extensively—although it is visually different from Theocritus's *Idyll 1*—to invoke pastoral feelings. In fact, one of the first translators of *Al Muallaqat*, William Jones, complains about the poets' use of extensive pastoral imagery: “It were to be wished, that he had said more of his mistress, and less of his camel” (78). Gelder explains that many ancient Arabic Bedouin poems begin with the exclamation *khalīlayya*, “My two friends!” (Gelder xiii). In this literary convention, the poet travels through the desert and finds a place “that reminds him of past pleasures, asks two companions to sympathize with his feelings of loss” (ibid.). Similar to *Idyll 1*, the golden days seem to be gone here. The expression of feelings is not a private event, he must have an audience to recognize and understand his feelings. Hence, this is how Imru' al-Qays starts his poem:

Halt, friends both! Let us weep, recalling a love and a lodging  
by the rim of the twisted sands between Ed-Dakhool and Haumal,  
Toodih and El-Mikrāt, whose trace is not yet effaced

for all the spinning of the south winds and the northern blasts;  
there, all about its yards, and away in the dry hollows  
you may see the dung of antelopes spattered like peppercorns. (61)

It is clear that the beginning is *khalīlayya* preparing the audience for the upcoming elegy and nostalgic reminiscence that will be conjured up by this wild nature. The wild desert evokes the memories of a happy and idealized past for the poet and his audience. Unlike the bucolic and static landscape in *Idyll 1*, this landscape is resilient, vast, and untamed. However, it functions in a similar manner as the Theocritean bucolic: the setting of an elegy for the past. Yearning became a convention in Arabic poetry called *nasib*, nostalgic yearning for the bygone days (Puerta Vílchez 37). *Nasib* intertwines past and present through oral poetry.

He then moves on to his erotic escapades, first with Onaiza, who does not reciprocate his love at all, and later with another mistress, Fathima. Like the suitors on the cup in *Idyll 1*, the poet depicts the events of his rejection. However, in Ancient Arabic poetry, “the past love affair is the theme of the beginning of the poem only, which moves on to other things, present or future: the description of the poet’s trusty camel, the desert...” (Gelder xiii). The love affair merely sets the scene for his fortitude. He talks about a dark night that he suffers through:

and I said to the night, when it stretched its lazy loins  
followed by its fat buttocks, and heaved off its heavy breast,  
“Well now, you tedious night, won't you clear yourself off, and let  
dawn shine? Yet dawn, when it comes, is no way better than you.  
Oh, what a night of a night you are! (64)

The personification and negotiation with time illustrate time’s equal position with the poet in the cosmos. The natural progression of nature is rushed by the poet, and yet he accepts that time has an agency of its own. In that sense, both *Idyll 1* and this poem deal with the temporal progression as nature and time become co-creators who dictate the scenery as much as the poet does.

Later, the morning comes and it leads to a hunting scene:  
Many’s the water-skin of all sorts of folk I have slung  
by its strap over my shoulder, as humble as can be, and humped it;  
many's the valley, bare as an ass's belly, I've crossed,  
a valley loud with the wolf howling like a many-bairned wastrel  
to which, howling, I've cried, ‘Well, wolf, that's a pair of us,  
pretty unprosperous both, if you're out of funds like me.  
It's the same with us both—whenever we get aught into our hands  
we let it slip through our fingers; tillers of our tilth go pretty thin.’  
Often I've been off with the morn, the birds yet asleep in their nests,  
my horse short-haired, outstripping the wild game, huge-bodied,



charging, fleet-fleeing, head-foremost, headlong, all together  
the match of a rugged boulder hurled from on high by the torrent (64)

Here, the poet assumes a humble role even though he is a Bedouin Prince. The poet's environment is not conventionally peaceful. Instead, it is loud and barren, giving it an ominous feeling. The interaction with the howling of the wolf is a moment of communion with nature. The poet finds a shared struggle with the wolf: they both lack financial prosperity, and they cannot acquire resources. The wolf and the poet share their plight with farmers because the cultivated land and their hard work only lead to scarcity and they also suffer from financial adversity. A prince/poet with much more affluence in society than anyone else in his tribe compares himself to an animal and a farmer. Another relation appears here: as with Theocritus's herdsmen, Imru' al-Qays's farmer figure, along with the wolf, brings the class question to the surface, creating solidarity across animals, lower class, and higher class. This humble moment of interconnectedness is especially important because, as mentioned previously, the poet of *Jahiliya* period did not create for himself but for others, "for those who listened to him in order to be moved by him" (Adūnīs 26). It was also used as a "sort of aesthetics of information;" poetic verse served as "a variety of declamatory speech able to affect people in its own particular manner" (27). There is an attempt at a connection between the prince and his people by way of everyday banter of financial struggles. The prince/poet knows that this commonality and an indication of harmony amongst all creatures will create a stronger bond, and hence loyalty, within his tribe. He takes off in the morning with his horse who is even faster than the wild game. The depiction of his horse is vivid, emphasizing the natural glory of the horse. There is an interesting dynamic here between the horse and the wild game. In a way, these two animals are synchronized based on the natural order and they move in a dynamic harmony.

However, his narrative is interrupted all of a sudden by a flash of lightning: "Friend, do you see yonder lightning? Look, there goes its glitter flashing like two hands now in the heaped-up, crowned storm cloud" (66). The lightning is disastrous and intense. Along with his companions, the poet watches the destruction of the lightning with an anxious gaze: "At Taimá it left not one trunk of a date-tree standing, not a solitary fort, save those buttressed with hard rocks" (ibid.). This scene grounds the reader in the reality of nature's wilderness and unpredictability. After this brutal destruction, the whole landscape changes:

In the morning the songbirds all along the broad valley

quaffed the choicest of sweet wines rich with spices;  
the wild beasts at evening drowned in the furthest reaches  
of the wide watercourse lay like drawn bulbs of wild onion. (66)

The songbirds, like the poet, enjoy the abundance of nature in a transformed and nourished environment, the beauty of nature replenished after the storm. The morning has brought about a renewal. The comparison to the wild onion suggests a peaceful and serene scene where the creatures rest in the calm waters. The imagery evokes a sense of harmony and natural balance being restored after the chaos. The poem ends with a feeling of restoration. In this final section, nature is much more active than Theocritus's description of nature. It goes through episodes of change to arrive at a final harmonious, abundant, restful state. The sense of harmony present in Theocritus's poem right from the beginning is primarily achieved through keen observation and lived experience. The pastoral here is, therefore, carefully developed through dualities, such as chaos and order, wild and tamed, peaceful and anxious. The Bedouin pastoral imagery influenced by mobile pastoralism is much more dynamic and robust than the settled and static version of Theocritus's bucolic poetry. Similar to Theocritus's position in Ancient Greece, Imru' Al-Qays is celebrated as one of the greatest Pre-Islamic poets because of his depiction of nature and metaphorical language (Al-Garrallah 178).

Analyzing *Al Muallaqat* from the perspective of errantry also entails investigating how this ancient literary work moves across different regions and comes to be known as *The Seven Odes* in the world literary space. In his study of *Al Muallaqat*'s translations, Aiman Sanad Al-Garrallah defines three prominent English translations: William Jones's *The Mo'allakat or Seven Arabian Poems* (1807), F. E. Johnson's *The Seven Poems Suspended in the Temple at Mecca* (1893), and A.J. Arberry's *The Seven Odes* (1953) which is the one cited here. Al-Garrallah states, "none of the three translators succeeded in translating most of the examples properly – a failure that might be attributed to the discrepancies of metaphor classification in English and Arabic" (185). In other words, the three most prominent translations of *Al Muallaqat* are flawed and, unfortunately, have not done justice to the metaphors in these seven odes. Although it is beyond the scope of this paper to analyze each translation in depth, it is important to understand the early translation strategies of *Al Muallaqat*. According to Arberry's *The Seven Odes*, which includes a comprehensive timeline of the work's translation journey, William Jones was

interested in a translation of *Al-Muallaqat* as early as 1772,. In the preface to his *Poems, consisting chiefly of translations from the Asiatick language*, he says:

The seven Arabick elegies, that were hung up in the temple of Mecca, and of which there are several fine copies at Oxford, would, no doubt, be highly acceptable to the lovers of antiquity, and the admirers of native genius: but when I propose a translation of these *Oriental* pieces, as a work likely to meet with success, I only mean to invite my readers, who have leisure and industry, to the study of the languages, in which they are written, and am very far from insinuating that I have the remotest design of performing any part of the task myself. (qtd. in Arberry 9)

William Jones was a pioneer in the conception of modern Orientalism with his translations of Indian, Persian, Turkish, and Arabic works (Mufti 100). He finished the translation of *Al Muallaqat* in 1781 (12), and as Arberry explains, Jones's translation "is a prose one, and its English is of the eighteenth century, polite, latinized, and little suggestive of the wild vigour of the original Arabic" (28). Raja Lahiani also states that "Jones's translation is rather inaccurate... Jones, though a known traveller, rather targeted aesthetic and cultural dimensions in the *Mu'allaqāt*" (22). Jones's translation is, therefore, the "valorization of the primitive" through the Orientalist gaze and suggestive/ imitative creations (Mufti 69). However, critics of world literature don't seem to be bothered by this suggestive translation since world literature has roots in this Orientalist tradition; in fact, Goëthe, who first suggested the concept of a *Weltliteratur*, states: "Die Verdienste dieses Mannes sind so weltbekannt und an mehr als einem Orte umständlich gerühmt" (qtd. in Arberry 25).<sup>1</sup> Later, Goëthe includes some parts of Jones's translation in his *West-östlicher Divan*.

F. E. Johnson's translation, on the other hand, was "intended to be nothing more than an aid to the student, and for this reason it has been made as literal as possible" (27). Arberry assesses that this translation strictly follows its author's purpose and "it adheres firmly to the tradition of the schoolboy's Latin crib and is understandably, and deliberately, without the least literary value" (ibid.). The poetic quality of *Al-Muallaqat* is disregarded, which runs the risk of positioning Ancient Arabic poetry as undeserving of literary and scholarly attention. In brief, while Jones's translation fabricated a speculative image of pre-Islamic Arabs, Johnson's translation disregarded the literary merit of this collection, which led to *Al-Muallaqat* being treated as a historical and factual document rather than a piece of Ancient literature. The violence

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<sup>1</sup> "The achievements of this man are known world-wide and celebrated in more than one place." Translation is mine.

of these translations is inevitable, as they create and justify the image of Arabia as anti-social and “plagued by constant blood feuds and inter-tribal wars” (Brown 37). These suggestive and Orientalist transliterations claim to “reveal its [pre-Islamic Arabic society] realistic underpinnings in their common pastoral-nomadic lifestyle” (29) and represent Arabic society in an “authentic” way (43). Given the translation history of *Al Muallaqat*, it is not surprising that its pastoral aspects have not garnered much literary attention, since its poetic language has not been fully available to readers in the Anglophone world.

In Arberry’s translation, as exemplified in this paper, Arabic rhyme is disregarded and replaced with blank verse. Fatima Zohra Benneghrouzi emphasizes that “Arberry’s alternative of literal translation, actually, weakens the effect such expression could have had, had it been transliterated, creating a gap between the original expression’s content, intent, and effect and the manner it has been carried across” (151). In addition to the weakening of the poetic effect, Benneghrouzi points out that Arberry translates the Arabic word, *matiyihum*, as “beasts” instead of its more correct translation of “riding animals” (ibid.). Arberry also replaces the occurrences of the translation of “beautiful women” with “virgins” and references to “tribes” as “clans” (Benneghrouzi 152–53). These problems in this translation are not innocent mistakes, they reinforce and reproduce the Orientalist stereotypes about Arabian men and women. The deliberate exoticization of Arabs encourages the fetishization of their bodies and nourishes the image of savage and barbaric Arabs. All three of these translations show no interest in transliteration with a similar poetic effect as the source language, rendering this poetry collection as a historic and factual document presenting the “barbaric” ways of the Other, instead of an aesthetic and poetic expression unique to the region. The Other is constructed in the translation through the Orientalist gaze of the West.

At the beginning of the essay, I referred to Spivak’s quote about the uneven field of comparison. Even though I find Relations rather than hierarchies between these two ancient poems, this disparity also exists in the case of this comparison. There are several factors at play for this disparity. The first one has already been identified as the problems related to the history of the work’s Arabic to English translation. Another factor is how this translation gets into circulation in the world literary space. David Damrosch, following the footsteps of Goethe, claims that a work enters into world literature by a double process: “First, by being read as

literature and second, by circulating out into a broader world beyond its linguistic and cultural point of origin.” On the other hand, Franco Moretti’s understanding of world literature adopts a world-system approach rooted in Marxism as a system built on inequality: one, but unequal (55–56). Each of these theories has its limits. Damrosch’s definition overemphasizes the written literature, excluding the orality of many literatures. Moretti, although he rightfully accepts inequality between the center and the periphery, does not provide an in-depth analysis of the sociopolitical reasons for these inequalities. Yet, each axis here converges in its emphasis on a “one-world” that originated in Europe. That “one-world” has granted permission to itself to create Others in its own vision, and thus, assimilate all the other worlds into one universal Eurocentric world. Instead of dealing with the complexities of a heterogeneous world and its literatures, one-world system is indifferent to differences. In other words, world literature, as Auerbach points out, is “at once realized and destroyed” as diversity of literatures is translated into a “single literary culture” (qtd. in Mufti 15). Aamir Mufti explains, “The concept of world literature always contains within itself an attempt (or at least the desire) to bridge the social distance between the First and Third Worlds, between the centers of the world system and its peripheries, our name for the logic of this bridging is ‘Orientalism’” (20). Then, English functions both as a medium of translation and a medium of evaluation (12). The Orientalist gaze determines which types of writing are worthy of circulation and scholarly engagement and which ones should be excluded, ignored and discarded from the global literary arena. Hence, as Mufti asserts, the genealogy of world literature leads to Orientalism as “an articulated and effective imperial system of cultural mapping” (19-20). This imperial mapping is a practice of extractivism, in which literary works are extracted from their contexts and translated into the image of the Oriental Other. “*English* is not merely a language of literary expression but, a cultural system with global reach, not simply a transparent return but an assemblage and apparatus for the assimilation and domestication of diverse practices of writing (and life-worlds) on a world scale” (17).

Then, what is the merit of the world literature framework when dealing with pastoral poetry? How do we reconcile the colonial history and practice of Orientalism in world literature? One might even argue that making the world literature framework obsolete would be the right strategy to deal with its problematic roots. Unfortunately, though, the elimination of the field

falls short of a solution. For example, Near Eastern pastoral examples in this paper, such as *Al Muallaqat* and *Epic of Gilgamesh*, continue to be evaluated within this framework. As Mufti explains throughout his book, the “one-world” conception also continues to be the dominant strategy of Anglophone world literature. Then, “one-world” should be challenged and disputed through heterogeneity, diversity, and plural worlds. One crucial step here is, of course, transliterations that can do justice to the source material, reviewed and approved by the first language speakers. Additionally, conceptualizing the pastoral mode as a universal approach to engage with the particular can open up the space for heterogeneity to flourish within the world literary arena. The pastoral can create Relations between what appear to be different and unrelated landscapes, natures, and peoples. The political edge and satirical language of the pastoral facilitate a more global conversation about class struggle. Therefore, pastoral literature as a way of conceptualizing multiple connected worlds across the global literary landscape could reformulate the interconnectedness of the world ecocritically diverting from the market dynamics of late capitalism. Pastoral already retains this possibility, as mentioned previously in reference to Schiller, “[a]ll peoples who possess a history have a paradise, a state of innocence, a golden age” (qtd. in Alpers 33).

In conclusion, this study challenges the Eurocentric conceptions of pastoral poetry and world literature through a comparison between Theocritus’s *Idyll 1* and Imru’ al-Qays’s *Al Muallaqat*. Both of these poems make influential contributions to the pastoral genre: Theocritus to Western pastoral and Imru’ al-Qays to Near Eastern pastoral. However, *Al Muallaqat* has not been considered part of the pastoral tradition, in part? due to its translations put in circulation in the Anglophone world literature by famous Orientalists. By using Édouard Glissant’s theory of Relations and Errantry, I tried to expand the boundaries of pastoral poetry, positioning it as a productive ground for a heterogeneous formulation of world literature. Pastoral literature, when considered as world literature, can establish meaningful connections between seemingly disparate literary works, offering insights into nature, class dynamics, and creative expressions.

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