Taylor & Francis
Taylor & Francis Group

Edebiyat: Journal of M.E. Literatures

ISSN: 0364-6505 (Print) (Online) Journal homepage: http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/gede20

Evocation and Mimesis: al‐Muwayli$h$ī, al‐Mas$a$dī and the Narrative Tradition

Mohamed‐Salah Omri

To cite this article: Mohamed#Salah Omri (2003) Evocation and Mimesis: al#Muwayli$h$ī, al#Mas$a$dī and the Narrative Tradition, Edebiyat: Journal of M.E. Literatures, 14:1-2, 57-79

To link to this article: http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/0364650032000173343

Published online: 24 Jun 2010.

Submit your article to this journal

Article views: 48

View related articles

Full Terms & Conditions of access and use can be found at
http://www.tandfonline.com/action/journalInformation?journalCode=gede20

Download by: [Radcliffe Infirmary] **Date:** 15 February 2016, At: 01:53

Edebiyat, 2003, Vol. 14, No. 1 & 2, pp. 57–79

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

Evocation and Mimesis: al-Muwayliḥī, al-Masᶜadī and the Narrative Tradition

Mohamed-Salah Omri

Institute of Arab and Islamic Studies, University of Exeter, UK

Downloaded by [Radcliffe Infirmary] at 01:54 15 February 2016

Pathways to *Turāth*

I like to think that the late Magda al-Nowaihi would have commented that the present essay is about connections. Most of her work, supported by her prodigious memory, establishes connections between the past and the present, the Arab East and the Maghreb. This paper recognizes these ties and explores their limitations and implications by discussing two seminal instances of modern Arabic prose, one from her native Egypt and one from my native Tunisia: my own attempt to continue in her path and to remember a loyal friend and an inspirational scholar.

The present essay does not deal with the ways in which Arabic fiction has engaged cultural heritage (*turāth*) as theme (e.g., religious themes in al-Hakim or Mahfuz, etc) nor how it "experimented" with various aspects of *adab* as intertext. Others have done that.[1] Instead it raises a question: What are the poetics and politics of using Arabic narrative convention in modern Arabic literature? In other words, it will consider pathways to *turāth* rather than instances of its presence as intertext in modern fiction.[2] These pathways are seen as expressions of stances towards the Other as well as the self. In the essay I single out two major pathways. Both are encapsulated in titles of works of fiction. The "archeology" of each title uncovers the layers of *turāth* it is built on and reveals its lineage. And it is this genealogy that the essay hopes to reveal and posit within an esthetic as well as ideological context. The study of modern Arabic literature in its relation to *turāth* or to modern Western literature has also focused on genre. This study is not about genre. Such argument, important as it is, limits the perspective. Because it is novel-centered, it results in studying texts against set criteria, explaining differences or similarities in relation to the novel. Since the novel has developed in Western cultures, criteria are, *per force*, derived from this tradition. The debate about the origin of Arabic novel is a case in point, as I show below. My aim here is to refocus on narrative rather than a specific genre such as the novel or the short story, much less on sub-genres such as the *Bildungsroman*, realist novel, or *Nouveau Roman*. Narrative is the origin and it is on this constituting basic feature of fiction that I focus here.

Hadīth ᶜĪsā ibn Hishām (The Tale of ᶜĪsā ibn Hishām) and *Haddatha Abū Hurayrah qāl* (Abū Hurayrah spoke, saying . . .) are the gateways through which I explore the relationship between modern Arabic fiction and its inherited narrative repertoire, which

ISSN 0364-6505 print; ISSN 1477-2841 online/03/010057-23 © 2003 Taylor & Francis Ltd
DOI 10.1080/0364650032000173343

will be referred to as *al-turāth al-sardī*. The formulaic nature of the two titles reveals the history of how an expression becomes a formula, a history of reception and repetition through imitation, parody, and other literary processes. To choose one of the two formulas as title is an act of significant importance. It is different in nature from, say, titling a novel *Zaynab, Bayna al-qasrayn, Mudun al-milḥ*, or *Mawsim al-hijrah ʾilā al-shamāl*, to cite key Arabic novels. It is a direct and explicit dialogue with *al-turāth al-sardī*. The first title allows me to focus on the *maqāmah*, considered by many the one Arabic literary form which bears close kinship to modern fiction. The second makes possible an exploration of *ḥadīth*, the narrative form which gave rise to the *maqāmah* itself.

At the explicit level, the first title recalls a fictional figure, a prototypical narrator (ʿĪsā ibn Hishām) and his narrative (*maqāmah*). The second refers to a historical figure (Abū Hurayrah) and the originating formula of narrative (*ḥaddatha . . . qāl*). The first announces its fictionality while the second hides it by calling attention to a history. ʿĪsa ibn Hishām conjures up fiction while Abū Hurayrah inspires truth, even dogma. While both share one narrative convention as medium, their two horizons of expectations could not be more different. In the course of the essay it will become clear that interaction with *turāth* is not without pitfalls. It can even be perilous. For, perhaps unlike other cultures, *turāth* for the Arab writer is really never historical in the usual sense. It is never a past. To understand this one needs only to note that the power of religion and the politics of identity in the Arab world remain a pervasive reality today. In fact, the books, which will be studied in detail, bear witness to this. The writer of *Hadīth ʿĪsā ibn Hishām* had to make changes to his book to satisfy objections by the religious establishment. *Haddatha Abū Hurayrah qāl* remained unpublished for decades for similar reasons.

Downloaded by [Radcliffe Infirmary] at 01:54 15 February 2016

Perennial Dilemma: What to Take and what to Reject from the West

Hadīth ʿĪsā ibn Hishām by Muḥammad al-Muwayliḥī (1858–1930) is a complex text that resonates with the broader pattern of exchange between Arab and European cultures at the turn of the nineteenth century in Egypt.[3] It enacts a triple fiction: it is a fictional account by a fictional character—ʿĪsā ibn Hishām—of a dream. The narrator, ʿĪsā ibn Hishām dreams that he is thoughtfully strolling through a cemetery when he is reminded through the poet Abū al-ʿAlaʾ al-Maʿarrī that he should feel more veneration towards the ground on which he walks, for it is made of human bodies (107). He repents, and feels sorrow for the rosy cheeks, watery mouths and marble breasts that lie food for worms. Suddenly, he feels a tremor, turns around and sees a tomb opening up and a man walking out of it. The rest is the well known journey through which ʿĪsā ibn Hishām takes the resurrected Pasha from the Cairo cemetery all the way to a Parisian cinema. The themes depicted in *Hadīth* are clearly a product of the author's era. The focus is the politics and society of Egypt at the time. The journey and the Pasha's questions allow the episodes to be self-contained in theme. Hence courts and corruption in the legal sector are treated when the Pasha enters an argument with a Donkeyman and must pass through the maze of the new legal system. The same occcurs when they visit places such as the theatre, a cabaret, and so on. Characters include the people ʿĪsā ibn Hishām encounters along the journey: the Pasha, the Friend, Donkeyman, Policeman, Dancer, Merchant, ʿUmda or village head, and others.

The study of al-Muwayliḥī's book in relation to the novel can only be applied from the first edition (1907) on, when the fragments were rearranged into a whole. However, the story of how the book took shape explains the narrative as well stylistic choices made by its

author. Roger Allen explains that the series of articles or the column was entitled "Fitra min al-zaman (A Period of Time)" from November 1898 until 30 June 1899 when the title changed to "Ḥadīth ᶜĪsā ibn Hishām" (1992, 30).[4] His weekly readers must have come to expect "Ḥaddathanā ᶜĪsā ibn Hishām . . .". The formula must have become associated with al-Muwayliḥī long before he created the figure of the Pasha (Allen, 1992, 33–4). And when he did, the columnist had no intention of writing a book. Subsequent editions would involve extensive rewriting but the origin remained obvious. In the 1927 edition, passages that criticized the religious establishment were omitted, most likely under pressure. The book was, however, expanded to include the articles on Paris.

Hadīth strikes the reader of *adab* and modern fiction alike by the complete absence of proper names of characters. The book has a large number of them, mostly men as Allen notes, but none carries a name. They are identified by their occupation (The Dancer, Merchant, Donkeyman, Policeman) or social status (Pasha, ᶜUmda), dominant feature (Khalīʿ or Playboy) or relationship to the main narrator (Friend).[5] ᶜIsā ibn Hishām may appear to be an exception. But in light of the fact that he is taken directly from another book (i.e., as citation) verisimilitude is immediately discarded. Far from conveying a reality effect, this name flags fiction and points to an intertext. The semblance of truth associated with the attribution "*ḥaddathanā*" (So and so told us) is undercut by the obvious fictional nature of the transmitter. Reference to ᶜĪsā ibn Hishām here is rather easy (or near, *qarīb*, as classical Arab critics used to say). In a word, the mere mention of the name, whether parodic or not, establishes an immediate connection with *adab*.[6] The genealogy of the narrative is made explicit, and explained. There is little play (unlike what we will see in the case of al-Masᶜadī). Furthermore, the intent of the book is flagged as "*ᶜibra*", a moral conveyed through humor; i.e., edification through entertainment, or, in the language of *adab*, seriousness (*jidd*) through jest (*hazl*). Al-Muwayliḥī's introduction to the first edition (1907) confirms the connection:

> Even though the narrative itself is presented in an imaginary and figurative form, it is also a true picture which has been dressed up in an imaginary garb, «not a fantasy shaped in a realistic form ». We have tried to use it to comment on the morals and conditions of present-day people, to mention the shortcomings of various classes of people which should be avoided and the qualities which should be maintained" (Allen, 1992, 103).[7]

At the ideological level, al-Muwayliḥī's artistic path is quite safe. (In the area of politics, he was rather harassed and troubled as a result of his criticism of British rule before he wrote the *Hadith*, and criticized for his satirical treatment of religious Shaykhs and princes in the book). In the literary sphere, his choice was rather conservative. He walked in a path paved by influential predecessors (al-Hamadhānī, al-Ḥarīrī, al-Jāḥīz and, closer to his time, al-Shidyāq and al-Yāzijī).[8] His legitimacy was beyond doubt. The politics of his choice of narrative form was reflective of his stance towards the major issues of his day.

The choice of narrative form by al-Muwayliḥī is indicative of an intellectual stance towards both the West and *turāth*. Al-Muwayliḥī's description of people's indiscriminating attitudes towards the West, resulting in the scenes of degraded morality portrayed in the chapters on bars and cabarets provides evidence of this. He writes:

> The major cause for all this change is the rapid penetration of Western civilization into Eastern countries and the way in which people of the East are behaving like the blind, emulating Western people in every conceivable aspect of their lives. In so doing, they're not enlightened by research, nor do they use analogy or consider issues in a sensible fashion. (. . .) They do not sift out the genuine from the false or the good from the bad, but assume the issue is indisputable. They believe that change will automatically bring them happiness and

Downloaded by [Radcliffe Infirmary] at 01:54 15 February 2016

> provide them with power and authority. On that basis, they proceed to abandon all the old principles, sound customs, and authentic literature that is already their heritage, and ignore the true way as practiced by their ancestors." (Allen, 1992, 378).

The terms al-Muwayliḥī uses for thinking about the invading culture are quite significant. He uses *baḥth* (research), *qiyās* (analogy) and *ḥusn al-nazar* (considered thinking (al-Muwayliḥî, 289)). The terms refer to traditional methods used in solving problems in the judicial as well as the doctrinal systems of Islam. Looking for precedents, using analogy or comparison and *ijtihād* or rational judgement constitute three major ways in which new phenomena have been thought and new situations regulated. All these are methods that al-Muwayliḥī would have liked to see applied in order to guide the community in the difficult choices it had to make as to what to take and what to reject from the West. In his own life, al-Muwayliḥī appears to have been an outspoken opponent of the wholesale adoption of Western ways, particularly in the area of culture.[9] He did so from the point of view of someone who had close contacts with Europe and a reasonable understanding of its cultures, having lived in Italy, France and England.[10]

Arab critics recognized the significance of *Hadīth ᶜĪsā ibn Hishām* early on. Aḥmad ᶜAbd al-Salām, writing in occupied Tunisia in 1946, saw in the book a reflection of its time at a number of levels. He explains: "The book is a crossroads between rhyming prose and free prose in style; the modern story and *maqāmah* in form; and the old and the new in theme. It tries to do in the literary field what al-Afghānī and ᶜAbdū have done in the religious sphere: to lift off the veil which afflicted the Muslim community the way it afflicts any nation in the face of a new and victorious civilization" (*al-Mabāḥith* 27–28, 1946,4). The effects of the encounter were such that one writer even spoke of the period of disturbance which was the end of the nineteenth century in Egypt: "Writers were affected by two factors: nostalgia for the old, which valued artistic beauty, and the new method, which emphasized meaning and clarity in everything" ('Abd al-Muṭṭalib, 242). ᶜAbd al-Salām says: "The crux of the book and the issue which lends it unity is the puzzlement of the East in the face of two cultures and two mentalities" (3).

The canonical history of the Arabic novel has given *Hadīth ᶜĪsā ibn Hishām* a prominent position. It is in fact the focal point of the contributions as well as the shortcomings of this debate. Allen, for example, assigns to it a "bridging function" (1995, 31). Matti Moosa disagrees:

> Despite its episodic structure, the *Ḥadīth* tells a complete story which begins with the resurrection of the Pasha and develops simultaneously with his personality. Because of the narrative quality and the relative flexibility of some of its characters, one may even venture to regard al-Muwaylihī's *Ḥadīth* not only as a work which points up the palpable distinctions between the *maqāma* and the novel, but in fact as an early form of the Egyptian novel. (106)

Moosa explains that *Hadīth* cannot be seen as a novel in the "Western sense" but that it contains the "basic ingredients of that form" (107). These are: continuous plot, flexible characters, authentic setting and simple prose (107). Moosa's assessment of *Hadīth* betrays a restrictive understanding of the history of the novel as genre. For him, it is the style of a particular kind of novel, or of the novel in a particular stage of its development (the nineteenth century English and French realist novel) that serves as the paradigm to preclude *Hadīth* from belonging fully to the genre.[11] Studying the text using the novel as a frame of reference ultimately leads to talking about the book in terms of "defects", shortcomings and inadequacy. Allen writes:

Downloaded by [Radcliffe Infirmary] at 01:54 15 February 2016

> The above analysis of structure, characterization and style of the book shows clearly the artistic merit of al-Muwaylihī's writings, on the one hand and the features which make it difficult, if not impossible, to consider it as a *successful* novel on the other. But these *defects* of structure and characterization serve to underline the necessity of considering *Ḥadīth ᶜīsā ibn Hishām* in a broader context. . . . Within the context of an investigation of the origins of the novel genre in modern Arabic literature it has emerged that al-Muwaylihī's pioneering work is essentially a transitional work with its underpinnings firmly rooted in the tenets of neo-classicism and thereby traced back to the tradition of classical Arabic prose narrative. (1992, 67–8, my emphasis)

Novelization of the Maqāmah.

Accounts of the rise of the novel in Arabic literature have underestimated, even de-emphasized, the role played by the *maqāmah* in this process. Their treatment of texts like *Hadīth ᶜIsa ibn Hishām* have thus far stressed a so-called "neo-classicism." Such theories emerge from a narrow and static understanding of both the novel and the *maqāmah*. If we were to study *Hadīth ᶜIsa ibn Hishām* from the perspective of what I call, borrowing a Bakhtinian concept, the "novelization of the *maqāmah*", it becomes the text in which one can detect the limits of a genre when it is subjected to the test of a new cultural and social reality. In the book, the resurrection of the Pasha results in an engaging contrast of discourses. Ideologically, the narrator as well as the Friend represent a critical look at the relationship between European civilization and Islamic culture in Egypt. The parallel between this position and the form itself of *Hadīth ᶜIsa ibn Hishām* is plausible. The use of a traditional and well-established literary form (*maqāmah*) in a long and open-ended narrative which combines *sajᶜ* (the characteristic style of the *maqāmah*) and the plain prose of journalistic writing points up the interplay of discourses in the book.[12] The book's form is an indication of the tenacity of local cultural forms in the face of the devastating dominant culture coming from Western Europe.

Critics have left unstudied the ways in which the *maqāmah*, till then, a novelization of "high" literature, became novelized in its turn. *Hadīth ᶜIsa ibn Hishām* can in fact be seen as a prominent instance where the *maqāmah* is pushed further towards more open-endedness by the changes that occurred in the cultural context in which it had acted for centuries. Under ever-widening sources, due particularly to active translation of Western literature and knowledge of foreign languages, the forces of novelization have grown more pervasive and less compromising. Other styles had to enter the one literary form that, in the words of Bakhtin, "registers all the voices of its time" (261).

Starting from this more dynamic view of change in literature, one can explore the new novelizing forces at work in *Hadīth ᶜIsa ibn Hishām* and its counterparts. It becomes also possible to account for the dual role of the *maqāmah* in modern Arabic fiction: as a genre that was better suited to respond to the challenges posed by the European versions of the novel and as the discursive strategy that was able to keep alive an Arab writers' claim to authenticity. The first role pertains to the potential of the *maqāmah* itself while the second has to do with the intellectuals' response to European cultural hegemony. At the methodological level, the first calls for a genre analysis whereas the other demands an inquiry into the discourses of the time. In this light, the questions why the *maqāmah* has survived in *Hadīth ᶜIsa ibn Hishām* and how it interacted with other genres become more engaging (and more appropriate) than the hasty condemnation of this genre as anachronistic. The constant shift in the book from one narrative style to another is evidence of the inability of any one genre to express the polyglot and multilayered culture of late nineteenth century Egypt. Genres traditionally known in Arabic writing—*maqāma*, epistle,

Downloaded by [Radcliffe Infirmary] at 01:54 15 February 2016

allegorical journey—as well as drama, journalistic reporting, and travel descriptions are transformed into voices in the novel. What emerges is a narrator's account of the world that stems from his own experience of a society in transition (Egypt) and its nemesis and model, Paris. Such an experience, by no means peculiar to al-Muwayliḥī or, indeed, to Egypt, had resulted in an ever-widening "horizon of expectations" that Arabic literature had to meet.[13]

Novelization of the *maqamah* is also a cultural project. One of its features is the ushering in of the domination of prose over poetry (poetry in al-Muwaylihī's book is but one of the languages and styles). It is also a move from an Arabic genre, the *maqāmah*, to a Western mode. Ideologically, it was natural that the *nahdah* made use of the *maqāmah*. The preservation and protection of the Arabic language from foreign intervention was needed. The perceptive Aḥmed ᶜAbd al-Salām suggests as early as 1946 that "the *maqāmah* preserved linguistic styles in a time of decline" (1946, 2). Al-Yāzijī did just that in his *Majmaᶜ al-Baḥrayn* in the middle of the nineteenth century. His focus remained the language. Al-Shidyāq would add the element of *riḥla*. He used the *maqāmah* but began to move away from it through parody, calling it, in a play on the meaning of *qāma* or to stand up, *muqᶜᶜada* (sitting down) and *muqayyama* (made to stand up) and *mamshiyya* (walking). He also played with the distinctive phrase of his predecessor al-Harīrī, "*ḥaddatha al-Hārith ibn Humam*," by changing it into "*ḥadasa al-Hāris ibn Hathām*."[14] In such a context, al-Muwayliḥī's book was to be expected, almost inevitable, even. The narrative convention was alive. A combination of *maqāmah*, the prose of journalistic reporting and the *riḥlah* was bound to occur: it was only a matter of time, and necessary accumulation.

Hadith ᶜĪsā ibn Hishām became the text to emulate. It was novelistic, and in a specific way: it re-presented social reality; it opened up to it. It also novelized the *maqāmah* in the same way. The impact and popularity of the book are difficult to overstate. What may be called novelistic order was to dominate Arabic letters from the 1930s onwards.[15] (This does not mean that I am advocating the supremacy of the novel. It simply means I am recognizing its domination or hegemony.) Such order was occasionally disturbed by individual attempts at a different narrative. Bishr Fāris and 'Adil Kāmil are but two such cases. These, however, remained limited in impact and extent. A parallel to what might be called the Muwayliḥî trajectory can be observed through the work of the Tunisian Maḥmūd al-Masᶜadī who constitutes a prominent instance of a radically different engagement with *al-turāth al-sardī*.

Downloaded by [Radcliffe Infirmary] at 01:54 15 February 2016

Al-Masᶜadī and his Fiction

The Tunisian writer and politician Maḥmūd al-Masᶜadī (b. 1911) was a prominent nationalist and labor activist in Tunisia during the French occupation and became a major public official after the county's independence in 1956.[16] Al-Masᶜadī, however, is best known as a writer who occupies a unique position in modern Arabic literature and who has exercised a pervasive influence on Tunisian literature since the late 1930s. In addition to *al-Sudd* (The Dam), al-Masᶜadī has written *Mawlid al-Nisyān* (The Birth of Oblivison), *Haddatha Abū Hurayrah qāl* and, most recently, *Min Ayyām 'Imrān* (The Days of ᶜImrān). He wrote most of his fiction between 1938 and 1941, but most of his work was published much later. His three main narratives share thematic, linguistic and stylistic features. Yet, they are strikingly different in form. *Al-Sudd* is structured like a play; *Haddatha* is organized as a series of *ḥadīth*s (reports or narratives) intertwined in theme and varied in title and narrators; *Mawlid* is one long story divided into six chapters.

Critics are often at pains to classify al-Masᶜadī's fiction. Muṣṭafa Kīlānī, for instance, suggests that al-Masᶜadī's *Haddatha Abū Hurayrah* may be considered a "contemplative novel"(*riwāyah taʾammuliyyah*), "vanguard," "heritage model" (*namudhaj turāthī*), "poetic novel," "mediator" between pre-modern narrative and the novel and "experimental" or "searching" (*bāḥith*) (20, 18, 14, 23, 25, 28 respectively). Roger Allen writes about al-Masᶜadī's play *al-Sudd* (The Dam): "Whatever the other qualities of the work, critical opinion is virtually unanimous in its esteem for the extreme elegance of its language, a factor which seems to have ensured it an enduring place in the history of modern Maghribi fiction" (*The Cambridge History of Modern Arabic Literature*, 190). Robin Ostle agrees: "Thus, what for many are the limitations, the archaisms, and the deficiencies of literary Arabic, are turned by him (al-Mas'adi) into highly creative elements of a work of literature which sacrifices nothing of the modernity and relevance of its message" (162). The prominent Egyptian intellectual Ṭaha Ḥusayn commented in 1957 that *al-Sudd* is a "wonderful but extremely strange dramatic story." He went as far as crediting the author with what he calls the "Islamization of Existentialism".[17]

Haddatha Abū Hurayrah qāl, (henceforth, *Haddatha*) is divided into 22 sections called *ḥadīth*s (discourses or narratives) that vary in length from three short sentences ("Hadīth al-shayṭān" (The Devil)) to 14 pages ("Hadīth al-ghaybah tuṭlab fa lā tudrak" (Absence Sought but Never Attained)).[18] The life and experiences of Abū Hurayrah are told in the form of anecdotes or stories and reported by various narrators, including Abū Hurayrah himself, who narrates four tales. The events take place in Mecca, Medina and other neighboring areas during the early period of Islam. Abū Hurayrah's journey begins at age 20 and lasts two decades. It covers a number of experiences often alluded to in the titles of *ḥadīth*s. For example, "Hadīth al-baᶜth al-awwal" (The First Awakening) is an account of Abū Hurayrah's awakening to the pleasures of life; "Hadīth al-taᶜāruf fī al-khamr" (Acquaintance over Wine) describes his first encounter with his lover Rayḥāna; "Hadīth al-ᶜadad" (Multiplicity) is devoted to Abū Hurayrah's social experience; "Hadīth al-ḥikma" (Wisdom) describes his encounter with a philosopher.

The book was not published in full until 1973 after an eventful and telling history.[19] Al-Masᶜadī did try to publish his work in full earlier. In addition to various chapters, which appeared in *al-Mabāḥith* and elsewhere in Tunisia in the 1940s, al-Masᶜadī solicited the help of prominent figures in the Arab East to put his fiction out to the public. But he came against stiff resistance from the religious establishment.

A rare testament to early reception of al-Masᶜadī's engagement with religion in the book took place in the late 1940s. It comes from a letter the writer addressed to Ṭâha Husayn dated December 14, 1948. He states that the manuscript of *Haddatha Abū Hurayrah* was presented to a "reading committee" by the eminent Arabist Lévi-Provençal and that it was rejected. Al-Masᶜadī explains:

> I hope that the book reaches the stage of actual existence after years of "gestation". It has been met with various oppositions, material and "ᶜimāmiyyah" [a sarcastic reference to turbaned scholars of theology or conservative sheikhs]. They have objected to the fact that the main character is called "Abū Hurayrah." It is as if this name were exclusive to the saḥābī (the prophet's companion by the same name); that no grammarian had this name; that it is impossible to invent an imaginary person bearing the same name or that no writer can put down an Arabic word without being drawn into unease (ḥaraj) with the turbaned ones . . . (34–35).

Al-Masᶜadī clearly thought highly of his book and sought approval for it at the most prominent level. But the letter shows that he was uncompromising in response to the demands of religious conservatives.[20]

Downloaded by [Radcliffe Infirmary] at 01:54 15 February 2016

What narrative conventions are at play in the text? By what process and to what effect? The density and economy of the text require a reading which pays close attention to the workings of the narrative. For this reason, the work of Roland Barthes offers useful entry into *Haddatha*.

"Hadīth al-Ṭîn" (The Clay).

A concrete instance of what conventions of narration al-Masᶜadī uses and how he actually uses them can be observed in an intensive reading of a particularly significant chapter or ḥadīth, namely, "Ḥadīth al-Ṭīn" (The Clay). The significance of the text will become apparent in the course of the paper. To situate the current chapter, I need only to mention that it is preceded by "Ḥadīth al-ḥāja (Necessity) and followed by "Hadīth al-Kalb" (The Dog) because the chapters in the book do not follow a chronological, or even narrative sequence. In the first, narrated by Abū al-Madāʾin, Abū Hurayrah is reported to complain of his inability to know what is inside peoples' minds and hearts. When asked for the reason, he replies: "I am not sure. It could be due to the confinement of the individual self" (*ḍīqu maḥbasi al-nafsi al-fardi*) (126).

In my analysis of "The Clay," I isolate blocks of text, following the idea of contiguity as stated in Barthes but I do not adhere to his idea of lexias ("brief, contiguous fragments"). Likewise, I do not make any attempt at drawing up an exhaustive index of cultural or other codes. In fact, of all the other codes, I keep only two, which are of specific relevance to my argument. For narrative analysis, I use the Hermeneutic Code as a key to narrative construction. The Hermeneutic Code operates through various ways of delaying the resolution. These are "the snare (a kind of deliberate evasion of the truth), the equivocation (a mixture of truth and snare which frequently, while focusing on the enigma, thickens it), the partial answer (which only exacerbates the expectation of truth), the suspended answer (an aphasic stoppage of the disclosure), and jamming (acknowledgment of insolubility)" (Barthes, 75–76). Codes are applied to small segments of the text, called, "lexies". The codes are proiaretic or narrative code; hermeneutic code (enigmas); cultural code (social knowledge as source); semiotic code (connotations of persons, places, objects); symbolic code (sexual and psychoanalytical) (Barthes, 18–20). "If we want to remain attentive to the plural of a text (however limited it may be), we must renounce structuring this text in large masses, as was done by classical rhetoric and secondary-school explications." We need the "step-by-step method" (Barthes, 12). Of the numerous cultural codes which permeate the Masadean text, I focus on narrative tradition (literary and cultural). The other cultural code is the *Qurʾān* as a citation and as object of parody.

The layout of the text below shows my analysis and signposts subsequent reading. B designates narrative blocks; L refers to links between two narrative blocks or sections within the same block. Narrators, stories and codes are inserted in the text between parentheses and in small capitals. REF indicates Cultural Codes whereas ENIGMA refers to the Hermeneutic codes.

B1

"Abū Hurayrah is reported to have said (NARRATOR 4: ABŪ HURAYRAH): 'I left Medina taking along nothing but my staff (cane), to lean on it and to lend it my weight. (ENIGMA 1: THE JOURNEY, WHERE AND WHY?) A virgin land appeared to me and called me forth, which

Downloaded by [Radcliffe Infirmary] at 01:54 15 February 2016

made me give up what I was carrying and lose interest (in my pursuit). (ENIGMA 2: REALITY OR VISION? ENIGMA 3: LOAD?) I set out freely to discover the land. It was like creation or time. (REF: CONCEPTION OF TIME) I spent few days there, like a groom on his wedding night, seeking unknown fruit, wishing the world were created anew and envying Adam and Eve (REF: CREATION). Until my solitude became complete, and night and day lost their meaning. Time has become homogeneous, like an ocean or like eternity." (REF: CONCEPTION OF TIME).

L

Narrated by Abū ᶜUbaydah (NARRATOR 1). Thābit al-Qaysī (NARRATOR 2) reported the same and added to it the following: (STORY 2 INTERRUPTED).

B2

"At that time, Abū Hurayrah was in Kurāᶜ al-Ghamīm (REF: PLACE NAME), a sandy river (*wādī*) located between the two Holy cities (REF: MECCA AND MEDINA. REALITY EFFECT). The *wādī* is reported to be a haunted land, rarely free of bedeviling demons and blinding spirits (*al-muᶜṣirāt al-muᶜmiyyāt*). It was a hard place to be; and no one dared to enter it alone (ENIGMA 4: THE NATURE OF THE PLACE). Someone (ENIGMA 5: PERSON NOT NAMED) saw Abū Hurayrah, whom he believed to be a spirit (*jinnī*) (ENIGMA 6: IS THE PERSON SEEN IN FACT ABŪ HURAYRAH?), and told me the story (NARRATOR 3: UNNAMED MAN). He said, 'I saw him cursing ruins (*rasm*) and past times, and spitting (*yatfal*) like a devil (REF: CONCEPTION OF THE DEVIL). He then looked around in the manner of someone who lost a friend, then went to a place nearby and lay down.' (VERSION 1 OF EVENTS. ENIGMA 7: IS THE MAN'S BEHAVIOR RATIONAL?).

Thābit said, "When I asked Abū Hurayrah about the matter, he said, 'Yes. That day I felt restless and needed relief. So I composed an elegy for Adam and Eve and took it to women from a clan in the valley (ENIGMA 7 CONTINUES: ABŪ HURAYRAH'S UNCERTAIN BEHAVIOR). But they refused to use it as a mourning and said, 'This is the dullest elegy we have ever heard. You are an idiot (*aḥmaq*)!' I said yes, and I used it in my own mourning. It was indeed the dullest poetry I have ever heard.' Then, he laughed." (ENIGMA 7: LAUGHTER. SNARE BY ABŪ HURAYRAH: DOES HE CONFIRM OR DENY THE EVENT?) Thābit added, "maybe he meant women and men from the world of spirits (PARTIAL ANSWER 1 TO ENIGMA 7). Perhaps he even made up the whole story without any parallel in reality (*anshaʾa al-khabara inshāʾan dūna muṭābaqa*). (PARTIAL ANSWER 2 TO ENIGMA 7). For Abū Hurayrah was a master of jest, misleading and deceit. He always acted as if he hated to divulge a deep secret or to let others know it, to the point that people have become uncertain about him (*ishtabaha amruhu*)." (PARTIAL ANSWER 3 TO ENIGMA 7).

Thābit added, "We asked him why did you want to mourn the elderly man and woman? He replied, 'Because they almost succeeded in teaching me how to unlearn life and in guiding me to the virgin path. So when I missed them, I found myself again on beaten paths and I returned to my old story and to my old self. I wanted my path to be virgin (*ᶜadhrāʾ*), untouched by men, but it turned out to be an old wretch (*ᶜajūz fājira*)'." (RESPONSE TO ENIGMA 1: THE JOURNEY WHERE AND WHY? FORMULATION OF NEW ENIGMA: IS THIS THE END OF THE NARRATIVE? END OF STORY 3).

L

Abū ᶜUbaydah said—but this was not reported by Thābit, (NARRATIVES DIVERGE. THĀBIT'S NARRATIVE ENDS HERE. STORY 2 RESUMES).

Downloaded by [Radcliffe Infirmary] at 01:54 15 February 2016

Downloaded by [Radcliffe Infirmary] at 01:54 15 February 2016

B3

"Abū Hurayrah said, 'One day, after my provisions had run out, I sat down as heat spread across the land. I felt as if I was in the clarity of a cloudless noon or in the light of a fire. At the time, I was in a valley whose sand was like a mirage on which sight rides and spreads until the valley appears like thin air. I was not long in my quietude when a wind began to whisper like a human voice. Then it grew in strength and blew on the sand which fluttered like a bead dress. Then the wind blew harder (*zafara*)) raising sand up like snake tongues. Wind then roared like a sea storm until it uncovered worn out signs (*rusūm*) and a decayed skull. (ENIGMA 9: WHAT DO THE SIGNS MEAN?). This did away with my solitude and spoiled my joy. I wondered why is it that whenever someone sought solitude, a sign would appear to him? It was as if the sign was in my heart. I hated that and decided to leave the place. For I had set out to erase my story, only to realize it was within me, before Adam and Eve, impossible to erase. (PARTIAL ANSWER: THE SIGN IS WITHIN HIM). But then I got distracted, lay down and soon fell asleep. (PARTIAL RESPONSE: ABŪ HURAYRAH CONFIRMS VERSION OF EVENTS BY NARRATOR 3. ANSWER OF ENIGMA 6: THE MAN SEEN IN THE VALLEY IS INDEED ABŪ HURAYRAH. NARRATOR 4).

In my sleep I had a most stupid and most arrogant dream (SNARE BY ABŪ HURAYRAH. STORY 3 CONTINUES). I saw a strange country, whose people appeared at times like elephants and at others like ants. They were mixing clay and using it to hold together stones to erect massive walls (*ṣurūḥ*). Some of them were singing lyrics at the rhythm of stone lifting:

Reason is death. Thought is a disease.
Soul is the echo of nothingness.
Action is abiding. Effort is salvation.
Let us erect a building which (negates) defies nothingness.

There was a reciter, reading in "Ḥamza's version": "Nobles, you have no other god that I know of except myself. Make me, Hāmān, bricks of clay, and build for me a tower that I may climb up to the god of Moses. I am convinced that he is lying!"[21] (REF: DIRECT CITATION FROM *QUR'AN*; REF: QUR'ANIC SCIENCES: READINGS OF *THE QUR'AN*). They respond to the reciter inserting their own speech, which sounds like thunder shaking the sky: "He denied it (the sign) and rebelled—(*banḍaldallam*)—He quickly went away—(*banhar talgham*)—and, summoning all his men—(*bar ānhandam*)—Made to them the proclamation. 'I am your supreme Lord,' he said."[22] (REF: CITATION FROM *QUR'AN*; REF: DREAM. ENIGMA 10: THE DREAM AND THE PHRASES INSERTED IN *THE QUR'AN*).

When I woke up, I went to Bedouin clans and stayed among them for two years'." (END OF ABŪ HURAYRAH'S NARRATIVE. ENIGMA 11: WHY WAS THE DECISION MADE? IS THERE A RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE DREAM AND THE DECISION? ANSWER DENIED OR WITHHELD).

L

Abū ᶜUbaydah said,

B4

"Abū Hurayrah did not explain the meaning of the corruption (gibberish) inserted in the verse. (PARTIAL RESPONSE TO ENIGMA 10: PHRASES ARE GIBBERISH). God's word is indeed beyond barbarism (*raṭānat al-ᶜajam*)! (REF: INTEGRITY AND SANCTITY OF QUR'AN). It was the devil taking hold (of him) during sleep! (wa *innamā huwa al-Shayṭānu fī al-nawmi alamma*."(ANSWER TO ENIGMA 10: THE GIBBERISH IS SATAN'S SPEECH. END OF ABU 'UBAYDAH'S

NARRATIVE. END OF STORY 3. END OF NARRATIVE, END OF STORY 1. UNRESOLVED ENIGMAS: IS ABŪ HURAYRAH RELIABLE? WHY DID HE GO TO THE BEDOUIN TRIBES? HOW IS THIS RELATED TO THE DREAM? ON A MORE BASIC LEVEL, DID ABŪ HURAYRAH GO TO THE VALLEY? DOES THE VALLEY EXIST? IN THE PRESENCE OF COMPETING NARRATIVES, WHICH ONE TO BELIEVE? IS THE PRESENCE OF GIBBERISH IN THE QUR'ANIC CITATION EXPLAINED SATISFACTORILY OR SIMPLY EXPLAINED AWAY? IF SO, WHY?).

The narrative ends here but a narrative which does not provide answers is incomplete. Closure is missing. The end is not logical as it does not follow from the rest of the narrative. From various *Hadīth*s in the book, we know something of Abū Hurayrah's stay among Bedouins.[23] We also know that the dream refers very obliquely to al-Masᶜadī's play, *al-Sudd* (The Dam). But no answers are given to the other questions. Before seeking clues, let us look at the architecture of the text.

Building Blocks.

There are two narrators designated as such in the text, Abū ᶜUbaydah and Thābit al-Qaysī. But the first narrator to appear in the text is Abū Hurayrah. He is telling an audience his story but information about this audience is absent or delayed. It turns out, however, that it is Abū ᶜUbaydah who is reporting Abū Hurayrah's discourse. The story is then confirmed and expanded by Thābit. The text gives no indication that the narrators knew each other or were present among the audience at the same time. But both appear to have easy access to Abū Hurayrah. We have, then, two narrators whose narratives overlap at the beginning but diverge afterwards. There are also two other narrators or informants of the main narrators.

First narrator (N1) (Abu ᶜUbaydah) begins and closes the story (frames the story). He does not take part in the story but comments on it.

Second narrator (N2) (Thābit al-Qaysī) reports a story and takes part in it.

Third narrator (N3) (Unnamed Man) reports Abū Hurayrah's behavior in the valley to N2.

Fourth narrator (N4) (Abū Hurayrah). He reports to N1 directly and converses with N2.

All these stories are reported by a narrator who is clearly aware of all the versions of the event and has collected them. But he is never named. He is implied in the phrases which report speech, "Abū Hurayrah is reported to have said," "Abū ᶜUbaydah told us," "Thābit added," and "Abū ᶜUbaydah said, but Thābit did not report this." I designate these statements as L, or links. This narrator appears to be an omnipresent but also an omniscient narrator, who speaks through syntax and controls the stories. He is authoritative and absolutely necessary to our knowledge. In fact he is the only source of knowledge. Who is speaking? Is this the implied author, the author, al-Masᶜadī? And who is speaking through him? Is it the voice of religious orthodoxy, standing against corruption of the holy text? Or the voice of transgression, eager to challenge the word of God? The interplay of the stories and narrators may give a clue to this.

A graphic representation may elucidate the architecture of the text. Abū Hurayrah's dream, in which he sees builders mixing clay to hold together stones in order to erect a wall—which also refers to the title of the chapter, "The Clay"—offers a guide. Indeed, the chapter is made up of four main narrative blocks (B1, B2, B3, and B4). A narrative block is understood to mean a continuous narrative told by the same narrator. These blocks are

Downloaded by [Radcliffe Infirmary] at 01:54 15 February 2016

held together by what I call here an anonymous narrator (AN), whose narrative introduces the other narrators and their stories. From the point of view of the story as a whole, the blocks augment and expand the story by introducing new information or new versions. The table below gives a clearer picture of how the text is built. In the chart the Narrators are N1: Abū ʿUbaydah; N2: Thābit al-Qaysī; AN: Anonymous narrator; N3: the Unnamed man and N4: Abū Hurayrah. S designates Story; B, narrative block.

Story	Narrator	Narrative block	Other narrators
S1 (Abū Hurayrah's journey, his visions, the reports and comments)	Anonymous Narrator	B1, B2, B3, B4 And Links.	N1, N2, N3, N4
S2 Abū Hurayrah's journey, his own description of the dream, narrator's comment	N1 (Abū ʿUbaydah)	B1, B3, B4	N4, N2
S3 Abū Hurayrah's journey, report by unnamed man, Abū Hurayrah's version, Narrator's comment	N2 (Thābit al-Qaysī)	B1, B2	N3, N1, N4

S1 is made up of contiguous narrative blocks held together by AN. S2 is interrupted by S1 in B2 and resumed in B3. There is an obvious arranging of the stories and narrative blocks. The term "blocks" is appropriate here. These can be manipulated, and moved around, with immediate effect on the whole. The phrase "X said" does not change the content of the narrative block. It merely indicates moving to a different one. Yet such phrase can have a strong effect. B1 is not introduced by the phrase, which gives the impression, at the linear level, on a first reading, that Abū Hurayrah, the protagonist, is telling his own story, i.e., that we have a first-person narrative. Such effect is completely demolished by the phrase which follows the story, "Narrated by Abū ʿUbaydah." We are now dealing with a third-person narrative. As transition to B2, the AN says, "Thābit al-Qaysī reported the same and added to it the following." N1's story is completed or at least put on hold. He is no longer an authority. The story S3 continues but S2 is interrupted. This gives a semblance of an ending but also of a change in angle. AN returns to close B2 and introduce B3, "Abu Ubaydah said but this was not reported by Thābit." This time, S2 is interrupted but S3 resumes. This gives S2 an intermediate position in the narrative. Since N1 opens and closes the narrative, S2 is framed within the larger narrative.

Downloaded by [Radcliffe Infirmary] at 01:54 15 February 2016

One key observation emerges: this framing is unusual. Hence the question: What is the genealogy of the narrative? In the best known example of the framed tale, *The Thousand and One Nights*, the narrative chain is not interrupted: a narrator tells a story within which another narrator tells a story and so on. Here AN, who could be the equivalent of Shaherazad for our purposes, tells a story whose first part (B1) is told by two narrators. Their narratives then diverge. N1 closes the story but he is absent from part of it, namely, B2. B2, however, is crucial to the formulation and partial answers of key enigmas. Some of these cast doubt on Abū Hurayrah's credibility and throw into doubt the key events of the story. While B1 is corroborated by N1 and N2, B2 and B3 rely on the authority of one narrator each.

Now that the frame tale model is excluded, the sequencing raises the question: What narrative convention is at play here?

If we take the key event "being in the valley" as an example, we notice that all narrators agree to its veracity. The dream, however, is confirmed only by Narrator 1 (Abu ᶜUbaydah). Narrator 2 (Thābit) is explicitly excluded ("Abū ᶜUbaydah said, but this was not reported by Thābit"). Given the importance of the event, one witness may not be sufficient.[24] The source is Abū Hurayrah, whose credibility is thrown in doubt by Thābit but who is trusted by Abū ᶜUbaydah. The latter appears to be on more solid ground since he reports directly from Abū Hurayrah. Thābit, on the contrary, resorts to a secondary source, an unnamed man. Yet, judging by his name—Abū ᶜUbaydah—he himself can be seriously challenged. This is a mere nickname shared by many people (Father of Ubaydah), unlike the fully named Thābit al-Qaysī. However, despite the full name, Thābit al-Qaysī appears only in this instance of the book. Abū ʻUbaydah, if we can assume he is the same person, appears elsewhere in the book. He is named as the source of the very short "Ḥadith of Company and Solitude," narrated by Hishām Ibn al-Ḥārith (162–3). This gives him a textual credibility, which Thābit is lacking.

Uncertainty does not stop here. The whole event is doubtful. Let us begin with the place. Kurāᶜ al-Ghamīm may be a real place but it is a space shrouded in myth and legend.[25] It is a haunted valley, "no one dared to enter it"; and even when an event occurs there, it is often doubtful: Thābit's informant thought Abū Hurayrah was a demon. Moreover, the events of the story themselves are uncertain. Abū Hurayrah casts doubt on his own story (He "laughed"). The visions he experiences are fantastic (description of the storm and of the signs and skull which appear to him). His vision could have been impaired by the heat or by supernatural beings (everything appears as a mirage in the valley).

Further, some of the narrators are not easily trusted. Abū Hurayrah himself is not a trustworthy reporter. He is known to deceive his audience and hide behind his jokes. Thābit casts doubt on him and does not apologize for his behavior in the valley while Abū ᶜUbaydah lets him speak directly. And even when Abū Hurayrah appears in danger, the faithful Abū ʻUbaydah comes to his rescue with an apology, to which I will return.

Did events actually take place? Was Abū Hurayrah even present in the valley? We do not know for certain. There is an ambiguity which is at the heart of the composition.

Perilous Intertextuality

Barthes defines Cultural Codes as references to social knowledge, or social knowledge as source in the text. They are "Resumés of common knowledge" (184). Such knowledge is indexed in the text. It does not enter the making of the fabric itself. I depart from Barthes

Downloaded by [Radcliffe Infirmary] at 01:54 15 February 2016

by extending his definition of cultural codes to include narrative conventions. In other words, the cultural codes I detect do enter the fabric of the text. In fact they are key to the very functioning of this particular narrative. In addition, these same conventions affect (determine, I think) the social significance and political legitimacy of the narrative. On them depend the very circulation of the text, even the life of the text, if not that of its author, as I show below.

There is an intricacy of narrative voices and narratives within "The Clay". Narrators confirm, deny, modify, complete or cast doubt on events and discourse. They themselves see their reliability questioned and put to the test. Thābit attempts to verify the veracity of an account he could not trust because of the circumstances surrounding the occurrence. In fact, the haunted valley and the doubtful narrator whose judgment may have been impaired by the popular perception of the valley as a debilitating place both cast doubt on Abū Hurayrah's experience. Thābit goes to the source and asks the "protagonist" of the story to confirm or deny it. But he receives only a troubling response: Abū Hurayrah confirms (he says, "yes!"), but he also laughs. Thābit interjects his own judgment about Abū Hurayrah's reliability and expresses his doubt that the story ever took place. He says, "Perhaps he (Abū Hurayrah) invented the story without any basis in reality." In addition, we are told, this is not unexpected since Abū Hurayrah is not a reliable reporter of stories in general. His irony and inclination to jest preclude him from telling a believable story.

The phrase, "He invented the story without parallel in reality" (*anshaʾa al-khabara inshāʾan dūna muṭābaqah*) strikes the informed reader with its formulaic nature. It is a traceable formula, just like the title itself, "ḥaddatha Abū Hurayrah qāl" and the name Abū Hurayrah. Neither may have a referent or a basis in reality; but they clearly allude to a reference. Al-Masʿadī's story may not have an equivalent in reality while his Abū Hurayrah is clearly not the most celebrated and most trustworthy narrator of prophetic tradition (*ḥadīth*) in Islamic history. However, both operate through and draw their evocative power from a particular but pervasive founding reference. A full understanding of how al-Masʿadī's text works and why it is structured in this way cannot be fully appreciated without reference to narrative conventions in Arabic culture. More specifically, I suggest that *ḥadīth* literature, the narratives of the sayings and deeds of Prophet Muḥammad, underlie al-Masʿadī's narrative. This convention is central to Islamic culture as a whole, and hence to Arabic literature. Using it as a blueprint in a work of fiction in the 20th century is an act of significant proportions.

Hadīth is the second most important source of Islam as discourse and as practice, at least for Sunni Islam. It is both the first exegesis of *Qurʾān* and the first application of it in Islamic history. Together with the *Qurʾān*, they make up the fundamental sources (uṣūl) of the religion from which all else derives. Since the prophet's word (*ḥadīth*) is to guide the Moslem community, its veracity had to be beyond doubt. For this reason, establishing *ḥadīth* has been a scrupulous and rigorous process. As a result, a well-regulated discipline has taken shape to sift through and verify the countless *ḥadīth*s attributed to the prophet and which cover all aspects of life, from clarification of Islamic rituals to medicine. "Scientific" methods were applied. This branch of Islamic sciences is called, *ʿulūm al-ḥadīth*," the *ḥadīth* sciences.

The prophet's word wielded tremendous power. It was, understandably, susceptible to manipulation, alteration or even fabrication and forgery in order to serve sectarian, political or personal motivations. The compilation of *ḥadīth*, both authentic and apocryphal was taken very seriously. But in a largely oral culture, it was inevitable that the first source was the memory of those who had direct contact with the prophet, most notably his companions

Downloaded by [Radcliffe Infirmary] at 01:54 15 February 2016

and wives. It was essential, therefore to trace every *ḥadīth* back to a direct link with the prophet. Transmitters were subjected to intense scrutiny which often exceeded the examination of the *ḥadīth* itself. They had to satisfy a variety of tests. In addition to being an adult Muslim, they had to meet stringent criteria, both moral, such as decency and honesty, and intellectual, such as good memory. A chain (*silsilah*) of transmitters where every link had to be reliable, had to be proven uninterrupted. For on this chain depends the classification of *ḥadīth*. *Hadīths* can be classified as sound (*ṣaḥīḥ*), fair (*ḥasan*), or weak (*ḍaᶜīf*). Within the latter categories *ḥadīth* scholars distinguished between suspended (*muᶜallaq*), interrupted (*maqṭūᶜ*), broken (*munqaṭiᶜ*), incomplete (*mursal*), defective in content or in the chain (*muṣaḥḥaf*), rare (*shādhdh*) or simply forged (*mawḍūᶜ*) (Siddiqi, 109).

These were minimum conditions to guarantee the veracity of the transmission. Each narrator or transmitter had to have heard the account personally from his or her predecessor, all the way back to the primary link and on to the prophet. In this chain, the primary link becomes of essential importance to the tradition. In addition to being an original source, he or she also would become a venerated figure. In this system of narrative transmission, Abd al-Raḥmān Abū Hurayrah holds an unparalleled place of pride. His name has become a guarantor of veracity. His own life was therefore of essential importance to the tradition and it had to be scrutinized in its minutest detail. He was the transmitter of no less than 5374 ḥadīths, the largest number by a single narrator by far (Abd Allah Ibn ᶜUmar comes a distant second with only 2630) (Siddiqi, 118). Sources tell us that Abū Hurayrah (d. 59AH or 678 AD) kept close company with the prophet for many years and devoted himself to listening and memorizing what Muḥammad said. He then propagated his knowledge through the teaching of hundreds of students. His reliability and piety had to be beyond doubt. His position in the tradition can hardly be exaggerated. In fact, it is likely that doubts about him were a result of this very reputation, which encouraged others to attribute apocryphal or weak *ḥadīth*s to him—he was also known as someone who combined piety with a good sense of humor (*EI*2).

Hadīth investigators—for we are dealing with a veritable detective work—have not limited their examination to the personality and motivations of one or more of the transmitters. They also looked at the reported *ḥadīth* using internal evidence to corroborate or contradict the transmission. They checked for signs of deficiency related to reason or faith. If a *ḥadīth* contradicted reason, went against the fundamentals of Islam or was found anachronistic, it was immediately dismissed as apocryphal. There was no shortage of inventors of *ḥadīth*. In addition to the heretics and well-intentioned Muslims, storytellers (*Quṣṣāṣ*) were perhaps the most prolific culprits. These appointed officials whose role was to edify the community through pious stories, quickly gave in to the demand for entertaining narratives and began to invent scores of *ḥadith*s. Their effect was judged so damaging that they were banned in Baghdad in 272 or 892 AD (Siddiqi, 34).[26] From the perspective of cultural dissemination (writing and fiction) playing with *ḥadīth* has become a tool of the trade. The interface between the two domains, entertainment and edification, is clearly quite significant. Therefore, the fact that al-Masᶜadī's narrative is made up of fabricated *ḥadīth* ("*anshaʾa al-khabar inshāʾan*") should not surprise. It is not without precedents.[27]

The cultural space within which al-Masᶜadī operates and the imaginary to which he refers are indeed very complex. Knowing this, one begins to appreciate how the mere use of Abū Hurayrah's name in a context which inspires doubt and impiety would be a significant challenge to Islamic culture, even a punishable offense. We recall that al-Masᶜadī's book was

Downloaded by [Radcliffe Infirmary] at 01:54 15 February 2016

rejected for using the name of this revered figure in fiction. The formula "ḥaddatha Abū Hurayrah qāl" has become, by virtue of its frequency and potency, emblematic of piety and knowledge of Islam. To use it in a fictional account involves playfulness with the reader's expectations as well as "playing with fire". (The author himself admits that at a book fair in an Arab country people flocked to buy the book, mistaking it for a collection of the Prophet's *ḥadīth*). Yet without this reference, al-Masᶜadī's poetics cannot be established. And it is because of this reference, and others like it, that al-Masᶜadī's pathway to *turāth* needs to be explored.[28]

Abū Hurayrah is clearly telling a story which does not make good sense. His journey, the dream, and the apparitions require a great deal of suspension of disbelief and hence cast doubt on his version of the story. There may even be signs of corruption of faith in the clearly careless citation of *Qurʾān*.

An examination of the various versions of the story shows a clear overlap. But two key factors are missing. According to *Hadīth* sciences, there are two sure ways of verification. The first is that the chain must be uninterrupted. The second is that a version is more sure if its chain is corroborated. Indeed, a *ḥadīth* which appears the same but is transmitted by more than one reliable chain (i.e., ultimately traced to two or more different original sources) is clearly strong and reliable. In fact, the strength of a *ḥadīth* is a function of parallel authentication during the first three generations of Islam (Siddiqi, 110). Hence, the strongest *ḥadīth* is the one subject to the consensus or at least a majority of narrators during the same period. Such *ḥadīth* is called *mutawātir.*

Neither of these two elements is satisfied in "The Clay." Yet both are implied or assumed as reference. Authentication through multiplicity of sources is guaranteed because the story is told by two separate chains of reporters. But the stories corroborate each other only partially. One can therefore say that only the first part of the story is authenticated. The reporters, however, are enigmatic. They are never described or even related to Abū Hurayrah in a significant way.[29] Yet, while al-Masᶜadī's text operates within this narrative convention and tradition, it also uses its tools (critical and analytical study of *Hadīth*) to represent the transgression. In the text, the original narrator is proven tainted with doubt and uncertainty by a later narrator (Thābit al-Qaysī). External evidence is found wanting.

Downloaded by [Radcliffe Infirmary] at 01:54 15 February 2016

Veiling the Reference

We recall that at some point, the audience responds to the reciter of a Qurʾānic verse by inserting their own speech, *banḍaldallam, banhar talgham, barr ānhandam* (*Haddatha*, 134).[30] As I mention above, we never really know if the whole story, including the utterances, actually took place. This leads me to suggest that the parodic play on the *Qurʾān* takes place within a space where rules of discourse, as a socially determined activity, become irrelevant or at least inadequate. Transgression, is, understandably, permitted.

Nevertheless, the text as an Arabic text within an Islamic context, is itself bound by specific codes and rules. In order for it to circulate unimpeded, it must either conform to these restrictions and codes or find alternative access around them. An Islamic convention, whose specific role is to "protect" the discourse of the text, is activated in order to guarantee the text's circulation. *Taqiyyah*, meaning to show the opposite of what one hides, serves as a safeguard against charges of blasphemy and transgression. The history of *taqiyyah* as a practice is inseparable from the repression of religious dissent in Islamic history. At its basic level, *taqiyyah* involves a duplicity between a belief to be kept secret or

private, and public confession of the opposite. An early example is the practice among some of the companions of the Prophet Muḥammad to conceal their conversion to Islam while adhering to the religious practices of their tribes. Kharijites invented the idea of *Dār al-taqiyyah* (the dominion of *taqiyyah*) to refer to an area where they had to keep their beliefs secret because their enemies were in the majority. But *taqiyyah* is most closely associated with Shīᶜī Islam. The Imām al-Bāqir, Jaᶜfar Ibn Muḥammad (148 AH, 765 AD), is quoted as saying, "*Taqiyyah* is my religion and the religion of my ancestors" (al-Imam, 73). But other sects and individuals such as *al-muᶜtazilah* and a number of Sufis have resorted to it or advocated it to protect themselves or their followers from persecution.

Taqiyyah is by its very nature intensely creative. It functions through indirect and covert language. It uses *ramz* (symbolism), *tawriya* (double entendre or mispointing information for secrecy), *taᶜmiya* (mystification), *talghīz* (riddling), and a host of other figures of speech which may be considered forms of *ishārah* (allusion), according to the critic Ibn Rashīq al-Qayrawānī.[31] In short, *taqiyyah* is a weapon with which persecuted Moslems ward off repression, skeptics protect their ideas and critics express themselves in a climate of intolerance and lack of freedom. This was true of pre-modern Islamic societies and has become more so in contemporary times. How does *taqiyyah* operate in al-Masᶜadī?

The central enigma in "The Clay" can be encapsulated in the following question: has Abū Hurayrah actually been in the haunted valley? This generates a number of other enigmas or uncertainties. At the cultural or social level, this is a key factor. Without this ambiguity (doubt, uncertainty), the parody of *Qurᵓān* would not have been possible, at least not without major risk which goes beyond the life of the text—will it be published at all?—to that of the writer—would he be safe from accusations of blasphemy, which are punishable by death? The ambiguity sanctions parody and licenses transgression. The cultural norm, which would otherwise castigate and ban the transgression, now justifies it. How so? Abū ᶜUbaydah apologizes for Abū Hurayrah's insertion of gibberish in a Qurᵓanic text by saying, "God's word is indeed beyond barbarism (*raṭānat al-ᶜajam*)! It was the devil taking hold (of Abū Hurayrah) during sleep! (*wa innamā huwa al-Shayṭānu fī al-nawmi alam*)." By attributing the transgression to an outsider, an excluded entity, namely Satan, Abū Hurayrah is freed from a potentially deadly charge. The devil itself, is, we know, based in ambiguity. It is defined, not by what it is, but what it does: "It took hold of him during his sleep".

From a psychoanalytical point of view, this is quite telling; but I will not pursue this line of inquiry here. Suffice it to say that the irreverent transgression is shrouded in doubt, ambiguity and improbability. Abū ᶜUbaydah is stating something he cannot possibly verify and which is not confirmed within the narrative. Abū Hurayrah, the only "credible" source about his own speech explicitly describes his vision as a dream, not as a demonic inspiration. We are told that he did not explain the gibberish inserted in the verse. The only guarantor of validity of the narrator's statement resides in the socio-cultural context of the text: the belief that the devil sneaks upon unwitting souls is shared by the community of readers. Satan tempts the most pious of people.[32] It is necessary for al-Mas'adī to couch the utterance and "corruption" of the *Qurᵓān* in such a narrative context. *Taqiyyah* covers the transgression and reveals it at the same time. The transgression is banished to a realm of dreams and the belief in the devil. As a result, moral outrage and punishment have been preempted.[33]

Al-Masᶜadī's narrative conventions are drawn from the Arab-Islamic repertoire. And even when the narrative touches upon, plays with or steps outside the limits set by religious dogma or social code, a traditional (narrative) convention is called upon to sanction that very transgression. "Ḥadīth al-Ṭîn" (The Clay) finds its narrative model as well as its legitimacy in the narrative conventions of pre-modern Arabic culture. In "The Clay," the

Downloaded by [Radcliffe Infirmary] at 01:54 15 February 2016

hunt for the story in its versions walks a fine line between the sacred and sacrilege. The narrative incriminates Abū Hurayrah and simultaneously seeks his salvation. The text inscribes his doubt and protects his "life" at the same time. It does so without ever answering the question, "Who is Speaking?" This question is fundamental because the life of the narrative, and perhaps that of its writer, depend on the disclosure.[34] The indeterminacy in the text precludes any answer and thus averts conclusive evidence.

Writing and history.

Abū Hurayrah's desire to "erase" his story in "The Clay" has parallels in al-Masᶜadī's work. In fact, the desire to forget and return to an original state of being haunts al-Masᶜadī's characters in other texts as well. Madyan sets out on a quest of forgetting in *Mawlid al-Nisyan*; Ghaylan, in *al-Sudd* (The Dam), seeks to imitate gods in their capacity to create life; Sindabad longs to "return to purity." Other acts of return to origins in the text include the narrator and the language. Abū Hurayrah was the ultimate narrator of the ultimate narrative, the prophet's life and statements. He is the original narrator (*rāwī*) whose words represent the basic narration (*riwāyah*) and telling (*ḥadīth*). As such, he is key to the entire history of Islam and Islamic culture. His authority justifies the very existence of the prophet. Using the original form of narrative, *ḥadīth*, emanates from the same desire. At the level of language, words are often used in their root meaning (e.g., *islām* to mean surrender rather than Islam, the religion). Engagement with the *Qurān*, rather than later sources, also reflects the same drive. They are all originators: *Qurān* is the originating text; Abu Hurayrah is the first narrator and source of *Hadīth*; the root is the origin of the word. What does this mean?

There is an engagement with the origins of narrative; with an irreducible first text, and with the initial state of the language. The text may appear saturated, overloaded with *turāth*, hence the prevalent desire among many critics to catalogue its reference.[35] But the text is better understood, I suggest, not by indexing the reference but by uncovering the farthest layer. For rather than accumulating reference, al-Masᶜadī peels off the layers of connotation. He strips the Arabic language down to its roots; his use of rhythm engages an initial quality of the language; his economy of language relies on the evocative rather than the expository nature of Arabic.[36] In this, he undertakes the ultimate challenge of any writer using Arabic, wrestling the language out of a sacred history whose weight on the Arab writer is almost too hard to bear.[37] Like a painter who returns to primary colors, writing becomes a peeling off of cultural habitations in order to uncover an irreducible core, the primary colors of the word, the initial narrative form, the original narrator. This, again, is not a romantic glorification of the past. It is rather a preoccupation with the present. The aim is not representation but presence in a world that denies one's presence. The denial is linked to the colonial condition on the one hand and to the weight of the sacred, on the other. And it is in this respect that al-Masᶜadī's text is profoundly historical: it is an act of being in history.[38]

Conclusion

Haddatha and al-Muwayliḥī's book share a number of features. At the formal level, both books rely on narrative convention and make use of *adab*. They mix poetry and prose. Al-

Downloaded by [Radcliffe Infirmary] at 01:54 15 February 2016

Muwayliḥī makes extensive use of poetry to stress a point, vary styles or entertain the reader. The poetry in al-Masᶜadī's book is part of the character's speech. In addition, al-Muwayliḥī's recalls the Qur'anic story of *Ahl al-Kahf* in the resurrection of a Pasha out of his time while al-Masᶜadī's book portrays a resurrection within the self and uses the *Qur'ān* in very different ways. They both represent a journey. Yet while the first explores the self, the second travels into society and history. They both deal with the relationship between East and West. The first represents it as a synthesis and transcends the difference while the second shows the struggle and crisis of Arab culture and society in the face of Western values and material culture.

In *Hadīth ᶜIsā ibn Hishām*, the resurrection of a figure from the past marks the passing of time and takes stock of the new reality. In *Haddatha*, the resurrection questions the very passing of time. It takes place during the lifetime of the character, collapses past and present into one time. This recollection works in al-Masᶜadī's narrative through a compression that affects the idiom, the narrative as a whole, the main character as well as the space. It is apparent in his remarkable economy of language, heavily connotative names of characters and places and the bare landscape in which Abū Hurayrah's rich journey unfolds. All become repositories of collective memories of a textual past, of a past available only through texts.

Two distinct ways in which modern Arabic literature has engaged its own narrative memory emerge from the foregoing comparison. For al-Muwayliḥī, the use of *maqāmah* reflects, as a form, the dilemma so clearly expressed in his book, namely, what to take and what to reject from the invading culture of the West, the dilemma of the intellectual period of the *nahdah* in relationship to Western culture. Narrative convention meant a meaningful relationship with the past and a way of keeping it alive. This is the ideology of *Hadīth ᶜĪsā ibn Hishām* as form. The descendents or genealogy of the book are to be traced in the development of the Arabic novel away from the *maqāmah* and closer to the European novel since then. The lineage of *Haddatha Abū Hurayrah Qāl…*, on the other hand, runs parallel to this history, intertwines with it at moments, and remains largely uncharted. A full understanding of how Arabic culture has responded to modernity will remain incomplete unless the wide range of ways in which it has actively engaged its own past is better charted. Al-Masᶜadī himself may have given us, inadvertently, the terms to explain two of the pathways. He has suggested that the attitude of the modern Arab writer towards *turāth* and Western culture has been either *mimetic* or *evocative*.

Downloaded by [Radcliffe Infirmary] at 01:54 15 February 2016

Notes

1. There are numerous studies on this. A general book on the Arabic novel since the 1960s is Stefan Meyer, *The Experimental Arabic Novel: Postcolonial Literary Modernism in the Levant*, New York: SUNY Press, 2001. An example of country-specific study is Muḥammad Badawī, *Al-Riwāya al-jadīda fī miṣr*, Cairo: al-Muᵓassasah al-jāmiᶜiyyah li al-nashr wa al-tawzīᶜ, 1995. An example of study devoted to a specific author is the essay on al-Ghiṭānī's *al-Tajalliyāt*. Knysh, Alexandre. "Sufi Motifs in Contemporary Arabic Literature: The Case of Ibn Arabī". *The Muslim World* 86 (January 1996): 33–49.
2. A work which focuses on intertextual relationships with turāth is Saᶜīd Yaqṭīn's *al-Riwāyah wa al-turāth al-sardī*. Beirut: al-Markaz al-thaqāfī al-ᶜarabī, 1992.
3. Muḥammad al-Muwayliḥī was a journalist, an editor of Arabic manuscripts, a student of French and Italian, and a faithful follower of the reformers Muḥammad ᶜAbdū and Jamāl al-Dīn al-Afghānī (1839–97). He was condemned to death for distributing anti-British leaflets (1882) but the sentence was commuted to exile. He joined his father in Italy, then both went to Paris in 1884, where he helped 'Abdū and al-Afghānī with the publication of the journal, *al-ᶜUrwa al-Wuthqā*. But his father was soon expelled from France for criticizing the Ottoman Sultan. They went to England and then reconciled with the Ottomans and traveled to Istambul before

returning to Egypt in 1887. From 1898 he published the newspaper*Miṣbāḥ al-Sharq* with his father where in November 1898, he began publishing articles under the column "Fitrah min al-zaman." In 1907, he gathered and republished the articles as a book. In 1927, the book was expanded and became a secondary school textbook in Egypt. Al-Muaylihī died on 28 February, 1930 leaving his other book, *ᶜilāj al-Nafs* (The Cure of the Soul) to be published posthumously.

4. One can imagine the same journey for al-Hamadhānī's *maqāmāt*. They must have been known by their individual names before they were collected at a later date, no doubt. For unlike al-Ḥarīri who set out to write fifty pieces, al-Hamadhānī's intention to write a collection was perhaps not present at the beginning, although there are reports which claim that he intended to produce forty such pieces in emulation of a certain Ibn Durayd (al-Ḥusarı̣, 305).
5. "There is no genuine development in any of the characters whom al-Muwayliḥī introduces in the story; his ability to portray the failings and corruption of Egyptian petty-officialdom is unquestioned, but the resulting figures remain as types rather than characters" (Allen, 1992, 65).
6. The formula was by no means unusual at the time. Al-Muwayliḥī's father attributed his articles to Mūsā ibn ᶜIṣām and published them in the same newspaper as his son. Thus both fictional figures alternated in the newspaper. In 1900 when the son was in France and interrupted his regular column, the father reintroduced his narrator: "ᶜĪsā ibn Hishām has distracted (readers) from what Mūsā ibn ᶜIṣām has been doing. Days and months went by until we reached a full year and ᶜĪsā went to the fair (Paris). Mūsā has now returned to his interrupted discourse and we have come back to see what happened between his shaykh and his imam" (Abd al-Muttalib, 219 citing the newspaper *Miṣbāḥ al-sharq* 8 June 1900). This resemblance led some critics to doubt that the son was the author of *Hadīth ᶜĪsā ibn Hishām*. On the controversy see Abd al-Muttalib, 219 ff.
7. Allen's translation of the phrase between brackets reads "or rather a fantasy shaped in a realistic form". I believe that al-Muwayliḥī was adament to show the truthfulness of his account and the imaginative nature of his form rather than the other way around. Otherwise edification and didacticism, which are his declared purpose, could not be sustained. The writer is, of course, emulating an *adab* convention traceable back to al-Jāhiz. Even al-Harīrī who was clearly conscious of the fictional nature of his work adhered to edification as the the ultimate goal of fiction. He writes in the introduction to his *maqāmāt*: "The person who created anecdotes for alerting people rather than deceiving them and who intended edification rather than lying should be free of blame. In this he is comparable to those who are appointed to teach or to guide peole to the straight path" (*Maqamat al-Harīrī*, 9)
8. Al-Yāziji in *Majmaᶜ al-Baḥrayn* and A. F. al-Shidyāq in his *al-Saqa ᶜlā al-Sāq fī mā huwwa al-Faryāq*. The Tunisian Abd al-Salām reads al-Yaziji's *maqāmāt* as an attempt, not without precedent, to preserve the Arabic language in the face of the threat posed by foreign tongues (*al-Mabāḥith* 24, 1946, 2). Al-Shidyāq's work according to him, is a serious attempt at changing the *maqāmah*. "He renewed the form of the *maqāmah* by making it into a story with wide perspective and extensive breadth. He also showed that the Arabic language is capable of conveying any theme with eloquence and precision" (*al-Mabāḥith* 25, 1945, 6). This understanding of the *maqāmah* reflects, of course, the cultural politics of a Tunisian intellectual writing under French occupation. Arabic language and Arabic literary convention are seen as tools in the struggle for national identity.
9. Allen notes that both al-Muwayliḥī and his father "campaigned for a more careful approach to the acceptance of Western culture in Egypt" (1992, 57).
10. "We are thus dealing with the deliberate revival of the past heritage and its application to the present, a fully conscious neo-classicism, something made abundantly clear by the style known as *sajᶜ* (rhyming prose) used at the beginning of each serialized episode" (Allen, 1995).
11. J. Brugman states: "The modern novel—called *riwāya* or *riwāya fukāhiyya* or *adabiyya* at the beginning—in Egypt developed along and often as a reaction to the neo-maqamah, which, as has been stated above, for a long time enjoyed more prestige, the novel and the short story being generally regarded as lower genres" (205).
12. Unlike most *maqāmāt*, al-Muwaylihi's book turns out to be the story of the reincarnated and often awkward Pasha rather than that of an eloquent protagonist. The narrator ᶜIsa ibn Hishām ends up taking charge of the Pasha: he is his informant, his savior and his guide. The traditional clever rogue loses his roles of an entertainer and trickster and surrenders to the narrator's will. The immediate effect of this technique is of course to reduce the distance between the protagonist and the audience. The chain of informants is no longer from protagonist to narrator to author to audience but from narrator to author to audience. As a result the narrator takes the lead in story-telling as well as in the plot and abolishes any distance between him and the Pasha.
13. Does the Arab reader at the turn of the nineteenth century have a horizon within which *Hadīth* is expected to be read? It is important to reiterate that the book was published in independent installments or episodes. It was perhaps received, or read, like *maqāmāt*. At the time the generic boundaries were dominated by traditional Arabic narrative convention. Most prominent of these was the *maqāmah*, admittedly much changed and on the wane. *Hadīth* was received within this horizon and acted upon it at the same time. For the idea of literary genres and horizon of expectations, see Jauss "Littérature mediévale et théorie des genres." *Poétique* 1 (1970): 79–100.
14. On the use of the *maqāmah* and other styles in al-Shidyāq, see Sulaymān Jubrān. *Kitāb al-Fariyāq: mabnāh wa uslūbuhu wa sukhriyyatuhu*. (Literary Studies and Texts. Tel Aviv, 1991).
15. Late nineteenth century *Nahdawi* intellectuals developed a pudic look at the culture. This movement expressed itself in purging classical works of what was deemed "objectionable" content. Al-Muwayliḥī's friend and

Downloaded by [Radcliffe Infirmary] at 01:54 15 February 2016

mentor Muḥammad ᶜAbdu did not hesitate to admit that he had purged al-Hamadhānī's *maqāmat* when he edited the collection in 1889, cutting off "al-Maqāmah al-Shāmiyyah", deleting sentences from "al-Maqāmah al-Ruṣāfiyyah" and discarding words from "another *maqāmah*". Morality is cited as his excuse. In the early decades of the twentieth century, together with this attitude, emphasis on simplification of the language and the need to focus on portraying "reality" would dominate the critical discourse. Despite their role in spreading new ideas and literary trends, proponents of modernity, such as Ṭâha Ḥusyan may have contributed to limiting the creative engagement with narrative tradition. Ṭâha Ḥusayn's assessment of al-Masᶜadī's *al-Sudd* bears witness to this.

16. Born the same year as Naguib Mahfuz, his career could not be more different. He had direct access to the most influential institutions of learning available at his time, al-Madrasah al-Ṣādiqiyyah, founded by the reformer Khayr al-Dīn Pasha, the French Lycée Carnot; the Zaytūnah Islamic University and al-Khaldūniyyah and, in France, the Sorbonne from 1933 to 1936, then in 1939, and in 1947. As a scholar, al-Masᶜadī worked closely with eminent Islamicists Gaudefroy-Demombyne, Levi-Provinçal, Henri Massignon and the Arabist Regis Blachère. Al-Masᶜadī's own academic work bears kinship to this tradition. He published an academic book, "Essai sur le rythme dans la prose rimée en arabe" (An Essay on Rhythm in Arabic Rhymed Prose) (1981); articles on the theory of knowledge of the mystic and theologian al-Ghazālī, Abū al-ᶜAlāᵓ al-Maᶜarrī, the sufi poet Abū al-ᶜAtāhiyya. Outside Tunisia, al-Masᶜadī is the country's best-known cultural figure. He was Tunisia's representative to the UNESCO for 10 years (1958–68) before becoming Member of its Executive Council (1977–8) and (1980–85). He was also the spokesperson for Tunisian writers and often represented them abroad.
17. Published in the newspaper *al-Jumhūriyyah* in 1957, reprinted in *Min adabina al-Muʿāṣir.* (1958).
18. All references are to the 1979 edition unless specifically stated otherwise. All translation from *Haddatha* are mine.
19. Al-Masᶜadī reveals in a letter written to the Lebanese Khalil al-Jarr in the early 1940s that he was desparate to save the book in case his ship was attacked during his journey from Marseilles to Tunis in the aftermath of the German occupation of Paris. He wrote: "This is the manuscript of a book into which I poured my soul and committed my personal ideas about life. It is the most valuable thing I have. You can read it, if you wish; but I hope that you will take care of it as best you can"(*Haddatha* «1973», 193). Al-Jarr says that he failed to locate the book's author, about whom he knew only the initials M.M. until the early 1970s. It is, however, certain that there must have been a second manuscript. For while this copy was in the possession of al-Jarr in Lebanon, several sections of the book were published in Tunisia.
20. In this and other letters, he seeks Ḥusayn's opinion of the manuscript. Unfortunately, we have no evidence of Ḥusayn's assessment of *Haddatha* but his response to al-Masᶜadī's writings, as demonstrated in his reading of *al-Sudd* a few years later, falls short of what the young Tunisian expected from his enlightened Egyptian senior.
21. *The Koran*, "*al-qaṣaṣ*" (28, The Story), 38.
22. *The Koran, "al-Naziᶜāt*" (79, The Soul-Snatchers), 21–24.
23. In "The Dog", Kahlān, a notorious rogue and highway robber, tries to rescue a man from death in the desert but the man jumps to his feet and says: "Go on your way! My journey has ended here"(139). Kahlān leaves him there but soon runs into six men and a dog looking for him. They recognize Abū Hurayrah. Kahlān says that he had heard of a man of the same name who had been preaching a strange doctrine in the area for a year or two. "Patience and death are not human pursuits," he used to say (139–40). He addressed people in metaphors and aphorisms but they laughed him off, which led him to leave their company. Abū Hurayrah is then taken to a shelter where he had hallucinations and often asked: "Pharaoh or God?" Kahlān learns that the men used to be highway robbers in times of scarcity until Abū Hurayrah appearance in the aftermath of a raid where they killed a number of people. He buried the dead, prayed for their souls and persuaded the men to reject violence. He guided them to an oasis, asked them to spread his word and did the same for many others. The men said, "Soon envy and rebellion rose in the oasis causing Abū Hurayrah to leave the place. But no one cared, except us" (145). When he came to his senses, Abū Hurayrah ordered his followers to leave and ordered the dog to do the same. The men left but the dog kept howling for days. "Dogs, too, are hurt by fate," comments Abū Hurayrah (146).
24. One witness has no credibility, as a minimum of two witnesses is required in Islamic law.
25. A place near Mecca made famous in accounts of the Prophet's battles and *al-Hudaybiyyah* Treaty, which is the subject of the chapter *al-Fatḥ* (The Victory) in the *Qurᵓan*.
26. False *ḥadīth*s, Kilito points out, did not disappear from the culture. In fact, they were gathered and disseminated widely. The best way to minimize their effect was to make them known. Yet, for this reason—an unintended result—such *ḥadīth*s had become widely available, not as guidelines or norms but for public and private amusement. Ibn al-Jawzī notes that storytellers in particular have a propensity to spread apocryphal *ḥadīth*s to please their audiences (1985, 48–49).
27. The link between *quṣṣāṣ* and the consolidation of narrative fiction in Arabic literature, long neglected by historians of literature, can hardly be overemphasized. See Kilito's work on the *maqāmah* and the storytelling milieu in *Les Séances*.
28. On the other hand, the interplay between the pious and the transgressive has long been part of *adab*. For an example of how the language of mysticism was used by licentious writers in a sexual context, see my "Adab in

Downloaded by [Radcliffe Infirmary] at 01:54 15 February 2016

the Seventeenth Century: Narrative and Parody in al-Shribīnī's *Hazz al-Quḥūf*" *Edebiyat* 11 (2) 2000: 169–96.

29. Al-Masᶜadī here as well works within a tradition. *Isnād* seems to be unique to Islamic culture. It informs about the milieu in which knowledge was transmitted and circulated. "The *isnād* system, while originating in connection with the *ḥadīth* literature, was in due course extended by the Arab authors to many other genres, including geography, history, and prose fiction" (Siddiqi, 83).
30. Much effort has gone into explaining these expressions. The likely explanantion is that they are a play on words and syllables in the manner of Pig Latin in English. The effect here is on rhythm rather than any mysterious meaning.
31. *Al-Qayrawani*, Chapter on Allusion, Vol. 1, pp. 302–313. See also *Tawriyah, EI2*.
32. But if the referent is absent, what about the reference? There are at least two, which I can pin down here. The first links up with other texts by al-Masᶜadī, i.e., a cross-reference. In *al-Sudd*, an extensive instance of parody of *Qurān* takes place in Scene Four. The gospel of the goddess Ṣāhabbāʾ can be traced to the *Qurʾān* almost in its entirety. But here again, the reference is couched within a narrative context shrouded in doubt and uncertainty. See Omri, 44 ff. for a discussion of the intertextual relationship between the *Qurʾān* and *al-Sudd*. The second is actually very common in the lore of Arab-Islamic culture. The *Qurʾan* itself gives ample evidence of demons and spirits. In fact, in Islam, to believe in spirits as God's creations is a pre-condition of belief in God.
33. *Taqiyyah* is necessary but is it sufficient? In the past *taqiyyah* may have lessened persecution, but it did not prevent it altogther. The repression of dissent, whether by Kharijites or individuals such as al-Ḥallāj and others, went on. Today censorship continues to be applied, either through the state apparatus, religious bodies or the public. Naguib Mahfuz used a form of *taqiyyah*, namely, allegory in his novel *Awlād Hāratinā* (Children of Gabalawi), but was unable to avert moral outrage, outright ban, and even violent assault on his person.
34. "This is the question raised, perhaps, by every narrative. What should the narrative be exchanged for? What is the narrative worth?" (e.g., in *1001 Nights* it is worth life itself) (Barthes, 89).
35. To take just one example, characters in al-Masᶜadī carry names which have compelled critics to delve deeply into the archive of the culture. They found equivalents to Ghaylān, Madyan, Rayhāna, Abū Rughāl, Maymūna and others in the tradition. These names function at two levels, as codes. For example, Ghaylān and his single mindedness in *al-Sudd* recalls Ghaylān al-Dimashqī's belief in human will. They are also instances where the "effect of reality" is affirmed and denied at the same time. They point to real, important Islamic figures but do not re-present them.
36. Al-Misaddi suggests that what distinguishes al-Masᶜadī's relationship to Arabic from other writers is his use of rhythm.
37. Francophone writer Abdelwahab Meddeb cites the desire to disassociate Arabness from the Islamic dominant as the key factor of the choice of language. He suggests that the Arabic language is tied to Islam and is therefore denied its status as language, carrier of secular culture. The writer's task is to disentangle the two. He says: "je voudrais désenclaver l'Islam et la référence arabe de manière à ramener la lettre arabe dans sa vérité historique, à côté des lettres grecque, latine, hébraïque" (Claude and Roche, 21).
38. Berque writes about colonization in the Maghreb: "Even the vital power of describing its inner perturbations was usurped by the French language. Henceforward not only action, but feeling and revolution must speak and think in French. And so any movement aiming at recovery must seek to restore signs to things" (86).

Downloaded by [Radcliffe Infirmary] at 01:54 15 February 2016

Works Cited

ᶜAbd al-Muṭṭalib, ᶜAbd al-Allah. *Al-Muwayliḥī al-ṣaghīr.* Cairo: al-Hayʾah al-miṣriyyah al-ᶜammah li al-kitāb, 1985.

'Abd al-Salām, Ahmad. "Manzilat *Hadīth ᶜĪsā ibn ḥishām* fi al-ʾadab al-ᶜarabī al-Ḥadīth." *Al-Mabāḥith* 26 (1946): 2, 4; and 27–28 (1946): 3–4.

——. "Taṭawwur al-maqāma fī al-adab al-ḥadīth." *Al-Mabāḥith* 24 and 25 (1946): 2 and 6 respectively.

Allen, Roger. *The Arabic Novel: An Historical and Critical Introduction*. 2nd ed. Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1995.

——. *A Period of Time*. (A Study and Translation of Ḥadīth ᶜīsā ibn Hishām by Muḥammad al-Muwayliḥī). Oxford: St. Anthony's Middle East Monographs, no. 27, 1992.

Bakhtin, M.M. *The Dialogic Imagination*. Tr. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981.

Barthes, Roland. *S/Z: an Essay.* Tr. Richard Miller. New York: The Noonday Press, 1974.

Berque, Jacques. *French North Africa: The Maghrib Between Two World Wars*. Tr. Jean Stewart. London: Faber and Faber, 1967.

Brugman, J. *An Introduction to the History of Modern Arabic Literature in Egypt*. Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1984.

Al-Huṣarī, Abū ʾIsḥāq Muḥammad ibn ᶜAlī. *Zahr al-Ādāb*. ed. Zakī Mubārak. Beirut: Dār al-jalīl, 1972.

Ḥusayn, Ṭâha. *Min adabina al-muāṣir.* Beirut: Dār al-ādāb, 1958.

Al-Imām, Ḥasan. *Dāʾirat al-maᶜārif al-islāmiyyah al-shīᶜiyyah*. 2nd edition. Beirut: Dār al-maᶜārif, 1981.

Kilani, Mustafa. *Al-adab al-hadīth wa al-mu'asir: ishkaliyyat al-riwayah*. Carthage: Bayt al-hikmah, 1990.
Kilito, Abdelfattah. *Les séances: récits et codes culturels chez Hamadhani et Hariri*. Paris: Editions Sindbad, 1983.
——. *L'auteur et ses doubles: Essai sur la culture arabe classique*. Paris : Seuil, 1985.
The Koran. Trans. N.J. Dawood. London: Penguin Classics, 1990.
al-Masᶜadī, Maḥmūd. *Haddatha abū Hurayrah qâl*. Tunis: Dār al-janūb, 1979.
——. "Rasāʾil Maḥmūd al-Masᶜadī ilā Ṭâha Ḥusayn. *al-Ādāb*, 42, 32–35.
——. *Al-Sudd* (The Dam). 1955.
al-Misaddī, ᶜAbd al-Salām. "Maḥmūd al-Masᶜadī wa ʾĪqāᶜ al-Naṣṣ." *Thaqāfāt*, 1 (Winter 2002): 25–42.
Moosa, Matti. *The Origins of Modern Arabic Fiction*. Washington: Three Continents Press, 1983.
al- Muwayliḥī, Muḥammad. *Hadīth Īsā ibn Hishām*. Tunis: Dār al-janūb, 1982.
Ollier, Claude and Anne Roche. Eds. *Abdelwhab Meddeb*. Poitiers: Office du livre, 1993.
Omri, Mohamed-Salah. "Issues in World Literature: The Politics and Poetics of Maḥmūd al-Masᶜadī". PhD Dissertation. Washington University in St. Louis. 2001.
Ostle, R. C. "Mahmud al-Mas'adi and Tunisia's 'Lost Generation"'. *Jornal of Arabic Literature*. VIII (1977): 153–166.
Al-Qayrawānī, Ibn Rashīq (390–457 AH, 999–1064 AD) *Al-ᶜUmda fī maḥāsin al al-shiᶜr wa naqdihi*. Ed. Muḥyī al-Dīn ᶜAbd al-Ḥamīd. Dār al-jīl: Beirut, 1981.
Siddiqi, Muhammad Zubayr, ed. *Hadīth Literature*: *Its Origins, Development and Special Features* by Abdal Hakim Murad, Cambridge: Islamic Texts 1993.

Downloaded by [Radcliffe Infirmary] at 01:54 15 February 2016